

THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON LANGUAGE LEARNING BARRIERS OF EFL STUDENTS IN CIU, NORTH CYPRUS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the perception of preparatory department teachers at school of foreign languages at Cyprus University on the language learning barriers faced by English as a foreign language (EFL) students. A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 samples of teachers who have experience teaching EFL students. The data were analyzed using content analysis. The results of this study provide insight into the most common language learning barriers perceived by teachers of EFL students, the impact these barriers have on the academic performance of EFL students, and the strategies that teachers use to overcome these barriers in their classrooms. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on language learning barriers and may provide guidance for teachers in addressing these barriers in their classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

English as a second or foreign language is taught and learned through what is known as English language teaching (ELT). Despite the fact that English is now the most widely used language in commerce, science, and technology, learning and proficient use of the language still creates difficulties for many people. Depending on the situation and the unique characteristics of the learner, these barriers may be of a personal, social, or educational aspect. Language barriers are one of several difficulties that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have while learning a new language. Learning difficulties are a large concern for educators, so they should identify these students and work with their parents to support them. How teachers approach teaching and supporting their students can be greatly influenced by their perceptions of the language learning challenges experienced by EFL students (Nunan, 1991). A teacher who is knowledgeable about the typical difficulties EFL students encounter can create plans to assist students in overcoming these challenges and enhancing their language competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). Issues with learning can be attributed to a number of factors, such as inadequate school curricula and inadequate training (Pop & Ciascai, 2013). Lack of motivation, low self-confidence, limited exposure to English, and negative attitudes toward the language are some common challenges to ELT, according to a study published in the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* in 2014 (Dörnyei & Ushioda). Age, language learning capacity, prior language experience, and cultural differences are other variables that could make teaching English to speakers of other languages more difficult (Ghanbari, 2015). Overcoming these obstacles is a crucial component of effective ELT since it can help learners have more academic and professional possibilities and improve global communication and comprehension. For a variety of reasons, such as a lack of interest in the language or a lack of trust in their language abilities, EFL students may lack motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). Another barrier to language learning identified in the research is inadequate access to resources, such as books or language learning materials (Al-Seghayer, 2001).

Learning Barriers of EFL Students

The problems and difficulties that students face when learning a second or foreign language are referred to as language learning barriers. These obstacles may be of a personal, social, or educational nature and may change depending on the situation and the characteristics of the learner. Understanding how teachers view language learning difficulties might help educators build more successful teaching methods by illuminating how these barriers are recognized and managed in the classroom. According to one study done in Turkey (Dündar & zdemir, 2018), language learning difficulties that students encounter when studying English as a foreign language (EFL) can be seen differently by EFL teachers. According to the researchers, the most widely mentioned barriers were a lack of desire, a lack of self-confidence, a lack of practice opportunities, and a lack of family support. Lack of time, little English exposure, and a lack of interest in the language were among the other obstacles found. This study's teachers stressed the significance of removing these obstacles in order to promote language acquisition and enhance student performance. Another study, this one in Saudi Arabia, looked at how EFL teachers felt about the difficulties that female students have learning languages (Alshammari, 2016). According to the study, inadequate exposure to English, a lack of opportunity for practice, and a lack of confidence was the most often mentioned barriers. Other important obstacles mentioned by the teachers included cultural differences, a lack of

support from friends and family, and a lack of motivation. The study's authors stressed that in order to ease language acquisition and advance gender equality in education, teachers must be aware of these barriers and take steps to overcome them.

A study carried out in Thailand investigated how EFL teachers felt about the challenges that low-achieving students encounter when learning a language (Pongsapich & Sirikulchayanonta, 2012). The most often identified barriers, according to the researchers, were a lack of motivation, a lack of self-confidence, and a lack of practice chances. Limited exposure to English, a lack of family support, and a lack of time were among the other obstacles that were noted. In order to promote low-achieving students' language learning and enhance their academic results, the study's authors stressed the necessity for teachers to be aware of and address these barriers. The L1 has been one of the main justifications for teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). There are several perspectives on the use of L1 in EFL lessons, and several studies have been done on it so far. According to earlier surveys, the majority of EFL teachers support the practice of L1, commonly known as the bilingual approach, especially in classes for beginners who are studying the English language (elik & Aydn, 2018; Erkan, 2019; Kayaolu, 2012; Kaymakamolu & Yltanlar, 2019; Mahmutolu & Kcr, 2013; Sali, 2014; Tang, 2002). In EFL programs, where using the mother tongue as a facilitator is recommended, they frequently emphasize using monolingual teaching practices.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the study of English by individuals who do not speak it as their first language (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 2014). EFL is a rapidly growing field, with millions of people around the world learning English for a variety of reasons, including academic study, travel, and career advancement (Dornyei, 2009). This might be particularly challenging for students who are studying in a place where the target language is not commonly spoken or where there are scarce resources (Borg, 2003). Lack of time, resources, and support are only a few of the other challenges experienced by EFL students that have been noted by previous studies (Gao & Hu, 2012; Song & Chen, 2010). EFL is a complex and challenging process that involves a range of linguistic, cultural, and psychological factors (Nunan, 1991). Students who are learning English as a foreign language face a number of barriers, including limited exposure to the language, lack of motivation, poor study habits, and limited language proficiency (Sánchez, 2019). Despite these challenges, many EFL students are able to overcome these obstacles and make significant progress in their language learning (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). Effective EFL teaching can play a key role in helping students overcome these barriers and achieve their language learning goals (Dornyei, 2009). These obstacles may also have a substantial effect on how well EFL students acquire a language. Teachers guarantee the success of EFL students in their language acquisition since it is their obligation to identify and address the language learning difficulties that their students encounter (Liu & Young, 2011). Understanding how teachers view the challenges EFL students face when learning a language is crucial in order to creating classroom-based strategies for removing these obstacles (Liu & Young, 2011). In addition to language barriers in grammar and vocabulary, the bilingual approach is used for educational objectives. Using an L1 can improve students' language and comprehension skills as well as their metalinguistic awareness (Kaymakamolu & Yltanlar, 2019; Sali, 2014; Sarçoban, 2010; Tang, 2002). The lower levels, in particular, are able to differentiate between similar utterances in the target language (TL) and their mother tongue (ML) (Cole, 1998). The bilingual approach offers integrated linguistic learning and conceptual development. According to Cook (2001), the process of enhancing L1 and learning a second language is comparable. Children must be exposed to TL in addition to learning it.

THE STUDY

This research seeks an answer to the question "What kind of Barriers do the preparation school teachers working at Cyprus University encounter while they are teaching EFL students?" The following questions were formed with the aim of responding to the main question of the research:

1. What are the most common language learning barriers perceived by teachers of EFL students?
2. What strategies do teachers use to overcome these language learning barriers in their classrooms?

The study applied a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews using a purposive sampling technique. The aim of the qualitative approach is to comprehend the participants' subjective reality from within (Creswell, 2017). Zorn (2010) further mentioned that the classification of insights into the topic from the perspective of participants is the goal of using a semi-structured interview. The goal of adopting a purposive sample technique is to choose respondents from the field experts who can assess the problem based on their experience and comprehension of the authentic concerns.

Considering the purpose of the research, potential participants should have been local and international teachers, at Cyprus University. The aim of this study is to better understand teachers' perceptions of the Language

Learning Barrier of EFL students. Therefore, seven EFL teachers from Cyprus University's preparatory English Department school of foreign languages were chosen as the study participants. According to Blandford (2013), the choice of recruiting strategies depends on the goals of the study and the types of respondents required. The sample for this study will consist of a purposive sample of teachers who have experience teaching EFL students. A purposive sample is a non-random sample that is selected based on specific characteristics or criteria (Creswell, 2013). The sample will be recruited through a convenience sampling method, which involves recruiting participants who are easily accessible and willing to participate (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, first of all, a research form consisting of 4 open-ended questions was prepared to make sure to reveal teachers' thoughts about barriers perceived by teaching EFL students ("see Appendix"). In order to determine the level of language, coverage, and suitability of these 4 questions in terms of the purpose of this research, opinions of an expert in the field of ELT (English Language Teaching) were taken, and studies conducted on this topic were examined. After that, these questions were rearranged in line with the previous studies and suggestions by the expert.

The data for this study will be collected through semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers. A semi-structured interview is a method of collecting data in which the interviewer has a general outline or set of questions to guide the conversation, but also allows for flexibility and follow-up questions based on the responses of the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). This type of interview allows for a more natural flow of conversation and can provide a deeper understanding of the subject being studied, but it can also make it more difficult to compare and analyze the data collected due to the lack of strict structure. The interviews will be conducted by the researcher and will be guided by a set of open-ended questions that are designed to explore the research questions. Before handing out the research forms to the participants of this study (Teachers), it was explained that the purpose of the survey is not testing their knowledge or experience; instead, collecting information regarding prep-school teachers' thoughts and ideas about language learning barriers of EFL students. For this reason, teachers were asked not to write their personal information on their answer sheets in order to reflect their true feelings and thoughts and to protect their confidentiality. Teachers were also asked to explain their thoughts and ideas in detail. It was assumed that the participants provided their real thoughts to the questions on the interview sheets.

The "content analysis" method was used to analyze the data. "Separating the content into codes, recognizing themes by analyzing codes, unifying codes and themes by evaluating them, and interpreting discoveries by writing them," are the four stages that make up content analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994). First, the information obtained from the interviews was documented and set up for analysis with the intention of coding it. The written content was then organized into meaningful sets. The researchers created the coding list and came to a "consensus." The research's specified codes were arranged into headings (categories). Each teacher was given a numerical identity to use while presenting participant thoughts in the study, and identities were kept hidden to protect anonymity. At Cyprus International University's school of foreign languages, the teachers in the preparatory department were classified as "T- 1" to "T-7." To provide validity to the research, the opinions of the participating teachers were presented as quotations.

FINDINGS

Based on the two study questions specified in the research's introduction, research findings were given. The thoughts of the preparatory department teachers at Cyprus International University's school of foreign languages were individually given. The interview questions generated four main topics, which were then subdivided into subthemes by the participant's viewpoints.

THEME ONE: Different Ways of Teaching EFL Students

The views of teachers related to the first theme were divided into four subthemes:

Many different approaches are frequently used when teaching EFL to students. The communicative approach is one method that emphasizes using the target language in authentic contexts and aims to improve students' communication skills, which was considered the most important factor that most of the teachers mentioned in this study. Task-based language instruction is another method that involves giving pupils language-based tasks and exercises to practice their language abilities. That looked really useful to guarantee the learners' comprehension and team-working. The direct method, the grammar-translation method, and the audio-lingual method are additional strategies. When choosing the optimal strategy for their classroom, EFL teachers must take into account the requirements and objectives of their students as well as the tools and resources in their classroom. Because EFL students mostly want to use their L1 to make sure they learn the lesson.

Two teachers said,

Teachers' preference would be the student-centered class to activate their background knowledge and motivate them to share their thoughts to improve their speaking, in other words, engage them with the process of discovery learning. (T-1)

The task-based approach would be really practical by setting some strategies like starting a team working and defining some role plays among groups to create peer mediation and teacher mediation to facilitate learning and teaching simultaneously. (T-5)

THEME TWO: Curriculum to Teach EFL Students

English is taught to students as a foreign language (EFL) using a variety of different curricula. To meet the requirements and objectives of their students, EFL teachers can select from a number of materials and resources, including textbooks, workbooks, films, audio recordings, internet resources, and realia. For their students to be engaged and challenged, EFL teachers must create a well-balanced, organized curriculum with a range of activities and teaching methods. EFL teachers can make their own materials, such as lesson plans, activities, and handouts, to use in their classrooms in addition to selecting appropriate materials. The specific EFL curriculum used will depend on the teacher's individual teaching methods, the student's needs and goals, and other factors.

Some of the teachers' opinions are as follows:

I'm quite enthusiastic about the written curriculum which fully filled my learners' appetite in terms of their current needs and their future mindsets and short-term goals including textbooks like inside reading and writing to help them succeed in future college studies. (T-3)

I follow the curriculum which is set or prepared by the coordinators of the preparatory school in our department. The main focus is on English file series, although I personally ask my students to work on some English podcasts like TED Talks or BBC ten minutes and so on to facilitate their learning in terms of speaking. (T-4)

THEME THREE: The Perception of Barriers while Teaching EFL Students

The success of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students can be affected by a variety of obstacles. These obstacles can include a lack of time and finances, a learner's lack of enthusiasm or interest, a lack of qualified teachers, and learning a new language anxiety. Other obstacles include a lack of exposure to the language, difficulties with pronunciation and grammar, and a lack of opportunities for speaking and listening practice. A barrier can also be posed by cultural differences and a lack of familiarity with the traditions and values of the culture linked with the language. These obstacles may be seen by EFL teachers as difficulties that could restrict their students' progress and make it more difficult for them to be successful in their language acquisition. These obstacles may be overcome, and students can significantly improve their language skills, but it takes time, creativity, and a desire to adapt and discover answers.

Teachers said,

Personally, I think teaching EFL students is a kind of big challenge thanks to the different kinds of barriers among multicultural learners in CIU, in terms of lack of familiarity with the tradition, values, and cultures respectively. (T-2)

There are different factors to be mentioned here, like the loss of motivation due to language anxiety or even lack of finance to pay the tuition fee which leads to frustration and demotivation. Therefore, they easily lose their opportunity to learn the target language successfully. (T-6)

CIU as an international university would accept young learners from different neighborhoods like Arabic, Turkish, French, Persian and Korean difficulties with pronunciation and grammar due to the lack of exposure to native speakers make communication more challenging. (T-5)

THEME FOUR: What Strategies do you Use to Overcome these Barriers

There are several tactics that can be applied to get over the obstacles that might hinder English as a foreign language (EFL) students' success. Adding more materials and resources, encouraging regular practice, developing an inviting and welcoming learning environment, utilizing a variety of teaching techniques, offering extra help to students who need it, encouraging the use of the target language, and adapting resources and methods to meet the needs of specific students are some effective strategies. For their students to succeed in their language learning endeavors, EFL teachers must be flexible and eager to try out new approaches in order to get over any obstacles that may appear.

Teachers' opinions are,

Several strategies can be used to overcome the barriers that can impact the success of English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Some effective strategies that most of the teachers mentioned include:

1. Providing extra tools and resources: EFL students may benefit from having access to a range of materials, including books, workbooks, videos, audio recordings, and internet resources, to help to their language learning and practice.
2. Promoting consistent practice: Speaking and listening practice outside of the classroom is beneficial for EFL students because it is essential to language learning.
3. Providing a welcoming and inclusive learning environment: If EFL students feel comfortable and included in the classroom, they may feel more encouraged to learn.
4. Making use of a range of teaching strategies: EFL students may have various learning preferences, therefore making use of a range of strategies can help to engage and test them.
5. Providing more support: EFL students who are having trouble could profit from extra guidance, such as private tutoring or extra assistance in class.
6. Encourage EFL students to use the target language: Encouraging EFL students to use the target language as much as possible can help to develop their language abilities and confidence.
7. EFL teachers can utilize evaluation tools, such as quizzes and tests, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their students and change their contents and methods accordingly. This will help them better fulfill the needs of each individual student.

Teachers' perceptions are critical in understanding and addressing language learning barriers faced by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 2014). Teachers who understand these barriers can devise effective strategies to help their students develop their language skills (Sánchez, 2019). In other words, a key element in the successful acquisition of a language is teachers' perceptions of the language learning challenges faced by students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), such as limited exposure to English (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014), a lack of motivation (Dornyei, 2009), poor study habits (Nunan, 1991), and limited language proficiency (Sánchez, 2019). Hence, several studies have looked into how teachers view the difficulties that EFL students confront. According to one study, some EFL students' lack of motivation is a significant obstacle to language learning (zdemir & Arslan, 2018). Similar barriers, such as a lack of confidence or an interest in the language, have been discovered in other studies (Ghorbani & Ghanbari, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2017).

Teachers who recognize these barriers can modify their teaching approach to meet the needs of their students, for example, by providing more opportunities for speaking and listening practice (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014), or by finding ways to make language learning more engaging and relevant to students (Dornyei, 2009). Furthermore, teachers can play an important role in creating a positive classroom environment that promotes language learning (Nunan, 1991). This may entail creating a safe and supportive environment in which students feel comfortable taking risks with the language and are encouraged to ask questions and participate in class discussions (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). (Dornyei, 2009). Teachers can also provide feedback and support to students in order to help them develop the skills and strategies required to overcome language learning barriers (Sánchez, 2019).

Teachers have also noted that students' limited exposure to English outside of the classroom is a barrier. This may be due to limited access to English-language media or a lack of opportunity to use the language in everyday settings (Zdemir & Arslan, 2018; Kim & Lee, 2017), among other factors. The lack of resources in the neighborhood for language learning has been cited as a third barrier by teachers. There may not be enough qualified language teachers, there may not be enough relevant materials, and there may not be enough technology or other resources available for language learning (Ghorbani & Ghanbari, 2016; zdemir & Arslan, 2018).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students faces a number of challenges when learning a language that may affect their progress. A major obstacle is a lack of exposure to the language. Many EFL students do not often have access to native speakers or opportunities to use the language in a natural situation, which can make it difficult for them to improve their speaking and listening abilities (Swain, 2000).

Lack of sufficient resources or materials is another barrier to language learning among EFL students. There is a chance that many EFL students lack access to high-quality textbooks, materials, or technology to enhance their learning (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Because of this, it may be challenging for them to learn the language and gain the proficiency needed to speak effectively in the target language. The process of students acquiring a language may also be affected if teachers completely depend on conventional, poor teaching techniques. Overall, it is clear that teachers' perceptions have a significant impact on EFL students' language learning experiences

(Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). Teachers can help create a supportive and conducive environment for language learning by recognizing and addressing the language learning barriers that their students face (Dornyei, 2009).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a key aspect in the successful acquisition of a language is teachers' perceptions of the language learning challenges faced by students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The lack of motivation, limited exposure to English outside of the classroom, and a lack of language learning tools in the community are among the factors that teachers believe prevent EFL students from learning the language (Ghorbani & Ghanbari, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2017; zdemir & Arslan, 2018). Teachers can more effectively encourage and help EFL students in their language learning by knowing these obstacles. In order to support their student's success, teachers must constantly examine and address the challenges that their pupils face when learning a new language.

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Appendix

Dear Participants,

This research aims to identify your Perceptions as a Teacher in terms of Language Learning Barriers of EFL students in CIU, North Cyprus.

Kindly answer the following questions to state your opinion. I do appreciate your cooperation.

1. How do you teach EFL students? Tell me about your experience.
2. What curriculum do you use to teach EFL students?
3. What is the perception of barriers while teaching EFL students?
4. What kind of strategies do you use to overcome these barriers?