

## An Evaluation of the Teaching Aids Used By English Teachers within Libyan Secondary Schools

Abdelbasit Gadour<sup>1</sup>, Samia Amaniana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Education, Omer Al Mukhtar University, Libya

Email: [abderna@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:abderna@yahoo.co.uk)

**Abstract:** *This study is concerned with the English language teachers' views regarding the use of teaching aids in secondary schools in Libya. The aim is to explore English teachers' opinions of the availability, problems, sources and other characteristics of the teaching aids. In order to explore these issues, this study has made use of a combination of methods in the form of questionnaire and interview with English language teachers. One hundred questionnaires were sent to English teachers in secondary schools in Libya, of whom 85 responded. This was followed by interviews with some teachers. Although the results of this study echoed the general views on the importance of using teaching aids, it revealed that traditional teaching aids e.g. chalk and blackboard, pictures and textbooks still dominate. Apparently more teaching aids are used by English teachers in private schools than in state schools, yet teachers seemed to have common issues preventing them from using teaching aids which include: lack of money to purchase aids, lack of locally produced aids, students' language inadequacy, insufficient time, and class size. The findings of this study reflect the urgency to address these problems including that of the English curriculum in secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching and learning, language, teaching aids, educational needs*

### I. Introduction

English language has spread widely from its first home in England to nearby Scotland and Ireland; across the Atlantic to Canada and the United States; and across the world to Australia and New Zealand. It has spread out to parts of Asia and Africa as well. However, it is far from the case that people all speak or write alike. One of the reasons for this may lie in the nature of the methods and the language, which is selected to be taught. Crystal (1971) claimed that English language is often taught in a very restricted manner, neglecting the informal and colloquial methods of teaching the language. In line with this, the content of the national curriculum and English language syllabus, the public examinations, school examinations and textbooks, all of which have imposed restriction on the students in Libya (Amaniana and Gadour, 2007; Mohammed, 1987). In fact, due to the Government's stand against the learning of foreign languages, particularly English and French, which was a decision fuelled by the Libyan leader "Al-Qaddafi" who considered English language as another form of colonisation, the Ministry of Education decided to abolish the English syllabus from all schools. One decade later, the teaching of English language returned to secondary schools, and subsequently there was a need to revive the English syllabus. The Ministry of Education Policy (1992) underlined the importance of developing an active use of both oral and written language, giving the students a knowledge of the language based on basic, technical, and humanistic topics through the integration of the language skills, grammar and effective teaching approaches. Hence, textbooks e.g. The Living English for Libya (LEFL) are set for secondary school. However, having used these textbooks (LEFL), they appeared to be much less effective for secondary school students aged from 15-18, as they were initially prepared for the intermediate students aged from 12-15 years.

The state of English language teaching in Libya is rather unsatisfactory. This is due to the nature of the method and the language that is selected to be taught which is entirely based on teacher wishes (Amniana and Gadour, 2007). Language is not static and it is always changing with time. This necessitates that teachers should not stick with one particular activity or with grammar books, but rather deal with language as changeable process and their lessons should be updated. Stubbs (1986) claimed that traditional approaches to language is due to the fact that many would value the rules that make language i.e. speaking and writing, and not be concerned with the establishment of how people actually speak and write. With a lot of training using neutral and formal writings, Libyan students can perform quite well in answering examination questions in written form. Yet, they find it extremely hard to communicate verbally with English native speakers. When speaking, they are always short of vocabulary and do not know how to express themselves properly. They may experience problems including such things as talking like a book and mixing of linguistic items from different registers. There is a need for a better approach to teach English language in Libya in order to motivate students further (Amniana and Gadour, 2007). This underlined the need for teachers to possess knowledge of the language that s/he is teaching, and the methods of organizing the condition in which learning takes place; they should be able to create various situations for students to experience and utilize the new items of the target language, like greeting, inquiring, expressing like or dislike, agreement, or disagreement, etc. This would help students to learn about the different registers of English by putting them into materials and tasks. Teachers have the responsibility to teach the relationship between language and culture, and historical social influence on language (Stubbs, 1986). This should not only help in the development of students' language skills, but also in their development of critical thinking about language diversity. Hence, teachers need to design different tasks and projects, which encourage students to use English language in their daily life. In line with this, Moses (1993) suggested to use different activities such as making advertisement, newspaper reports, and legal document in order to help learners acquire the language easily and make lessons attractive and very interesting.

In recent years there is a growing concern among Libyan educators concerning the lack of quality of teaching and in particular in relation to the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools. Teachers are generally criticised for sticking to traditional methods where they remain the centre of the process of teaching and learning (The National Educational Report, 2008); instead of giving students tasks and encouraging classroom interaction where everyone is involved. Generally, teachers are required to use a variety of teaching aids for better classroom communication, yet very little resources available for teachers in Libya (Al-Shapani, 2001; Amniana and Gadour, 2007). Apart from chalk and blackboard, nothing is available for teachers to use and impress students positively toward their learning (Al-Shapani, 1996). Certainly these types of tools would not attract students' attention to learn but rather make the classroom very boring. English teachers lack the potential to make students engaged in the lessons (The Department of Educational Supervision in 1998). Yet, it is not clear why teachers cannot use up to date teaching aids. Is it the fault of teachers, school administration, or those who are in power who fail to provide appropriate teaching aids. There is a need to explore the factors responsible for the lack of using teaching aids in secondary classrooms in Libya. The need for this study does not only arise from the above questions but moreover is supported by the increasing number of students' failure in English language at secondary schools (Educational Supervision's Report 1998). The general English proficiency of the Libyan students is low, especially in spoken communication in English. This failure seemed to be of major concern to English educational supervisors. There are different reasons contributing to this failure: student speaking inadequacy, listening inadequacy, and lack of

confidence, teachers' lack of confidence, inadequate/teaching methods and inability to teach English (see 'The Educational Supervisions' Report, 1998). In a similar way, there is a decline in the interest of using English within the classroom in Libyan secondary schools (The Ministry Educational Report, 2008). The report also suggested that English teachers' instructional skills have deteriorated, especially after the abolition of English language from the Libyan curriculum. This study is considered of relevancy to both teachers and students in secondary schools.

Using teaching aids can help the English teachers to assimilate more authentic situations to communicate with the learners functionally and develop the learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills through meaningful situations. It is also believed that using teaching aids such as pictures, TV, and songs on films, radio and acting can stimulate students' interests to learn English in non-English speaking communities like Libya. Thus, it is essential to explore English teachers' opinions of the availability, problems, and other sources of teaching aids, especially after the considerable amount of change in the National Curriculum of English language in secondary schools.

In searching the literature regarding the methods used by English teachers and the resources available for them in the Arab world, very little has been done in this area. In fact, what has been found in the literature suggest that the traditional approach to the teaching of English is dominant and English teachers are kept in isolation from what is going on in terms of new methods/techniques to teach more effectively (Amniana and Gadour, 2007; Mohammed, 1987; The National Educational Report, 2008). This report also underlined the lack of using teaching aids and appropriate methods to teach English language, all of which led students to have a casual attitude toward learning English. Equally the report highlighted the need to review English textbooks in Libya. Yet, it is not clear from this report what may have contributed to the low standard of teaching English. Thus, it is hoped to shed light on the difficulties encountered by English teachers.

Although teachers are very often instructed to use a variety of teaching aids to facilitate the process of teaching and learning, students claimed that their English teachers very rarely use them (Mohammed, 1987). In fact, after the revision of the English syllabuses for better communication in 1991 in Libya, the use of teaching aids was deemed very important. All on in all, it is believed that skilful use of teaching aids can provide many communicative activities, tasks, and games for learners to develop their understanding, communicative competence, and above all help them enjoy their English lessons (Amniana and Gadour, 2007). While it could be argued that it is the skilful teacher and not the use of various teaching aids in classrooms, teaching aids have become indispensable tools which are considered an essential part for the teaching and learning process. Thus, the aim of this study stems from the need to explore the issues of availability, problems, sources and other characteristics of the teaching aids and to look at ways of how teaching aids motivate teachers in teaching English in secondary schools in Libya.

## **II. Research Methods**

This study is conducted to investigate the teaching aids used by the English language teachers in secondary schools in Libya. Therefore, in order to construct a rich picture of the current situation of teaching English, this study made use of a combinations of quantitative and qualitative research. Different books, journals, Internet, magazines, web-sites, and various researches concerning the use of teaching aids and foreign languages were consulted. A questionnaire was constructed according to the relevant literature available on the subject and

informed by our own personal experience. One hundred questionnaires were sent out to English language teachers working in both private and state secondary schools in the capital of Libya, Tripoli, of whom 85 responded. Following the return of the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were undertaken based on the information gathered from the teachers in questionnaires. Four teachers agreed to take further part in this study and later were interviewed. The interviews were tapes recorded, transcribed, and later analysed.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Results**

Of those who responded to the questionnaire, there were 46 teachers from state schools and 39 from private schools. Of the 85 English teachers, there were 37 male teachers and 48 female teachers. Of the total number, 33 taught first year at secondary school, 27 taught second year, 25 taught the third year. The results of this study suggested that English teachers used some teaching aids in secondary schools. However, the extent and type of teaching aids used varied from one teacher to another. All teachers in private and state schools reported that they utilized chalk and blackboard in their classes. Textbooks were another type of teaching aid which were used heavily by all private and state secondary school teachers. Of the 40 teachers who said that they used pictures in teaching English, 23 were from state schools. Allied to this, 26 teachers made use of photos in their English classes, of whom 16 were private school teachers. Games as another form of teaching aids were employed by 19 teachers of whom 11 were private school teachers. Surprisingly none of the respondents mentioned that they used tape recorders, overhead projectors or computers in teaching English. All in all, teaching aids were applied more in private schools than in state schools. This, in fact, comes as no surprise as most of the parents in Libya take their children to private schools for better resources and quality teaching.

While there are different reasons for using teaching aids, the majority of teachers in this study reported that they used the above teaching aids most frequently because they were the only ones available for them, making a total percentage of 41.30% of state teachers and 48.71% of private teachers. 19 teachers reported that they use teaching aids in their classes because they were effective, compared with 21 teachers who said they used teaching aids merely because students liked them. Yet seven teachers mentioned that they used teaching aids because they were easy to prepare and use.

When teachers were asked about the most enjoyable teaching aids for students, they rated games, pictures and photos highly. 32 teachers reported that students enjoy games the most, of whom 22 teachers were from private schools. Of the 17 teachers who selected photos as the most enjoyable teaching aid for their students, 11 were private school teachers. Although there is agreement between private and state school teachers on what may have contributed to the students' enjoyment of the use of teaching aids, there were different reasons for this. While the majority of teachers in private and state schools said that their students liked teaching aids because they allowed better interaction with friends and teachers, 23 teachers attributed the enjoyment of their students to the use of teaching aids for freeing them from the strict curriculum.

Only 18 teachers recounted that students liked teaching aids because they enabled them to understand new words.

The results showed that most teaching aids were collected by individual teachers. The other source of teaching aids came from the students themselves, besides another source of

teaching aids were locally produced materials purchased by the school. Yet very few teachers mentioned that the source of their teaching aids was overseas produced materials which were purchased by the school.

In line with the resources available for teachers in secondary schools, teachers were asked whether they had a resource library of teaching aids within their schools. From the 56 who responded negatively to this question, 31 teachers were from private schools and 25 were from state schools. However, of the 29 teachers who reported that they had a resource library of teaching aids within their schools 15 teachers were from private schools.

In attempt to understand the problems that prevent English teachers from using teaching aids in their classes, teachers revealed five major problems preventing them from using teaching aids. These problems can be ranked as: lack of money to purchase aids, lack of locally produced aids, students' lack of ability in English, time constraints and class size. Of the 25 teachers who said that the major problem obstructing them from using teaching aids was the lack of money to purchase aids, 15 were state teachers. In contrast, 21 teachers reported that there was a lack of locally produced aids which prevented them from employing teaching aids, of whom 16 were state teachers. While 21 teachers held students' lack of ability in English responsible for not using teaching aids in their classes, of whom eight were from private schools. Equally time consumption appeared to be another problem which prevented 18 teachers from using teaching aids, of whom 11 were from state schools. Class size ranked as fifth by state and private school teachers making a total percentage of 19.56% and eight 20.51% teachers respectively. Hence, in contrast private school teachers seem to have less problems that prevent them from using teaching aids compared with state school teachers.

Although it appears from this study that the majority of teachers value the use of teaching aids, they highlighted the importance of being a skilful teacher in the process of teaching and learning. In fact, teachers acknowledged the importance of using teaching aids and considered them useful tools for both teachers and students alike. They considered the use of teaching aids as complementary to the skill of teachers, and consequently they stressed that teaching aids alone cannot be of great benefit without the skilful teacher who manipulates them effectively. In a similar way, teachers in the interview revealed that they can make their lessons very interesting and more effective whenever they like. In other words, they claimed that they can facilitate the process of learning and improve their own performance by using whatever resources available for them. They considered the role of teacher at the heart of the process of learning and teaching, though they agreed that this process can be enhanced further by using appropriate teaching aids. Nonetheless, teachers appeared in the interview to agree that being a skilful teacher was not enough and the use of teaching aids should encourage students to interact more effectively. They also claimed that the use of teaching aids can make the lessons easier to understand for students. Yet, some teachers held the view that the use of teaching aids was not as important as being a skilful teacher. Instead, they suggested teachers can behave like an actors without making any use of teaching aids. One teacher revealed in the interview that she can do very well by using the chalk and blackboard alone; another teacher claimed to create teaching aids by himself and stated that very much depends on the teacher and in conclusion if s/he can use them well. Thus, for many teachers in this study being a skilful is what matters and teaching aids can only be used as an adjunct to the teacher.

### **3.2 Discussion**

This study is concerned with the use of teaching aids in Libyan secondary schools. It must be noted that one of the reasons, which led us to choose this particular topic, was our own appreciation of the new materials and resources that are available to English teachers in

England. In fact, being taught by teachers who mainly used traditional methods in Libya, we felt that our English could be much better if teachers benefited from using such materials. Regardless of the difficulties encountered by teachers in Libya, we certainly believe that the level of English could be vastly improved by using such teaching aids. Hence, it was necessary to explore English teachers' views and opinions of the resources available to them in secondary schools particularly after the return of teaching foreign languages. Certainly the abolition of English language teaching in Libya has somehow had an effect on teachers' attitudes and motivations.

Although there is an agreement among teachers in the questionnaire that the curriculum of English language in secondary school has been made easier since the return of English, all teachers in the interview revealed that English can be difficult to teach for various reasons. The two most important reasons appeared to be the lack of resources and interference by the mother tongue, alongside the students' lack of ability as well as the level of English which affects the process of teaching English. It is very interesting to note the differences in opinion between the participants in the interview and those of the questionnaire, in the sense that the former relate the problems of teaching English to the interference of mother tongue and the lack of resources and the latter to students' lack of ability. These findings support very much that of Mohammed (1987). Certainly almost all teachers find teaching, listening, and speaking skills very difficult. While there is more emphasis on teaching reading and writing English skills in Libyan secondary schools than listening and speaking, there is not enough English materials, media, papers, magazines etc, available for both students and teachers to improve communication skills. Murphy (1991) considers speaking and listening skills as the most powerful skills in learning any language. Yet, teachers appear to have difficulty with the productive skills rather than with the receptive ones. In line with this, Savignon (1991) suggested that even though more attention has been paid to the methods of developing listening and speaking skills, teachers still find it difficult to teach them. Although the difficulty to teach listening and speaking is apparent from this study, certainly the situation has been made worse by the interference of the mother tongue. This may reflect the difficulty of teaching a foreign language in a completely alien land to the target language. This may also suggest a need to rethink the current English syllabus in secondary school to address the students' needs. It is widely accepted that in order to improve students' speaking they must develop their listening skills and vice versa. Hence, Byrne (1977) claimed language skills are interrelated and must be considered as such to stimulate the learners to perceive them as a whole package.

The results of this study suggested that teachers in both private and state secondary schools appreciate the use of the teaching aids in their classes and acknowledge their usefulness. It is also interesting to note that more teaching aids were used in secondary schools than initially anticipated. However, it appears that private school teachers apply more teaching aids and paid more attention to them, using them frequently in their lessons when compared to state school teachers. This can be explained by the fact that private schools in Libya are well resourced and teachers are well prepared to use up to date teaching aids (see for instance, Al-Shapani, 2001; Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Mohammed 1987). Equally this study confirm that students enjoy very much the use of pictures, games, and photos. In fact, the enjoyment of these teaching aids can be referred to the interaction that these aids can offer to free students from the strict curriculum and provide a better atmosphere. While this finding reflects that of previous studies (Widdowson, 1984; Leclerc, 1985), in that teachers are often tend to use what is available of teaching aids, cheap and easy to use. In contrast with state teachers, private teachers appeared to have more sources for their teaching aids.

Yet this study revealed similar problems to that of the literature (Al-Shapani, 2001; Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Lai, 1994) which prevent teachers from employing teaching aids. These problems are listed from in order of severity as expressed by Libyan teachers in this study: lack of money to purchase aids, lack of locally produced aids, students' language inadequacy, insufficient time and class size. Indeed, the lack of money to purchase aids and the lack of locally produced aids are of major concern to each individual teacher (Al-Shapani, 2001; Al-Ahaydib, 1986). Yet teachers in state secondary schools in particular appeared to have fewer resources available to them compared with private school teachers. This may, reflect in general, the Libyan government's indifferent attitude toward education in Libya. Yet the situation has not improved since the return of teaching English language in mainstream schools. Teachers also identified students' language inadequacy as another problem preventing them from applying teaching aids. This, to a large degree, can be attributed to the design of English curriculum in Libya which has been criticised for being long and formal to teach, as well as neglecting the listening and speaking skills (Amniana and Gadour, 2007). Whilst insufficient time ranks fourth among the problems listed by teachers suggesting making, preparing, evaluating, selecting, and manipulating teaching aids demands time. Explaining one word in English may need a lot of aids for students to appreciate the meaning, one teacher reported. It certainly consumes more time than the direct translation method, another teacher stated. Following this problem comes the class size which is considered the fifth major problem facing English teachers. In Libya, the secondary schools have an average of 35 students per class. With this average size of class it is not always possible to apply teaching aids to stimulate students to interact effectively. The large class may also prevent teachers and students from moving around and carrying out their activities. Hence, it should be noticed that even though English teachers appear to use a variety of teaching aids, the traditional ones are still predominant in secondary schools. This finding fits very well with previous studies (see for example, Al-Shapani, 2001; Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Mohammed, 1987 and The National Educational Report, 2008), which found that the traditional approach to English language teaching is common. Despite this, private school teachers in this study appeared well equipped with teaching aids and therefore use them more often compared with state school teachers. This is perhaps why families pay a lot of money for their children to be taught in private schools. Also private schools have, in general, a smaller number of students with small class sizes compared with state schools; consequently teachers can manage to use a variety of teaching aids more effectively.

With regard to the use of particular teaching aids the majority of teachers stated that chalk/blackboard, textbooks, and pictures are the most frequently used ones. The common reason given by teachers for using these particular teaching aids is that they were the only ones available for them to use all the time. Indeed, this was the case with us when we were teaching in Libya. Also, Al-Shapani (2001) reached similar conclusion. While this maybe underlined the lack of resources available for English teachers in Libya in general, it certainly reflects the lack of the Ministry of Education's commitment to improve the teaching of foreign languages. This finding, however, does not support that of the National Educational Report (2008) in that schools and teachers are often provided with the necessary teaching aids and materials but they are the ones to blame for abusing these aids. Regardless, the Ministry of Education is responsible for implementing its policies concerning the curriculum and quality teaching.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This study explored the importance of the use of teaching aids in Libyan secondary schools and how they play a significant role in the teaching of English. The ultimate aim of using teaching aids is to make English lessons interesting and enjoyable in order to allow

students acquire English through pleasurable and rewarding experiences. This study suggested that success in using teaching aids depends very much on the teachers' own enthusiasm and skills, good preparation, and careful manipulation. The study also pointed out that teaching aids should be systematically and carefully selected so they can be easily evaluated. Although the present study found more teaching aids applied by English teachers in secondary schools than initially anticipated, the traditional aids still prevail e.g. chalk and blackboard, pictures and textbooks. However, the implications of this study underlined the need to provide teachers and schools, particularly state schools, with enough teaching aids and resources. This is with aim to support teachers incorporate the teaching aids competently and effectively in their teaching in order to help students acquire English language and improve the classroom environment. There is also a need to improve the current English curriculum e.g. textbooks to suit the relevant age of students and the context. Equally an annual evaluation of the English curriculum by the English educational supervisors, teachers, and students should be made to improve its contents. Language experts should also assess the standard of English teachers and supervisors. Thus, the Libyan Ministry of Education and all its Local Education Authorities should work together with English teachers and educational supervisors to improve the current situation of English language teaching.

## References

- Al-Ahaydib, M. (1986) Teaching English as a foreign language in the intermediate and secondary schools of Saudi Arabia: Ph.D. Thesis, University of Kansas. United States.
- Al-Shapani, O. (2001) The problems that face education in Libya and ways of overcoming them. Tripoli. Educational research Publication.
- Amniana, S. and Gadour, A. (2007) Differing expectations: an account of home and school factors affecting EAL learners from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. *English in Education*, 41(1):51-67
- Byrne, D. (1977) *English Teaching Extracts*. London: Longman.
- Crystal, D. (1992) *Encyclopedic dictionary of language and languages*. GB. Hartnols Ltd.
- Lai, F. K. (1994) Teachers' views on ways of improving English language teaching in Hong Kong. Conference papers. United States.
- Leclerc, M. (1985) *Classroom aids Apparatus & Materials*. Stafford: National Association for Remedial Education.
- Mohammed, S. H. (1987) The communicative approach in language teaching and its implications for syllabus design in Libya. Ph.D. thesis. East Anglia. Britain.
- Moses, D. (1993) How learners can be motivated. Jordan.
- Murphy, J. M. (1991) Oral communication in TESOL: integrating speaking, listening, and pronunciation, Georgia State University. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(1), Spring 1991, 15-75.
- Savignon, S. J. (1991) Communicative language teaching. State of the Art. University of Jllinois at Urban-Champaign. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2), Summer 1991, 261-277.
- Stubbs, M. (1986) *Educational linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- The Educational Supervisions' Report (1998) Tripoli: Government Press.
- The Ministry of Education (1968) *Education Report*. Tripoli: Government Press.
- The National Educational Report (2008) Tripoli: Government Press.
- The National Conference for Education (1996) *Education facing the twenty First century*. Tripoli.
- The People's Committee for Education Scientific Research (1994) *Annual Report*. Tripoli: Government Press.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1984) The incentive value of Theory in Teacher Education. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 38(2), April 1984, 86-90.