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Title: The Practice of Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language in Iraqi Primary Schools: A Study in Babylon

Abstract

English language teaching has been a part of the Iraqi school curriculum since 1919. In 2006, however, a new curriculum was introduced in which the Communicative Approach/Communicative Language Teaching is used to develop learners' communicative competence. This study, based in Babylon, attempted to find out how EFL primary teachers implement this approach based learner-centred method in their classrooms in the context of Education as a centralized system in Iraq. The study was carried out in two phases: first, a large scale questionnaire survey of primary EFL teachers and a classroom observation was conducted on ten primary EFL Iraqi female teachers. Then, an examination of the curriculum document, textbook/materials, assessment and teacher training programmes was conducted to find out whether they work towards the fulfilment of curriculum goals, i.e. to develop learners' communicative and linguistic competence in using English fluently and accurately. The research has aimed primarily at exploring the use of the communicative approach but more specifically focused on (1) teachers' understanding of EFL training programmes and the communicative approach, and (2) students' practices and their language learning. Secondly, in order to get a better understanding of English learning strategies Fifth and Sixth primary students used in

Babylon governmental Schools, this research also describes the strategies used during their acquisition process in general as well as the strategies used for the acquisition of the foreign language. Our investigation of the learners' strategies primarily relied on the use of a Questionnaire and an Interview in which we have included different language learning tasks.

To investigate the Iraqi primary English teachers' views and practices, this study adopted a mixed mode of research methods using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect data in order to explore and study the teachers' views and practices and also to provide an understanding of teachers' classroom behaviours with regard to learner-centred teaching. The data analysis of the first phase indicated that teachers do not implement a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based learner-centred method for various reasons. Teachers' interviews and the examination of teacher training programmes have shown that teachers were prepared theoretically to teach, therefore, they adopted a hybrid of teaching methods, i.e. learner-centred and teacher-centred both in teaching English.

The second phase results of both grades indicated that the more frequent learning strategies used were the metacognitive strategies and among the different items of the metacognitive category, self-evaluating and monitoring were the most frequently reported by the children. Second, the next most frequently used category was the memory category and within this category, learners seemed to use the mechanical techniques, associating, reviewing, and using imagery items significantly more frequently than the other items. The cognitive strategy category was the third choice in order of preference within which the most frequent items used were repetition, practicing naturalistically, practicing structures and sounds formally. The results also indicated that there were differences in metacognitive, and compensation strategies between both grades although female pupils were slightly more frequent users of these strategies than male pupils. This may be due to cultural reasons, motivation and learning styles.