

the most important factor behind students ' weakness in English language from the point view of English Language teachers

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Abstract :

This study aimed at finding out the most important factor behind students ' weakness in English language from the view of English Language teachers identifying . The study used the analytic descriptive research design as well as questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the sample of the study at the university of Tamar and Sana'a university. The study reached the following results:

- 1. Students' background in English language is weak thus it affects their learning.**
- 2. Lack of listening evaluation was found to be one of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language.**
- 3. Society's negative attitudes towards learning English language affects students' learning of English language.**
- 4. Lack of listening lab was found to be one of the most important factors behind students' weakness in English language.**

Introduction

Language is a symbol of thought. Early man communicated through symbols and gestures and later through spoken word in the form of language enables us to communicate an infinite number and a variety of messages. English language is mostly several things at once. To begin with, it is an assortment of national and international varieties.

Many people use English language all over the world. English is the language used by all sorts of people in all sorts of situations. What makes English language attractive is that it is a language of communication between different people around the world. English language is culture preserving and culture transmitting.

A Historical Background of TEFL in Yemen

The last three decades have witnessed a rapid increase of international communication in many different respects, such as trade, travel, tourism...etc. thus, many people interested in learning English language which is considered as the language of international communication.

Yemen is one of the countries that gives emphasis and importance for teaching and learning English language as a foreign language. It was an important step to teach English in Yemen in the middle of the twentieth century. In fact, English in south Yemen, namely Aden was introduced by British in the early thirties of the ninetieth century. Consequently, southern Yemeni people were more familiar with English for decades than northern people, who were under the control of Aimam.

Background of the Study

Nowadays, the English language has become the main of communication in all over the world.

It is the language of trade, commerce, scholarships and science. Therefore, a Yemeni student is in need to learn this language, which is universally widespread.

In learning English, the Yemeni Student faces many problems and obstacles, which prevent him from learning this language accurately and effectively. Thus, students suffer sorts of weakness in learning English language. Through the observation of the researcher for the students performances in learning English language and also through English teachers, complaining that their students suffer from weakness of learning and acquiring English language.

It is an established fact that there are various factors that affect students' learning in different aspects. These various factors have more than one aspect of deep relationship with learning process in general and the process of learning English language in particular. Thus, the researcher decided to investigate the issue.

Through the observation of the researcher, there are a lot of teachers and students at the faculties of Education departments of English language who usually complain about the aspect of students' weakness in English at the mentioned departments. Several studies concluded that students' weakness in English language is related to students' performance, teachers' evaluation of students' learning, lack of facilities and society cultural (Alan, W. 1994. P.15).

Some researchers out side Yemen investigated the problem of students' weakness in English language.(Allen, H. 1995. P.16) of a belief that young students who are unmotivated surly marke poor language learning. (Anew, W. 1991. P. 65) believes that students who are uncooperative have many barriers to learning English language because of the slowing effects of ageing. (Berton, C. 1990. P. 77) thinks that students who have negative past experience of learning E.L. they only rarely have any success. (Cox, K. 1994. P.26)

concluded that motivation is a critical factor in successful learning and knowing what you want to achieve is an important part or this without such motivating the student will almost certainly fail to make the necessary effort. (Cook, V. 1991. P.19) argues that the strength of motivation will depend on the outcome the student wishes to achieve. According to (Hyme, D. 1992. P. 61) Outside any classroom, there are attitudes to language and English language in particular such as how important, is the learning of English considered being in the society? In school situation for example, is language-learning part of the curriculum of high or low status. Are the cultural images associated with English positive or negative? All these views of language will affect the students' attitude to the language being studied and the nature and strength of this attitude will in its turn have profound effect on the degree of motivation the student brings to class and whether or not that motivation continues. In the (1992. P.45) study by Hyme the attitude of parents and older siblings will be crucial on students' learning, the attitude of students' peers is also vital. If they are critical of the subject of activity the students' own motivation may suffer.

(Johnson, K. 1991. P.77) of the opinion that clearly a major factor in the continuance of a students' motivation is the teacher. It is worth pointing out that a students' attitude to the language and the task of learning will be vital. An obvious enthusiasm for English and English learning in this case, would seem to prerequisites for a positive classroom atmospheres. (Joshi, N. 1994. P. 100) believes that it is vital that both teacher and students' have some confidence in the way teaching and learning take place. When either loss this confidence, motivation can be disastrously affected. (Hyme, D. P.123) thinks that most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear it, and particularly when this is coupled with interesting task. On the other hand, if

students loss this advantage their success and interest are much more unlikely.

(Joshi, N. 1994. P.25) of the opinion, that students' experiences in their families have a profound influence on their attitudes to authority. Sometimes indiscipline can be traced back to a difficult home situation sometimes home attitudes to English, to learning in general, or even to teachers themselves can predispose students' to have problematically.

(Adam, S. 1998. P.15) of the opinion that previous learning experiences (education of all kinds affect students) behaving even at the level of the last teacher because students are influenced by what went before and their expectations of the learning experience can be colored either by unpleasant memories or by what they were once allowed to get away with the significance of the study.

Several studies indicated that positive or negative motivation, attitude, previous learning experience, parents' influence and society culture play an important role in students' weakness or strength in English language.

This study is geared toward identifying the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at public universities of Yemen. If students were good enough, then it is more likely that they would have strong background and experiences about the target language that may help in decreasing and overcoming their weakness. Thus, this study is aiming at identifying students' weakness in English language. In doing so, students can determine their weakness areas and can strength then their target language better than they do now. Under the current circumstances, the students' strength and weakness are not identified. Thus, the present study has to be conducted.

Statement of the problem

The problem of the present study can be stated in the following sentence.

The most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at the departments of Education Thamar university and Sana'a university from the point view of teachers.

The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are trying to answer the following questions.

The major question of the study can be mentioned as follow:

What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at the departments of Education of Thamar university and Sana'a university from the point view of E.L teachers?

This major question can be branched into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to students, at the departments of Education at the universities of Thamar and Sana'a from the point view of English language teachers?
2. What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to evaluation of students' learning at the departments of Education at Thamar and Sana'a universities from the point view of E.L teachers?
3. What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to the society at the departments of Education at Thamar and Sana'a universities from the point view of E.L teachers?
4. What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to lack of

equipment at Sana'a and Thamar universities from the point view of E.L teachers?

Significance of the study:

There is a need to study more about the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, so as to enable a large number of English language teachers and decision makers to become more aware of this problem and studying this problem is very important for several reasons. First of all understanding students' weakness in English language can help to reveal the underlying factors behind students' weakness. Second studying this problem can help teachers of English language evaluate strategies of teaching and learning. Third, researches have often studied students' weakness reflecting one or two factors, but their findings may have been implicitly over generalized to all organizations.

• **Limitation of the study:**

- The study is limited to the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language.
- The study is limited to Thamar University and Sana'a University.
- The study is limited to the teachers who are working for the Yemeni governorate at Thamar University and Sana'a University at the departments of Education.

Operational definitions of technical terms:

- **Factor:** It refers to an element that actively contributes to the production of a result. In the present study, this term is used to refer to a set of components, which are related to students' weakness.
- **Weakness:** In the present study this term is used to refer to the quality of state of weak. Also this term is used to diagnose the reasons behind students' weakness in English language.

- **Procedures of the study:**

In an attempt to answer the questions raised in the present study, the researcher followed these procedures:

- I. Reviewed literature on the area of students' weakness in English language in general with a special focus on the Yemeni community in particular.
- II. Analyzed literature critically with ultimate goals of coming out with appropriate definitions of the needed technical terms and of identifying the elements behind students' weakness to offer suggestions for the purpose of the study.
- III. Designed a questionnaire to identify jury members' opinions concerning the selected factors behind students' weakness to be included in the study
- IV. Reaching some suggestions.

- **Tools of the study:**

To best achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher has designed a questionnaire, which consists of four axes. The first axis through the fourth axis of the questionnaire consist of 25 items and designed to be answered on a three – point scale of very important, important and not important.

Data collection:

To collect the necessary data for the current study, the researcher designed a questionnaire.

The questionnaire which consists of four axes was distributed to the sample of the study and the respondents were given clear instruction:

- **The four axes contain twenty five. The first axis item contains eleven factors which are related to students'. the second axis comprises five factors which are related to evaluation of students' learning: The third axis consists of six factors which are related to lack of equipment.**

The fourth axis contains of three factors which are related to society. Also, the researcher has gone through the available documents to identify what the investigators takes to be the key issues, the crucial questions and the obvious gaps in the current state of knowledge.

- **The population of the study:**

The population of this study is all teachers of English language at the faculties of Education departments of E.L who have worked at the public universities of Yemen for the academic year (2005 – 2006).

- **The sample of the study:**

Two government universities were randomly chosen out of seven universities.

The universities, which were chosen randomly, are Sana'a University and Thamar university. The sample of the study was all English language teachers who have been working at these universities at the time of the present study. The sample consists of twenty teachers from both universities.

- **The validity of questionnaire:**

The validity of the questionnaire was established by showing it to a jury of experts in the fields of curriculum and teaching English language at Thamar University. The jury's suggestions for adding, deleting or modifying certain items were all taken into account in the final stages of the production of the questionnaire.

Discussion and interpretation of the results

The purpose of the study was to find out the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language. Two universities were selected randomly for the study. Sana'a university and Thamar university were chosen. The deparurents of Educations at the mentioned universities were the target of the current study. The data collected and tabulated were analyzed using three stactical techniques namely, frequencies, percentage and mean

- For the purpose of stactical analysis, the positive factor answers of the questionnaire are given 3 and 2 marks respectively where as the negative factor answers were given 1 mark.
- Analysis of the data has been done based on the specific objectives set for the study as specified on the questions of the study.

In the following part the researcher intends to display and interprete the results of the study based on the order of the questions of the study and as follow:

In order to know the order of the four axeses of the study, the mean of the teachers' respons was calculated and the order came as follow:

Table (1): Axeses of the questionnaire which contain the most important factor behind students' weakness arranged according to their most weakness.

Axeses	Mean	Order
Factors related to students.	2.71	One
Factors related to evaluation of students learning.	2.34	Two
Factors related to society.	2.15	Three
Factors related to lack of equipment.	1.99	Four

Table (1): Displays the four axes of the study arranged according to their weakness from the highest to the lowest. This table shows that axis number one which contains the factors which are related to students' weakness in English language is the weakest of the four axes of the study. The mean of this axis is (2.71) out of 3 and followed by the axis which contains factors related to evaluation of students' learning. The mean of this axis is (2.34) out of 3. The axis that contains the factors which are related to society got the third rank. The mean of this axis is (2.15) out of 3. The axis that contains factors related to lack of equipment got the last rank and its mean (1.99) out of 3. Thus it could be concluded that the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language summed in axis number one with the highest mean of the four axes (2.71) out of 3 and followed by axis number two, axis number three and axis number four.

The mean of the three axes are (2.34, 2.15 and 1.99) respectively.

To find out the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at the departments of Education at Sana'a and Thamar universities, question number one was phrased in the following form.

What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to students from the point view of English language teachers?

Table (2) Frequencies, percentage and mean of teachers' responses about the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which are related to students from the point view of English language teachers.

Factor number	Very important		Important		Not important		Mean
	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	
1	22	0.88	2	0.08	1	0.04	2.84
2	22	0.88	2	0.08	1	0.04	2.84
8	20	0.80	3	0.12	2	0.08	2.72
6	20	0.80	2	0.08	3	0.12	2.68
4	19	0.76	3	0.12	3	0.12	2.64
11	18	0.72	4	0.16	3	0.12	2.60
10	18	0.72	4	0.16	3	0.12	2.60
3	17	0.68	4	0.16	4	0.16	2.52
9	16	0.64	5	0.20	4	0.16	2.48
7	15	0.60	5	0.20	5	0.20	2.40
5	14	0.56	6	0.24	5	0.20	2.36

Table (2) Demonstrates all the factors which are related to students. This table shows that factor number one which is related to students' background in English is the weakest and came in the peak of table (2). The mean of this factor is (2.84) out of 3 which reflects that students' background in English language is very weak and thus affects students' learning of English language. This what many studies indicated that students' weakness in English language is strongly associated with laziness, careless and weak back ground.

Also factor number 2 which is related to some students who do not have real motivation.

This factor has mean of (2.84) out of 3 and it is clear that the mean is high thus it could be concluded that the students have negative motivation towards learning English language. Several studies indicated that a student who lacks extrinsic reward from the environment around him discourages him.

Thus lack of extrinsic reward affects students' intrinsic motivation. The mentioned factor was followed by factors number 8, 6, 4, 11, 10, 3, 9, 7 and 5 respectively.

Those factors are related to students lack to complete homework assignments, to take risks, to participate in classroom activities, to enhance their use of language, to take more responsibilities, to be aware of their individual learning, to accept oral orientation and to listen respectively.

Thus it is clear that the mentioned factors affect students' learning in many different ways.

To find out the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at the departments of Education at Sana'a and Thamar universities, question number two was phrased in the following form.

What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to evaluation of students' learning at the departments of education at Sana'a and Thamar universities from the point view of English language teachers?

Table (3): Frequencies, percentage and mean of teachers' Responses about the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to the evaluation of students' learning from the point view of English language teachers.

Factor number	Very important		Important		Not important		Mean
	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	
13	17	0.68	3	0.12	5	0.20	2.48
15	15	0.60	4	0.16	6	0.24	2.36

Factor number	Very important		Important		Not important		Mean
	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	
14	16	0.64	2	0.08	7	0.28	2.36
16	14	0.56	4	0.16	7	0.28	2.28
12	12	0.48	7	0.28	6	0.24	2.24

Table (3): Displays all the factors that are related to evaluation of students' learning. This table reveals that factor number 13 which is related to listening ability is not evaluated due to the lack of modern aids such as listening lab. This factor came in the top of all factors which are related to evaluation of students' learning. The mean of the mentioned factor is (2.48) out of 3 and this mean considered high as compared with other factors. This means lack of listening could be one of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language because the power of spoken is derived from the power of listening and the power of English language in general is driven from its speakers. The above mentioned factor was followed by factor number 15, 14, 16, and 12 respectively. The mean of those factors are 2.36, 2.36, 2.28 and 2.24 respectively. Then came factor number 15 as the second weakest factor. This factor indicated that some teachers gear their teaching activities exclusively to suit the examination need. That means some teachers are not directing their teaching towards enhancing students' learning skills by asking students to listen more, speak more, read more, write more, work more on self – study exercises, use dictionaries and other means to build up their language store. Thus the students' suffer from the weakness of English language.

- To find out the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to the society, question number three was phrased in the following form.

What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to the society at the departments of education at Sana'a university and Thamar university from the point view of English language teachers?

Table (4): Frequencies, percentage and mean of teachers' responses about the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to society from the point view of English language teachers.

Factor number	Very important		Important		Not important		Mean
	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	
17	15	0.60	2	0.08	8	0.32	2.28
18	13	0.52	3	0.12	9	0.36	2.16
19	11	0.44	3	0.12	11	0.44	2.00

Table (4): Expose all the factors that are related to society. This table shows that factor number 17 which is related to some families who have negative performed influence on their attitudes towards learning English language.

This factor is the weakest of the three factors which are related to the society. The mean of this factor is (2.28) out of 3. This means that the society discourage students' to take risk in speaking outside classroom which ventually affects students' performance. Also the society lacks regonition and admiration of foreign language. In addition to that the society places importance not so much on what individual can do but on how well he does it relative to others. The

previous factor was followed by factors number 18 and 19 respectively. The mean of those factors are 2.16 and 2 respectively.

- To find out the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language which is related to the lack of equipment, question number four was pharrsed in the flowing form.

What is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language, which is related to the lack of equipment at the departments of education of Sana'a university and Tamar university from the point view of English language teachers?

Table (5): Frequencies, percentage and mean of teachers' responses about the most important factor behind students weakness in English language which is related to lack of equipment from the point view of English language teachers.

Factor number	Very important		Important		Not important		Mean
	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	Frequencies	Pre %	
20	14	0.56	2	0.08	9	0.36	2.20
25	13	0.52	2	0.08	10	0.04	2.12
22	13	0.52	1	0.04	11	0.44	2.04
21	11	0.44	3	0.12	11	0.44	1.88
23	10	0.04	2	0.08	13	0.52	1.88
24	10	0.04	1	0.04	14	0.56	1.84

Table (5): Displays all the factors that are related to lack of equipment. This table reveals that factor number 20 which is related to lack of listening labe was the weakest of all the factors which are related to lack of equipment. The mean of this factor is (2.20) out of

3. The interpretation of this can be summarized in the following sentence.

Lack of equipment and facilities is a barrier of achieving additional linguistic development by making the best of the technical and technological possibilities available to students to promote the status of their English language learning. The mentioned factor was followed by factors number 25, 22, 21, 23 and 24 respectively. The means of those factors are 2.12, 2.04, 1.88, 1.88 and 1.84 respectively.

Factor number 25 which is related to lack of video play back machine came as the second weakest factor of all the factors which are related to lack of equipment. The mean of this factor is (2.12) out of 3. The lack of equipment means that the students deprived seeing language in use. One of the main advantages of video is that students don't just hear language, they see it too, but in the current circumstances the students have no access to this important aid. Lack of equipment deprived the students access to valuable meaning clues which can help them to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply.

Conclusion of the study :

1. Students' background in English language was found to be one of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language .

2. Lack of listening evaluation was found to be another element of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language .

3. Society's negative attitudes towards learning English language was found to be another element of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language .

Lack of listening lab was found to be one of the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language.

Suggestions

According to the research results, the researcher suggests the following:

1. The university should give the students' a year of general English language before starting their academic subjects.
2. The students' weakness needs to be evaluated from time to time to find out its barriers and to what extent it can be solved.
3. Providing the faculties with all necessary facilities that help enhancing students' learning.

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Attach

Dear sir, teachers

The researcher is conducting a field study for the purpose of scientific research.

The title of the study is the most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at Sana'a and Thamar universities from the point view of English language teachers. The questionnaire of the study designed to satisfy the purpose of the study. The questionnaire consists of four axes. The researcher will use the following measure, which is presented in the following items:

1- Very important 2- important 3- not important.

Please read the items of each factor and put (✓) on the column which represents your point of view.

I thank you very much and assure you that your answers will be used for the purpose of research.

Your sincere

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The most important factor behind students' weakness in English language at the departments of Education at Sana'a and Thamar universities from the point view of English language teachers.

Firstly- Axis number one: Factors related to students.

Factor no	Very important	important	not important	The factors of the first axis
1.				Students' background knowledg in English is very weak.
2.				Some students do not have real motivation at all.
3.				Students learn English as a means to an end (e.g. getting a Job).
4.				Some students are not willing to participate in-classroom activities.
5.				Some students lack a willingness to listen.
6.				Some students lack a willingness to take risks, to try things out and see how it works.
7.				Some students lack a willingness to accept oral correction in front of their classmates.
8.				Some students are not willing to complete homework assignments and in-class language tasks more efficiently.
9.				Some students are not aware of their individual learning needs.
10.				Some students are not willing to take more responsibilities for their own language learning.
11.				Some students are not willing to enhance their use of target language out of class.
Secondly- Axis number tow: Factor related to evaluation of Students' learning.				
Factor no	Very important	important	not important	The factors of the second axis
12.				Teacher lacks a willingness to evaluate syllabuses, textbook courses or programmers.
13.				Listening ability is not evaluated due to the lack of modern teaching aids such as listening lab

Factor no	Very important	important	not important	The factors of the first axis
				computers, T.V, Video... etc.
14.				The objectives of teaching are not the same as those of testing.
15.				Some teachers gear their teaching activities exclusively to suit the examination needs.
16.				Procedures of testing are not transparent.

Thirdly - Axis number three: Factor related to lack of equipment.

Factor no	Very important	important	not important	The factors of the first axis
17.				The faculty lacks of listening lab.
18.				dictionaries to be used by students.
19.				The faculty lacks overhead projector.
20.				The faculty lacks pictures and cards.
21.				The faculty lacks tape recorders.
22.				The faculty lacks video play back machine.

Fourthly- Axis number four: Factor related to society.

Factor no	Very important	important	not important	The factors of the first axis
23.				Some families have negative preformed influence on their attitudes towards learning English.
24.				Some negative attitudes to learning English or to teacher themselves can predispose students to behave problematically.
25.				Society lack willingness to appreciate learning of English influence their students' learning.

