

Observation and Possible solutions of Difficulties Faced by Omanis in Learning English

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Abstract: *English language is one of the means of communication in the Sultanate of Oman. It is the major tool or medium of communication between Omanis and foreigners/expatriates from all over the world who are working here or who make a visit. Communication and exact pronunciation are major difficulties in learning of any other language. Difficulty as defined in literature is an act that is hard to accomplish, deal with, or understand. On the other hand, learning is a process that has many categories of difficulties. Sometimes difficulties like emotional and motivational barriers work as major hurdles. The study was based on two above learning processes. Difficulties were considered as parameters to assess the capabilities of local Omanis in learning English language. Data obtained from this study confirmed the effect of studied factors on the learner's ability in respect of communication and pronunciation. From comparative study of both learning factors pronunciation and communication, it was noted that sensitivity, showed most severity for pronunciation while idleness for communication. The main reason behind this high severity might be the culture, hesitation to talk to others. In such cases, the combined effect of fear and shame make it more severe. However, learners affected by sensitivity have sufficient intelligence and they are very able to learn.*

Key Words: Communication, pronunciation, learning barrier, motivational, disabilities

Introduction:

Human beings are considered as unique in animal kingdom because of their power of communication and ability to express their feelings to others by using language. Language plays an important role, not only in expression of thinking, communication but also in education (Mosha 2014; Souriyavongsa et al. 2013; ADEA 2005; Malekela, 2003). English language is the means of communication within the country, the and one of the major tool or medium of communication between Omanis and foreigners/expatriates from all over the world who are

working there or who make a visit. There are some common problems faced by most people in learning English as a second or foreign language in non-English speaking countries (Husna, 2009; Hu, 2002). Communication and exact pronunciation are major difficulties in learning of any other language (Souriyavongsa et al. 2013). It has been argued that the adult learner is less motivated than children to learn the language and is more self-conscious about speaking, in terms of practicing and making errors. English learning process of learner, an interrelated activity of both the newly-learned English knowledge and their original related knowledge in the cognitive structure, is to form new English cognitive structure or expand the original structure. The construct of reading comprehension is, however, a complex phenomenon which involves psycholinguistic factors which relate to schemata and text processing (Grabe & Stoller, 2002); linguistic and sociolinguistic factors, which also include an understanding of pragmatics and discourse organization; and a knowledge of a particular range of reading strategies (Koda, 2004) including the active utilization of background knowledge (Westwood, 2003). Difficult pronunciation of the words in the English do not generally depress young children as much adults, who are likely to be affected negatively by difficult subject matters and pronunciation (Krashen 1982). Difficulty as defined in literature is an act that is hard to accomplish, deal with, or understand. On the other hand, learning is a process that has many categories under difficulties. Sometimes difficulties like (behavior problem, depression, sickness), emotional (fear, shame, sensitivity, adjustments) and motivational barriers (lack of goal, idleness) worked as major hurdles. Criticism, failure and rejection are major factors of fear barrier. Critical observations of these factors might be helpful in describing the causes and solutions of these particular barriers in learning (Rogerson and Scott 2010). It is already reported that learning process in institutions to be cyclic and tedious resulting in a lack of motivation and represent a pessimistic view (McLarty and Moran 2009). There are different assessment parameters include listing of abilities of learner in terms of their strong areas like memory power, representation, etc (Harrington 1995; Croft 2001; Croft and Cruse 2004; Goldberg 1995, 2003, 2006; Tomasello 2003; Robinson and Ellis 2008; Bybee 2008). Singleton (1989) claims that success in second language learning is strictly related to age. Comparison between learners of same age group for a particular ability is another way of assessments (Harrington 1995; McLarty and Moran 2009). Assessment and self assessment are the tools to judge learning capacity of learners (Boud and Falchikov 1989). These methods of assessments might be applied to recognize the particular

difficulty for specific learner. Comparative assessments helped in identification of weakness in particular areas of learning. There are practically different instruments used for assessment, self assessments and comparative assessments. In present era, the advanced method of assessment includes performance, portfolio, peer and students' self-assessment, hence, is somewhat different from traditional assessments (Chen 2008). There are so many studies in the literature available focused on the improvement of teaching methodology with clear aim to convert it more well-organized and effectual. However, very few studies are found in literature deal with experience of learning from the students' viewpoint, and consider what, in their observation, are the difficulties due to their social and cultural barriers (Mosha 2014; Rogerson and Scott 2010; McLarty and Moran 2009; Chen 2008).

Objective of the study:

The objective of this study was to observe difficulties (existed in the form of barriers), causes and solutions of these particular barriers in learning English language faced by local Omanis.

Background:

Oman is one of many rapidly developing countries whose economies require increasing numbers of English speakers in the light of the global spread of English in recent decades. Along with other Arabic speaking countries, Oman realized the need to communicate with non-Arabic speaking countries in order to expand their bilateral relations (Husna, 2009). There was an urgent need for expatriate foreign expertise to strengthen such relationships especially after the discovery of oil in the Gulf States (Mosha 2014; Husna, 2009; Hu, 2002). English has become a key factor in the development of the nation's globally. English is the medium of teaching in colleges and universities. Mostly universities run foundation program to improve the ability of students in using the English language before enrolling them in graduate course. There are several factors that engage young Omanis in learning English as a second or foreign language with possibilities of wide array of barrier. Learning another language can be a challenge. The time it takes to learn English may vary from child to child depending on the child's age, motivation, personality, knowledge of the first language, and exposure to English (Rogerson and Scott 2010). However, the developmental period for learning English is fairly consistent across young children. This developmental period includes four stages; 1) The continued use of the

home language; 2) the silent or nonverbal periods; 3) Sound experimentation and use of telegraphic speech; 4) Productive use of the new language (Dornyei 1998; Quist 2000). One of the oldest methods is the grammar-translation method, which focuses on memorizing word lists and grammar rules. Written language is encouraged rather than spoken language. Those who hate memorization may be discouraged by learning a language with this method. On the other hand, the audio-lingual method -- which emphasizes spoken language -- may hinder the learning for individuals who are not inclined to speak in the target language and instead focus on written language. Because there are many different methods for learning a second language, using the best technique for an individual learner will create the most productive and efficient education environment. Because cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development are involved in and affected by the process of second-language acquisition, it is important to assess these areas. Effective teaching of English as a foreign language in colleges and universities is therefore a key strategy in Oman's continuing development. Omani universities also need to establish a research base into how this can, best be done. There are factors that have been associated with students' stumpy performances due to a variety of barriers. The most habitually cited barriers to learning among youth were behavior problem, depression, sickness, fear, shame, sensitivity, adjustments, lack of goal, idleness etc. These barriers have an effect on other characteristics correlated to their studies, such as self-confidence, time management, and problem solving skills, all of which are needed in order to succeed (Scott, 2008; Simon et al., 2006). Despite, being currently engaged in learning, these young people are able to anticipate barriers to learning that they may encounter in the future. Childcare responsibilities are a major consideration for young people in this segment; many are already finding it difficult to balance family and learning commitments (Rogerson and Scott 2010). If society is to deal effectively with learning and behavior problems, there must be greater understanding of the parts that make up the phenomena. To begin with, it is important to differentiate learning disabilities from learning problems and attention/deficit/hyperactivity disorder from common place behavior problems (Rogerson and Scott 2010; Scott, 2008; Simon et al., 2006). It is predictable, that this study would be helpful to treat the challenges and difficulties of learning as observed and described by the learners themselves. It will contribute to a deeper understanding of this area of concern for educationalists in general and English educators in particular.

Literature Review:

The following paragraph comprises the general description of barrier like disabilities (behavior problem, depression, sickness), emotional (fear, shame, sensitivity, adjustments) and motivational barriers (lack of goal, idleness). Furthermore, the effect of these barriers on various aspects of English learning has been reviewed. Lastly, various strategies that are applied by different researchers to enhance the learning ability are also summarized in this section.

The social and emotional well-being of the learners is major factor that are directly related to learning. The social, economic and political environment of the surrounding of learner that impact positively or negatively on the learner's abilities. Sometimes learners are placed at risk by conditions arising in the wider society (Mosha 2014; Souriyavongsa et al. 2013; ADEA 2005; Malekela, 2003; Hughes and Lavery). Sometime locals are treated as different by faculty members no matter they are associated or not associated visible learning disability (Docherty et al. 2010; Walmsley and Welshman 2006). Such behavior of faculty members can make reputational pressure on the learner which might ignite the will power of the learner to learn.

Disabilities:

A condition of learners that might be responsible for poor performance in learning aspect like ability to store, process, or produce information (Gogtay et al. 2004.). Conditions like mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or visual/hearing impairments are not the cause of learning disabilities. Behavioral disorder is distinguished as an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors, to build satisfactory relationship with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances and a general pervasive mood or unhappiness or depression (Rogerson and Scott 2010; Gogtay et al. 2004). People who have the problem of depression feel alone and isolated. Sickness like mental disorder is an important learning barrier that needs to be studied in detail. Mental disorders amongst children are due to family situation like unemployment, lower income, low educational attainment (Green et al. 2005). The Department of Health (2001) in England explained learning disability as a combination of:

1. *Reduced ability to learn new complex information and skills (impaired intelligence)*

2. *Reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning)*
3. *An onset of disability which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.*

Emotional Barriers:

Emotional barriers are major problems in learning process. Sometimes, learners encounter more than one emotional barrier. Emotional barrier includes fear, shame, sensitivity, and adjustments. A major emotional barrier is the fear of learning. It is well known, that sometimes emotional stimulation increases the concentration and assists learning but the emotion like fear shows opposite effect on learning (Veliyeva 2015). Rogerson and Scott (2010) reported that learning abilities are affected by feelings of fear. Fear also influences learning, such as self-assurance, time organization, and problem solving abilities, all of which are required, in order to do well (Scott, 2008; Simon et al., 2006). Shame is one of the major factors among emotional barrier in the English learning and communication. Factor like fear worked in combination with shame to reduce learning English. Sometimes learners show timidity to use the language because of fear and shyness if they make mistakes (Souriyavongsa et al. 2013). Shame is perhaps the most self-destructive barrier to a student's learning. Students in high school can be emotionally sensitive. "Emotional sensitivity" is not only the means to realize other people's feelings but also to improve strengths in some areas of learning while weaknesses in others (Veliyeva 2015; Souriyavongsa et al. 2013; Rogerson and Scott 2010). Further, adjustment of fluency from one language to other is not an easy task for learners. Some learners have preference to stay the same and have a hard time to move from one task to another.

Motivational barriers:

Lack of goal and idleness are the main motivational barriers which have a clear cut effect on learning capacity of the learner. The learner must be aware about his goal to improve learning process (Roger 2009). Deficiency in physiological activities and feeling of vulnerable are other major motivational barriers in the learning. Physiological activity and safety are considered as the basic need of learning (Roger 2009). Merriam 2007 suggested that skills obtained by learners through their experiences enhanced the coping skills and personality which culminated the effective performance of learning. Vella (2002) observed the tendency of immediate use of new

skill in learning amongst the adult learner. Sometimes these tendencies are useful for the learner of new language (Roger 2009; Merriam 2007; Vella 2002; Ileris 2003, 2006, 2007). Dymock 2007 studied several motivational factors like mutual relationships, external prospect, social benefit, proficient improvement etc and noted, that these motivational factors dynamically improved the ability of learner. Gardner (2001, 2002) studied the effect of attitudes and motivation on the ability of the learner. In his study, he found that there was correlation between attitudes and performance of the learner. It is a common view among the researches that positive attitudes help the learning, although attitude is different and cannot govern behavior (Khanna and Agnihotri, 1994). Elliot, Kratochil, and Cook (2000) studied the motivational factors and found motivation is the cause of activities that keeps the learner engaged in particular action and, in most cases, action is the learning process. They further noted that motivation helps the learner to obtain and recognize new information and skills.

Ileris (2007) established the relationship between learners with their environment and introduced a model to understand this relationship. His model is known as the “three dimensions of learning, with the help of this model, Ileris (2007) explained internal and external processes of learning. Before Ileris, it was the Thomas (2001) who explained the relationship, between habits and learning skills. Notwithstanding these problems, several researchers showed that learners of different age can learn, if they are supported by appropriate techniques, specific assistance and opportunity (Vella 2002; LSC 2005; Cross 2004; Falasca 2011; Ileris 2003, 2006, 2007). Susanna (2007) noticed that the gap between the learner’s capacities and proficiency in English due to negative teaching approach of educators. Further, Susanna (2007) also observed that weak learners followed the poor methodology of learning and most of them leave the program of learning when they find themselves in struggle. Abbasi et al. (2010) explained that language learning policies are the precise manners that help students to increase their language learning. Language learning policies are cognizant procedures for learners to assist English language learning which include both informal and formal interviews, group discussions, language learning diaries, dialogue journals among students and teachers, open-ended survey, structured three- or five point surveys of strategy frequency (Grainger 2005; Oxford 2002).

Methodology:

The study was based on two learning processes i.e. communication and exact pronunciation. Difficulties like disabilities (behavior problem, depression, sickness), emotional (fear, shame, sensitivity, adjustments) and motivational barriers (lack of goal, idleness) were considered as parameters to assess the capabilities of local Omanis in learning English language. The sample includes total 250 local Arabic speaking Omanis. The sample has equal number of males and females i.e. 125. The data collection has been carried out in April-May 2015. Participants were asked to indicate the level of overall language difficulty in general and for language skill separately, as well as self-rating their language achievement. The obtained quantitative data have been tabulated and statistically analyzed.

Data analysis and Result:

Data presented in tables, showed that most of the learners, faced the problems discussed in this paper. Further data obtained from this study confirmed the effect of studied factors on the learner's ability in respect of communication and pronunciation.

Learning factor: Pronunciation**In cases of disabilities:**

Sickness proved most severe learning barrier, 25 female participants were found 100% affected by this barrier. For male participants, it was depression that decreased 100% learning ability in 23 male participants. Factor behavior problem registered lowest effect and only 18 female and 20 male participants were 100% affected (Table 1).

In cases of emotional barrier:

Learning barrier sensitivity showed the highest negativities among the female learners. 38 out of 125 female participants were found 100% affected by the factor sensitivity. Almost the same trend was noted for the male participants (37 out of 125). Learning barriers shame and fear registered almost the same response in hindering the learning process (Table 2).

In cases of motivational barrier:

The learning ability of both male and female participants was severely affected by learning barrier '*lack of goal*'. Equal numbers of male participants were affected by both motivational

barriers. Female participants followed male participants in both motivational barriers and registered almost the same response to these barriers.

From the comparative study of data mentioned in table 1 to table 3, it was found that sensitivity proved severe barrier while behavior problem showed lowest effect on the learning ability of participants. In most cases, females followed males in response to any barrier for learning factor pronunciation.

Learning factor: Communication

In cases of disabilities:

Behavior problem and depression were noted as the most severe barriers for female participants and decreased 100% learning ability in 35 female participants in each case. Male participants followed female participants in all the three disabilities barriers (Table 4).

In cases of emotional barrier:

Again sensitivity proved severe barrier for female participants for the learning factor communication. Male participants also showed similar trend for this particular barrier. Almost equal responses were noted in barriers like fear and shame for both male and female participants (Table 5).

In cases of motivational barrier:

Both motivational barriers showed the equal response for male and female participants. However barrier 'lack of goal' found little bit more severe than idleness but it was not significantly different to each other (Table 6).

Idleness proved the most severe barrier for female participants amongst all the barriers for the learning factor communication. All other barriers followed idleness, closely in their effect for both male and female participants (Tables 4-6). From comparative study of both learning factors pronunciation and communication, it was noted that sensitivity, showed most severity for pronunciation while idleness for communication.

Result Discussion:

Based on this research study on evaluation, numerous conclusions can be drawn. Sometime the number of aspects measured in the assessment may have biased the outcome. Data obtained from present study indicate that local Omanis have faced various kinds of difficulties and barriers in learning English language. Only less than 15% participants had no effect of any barrier. Barrier sensitivity showed severity for both learning factor communication and pronunciation. The main reason behind this high severity might be the culture, hesitation to talk to others. In such cases, the combined effect of fear and shame make it more severe. However, learners affected by sensitivity have sufficient intelligence and they are very able to learn (Nichy 2002). Data presented in table 1 about the disabilities indicate that most of the participants were 50-75% affected by all three disabilities barriers which reflect their poor physical and mental status. Physical and mental health is important to learner's excellence in their learning and development. A learner struggling with a mental health problem, such as depression, sickness, behavior, cannot use 100% ability in learning (Fleming et al., 2005; Jennings et al. 2000). However, pronunciation is the first step to communicate in any foreign language but on the basis of data mentioned in table 4, it is understood that mental and physical disabilities have more effect on communication than that of pronunciation. Learners with these problems were timorous due to their incorrect pronunciation. The solutions of these problems were discussed by Dornyei in 1998. He suggested that parents, family and friends can help the learners to cope these problems. Data recorded in tables 2 and 5 are related to emotional barrier in regards to pronunciation and communication respectively. Amongst the emotional barriers, sensitivity was found more severe in its effect than those of other two. The causes of severity are already discussed in previous lines. Maltreatment and humiliation in childhood, leading to traumatic stress etc are other causes that decreased the ability of the learners. All these causes are somewhat related to emotional barrier (Dornyei 1998; Cook 2006; Perry 2006). If the learners have no ability to read out some words without stuttering or misspelling, such learners had felt shame to communicate with the people who are more qualified in their opinion. But such learners tried to speak such difficult term among their family members and friends, who are familiar with the learner's problem and ready to help to overcome the problem (Cook 2006; Perry 2006). The strangeness in estimation by learners of themselves and their peers showed that

this was a difficult task even after advanced training. Data mentioned in tables 3 and 6 reflected the severity of motivational problem for pronunciation and communication respectively. Both motivational barriers have more severe effect on male in comparison to female. This is due to careless behavior of male, hence, both motivational barriers viz. “lack of goal and idleness” are correlated with barrier behavior problems. In comparison to male participants, female are serious to learn and found hard workers. A learner cannot handle these entire learning barriers with the help of teacher only. There is a need to improve the learning environment that include classes, college, home, interaction between family members, friends etc. In learning of any language, the learning process has two components viz. learner and educator or teacher. The learning performance of a learner depends on the relationship between learner and his educator or teacher (Quist 2000; Cook 2006; Perry 2006). The finding of this study suggested that learners with low performance have a comparative tendency in comparison to learners with better performance. This tendency indicates a major difference between the learners in terms of high level confidence and/or a lack of understanding (Veliyeva 2015). Further, from the data, it is concluded that post-assessment interviews, training and practice in self and also peer assessment are the tools that can help the learners. Self-assessment in delivery techniques – accent, activity, and body language are helpful to learner of both gender to cope up all barriers in learning. The argumentation ability of learner is very helpful to find out the way to learn exact pronunciation of a word with its appropriate mean. However, the findings in present and many other studies indicated deficiencies in students' argumentative skills (Wolfe and Britt 2008; Wolfe, 2012). Poor knowledge of grammar is another learning barrier to write, speak and listening in a particular learners (Ellis et al. 2008).

Conclusion:

Finally, the quantitative content analysis in the present study pinpointed the participants' increased usage of accent, activity, and body language which function as connection among textbooks, trainer or teacher, and learner. The present quantitative study of learning barrier explained the situation that learner faced in different environment. The environment of learning facility such as class room, library has great effect on learning barrier. Further, it was also noted that behavior of the learner is another factor that is responsible for increment and decrement in the capacity of learning. This study also confirmed that female learners are more serious in

learning in comparison to male learner. Moreover, we need ever to remember that language is all about interactions. Cognition, consciousness, experience, embodiment, brain, self, and human interaction, society, culture, and history are all inextricably intertwined in rich, complex, and dynamic ways in language. Yet despite this complexity, despite its lack of overt government, instead of anarchy and chaos, there are patterns everywhere. Linguistic patterns are not pre-ordained by God, genes, school curriculum, or other human policy.

Table 1: Effect of disabilities on the learning factor pronunciation.

Learning barrier (disabilities)	Learning factor: Pronunciation						
	Gender	Level of learning affected by disabilities barrier					
		0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Behavior problem,	Male	11	28	35	31	20	4
	Female	8	33	36	30	18	6
Depression	Male	8	28	38	28	23	6
	Female	10	24	32	35	24	4
Sickness	Male	13	23	34	33	22	3
	Female	15	27	30	34	25	5

Table 2: Effect of emotional barriers on the learning factor pronunciation.

Learning barrier (emotional)	Learning factor: Pronunciation						
	Gender	Level of learning affected by emotional barrier					
		0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Fear	Male	13	27	31	33	21	4
	Female	14	22	30	34	25	8
Shame	Male	15	21	25	35	29	6
	Female	16	25	34	27	23	4
Sensitivity	Male	11	16	27	34	37	5
	Female	5	19	28	35	38	4

Table 3: Effect of motivational barriers on the learning factor pronunciation.

Learning barrier (motivational)	Learning factor: Pronunciation Level of learning affected by motivational barrier						
	Gender	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Lack of goal,	Male	17	22	23	28	35	6
	Female	18	21	25	29	34	4
Idleness	Male	19	21	24	26	35	3
	Female	22	20	23	30	30	5

Table 4: Effect of disabilities on the learning factor communication.

Learning barrier (disabilities)	Learning factor: Communication Level of learning affected by disabilities barrier						
	Gender	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Behavior problem,	Male	15	17	28	32	33	4
	Female	12	16	32	30	35	3
Depression	Male	13	19	33	28	32	5
	Female	12	21	30	27	35	4
Sickness	Male	14	22	29	30	30	3
	Female	12	25	27	30	31	3

Table 5: Effect of emotional barriers on the learning factor communication.

Learning barrier (emotional)	Learning factor: Communication Level of learning affected by emotional barrier						
	Gender	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Fear	Male	10	23	27	32	33	4
	Female	14	19	24	35	33	5
Shame	Male	10	22	28	32	34	4
	Female	11	23	27	31	33	4
Sensitivity	Male	14	18	25	30	34	5
	Female	12	22	25	31	35	6

Table 6 Effect of emotional barriers on the learning factor communication.

Learning barrier (motivational)	Learning factor: Communication						
	Gender	Level of learning affected by motivational barrier					
		0%	25%	50%	75%	100%	CD at 5%
Lack of goal,	Male	14	18	25	33	35	4
	Female	16	21	25	29	34	5
Idleness	Male	11	24	26	29	35	4
	Female	15	21	25	28	36	5

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