Arabic Language Impact on EFL Learners' Speaking Competence: The Case of Algerian First Year Bachelor Students at Kasdi Merbah University-Ouargla

Arapça Dilinin Yabancı Dil Öğrencilerinin Konuşma Yetkinliği Üzerindeki Etkisi: Kasdi Merbah Üniversitesi-Ouargla'daki Cezayirli Birinci Yıl Lisans Öğrencileri Örneği

Fatima Yahia[1*]

[1] University of Ghardaia, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English Language, Ghardaia, Algeria | https://ror.org/02ck5yd04, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0824-8245, yahia.fatima@univ-ghardaia.dz

Ghardaia Üniversitesi, Edebiyat ve Dil Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Bölümü, Ghardaia, Cezayir | https://ror.org/02ck5yd04, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0824-8245, yahia.fatima@univ-ghardaia.dz

* Corresponding author

Öz

Bu makale Arapça dilinin İngilizce yabancı dil öğrenenlerin (Cezayir) konuşma yeterliliği üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Arap öğrenciler ikinci dil konuşma becerilerini geliştirmede çok sayıda engelle karşılaşıyor. Hem sınıf içinde hem de sınıf dışında İngilizceye sınırlı maruz kalmaları, konuşmada akıcılık ve yeterlilik kazanma yeteneklerini engellemektedir. Cezayir örneğinde, öğrencilerin yabancı dil öğrenme geçmişi hem standart Arapça'dan hem de Cezayir'de bir bölgeden diğerine tamamen farklılık gösteren çeşitli yerel lehçelerden etkilenmektedir. Bu bakımdan Arapça ve İngilizce arasındaki morfoloji, ses bilgisi, sözdizimi ve imla farklılıkları nedeniyle ciddi dilsel engeller mevcut olabilir ve bu nedenle öğretim süreci özellikle yeni başlayanlar için kolay bir iş olmayacaktır. Bunun ışığında, mevcut çalışma Arapça dilinin İngilizce öğrenenlerin konuşma yeterliliğini nasıl etkileyebileceği sorununu gündeme getiriyor. Ortak hatalarını vurgulamayı, Cezayirli (Arap) öğrencilerin Arapça geçmişlerinin İngilizce akıcılıkları üzerindeki etkisi konusunda bilinçlerini yükseltmeyi ve İngilizcedeki zorluklara ve zorluklara değinmek için uygun yöntem ve teknikleri tespit ederek konuşma yeterlilikleri geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Hedef dilde iletişim kurmak. Betimleyici bir araştırma, Ouargla-Cezayir'deki Kasdi Merbah Üniversitesi'ndeki birinci sınıf öğrencileriyle (37 öğrenciden oluşan bir grup) sözlü anlatım oturumlarına katılarak ve gözlemleyerek takip edildi. Nicel bir yaklaşım benimsendi, aynı seviyedeki 150 öğrenciye konuşma yeterliliklerini ve yaygın hata kaynaklarını değerlendirmek için bir anket uygulandı. Bulgular, Cezayirli öğrencilerin Arapça geçmişinin, dilsel, fonolojik, sözdizimsel ve kültürel farklılıkların bir sonucu olarak İngilizce akıcılıklarını azalttığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Konuşma, Cezayirli Arap öğrenciler, İngilizce yabancı dil, Konuşma yeterliliği, Arapça geçmişi.

Abstract

The present paper examines the impact of Arabic language on EFL learners (Algerian) speaking competence. Arab students encounter numerous obstacles in developing their L2 speaking skills. Their limited exposure to English, both in and out of the classroom, impedes their ability to achieve fluency and proficiency in speaking. In the Algerian case, students' background of learning foreign languages is affected by both their standard Arabic and various local dialects that differ completely from one region to another. In this regard, serious linguistic obstacles may exist due to differences between Arabic and English morphology, phonology, syntax, and orthography so that the teaching process would not be an easy task, especially for beginners. In the light of this, the current study raises the problem of how Arabic language can affect EFL learners' speaking competency. It aims at highlighting their common errors, raising the Algerian (Arab) students' consciousness about the impact of their Arabic background on their fluency in English, and developing their competence of speaking through detecting the appropriate methods and techniques of addressing the challenges and difficulties of communicating in the target language. A descriptive type of research was followed via attending and observing sessions of oral expression with first year students (a group of 37 learners) at the University of Kasdi Merbah in Ouargla-Algeria. Via adopting a quantitative approach, a questionnaire was administered to 150 students from the same level to assess their speaking competence and common errors sources. The findings indicate that the Algerian learners' Arabic background reduces their fluency in English as a result of linguistic, phonological, syntactic, and cultural differences.

Keywords: Speaking, Algerian Arab learners, EFL, Speaking competence, Arabic background.

Introduction

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents distinct challenges for Arab (Algerian) students, especially in the realm of speaking skills. They may encounter obstacles in mastering English speaking due to the influence of their native language, Arabic. Several studies have examined the impact of Arabic language structure on English speaking competence, highlighting the difficulties faced by Arab learners when striving to speak English fluently (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 1).

Arabic is spoken by over four hundred million people globally and holds significance for academic pursuits, cultural comprehension, and international job prospects. Nevertheless, the diverse morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology of Arabic present difficulties for Arabic speakers in acquiring English speaking skills. While similarities between Arabic and English languages exist, disparities in linguistic structure hinder Arabic speakers from gaining proficiency in spoken English (Khasawneh & Khasawneh, 2022: 246).

Arab students frequently experience interference from their first language (L1) during their pursuit of learning English as a foreign language, affecting their oral proficiency (Rajab, 2013: 653). In addition, they must allocate much of their language learning efforts for acquiring other priority languages, such as Standard Arabic and different local dialects (in addition to the French language, as a source of colonization, in the case of Algerian learning contexts), leaving less energy for mastering the English language. The lack of opportunities for practice beyond the classroom further is one of the major challenges faced by Arab EFL learners.

So, the impact of the Arabic language on the speaking proficiency of Algerian EFL learners is substantial. The difficulties experienced by Arab students in speaking English are influenced by various factors, such as interference from their L1, social and cultural norms, lack of motivation, and participation in classroom activities (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 2). Moreover, using Arabic as the language of instruction has been explored as a way to enhance students' speaking skills. There is evidence to suggest that using Arabic in communication can positively affect language competence, particularly in speech. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are differing views on introducing English in teaching settings in the Arab world. In this regard, Educators have debated over the appropriate age for introducing English and its potential impact on learners' proficiency in Arabic (Mukattash, 2003: 217-218).

More importantly, a specific area of concern is the pragmatic competence of Arab EFL learners when it comes to speech acts like apology and requests. Due to their direct communication style, Arab learners, specifically those from Algeria learners have been criticized as impolite or discourteous, potentially stemming from lack of knowledge or instruction on how to perform these speech acts politely and properly in the target language (pragmatic competence (Fareh et al., 2023: 2). The use of L1 in the second language (L2) classroom has also been studied, with results indicating that teachers rarely use Arabic where they focus on the target language, English, more than Arabic for learning English as a second language (Alzamil, 2019: 193).

Therefore, there is a need for ongoing and unbiased research to identify specific areas of difficulty that Algerian students encounter in acquiring English speaking skills. Understanding these challenges will enable educators to develop effective strategies to address them and improve EFL teaching and learning outcomes.

In this case, it is needed to develop various teaching strategies to address these challenges and enhance EFL learners' speaking competence. For example, implementing a communicative approach in English classes has been

proposed as one technique to elevate teaching quality and help students overcome their speaking deficiencies (Bahruddin et al., 2021: 2760).

Moreover, focusing on pronunciation training that incorporates teaching phonetic alphabet codes can markedly enhance the speaking skills and confidence of EFL learners (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 2) Hence, L1 interference and limited opportunities for practice outside the classroom significantly affect Arab (Algerian) students' speaking competence in EFL. Grasping these influences is pivotal in devising effective teaching strategies and classroom activities to bolster EFL learners' speaking proficiency (Rajab, 2013: 654).

1. Review of Literature

1.1 Nature of Arabic Language Impact on EFL Learners' Speaking Competence

The influence of Arabic language on the speaking ability of EFL learners, especially those with Arab background, is quite significant. The phonetic differences between Arabic and English represent a major challenge for EFL learners, affecting their fluency and overall speaking competence in English. These differences often result in difficulties for Arab learners to accurately produce English sounds due to the influence of Arabic phonetics on English pronunciation (Che Haron, 2016: 80).

Another case where Arabic language interference is noticeable is in grammar and sentence structure. Arab learners tend to follow the sentence structure of their L1 when speaking or writing in English, leading to errors in word order, placement of noun modifiers, and coordination. In addition, the absence of uncountable nouns in Arabic causes difficulties for Arab learners when pluralizing such nouns in English (Altheneyan, 2019: 321).

Cultural differences (since language and culture are closely related) also play a role in impacting communication skills. Arab students living in countries where Arabic is dominant have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which hinders their speaking abilities and results in low motivation and poor performance in English classes. Furthermore, the teaching methods used in Arabic education systems often prioritize grammar and literature over practical speaking skills, limiting opportunities for students to practice Arabic speaking skills at school (Russak, 2021: 2).

The impact of the Arabic language on EFL learners' speaking competence is multifaceted. It encompasses challenges related to phonetics, grammar interference, and cultural differences that affect communication skills. To address these challenges and enhance EFL learning for Arab students, it is crucial to implement strategies that focus on improving pronunciation through communicative approaches as well as incorporating pragmatic competence into language teaching. Also, there is a need for a shift towards creating more opportunities for practical language use both inside and outside the classroom or via live chats with native speakers (Che Haron, 2016: 80).

1.2 Challenges Faced by Arab Learners in Speaking English

Arab EFL learners encounter a multitude of obstacles when it comes to speaking English. One of the primary factors contributing to these challenges is that English is not their native language, and they predominantly use Arabic as their formal means of communication. They also have limited exposure to English as spoken by native speakers, which impedes their ability to achieve fluency and accuracy in speaking English. Moreover, Arab

learners tend to favor using Arabic in EFL classrooms instead of English, and the English language curricula implemented by some academic institutions may not always be suitable or effective (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022: 330).

Furthermore, they often grapple with transferring linguistic skills from Arabic to English. For instance, they struggle with pluralizing uncountable nouns in English due to the absence of uncountable nouns in Arabic. They also encounter difficulties with word order and sentence structure, as they tend to adhere to the sentence structure of their L1 when writing in English (Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022: 776).

Another significant challenge for Arab EFL learners is the dearth of opportunities to practice speaking English, particularly in environments where Arabic is the predominant language, thereby limiting their exposure to natural interactions in English (Abu- Faraj & Ali, 2015: 157). In the case of Algeria, learners face a more serious challenge where the dominant language in the Algerian society is not just standard Arabic, but they speak also French in addition to the various local dialects.

Various studies have brought to light the influence of the native language on the acquisition of English as a second language. Lado (1957) introduced contrastive analysis as a theory to explain syntactic errors in L2 performance, attributing them to interference from L1. This is evident in examples as the placement of adjectives and verb forms, which differ between Arabic and English. Additionally, Ellis (1997) and Corder (1999) emphasized that errors reflect gaps in learners' competence, often stemming from ignorance or lack of application of appropriate rules or structures in the foreign language (Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 34).

To tackle these challenges, educators and institutions should provide Arab EFL learners with appropriate input that aligns with their level of linguistic competence. Furthermore, implementing a communicative approach in the classroom can enhance the quality of teaching and empower students to overcome their lack of speaking ability. Hence, the hurdles faced by Arab learners in speaking English are multifaceted and necessitate targeted strategies for effective resolution (Al-Khatib, et al., n.d: 1).

1.3. Examples of Arabic and English Differences

1.3.1. Alphabet

English and Arabic are two distinct languages with significant differences in their origins, alphabets, and syntactic aspects. Arabic, a descendant of Semitic languages, has twenty-eight letters in its alphabet. The Arabic script is always written in a cursive form, and there is no distinction between upper case and lower case letters. On the other hand, English is an Indo-European language that primarily originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects. It has twenty-six letters in its alphabet. Unlike Arabic, English has a clear distinction between upper case and lower case letters. English words can be written in both cursive and uncial styles. Furthermore, Arabic and English differ in various aspects, including morphology, syntax, vocabulary, phonology, semantics, rhetoric, and orthography. These distinctions contribute to the uniqueness of each language (Ali, 2007, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 34).

1.3.2. Phonology

Arabic has a simplified pronunciation system compared to English. Each sound in Arabic is represented by one letter, making spelling easier. In contrast, English has multiple letters to represent certain sounds. Differences

in sound representation between Arabic and English can lead to difficulties for Arabic-speaking learners. Some sounds found in English do not exist in Arabic, causing Arab students to substitute or borrow similar sounds from English (Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 37).

For example, Algerian students often pronounce the sound /r/ in "rubber" as the French one not heavily like the English pronunciation. Also, they pronounce the letter "ch" in the word "architect" as /ʃ/ instead of /k/. Arab learners of English face difficulties in pronouncing initial and final clusters of consonants in English words. This can result in a phonetic phenomenon known as vowel intrusion or epenthesis, where a vowel is inserted between consonant clusters.

Arabs often insert a vowel to separate the cluster of consonants, treating them as different words (ibid). Algerian students may also confuse the pronunciation of the letter "th" where it refers to two different phonemes: the voiced dental fricative /ð/ (as in "the") and the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ (earth). However, it can stand for /t/ (Thailand, Thomas) or the cluster /tθ/ (eighth). More importantly, most of beginner learners, pronounce "th" as /t/ instead of /θ/ in the words "thing," "through," "throw," etc. These pronunciation differences between Arabic and English can pose challenges for Arab learners as they strive to achieve accurate and fluent English pronunciation.

1.3.3. Tenses and Order of Words

Arabic and English exhibit clear differences, which often lead to mistakes made by Algerian EFL learners. In Arabic, there are only two tenses: the perfect tense (representing only the past) and the imperfect tense (representing the non-past, simple present, and simple future). On the other hand, English has multiple tenses achieved through the combination of these two tenses with aspects (progressive and perfective) (Ali, 2007, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 36). Arab students of English may struggle to produce sentences using the appropriate tenses, resulting in errors (especially in the case of the present/past perfect tense). It is important to guide and support these learners in order to help them develop a better understanding of tense usage and create meaningful sentences.

Arab EFL learners often make errors in word order when constructing English sentences. The basic word order in classical Arabic is (V+S+O) where the verb comes before the subject. This differs from English sentence word order (S+V+O). Here is an example to illustrate the correct and incorrect usage: e.g., "Wrote the pupil the lessons" (Arabic); "The pupil wrote the lessons." (English). Also, in the case of adjectives, in Arabic, speakers use (N+ADJ) order whereas in English, (ADJ+N) cluster is the correct form: e.g., "My red pen is on the table." (Correct English); "My pen red is on the table." (Correct Arabic).

1.3.4. Articles

In Arabic, there is one definite article, which is represented by the letters *"Al."* This article is attached to the beginning of nouns and their adjectives. However, Arabic does not have indefinite articles. Sometimes, Arabic learners of English use the definite article redundantly with nouns that do not require it in English but do in Arabic (Diab, 1996, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 35). This results in the following types of errors (Hamadalla & Tushyeh,1998, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 35): (1) Learners my omit of the definite article "the:" in the following sentence, "Books of students are available now," the definite article "the" should be used before "books," but it is often dropped by Arabic learners because Arabic does not use it in the genitive case. (2) They

may omit the indefinite article "a:" e.g., "My father works in bank;" in this case, the indefinite article "a" should be used before "bank" to indicate that it is not a specific bank.

1.3.5. Nouns

In English, nouns have two numbers: singular and plural. However, in Arabic, nouns have three numbers: singular, dual, and plural. (1) Plural Forms: in English, plurals can be formed by adding "s" or "es" to the singular noun, such as "desk" and "box" becoming "desks" and "boxes." By contrast, in Arabic, plurals can be of two kinds: sound plural (masculine and feminine) and broken plural. For example, *"muhandis"* (it means an architect. It is singular masculine) becomes *"muhandisuun"* (plural masculine) and *"muhandisa"* (singular feminine) becomes *"muhandisat"* (plural feminine). (2) Gender: English nouns do not have grammatical gender. However, English has three genders for pronouns: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Arabic nouns have two genders: masculine and feminine. Gender is also applicable to personal pronouns. (3) Cases: English nouns are inflected for the genitive case while Arabic nouns are inflected for three cases: nominative, accusative, and genitive. For example,

In Arabic, we find the following cases: singular masculine (*muhandis*); singular feminine (*muhandisa*); plural masculine (*muhandisuun*); dual masculine (*muhandisein*); plural feminine (muhandisat); dual feminine (*muhandisataan, muhandisatayin*: as subject and object). In English, the word "doctor" applies to both masculine and feminine singular case, and "doctors" to masculine and feminine of plural and dual cases. Arab students may face challenges in using plural nouns correctly, For example, they may utter the following false expressions: "She read five book;" "The three pen are blue." (Salimi, 2013, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 35).

1.3.6. Adjectives/Adverbs

Arabic learners of English often face challenges when distinguishing between adjectives and adverbs in both languages. One of the reasons for this confusion might be the gender and number agreement of Arabic adjectives with nouns. This can lead to mistakes in English grammar. For example, in Arabic: "My mother is a woman beautiful" translates to *"Walidati imra'atun jamilatun."* (False in English). Some Arab learners of English may use adjectives with nouns to express adverbs, which is the result of Arabic grammar rules. In Arabic, adverbs can be formed in two ways. For instance, the word "strongly" can be translated into Arabic as *"bikuw'a"* or *"bishaklen kawiy."* This difference in forming adverbs might contribute to errors in English usage. Here is an example of incorrect translation and its correct version: "The student read a careful reading of the text." (Correct Arabic/false in English); "The student read the text carefully." (Correct English). It is important to note that the incorrect versions provided by Arab students are influenced by the Arabic grammatical rule regarding unrestricted or absolute objects. This difference in grammar rules contributes to the incorrect translations in their English usage (Marpaung, 2014, in Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 36).

1.3.7. Relative Pronouns

In contrast to English relative pronouns, the Arabic ones vary based on the nouns they describe. They have different forms for masculine, feminine, singular, dual, and plural nouns. Furthermore, their form changes depending on their position in the sentence, whether it is as a subject, object, or predicate. The following is a list of these relative nouns: *"alladi"* (singular masculine); *"alldaan"* (masculine dual subject*); "aladiina"* (masculine plural); *"allati"* (feminine singular); *"allatein"* (object dual feminine); *"allataan"* (dual feminine subject),

"*allaati*" (plural feminine). As noted by Ali (2007) Arabic learners of English often make several errors when forming English relative clauses. One common error is the incorrect insertion or omission of the connected pronoun, as Arabic does not omit it. Here is an example of an incorrect usage: "This is the doctor whom I met him" (false English); "This is the doctor whom I met." (Correct English). To avoid this error, it is important to make learners remember that unlike Arabic, the pronoun "him" should not be used in this English context (Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022:37).

1.3.8. Prepositions

According to Essberger (2000), there are notable differences between Arabic and English prepositions. In Arabic, the number of prepositions includes the following list: *"'an"* (about), *"ila"* (to), *"min"* (from), *"la/li"* (of, for), *"ba/bi"* (by, with), *"'alla"* (on, over), *"fi"* (in, into). Arabic also allows for the use of certain adverbs as prepositions, like *"bayna"* (between), *"khalfa"* (behind), *"amam"* (in front), etc. However, Arab students learning English often face challenges due to two factors. Firstly, not every Arabic preposition has a direct equivalent in English, and vice versa. Secondly, not every English or Arabic preposition has a fixed usage and meaning. Students from an Arab background may make the following errors when using English prepositions: (1) they use prepositions with words that do not require them; e.g., I go to home (false); I go home (true). (2) They omit prepositions from words that require them: e.g., she was waiting the bus (faslse); I was waiting for the bus (true). (3) Being affected by Arabic structures, Algerian students often use the following wrong prepositions "proud with," "lie on," "consisted from," and "stand to" instead of "proud of," "lie to," "consisted of," and "stand for." (Alkhafeel & Elkholy, 2022: 36).

Table.1. Examples of Arabs (Algerian) EFL Learners' Common Errors

Error	Arabic	Type of mistake	Correct form
I saw a dream last night	*Ra'aytu huluman albariha.*	Equivalent verb	I had a dream last night.
E.g1. I am agree E.g2. I am having a headache	E.g1. *Ana muwafikun* E.g2. Ra'esi yu'elimuni	conjugation	E.g1. I agree. E.g2. I have a headache.
Explains the teacher the lesson.	Sharaha al'ustadu adarsa.	Word order (S+V+O)	The teacher explains the lesson.
Can I get some **informations** about your training courses?	*Hal astati'u akhda* **maluumatin** *hawla dawaratika atadribi'ya?*	Plural/singular (uncountable noun) In Arabic, "information" has both singular (maluuma) and plural (maluumat) forms	Can I get some **information** about your training courses?
He gave me advices	*Huwa Kadama li nasa'ihan.*	Plural/singular (uncountable noun) In Arabic, "advice" has both singular (nasiiha) and plural (nasaa'ih) forms.	He gave me pieces of advice.
Three /tri:/, think /tiŋk/	*Thalatatun, yufakiru*	pronunciation	Three /θri:/, think /θiŋk/
I am proud with you.	*Ana fakhuurun bika.*	Prepositions	I am proud of you.

		(with= *bi*)	
I don't know nothing	*Ana la alamu la shay'e*	Negation	I don't know anything

Source: the Researcher

So, for training Arab learners to avoid the errors mentioned above in the table, EFL teachers have to be skillful and eclectic in choosing their teaching methods, techniques, and materials that need to be appropriate to the age and level of their students. They have also to be familiar with technology development to exploit it in developing their teaching strategies.

1.4. Implications of Teaching EFL Speaking

In Algeria, the relationship between Arabic language and the EFL learners' speaking skills is a complex issue with significant implications. Arab learners face challenges, such as limited exposure to English, lack of practice opportunities, and psychological factors like shyness and fear of making mistakes. These obstacles underscore the need for effective teaching strategies to enhance EFL learning (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022: 330). In this regard, Timmis (n.d) believes that when learning to communicate, most of the students try to imitate native speakers. However, in the case of informal use of grammar by native speakers, the differences could be larger (Shoro, 2018: 6).

One proposed solution to tackle these difficulties is to integrate product and process approaches in teaching Arabic learners to improve their speaking skills. This approach emphasizes interaction and output in language learning, aiming to develop fluency and accuracy in speaking English. Moreover, there is a crucial need to focus on oral proficiency as a key goal even in Arabic language learning (El-Dakhs et al., 2023: 4).   .

The study also highlights difficulties faced by Arab students in learning English, including negative transfer from their first language and shyness in class participation. New teaching strategies should be implemented to minimize the impact of mother tongue interference on English language learning. Contextual and blended learning can also help motivate tech-savvy young learners and improve their speaking ability. Furthermore, it is important to explore how bilinguals realize speech acts, such as requests in both their first language (Arabic) and FL (English). This exploration can provide insights into pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge that EFL learners often lack, informing more effective teaching strategies (Yaqub, n.d: 142).

Moreover, considering how proficiency in standard Arabic correlates with proficiency in English concerning speaking skills can offer valuable insights into developing integrative texts and academic activities that bridge between Arabic and English languages. In the light of this, addressing the challenges faced by Arabic-speaking EFL learners requires a multifaceted approach that integrates product and process approaches; emphasizes oral proficiency; minimizes mother tongue interference, explores speech act realization differences; and considers correlations between proficiency in standard Arabic language and English language. Implementing these strategies can ultimately improve Arab learners' speaking competence (Elshahawy, 2021: 108).

1.4.1. Tips for Addressing Arabic Influence on EFL Learners' Speaking Competence

Addressing the impact of Arabic on EFL learners' speaking ability requires a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by Arab students when it comes to learning and using English speaking skills. The predominant use of Arabic as the language of instruction and communication at school and home places significant constraints on exposure to English. This limited exposure creates a barrier for students to fully engage in English speaking activities, leading to a lack of confidence, negative attitudes, and anxiety when using English (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022: 336).

One effective approach to mitigating this influence is the implementation of a communicative approach in English classes. Emphasizing meaningful interaction and communication in real-life situations can help students build confidence and overcome their anxiety when speaking English. Providing opportunities for authentic communication through activities like role-plays, debates, and discussions can gradually enhance students' speaking skills in a supportive and encouraging environment (Ali et al., 2019: 357).   .

Creating a conducive learning environment that encourages the use of English outside the classroom is also essential. Encouraging regular interactions with non-Arab friends and integrating opportunities for practicing English with native speakers can help students reduce their reliance on Arabic as their primary language for communication. Immersing themselves in an English-speaking environment can lead to a more positive attitude towards using English and practical experience that enhances their speaking competence (Yaseen et al., 2018: 394).

In addition, integrating technology-based language learning tools and resources can offer further support for EFL learners. Utilizing online platforms for language practice, virtual language exchange programs, and multimedia resources can provide diverse opportunities for students to engage with the language outside of traditional classroom settings. Overall, addressing the impact of Arabic on EFL learners' speaking ability necessitates a multifaceted approach that focuses on creating a supportive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. By implementing communicative teaching strategies, promoting authentic language use, and leveraging technology-based resources, educators can effectively support Arab students in developing their English speaking skills (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022: 336).

1.4.2. Classroom Activities for Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

The cultural and linguistic disparities between Arabic and English creates significant challenges for Arab learners. Variations in phonetic expressions, linguistic codes, and tones have a direct impact on their capacity to accurately translate and interpret English. This often leads to mispronunciations and errors in spoken English, making effective communication a challenge for learners (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 3). Also, Alvarez et al., (2016: 92) argue that learning English goes beyond grammar and vocabulary where they consider body language and different ways of greeting represent the cultural side of any language.

To tackle these issues, it is imperative to implement effective teaching strategies that prioritize speaking skills for Arab EFL learners. One recommended approach is to provide ample opportunities for students to practice speaking English both inside and outside the classroom. By creating a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to communicate in English with their peers, their fluency and confidence can be significantly enhanced. Moreover, integrating a communicative approach in English classes can also contribute to improving speaking skills by focusing on real-life communication scenarios. This emphasizes interactive and meaningful language use, allowing students to engage in authentic conversations that reflect everyday situations (Alsiyat, 2021: 3677).

Furthermore, teachers should actively encourage students to regularly listen to authentic English (e.g., listening to English songs, watching films, following English TV/YouTube programs, etc.) as part of their language learning process. Exposure to natural spoken English can help learners develop correct speaking competence and improve their pronunciation (Adil, 2020: 2). Renandya & Widodo (2016: 36) refers to this method as experiential context for raising students' motivation of speaking.

Therefore, the implementation of these strategies can assist Arab learners in overcoming their challenges with speaking English. Providing ample practice opportunities, creating a supportive learning environment, and emphasizing authentic communication can effectively enhance their speaking competence (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 3).

To improve the speaking abilities of EFL learners, it is essential to acknowledge the obstacles and hurdles faced by Arab students in learning English. Arab learners confront issues as lack of fluency, reluctance to participate in class activities, and negative influence from their native language. Moreover, the linguistic background of Arab students can impede their speaking skills as they may struggle with vocabulary and grammar usage. Consequently, they always depend on English/Arabic dictionary to translate words so that this habit can reduce their competence of comprehending the meaning from the whole context of new terms (Al-Khatib et al., n.d: 5).

Addressing these challenges and enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills requires the implementation of effective classroom activities. One method is to establish a supportive environment that encourages students to engage in genuine interactions in English. This can be accomplished through communication in the classroom through providing opportunities for authentic language use, like group discussions, debates, and performing on stage, students can develop their speaking competence while gaining confidence in using the language (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018: 3). So, teachers can exploit the sessions of literature to develop the earners' speaking competence via enabling them to watch films or plays of a written literary work or via encouraging them to perform scenes: they will be able to enhance their speaking fluency and to control their voice pitch and body language.

Furthermore, teachers can prioritize vocabulary development as a crucial aspect of improving speaking skills. Vocabulary-building activities should be integrated into the curriculum to help students expand their lexical knowledge and language usage. This can include word games, vocabulary exercises, and context-based learning to reinforce vocabulary retention.Also, incorporating blended learning approaches that integrate technology into language learning can create a more engaging and interactive learning experience for Arab EFL learners. Utilizing online resources, multimedia tools, and language learning apps can provide additional opportunities for students to practice speaking English outside the classroom (Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022: 777).

Researchers argue that the success of developing speaking skills depends mainly on three factors: the teacher, materials, and leaners themselves. The diagram below illustrates the importance of these elements in the EFL classroom:

Figure 1: Three Success Factors in L2 Speaking Development
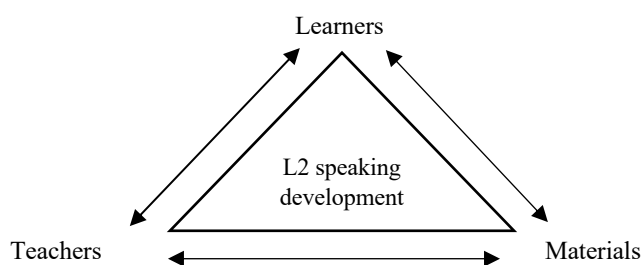
Source: (Goh & Burns, 2012: 6)

Consequently, addressing the influence of the Arabic language on EFL learners' speaking competence requires a strategic approach that includes effective teaching strategies and engaging classroom activities. By providing opportunities for authentic language use, focusing on vocabulary development, and integrating technology into language learning, teachers can effectively enhance EFL learners' speaking skills in the classroom (Al-Khatib et al., n.d: 4). In this regard, Folse (2017:14) believes that when teaching speaking, instructors have to consider the following features in the classroom: learners' reasons for speaking, age, attitudes toward EFL, level of proficiency, educational background (Arabic in the case of this study), anxiety, willingness to communicate, and time constraints. Concerning attitudes, researchers emphasize the role of positive attitudes towards a target language in improving language proficiency (Lou,

2023: 35). Nation & Newton (2009:5) also focused on the necessity for training learners to use dictionaries, communication strategies, and previous input to enhance their speaking skills.

2. Methodology

2.1. Rationale and Research Questions

This study focuses on the difficulties faced by Algerian (Arab) learners when speaking English. The Algerian context has a special case as comparison with other Arab countries. In other words, In the Algerian society, people use standard Arabic in academic contexts and various local dialects, such as *Shawi* (in the east), *Dziria* (in the north), *Wahrania* (in the west), *Sahrawiya* (in the south), *Kaba'ilya, Amazighi'a, Muzabi'a,* etc. (in other regions). In addition, due to colonization, French language is also used all over Algeria, creating a mixture between French, dialects, and Standard Arabic. Hence, because of this complex linguistic issue, the researcher has conducted this enquiry to highlight the challenges that face Algerian, Arab learners in speaking English. The interference of Arabic and French background of the Algerian EFL learners causes a serious problem and obstacles in acquiring an L2, causing common errors when communicating in English.

In the light of this, the present paper deals with the following research questions:

1. How can Arab (Algerian) learners' L1 affect their English speaking competence?
2. What are the Arab learners' common errors of speaking in English?
3. What are the useful strategies that can be adopted by teachers to raise Arab (Algerian) learners' speaking skills?

2.2. Objectives

The present study covers the following aims:

1. Raising the Algerian (Arab) learners' consciousness about the impact of their Arabic background on their fluency in English.

2. Highlighting the common errors of Arab EFL learners.

3. Developing Arab learners' competence of speaking.
4. Suggesting methods and techniques for enhancing Arab EFL learners' speaking skills.

2.3. Research Design

The current study is based on descriptive type of research, where the researcher attended sessions of oral expression module with 1st year licence students at the University of Kasdi Merbah in Ouargla. The researchers' main focus was on identifying the common errors made by the students while speaking, particularly those related to incorporating Arabic background and structures into English sentences. The choice of 1st year level was not haphazard: the students, at this level, are still beginners and lack proficiency in speaking accuracy and fluency. They face also the problem of meeting the world of university for the first time so that the factors of shyness and psychological considerations are always present in this case. During the initial lessons, the instructor initiated a subject to the students and led a group conversation. Afterwards, they were instructed to develop dialogues based on other suggested topics. In the following term, emphasis was placed on instructing the students about English idioms, and they were motivated to incorporate them into their individual presentations on a particular topic.

In the present enquiry, a quantitative approach has been adopted to gather data where a questionnaire was administered to 150 students from the same level of whole section, with 296 students. The questionnaire covers various questions focusing on exploring the impact of Arabic language on the learners' performance in the speaking sessions. It has also addressed the common errors (with Arabic background) that the students frequently made when communicating in English.

2.4. Research Instruments

A questionnaire was administered to 150 students of first year licence level at the University of Kasdi Merbah in Ouargla (Algeria) to assess the influence of their mother tongue (Arabic) on their speaking ability. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected information about the learners' age and gender. The second one focused on the students' familiarity with speaking English outside classroom. However, in the third section, the researcher has dealt with the main difficulties and errors of speaking both in oral expression sessions and real communication contexts (outside the classroom). Concerning the attended sessions of speaking with the students, the classroom contained 37 students, forming a group out of eight ones. The sessions were scheduled for two semesters. Observation has been the main source for collecting data. The students were still beginners at the university so that the researcher focused on the development of their speaking competence from the beginning of the year till the end of the second semester. Some learners were shy and uttered sometimes Arabic words when they faced difficulties in finding the necessary vocabulary in English. In the first term, the teacher dealt with simple topics either in group or dual conversations. However, in the second term, it was more difficult for the students to learn English idioms where they were in front of new linguistic contexts in addition to the foreign English culture from which the idioms are borrowed as a social phenomenon with its specific criteria related to the target community. Hence, the focus of observation was on the learners' psyche (issues related to shyness and anxiety of speaking), linguistic competence, and their ability of recognizing the cultural features related to the English language (since language and culture are closely related and each one of them reflects the other).

2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

Table 2: Speaking English Regularly

Possibilities	N°	%
always	00	00 %
Sometimes	00	00 %
Rarely	139	92.66%
never	11	7.33%
Total	150	100 %

The questionnaire results demonstrate that the students rarely, with 92.66%, speak English in their daily life while 7.33% of them do never use it.

Table 3: The Language Primarily Used with Colleagues Outside the Classroom

Possibilities	N°	%

English	00	00 %
Arabic	150	100 %
Total	**150**	**100 %**

All the informants use only Arabic in conversations with their colleagues outside the classroom.

Table 4: Difficulties of Speaking English

Possibilities	N°	%
Pronunciation	91	60.66 %
Forming correct sentences	146	97.33 %
Grammar	12	8%
Vocabulary	44	29.33%
Total	**150**	**100 %**

When asked about the difficulties they face when speaking English, 97.33% of the students acknowledged that it is not an easy task to formulate correct sentences. 60.66% of them believe that pronunciation in English is difficult while 8% and 29.33% relate it to grammar and vocabulary background respectively.

Table 5: Type of Dictionary Used in the Classroom

Possibilities	N°	%
Arabic/English dictionary	150	100 %
English/English dictionary	00	00 %
Total	**150**	**100 %**

In the classroom, 100% of the informants use Arabic/English dictionary instead of the English/English one.

Table 6: Beginning Sentences with Verb Instead of Subject

Possibilities	N°	%
Yes	112	74.66 %
NO	38	25.33 %
Total	**150**	**100 %**

74.66% of the learners make mistakes in starting with verbs instead of subjects when forming sentences.

Table 7: Reasons of Difficulties of Speaking English in the Classroom

Possibilities	N°	%
I feel shy	26	17.33 %
Lack of vocabulary background	41	27.33 %

I mispronounce words	93	62%
I have not background about the suggested topics	00	00%
Total	150	100 %

Concerning the reasons of the difficulties of speaking in the classroom, 17.33% of the students relate them to the factor of shyness, and 27.33% of them suffer from the lack of English vocabulary. Mispronunciation reason was expressed by 62% of them whereas none of them found any difficulty of dealing with the suggested topics by their teacher in oral expression session.

Table 8: Listening to English Songs for Leaning English

Possibilities	N°	%
Yes	51	34%
NO	99	66 %
Total	150	100 %

More than half of the population (66%) prefers Arabic songs instead of exploiting the English ones for enhancing their speaking competence.

Table 9: Difficulty of Using Idioms

Possibilities	N°	%
Yes	150	100%
No	00	00 %
Total	150	100 %

The whole population agreed that using idioms in conversations is one of the most difficult tasks for Algerian (Arab) learners.

2.6. Results and Discussion

Through the researchers' observation and the questionnaire results, the influence of the Algerian learners' L1 (Arabic) on speaking English is prominent. In other words, during the attended sessions, some learners' common errors were clear: their utterances are affected by the rules of Arabic where unlike English, sentences begin with verb instead of subject (the majority of them with 74.66% acknowledged this error). The high impact of Arabic on their speaking ability is due to the fact that they rarely use English in their daily conversation since in the Algerian society, citizens use either Arabic or French (as L2). More importantly, the learners do not try to reinforce their English capacity as they depend on Arabic/English dictionary instead of the English/English one. Even the students' shyness (17.33%) has a close relationship with their Arabic background: their Arabic accent influences the English one so that their pronunciation will not be like a native speaker. The Algerian learners' lack of vocabulary is always related to the dominance of Arabic in their daily communication, especially that they directly translate English words into Arabic instead of trying to understand their meaning from the whole context. They also do not exploit listening to English songs, instead of their preferable Arabic ones, to acquire new vocabulary. Cultural differences between English and Arabic do also play a role in affecting learners' ability of speaking: all the informants agreed on the difficulty of using idioms where they are formulated according to the social and cultural background of the target language community. So, the

ability of understanding the whole meaning of any idiom requires the foreign (Arab) learners to be familiar with the English culture and history. Hence, the Arabic impact on the English non-native speakers do not touch only their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills but also their way of thinking in the EFL context (the effects of their Arabic prior knowledge).

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, Arabic language has a considerable impact on the speaking abilities of EFL learners. The Arab Algerian students encounter various communication difficulties and lack proficiency in all language skills, including speaking. The use of incorrect expressions and reliance on communication strategies by them reveal the seriousness of the issue and the necessity for developing effective teaching methods. The influence of Arabic language structure on English speaking competence is evident, resulting in errors and interference in English speaking production.

The research indicates that Arab learners experience challenges with linguistic, phonetic, and cultural competence and struggle with social communication in English, causing gaps in their language proficiency. The importance of attitudes and motivation in learning English among EFL students is highlighted as a critical factor impacting their speaking skills. Also, teaching strategies need to be adapted to address the specific needs of non-native Arabic speakers when learning the target language.

Looking ahead, it is suggested to introduce a preparatory Arabic language course for speakers of other languages and conduct a needs analysis to assess its effectiveness. It is also crucial to explore techniques, for example, implementing a communicative approach in English classes to enhance teaching quality and help students overcome their speaking limitations. Teachers can also exploit the development of technology via ensuring live chats with native speakers, using social media, and all sources of online learning.

Thus, effectively addressing the influence of the Arabic language on EFL learners' speaking competence requires well-designed strategies to meet the specific linguistic needs of non-native speakers. By recognizing these challenges and applying effective teaching methods, educators can improve the speaking skills of EFL learners from Arabic-speaking background.

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Appendix

Dear students,

    This survey is part of a study that focuses on the impact of Arabic language on EFL learners speaking competence. I kindly request you to answer all the questions below. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section One

Before submitting the questionnaire, please, would you provide some information about yourself.

1. Gender: Male   Female
2. Age:

Section Two

1. Do you regularly speak English outside school?
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never

3. Before joining the university, did you receive any English speaking courses?
    - Yes
    - No
4. To improve your speaking ability, do you watch films?
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
5. Which language do you primarily use with your colleagues outside the classroom?
    - Arabic
    - English

Section Three

1. Do you frequently depend on English songs to acquire vocabulary?
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
2. When asked by your oral expression teacher to conduct a research, do you:
    - Conduct it in English?
    - Conduct it in Arabic to be translated into English?
3. When speaking English, what difficulties do you consider? (You can choose multiple answers)
    - Pronunciation
    - Forming correct sentences
    - Grammar
    - Vocabulary
4. Do you frequently use dictionary in speaking sessions?
    - Yes
    - No
5. If yes, what kind of dictionary do you use?
    - Arabic/English dictionary
    - English/English dictionary

6. Do you find it difficult to speak English in the classroom?
    - Yes

- No

7. If yes, explain the reasons (You can choose multiple answers)

   - I feel shy.
   - Lack of vocabulary background
   - I mispronounce words.
   - I have not background about the suggested topics

8. Do you make mistakes (forgetting/adding "s" with third person pronoun) in conjugating verbs in present simple?
   - Yes
   - No
9. Do you make mistakes in conjugating verbs (regular/irregular) in past simple tense?
   - Yes
   - No
10. Why?
    - I do not know the rules
    - Because of stress, I forget the rules

11. In formulating sentences, do you sometimes use the Arabic order of the subject and the verb?
    - Yes
    - No

12. When forgetting a term, do you?
    - Utter it in Arabic
    - find its synonym
13. When listening to English conversations, do you:
    - Translate all the words
    - Depend on the context for comprehension?
14. Do you consciously think about applying grammar rules while speaking?
    - Yes
    - No
15. Do you sometimes begin sentences with verb instead of subject?
    - Yes
    - No

16. Do you listen to English songs to learn English?
    - Yes
    - No
17. Is it difficult to use idioms in conversations?
    - Yes
    - No

Thank you for your time to complete this questionnaire.