An Exploratory Study of Micro-Context and Macro-Context Barriers to Teaching English Language in Iraqi EFL High School Framework

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The study aims at identifying the challenges and barriers that hinder the educational process. Those barriers include micro-context barriers or linguistic difficulties such as students' practice of spoken English, textual factors, too much vocabulary in English language, cultural competence and mismatching between what is spoken and written. On the other side the macro-context barriers include large classes, poor teacher knowledge, not enough class time, poor infrastructure, focus on written form in examinations, family education, and sticking into a particular method. The subjects of the study comprise 60 students and thirty teachers. The data collection procedure used in the present study is a double questionnaire; students' questionnaire and teachers' questionnaire. After collecting data from the questionnaire and analyse these data statistically, the study findings reveal that Iraqi EFL high school students have micro-context and macro-context barriers that impede their self-development and progress in the teacher-learning process. Some educational implications have been proposed to find some solutions to those barriers from the researcher's viewpoint.

Key words: *Barriers, micro-context, macro-context, linguistic difficulties, textual factors, cultural competence.*

Introduction

The English language occupies a special interest in the field of research and study nowadays for its globalising importance phenomenon. Besides, teaching English as a foreign language faces many difficulties and impediments while achieving the goals and principles of syllabus design. From a researcher's personal opinion, classroom obstructions could be micro-context, linguistic or text-related issues and macro-context or economic, sociological, psychological,

political or pedagogical matters. Micro-context foundations include complex obstacles such as text-based pedagogy, insufficient exposure to English practice, the current level of the students and large classes. Macro-context barriers comprises of social status, economic status, political status, cultural diversity, such as using the modern technology in class and the class materials, infrastructure and adjusting to recommended method. The present study per se focuses in depth on such issues that hinder the educational settings of students' performance and also that impede the advancement of teacher knowledge in completing the course aims. Madya et al. (2019: 266) maintains that EFL students experience many difficulties in English language learning.

Statement of the Problem

Iraqi educational settings suffers from many problematic issues that need to be treated thoroughly on the level of micro-contexts or linguistic issues; and macro-contexts such as social, political, economic, psychological, pedagogical or philosophical dimension that should be provided from outside sources to ensure opportunistic education to all students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of micro-context and macro-context barriers on the educational process.

Research Question

The following question has been adopted: "How do micro-context and macro-context influence Iraqi EFL high school student in language learning and teaching?"

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the educational barriers and Iraqi EFL high school teaching framework.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study enhances the identification of those barriers, either linguistic barriers or micro-context and pedagogical, psychological, political, economic, and philosophical barriers or macro-context barriers that contribute to find authentic solutions to the educational process.

Teaching and Learning Barriers
Micro-Context Barriers

On the most face of it, this section is concerned with linguistic-related issues or textbook-based matters.

Textual Concerns

It can be said that text-based instruction delineates students' performance. More practices and additional activities need to be taught other than in the prescribed textbook in order to increase students' opportunities and their performance accordingly. Text-based instruction should be fruitful and globalising; books that are taught should cover lots of topics and give great chances to students to participate in tasks and share their ideas successfully. Teachers have to adopt the portfolio assessment in the class to proliferate students' participation and know their power in all related topics. So, there is no best method as Prahbu (1990: 161) confirms. Consequently post method had been adopted instead of the implementation of method. The teacher is the centre in the classroom; not curriculum-based education.

Insufficient Practice in Spoken English

Almost all EFL classes are taught English with little exposure to the spoken part of language. Most class time is consumed focusing on teaching grammatical structures; the everlasting awkward and challenging matter. Though many studies and attempts have been developed to solve and treat this problem; but many teachers still concentrate on it and spend most of the class time on it. Since the aim of any language is to communicate fluently with others. So, great attention and consideration need to be taken into account when teaching EFL, especially when class time is not enough. Chang et al. (2011: 310) confirm that when there is little practice in spoken English, students are not confident in the way they want to participate in the speaking skill.

Cultural Competence

Cultural mismatching exposed in the textbook between the English language and Arabic language creates a gap when teaching EFL students. Teacher and texts have to approximate this distance to a nearer point to make teaching interesting and motivating. Sometimes a gap occurs between teacher's culture and students' culture. As Yoon and Kim (2012: 124) assert that in an EFL context where there is students culture and teacher culture, a barrier or a gap exists that may hinder the progress and advancement on the part of students in their language learning process.

Abundant Vocabulary

The English language has a lot of words. Even sometimes it is uncontrolled to capture the way teachers teach them. Although many techniques and activities have been formed, there is no best technique or strategy. Rusty et al. (2009: 137) claim that EFL words can be considered or formed as a barrier to language learning.

The Complexity of Linguistic Forms or Grammar

English grammar seems to be rather hard for learners. Apparently, this is because of the deep explanations English grammar has. Teaching should be compartmentalising, not separated parts or skills. Grammar teaching should be within the teaching of speaking and writing or reading to make the learning process automating and unconscious. Hosain (2018: 177) confirms that classes should be motivating and thought-provoking in order to teach and learn grammar effectively. Mahdi (2018: 1) asserts that learning grammar for EFL Iraqi learners form a barrier in the learning process of English language. Widianingsih and Gulö argue that "Grammatical rule is among other difficulties found in the process of learning other languages."

The Complications of English Pronunciation

Seemingly, English pronunciation is challenging and unpredictable to be taught or learned. Each new word needs to be taken from da ictionary to know its phonemic transcription; there is no space for prediction or guess. Because there is no match between English letters and sounds. Some letters are silent such as cas*t*le, *k*now, *w*rong. Gilakjani (2011: 81) certifies that "pronunciation can be one of the most difficult parts for a language learner to master and one of the least favourite".

Topics for teachers to address in the classroom

Macro-Context Barriers

Macro-context barriers highlight the external factors that diminish students' achievement of the English language, or that relates to psychological, sociological, pedagogical, political, economic and philosophical aspects.

Underprivileged Teacher Knowledge

EFL teachers are not supported with adequate qualifications that enable them to teach efficiently in the class in terms of many issues such as language competence, class

management and strong personality (the psychological element). Teachers need to be qualified with those traits to create gradually a promising generation. Behraam et al. (648: 2015) assert that teachers are not qualified well and they frequently complain.

Khan and Khan (2016, as cited in Rasheed, et al., 2017: 150) conducted "a study to explore the challenges faced by the English language teachers and students in the multilingual setting of district Mianwali and district Bhakkar, Punjab Pakistan. The participants were college students and teachers. The results of the study revealed that college students find it difficult to learn English language due to the untrained teachers, education policy, examination system and lengthy syllabus".

Large Classes

When classes are overcrowded, it can be said that achieving the educational aims and objectives becomes so hard to implement. It is not agreed among educationalists and practitioners upon the identification of the number of average class and no exact definition has been recognised to what is a large class. The vast majority confirm that large class is from 30 and over. This is controversial; it is not agreed whether large classes have positive or negative results. For example, theoretically speaking, students can be divided into groups and there is a competitive instruction among them on the form of a game, song, drill, activity or a task to solve within a specific period of time. The aim would to be to improve students' performance in certain aspect of language using groupings procedure. This can be said to be rather a positive impact on students even when classes are large. As Grace and Oluwatoyin (2016: 1) explains, the issue with large classes is one of the prominent barriers in the learning process. While Bahanshal (2013: 57) approves that "large classes are not firmly a pedagogical dilemma as the complications found in large classes raise more demands and actions from language teachers in large classes compared with their counterparts teaching smaller ones".

Lack of Enough Time

Class time is not sufficient for students to participate in all activities and tasks and share their ideas. Textbooks contain many activities and other supplementary drills that require time for students to share and participate through individual group, pair work or group work. Beginning from presentation procedure then practice what they have already taught and ending with students' production; producing the material they have just acquired in the class. All of the above needs extra time than the prescribed in the lessons. Savage and Savage (2010: 80) discuss that teachers never seem to have enough time to practice all activities and other techniques of method used in the class.

The System of Written Examinations

There is a contrast in Iraqi educational contexts, the textbook gives a clear and huge attention to the spoken part; but when it comes to testing in the final examinations especially in the Third intermediate stage and the Sixth preparatory stage, unfortunately we find no marks given or allotted to the speaking and listening skills. Instead, the focus is still on the written parts of language.

Sticking to the Prescribed Method

Though from 1994 and on, it becomes clear that the method that obliges teachers to apply and use in the class comprises many ups and downs. First, when it was invented, it was applied to a certain population or sample and it could be applied and usable to certain groups of students but applying it to all students can results in bad effects. Parsons and MacCallum (2019:286) indicate that keeping pace with the rapid revolution in English methodology leads to faultless and flawless fit institutional environment. This type of barrier needs special qualifications on the part of teacher in case they intend to apply post method era of education to improve their progress.

Lack of Proper Infrastructure

Infrastructure means the equipment that is in school such as desks, boards, realia, authentic objects, classes, building, and the materials that facilitate learning such as labs and datashow where necessary. Such materials have a great reflection on student's' self-development.

Lack of Modern Technology

All studies in the field of ELT confirm that modern technology improves the students' ability to develop and advance his learning. Francis (2017: iii) claims that the results show that students feel motivated through the specific use of technology in the classroom.

Parent's Education

Parents' background influences students' learning. Students with good parents' education, their development and progress can be better of those with little parents' education.

Students' Self-Confidence

Students' self-confidence enhances their speed of learning of EFL. Students with high self-confidence learn faster and better than of those with little or no self-confidence. A large

amount research has been done to show the relationship between students' confidence and their learning. The findings reveal that there is a strong correlation between them.

Students' Motivation

Motivation takes a special status in teaching and learning English. Motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic. Khajloo (2013: 56) asserts that motivation is the most significant factor in the process of language learning.

Data Collection Methods

The study is qualitative or exploratory. A questionnaire tool of measurement has been adopted to find out both students' barriers and teachers barriers in the educational process. A number of self-developed items of questions were employed to suit the aims of the study.

Subjects
Students

Sixty students, ages 16-18 participated in filling the identified questionnaire. They were in the fifth preparatory school, Misan, Iraq. The adopted textbook was English for Iraq.

Teachers

Thirty teachers from various schools in Misan were participated in this exploratory study.

Instruments

The instruments used here are two questionnaires, one specified for EFL students and the other for teachers to reveal both the micro-context and macro-context barriers in the teaching and learning process.

Validating the Items of the Questionnaire

The face validity and content validity have been assured by exposing the questionnaires to a jury of experts in the fields of EFL/ESL.

Results and Analysis
Item Analysis of the Students' Responses (Appendix-A)

1. 55% students say that the teaching process is successful in class, around 23% students disagree and nearly 21% stay undecided.

2. 70% students say that they use notebooks to jot down ideas and notes from teacher. Nearly 18% students disagree with the idea of writing notes down and more than 11% stay undecided.

3. 35% students feel pleasant and comfortable in class, 50% do not and 15% make no decision.

4. High number of students feels they are not convinced with the large number of students in class, being more than 76%. The numbers who disagree are 5% and 18% were undecided.

5. More than 46% of the students say they have systematic seating in class. Otherwise 51% disagree and only one student or 1% did not decide.

6. More than 61% students argue that they hear in class. 28% of the students disagreed and 10% are undecided.

7. 80% students say they are happy with group work, 20% disagree.

8. More than 58% students support the idea of family help. 35% disagree and nearly 6% are undecided.

9. 40% questionnaire takers find it hard to be active and stimulated. Around 48% students disagree and nearly 11% have no decision.

10. More than 56% students never feel bored from class teaching. 20% students refuse and around 23% never decide.

11. More than 43% students have a problem in understanding and producing language well. 19% students disagree and 25% don't not make up their decision.

12. More than 51% feel delighted at school. 40% students disagreed and around 8% did not decide.

13. Nearly 81% respondents approve that class time is not enough to share all ideas and participate. Around 16% disagree and 1% are undecided.

14. Less than 28% respondents confirm that they practice English well, 65% disagree and around 6% are undecided.

15. Nearly 60% argue that they don't remember or memorize words well. Less than 37% respondents say they remember words and around 3% have no decision.

16. More than 86% face a difficulty in pronunciation. Nearly 6% students say that they disagree and nearly 6% refused to answer.

Teacher's Item Analysis

1 More than 23% teachers confirm that group work may distract students' attention. 70% teachers say grouping attracts attention and nearly 6% are undecided.

2 More than 83% respondents say that labs and modern technology affect teaching quality. 10% say that technology has no effect on teaching and nearly 6% have no answer.

3. 70% teachers claim that focusing on written skills rather than spoken skills affect students' performance. 20% disagree and 10% are undecided.

4. More than 63% teachers assume that sticking to one method in class reduce students' production. Around 23% disagree and nearly 13% are undecided.

5. More than 93% adopt the notion that large classes influence achieving and completing textbook aims and goals. Around 3% disagree and more than 3% are undecided.

6. 80% teachers say that class time doesn't permit all students to share and participate actively and freely in class tasks and activities. Less than 14% teachers disagree and more than 6% are undecided.

7. 70% teachers support the indication that unprivileged teacher knowledge affects students' language learning. 30% teachers refused that notion.

8.60% teachers explain that the absence of realia and authentic objects may destruct the learning process. Less than 27% refused and more than 13% teachers have no response.

9. More than 43% teacher mentions that social and economic status of students has an impact on their learning. More than 53% teachers disagree and 1% are undecided.

10. More than 73% teachers assert that family education influences students' learning of language. 20% disagree and more than 6% are undecided.

Discussion

For micro-context barriers or linguistic difficulties, the current study shows some related problems to students' learning. Almost all students suffer from large classes' phenomenon, where they can't express their ideas and feelings freely and pleasantly. Besides, time in class doesn't allow all students to participate in all activities and tasks and also time is very specific in case they want to share ideas and communicate each other. Students are exposed to little practice in the spoken part of English language. Diversity between cultures affects students' self-development and evolvement as many gaps were found. English vocabulary constitutes a tremendous challenge where there is countless numbers of words, students can't control this large number of words unless they learn and retrieve them well. English pronunciation takes another dimension in the learning process as it forms a new barrier. Students face a problem in the relation to what is spoken and what is written; no exact connection is found between speaking and writing in English language. English grammatical structures form a big challenge where there are a lot of complicated details and specifics that need high concentration and much practice on the part of the students; unfortunately, less practice is available in classes.

For macro-context barriers, the most important factor is teacher knowledge. Generally speaking, when teacher is well-knowledge, a new generation will be born with high

efficiency and in case teacher knowledge is ill-formed students are going to be with little knowledge and have a weak personality. Another issue students encounter in their learning is large classes. An enormous problem that hinders students' headway is class time; where it prevents sharing and participating all activities and tasks in class. The emphasis on the written side of the language in examinations reduces students' attention in the speaking and listening skills. It can be said that focusing on only one method in the textbook weakens the instructional process since the emphasis be only on the procedures and techniques of that method used in the prescribed textbook. Whereas other methods that have not been concentrated on, teachers sometimes needs to bring new insights from his vision an views according to his/her appreciation of the current status available in the class and his experience and knowledge to decide what to do regardless of the method used. Deficiency of proper stuff or infrastructure discourages the students' motivation and self-confidence, where the existence of such infrastructure creates the right atmosphere of a stimulating learning environment through which students can share ideas and participate in activities and practice their language in an appropriate way. According to the questionnaire, family's education and background may affect the students' performance and achievement of language. Finally, technology plays an essential role in language acquisition, where it has a direct and indirect connection on students' development and performance; the use of modern lab enhances students' pronunciation and using of datashow to clarify the subject-matter or lesson the teacher presents to his students, and the use of computer and Internet have a great effectiveness on students' mental development.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Based on the study results and data analysis, the researcher recommends the following:
1. There should be a teacher course training on the part of the government aiming at developing teacher knowledge in classroom management and qualifying them scientifically.
2. Students' needs and ideas should be included within the scope and aims of the syllabus design when designing curriculum. Besides, the students' current level should be taken into account accurately.
3. Teachers are advised strongly to focus much more than ever on oral and written practice and also concentrate on real life situations in teaching authentic objects.
4. Recommend the government to highly focus on building new schools because schools have more than one presence; some are two and others are three. This, in turn, damages the infrastructure of those schools quickly and affects the school materials and class technology.
5. New classes need to be open in order to get rid of the highly overcrowded classes that impede the entire educational system; aims, goals, objectives, etc.

6. Class time is so restricted and students can't express or share ideas or participate easily in the class. Since there are many students in the class, time needs to be extended to ensure all students' participation and doing all textbook drills and activities effortlessly.

7. Much practice should be presented to students in order to enhance communicative skills and performative speaking drills.

8. Cultural diversity between the languages needs to be focused on in terms of approaching ideas and presenting cultural information in a closely related manner that facilitates the learning process.

9. For English vocabulary, they are innumerable; teachers should advise his/her students to focus on the key words or content words that occupy the essence of English language.

10. Students should be recommended that there is not any relation between the spoken part of language and the written part.

11. Grammar should be presented and practiced a lot to use and apply in authentic situations and real life conversations.

12. The most significant concern in the process of education is the teacher. Teachers are advised to be trained and do extra courses and additional seminars that should be supplied by the ministry of education.

13. There should be a intended study concerning class time either to lessen the subjects in the time table or lengthen the lesson time in order to permit practice all students in groupings and share tasks in all skills.

14. Attention should be focused on both the spoken and the written parts of language in doing the examinations.

15. As much as possible, the government should take into account that the availability of proper infrastructure as it is very essential on the part of both the teacher and the students.

16. Parents should try hard to develop and reconstruct their education because it has a direct relation with their children's learning.

17. Special attention should be given to the use of technology. Modern technology should be available in class as it has a direct association on students' enlargement of their performance in the learning process.

Conclusion

In sum, the current study deals with two key problems or barriers; micro-context barriers and macro-context barriers. The first one explains the linguistic disputes related to students' learning such as the little practicing of spoken English that results in catastrophic effects on students' production of language communication and understanding. Another micro-context barrier is the difficulty of English pronunciation; some letters are written but not spoken. English grammar also has some difficulty for students as it is shown in their questionnaire. In addition, copious vocabulary has been considered as one of students' barriers since English

words are rather uncontrollable in case they are dealt with in the process "coding, storing, retaining".

The other adjacent dimension of the exploratory study elucidates the macro-context formulas of students' barriers of language learning such as large classes, limitations of time component, poor infrastructure that hinder the educational system and affects students' self-developmental advances in language acquisition. Furthermore, the study illuminates the role of family background and education in their student improvement. Teacher knowledge plays a vital role in language learning; poor knowledge of teacher can be assumed to affect students' learning. Other barriers have also been dealt with thoroughly.

A proposed questionnaire supported by jury members of field experts has also been explicated in order to get sufficient information on the barriers being studied comprehensively. One questionnaire is specified for students and the other is for teachers. 60 students from different schools in the province Amara and 30 teachers have been selected randomly from the population to check the effect of those micro-context and macro-context barriers on secondary school students in the learning process. The analysis of the items of the study reveals that those barriers have a great effect on Iraqi EFL secondary school students' language repertoire.

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Appendix (A) Students' Questionnaire

Item No.	Item	Agree	Disagreed
Undecided			
1.	Teaching is very well in class		
2.	I focus on writing down notes		
3.	I feel comfortable in class		
4.	Overcrowded class affects me		
5.	I sit regularly		
6.	I hear and listen clearly		
7.	I feel happy with group-work		
8.	My family support helps me in class		
9.	I feel active and motivated		
10.	Never feel tired from class teaching		
11.	My language problems are difficult to tackle		
12.	I stay delightful at school		
13.	Class time is not enough		
14.	I practice English well		
15.	I don't memorize or remember words well		
16.	I face a difficulty in pronunciation		

Appendix (B) Teachers' Questionnaire

Item No.	Item	Agreed	Disagreed
Undecided			
1.	Students' groupings may distract attention		
2.	Lack of basic technology and lab affect teaching quality		
3.	Focusing on written not spoken language threatens the class participation and share ideas (i.e., testing)		
4.	Sticking to the assumed method of teaching may weaken and diminish students' productivity.		
5.	Large classes influence textbook aims and objectives		
6.	Sharing ideas and doing activities are not permitted within class time		
7.	Poor teacher knowledge impacts students' language acquisition.		
8.	Lack of realia and authentic object upset learning		
9.	Economic and social status of students have an impact on language teaching.		
10.	Students' family education and parents' background enhance teaching.		

Appendix (C) Students' Responses to Questionnaire

Item No.	Agreed	Disagreed	Undecided
1.	33	14	13
2.	42	11	7
3.	21	30	9
4.	46	3	11
5.	28	31	1
6.	37	17	6
7.	48	12	0
8.	35	21	4
9.	24	29	7
10.	34	12	14
11.	26	19	15
12.	31	24	5
13.	49	10	1
14.	17	39	4
15.	36	22	2
16.	52	4	4

Appendix (D) Teachers' Responses to Questionnaire

Item No.	Agreed	Disagreed Undecided	
1.	7	21	2
2.	25	2	3
3.	21	6	3
4.	19	7	4
5.	28	1	1
6.	24	4	2
7.	21	9	0
8.	18	8	4
9.	13	16	1
10.	22	6	2