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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | REVIEW ARTICLE

English language education in Jordan: Some recent trends and challenges

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to map out the status of English language teaching (ELT) as practised in the Arab World and, specifically, in Jordan today. The study also aims to bring into focus significant issues that need to be addressed in ELT in the Arab World. This paper presents a review of the current status of English language education, with an emphasis on the need for urgent reforms in the teaching of English in the Arab World. Further, longitudinal data in respect to classroom and workplace English proficiency are presented. English language education seems to be up-to-date teacher-centred and bound to other issues such as teaching the textbook rather than focusing on developing lifelong strategies. There is a critical need for writing national standards for English language professional development programmes that should be based on the findings of sound research. The paper highlights the significance of teaching English language through observing and reviewing the current practices.

Subjects: Language & Education; Language Policy & Planning; Language Teaching & Learning; World Englishes

Keywords: EFL; language learning; language achievement; Arab students; policy and language education

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper reviews English language education in Jordan. In this paper, the authors provide multiple sources of data, nationally and internationally, that are concerned with the performance of English language learners in Jordan. Additionally, this paper deals with some neglected and problematic issues that may have potential contribution to the current poor performance of English language learners in Jordan. One of these problematic issues is the unclear involvement of English language educators in the educational policy of English language education. Further, the authors discuss how the effects of textbook instructions and home environments may have potential contributions to the low self-efficacy of Jordanian learners of English. Finally, the need for a comprehensive instructional framework for preparing Jordanian English language learners is highlighted.

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1. Introduction

This review paper aims to provide an overlook of the current practices and future expectations of English as a foreign language education in Arab countries, with a specific focus on Jordan. In this paper, the sections indicated are treated as relatively self-contained menu items which discuss several issues pertaining to the general topic of this article, English language education. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

The recent unprecedented developments in the Arab region have resulted in economical, educational and political changes that have occurred in the lives of individuals and communities alike (Taha-Thomure, 2008). Further, educational reform projects were supported in Jordan by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (USAID, 2014) in order to meet the growing demands for effective teaching and learning in public schools in the country. However, questions have been raised regarding the achievement of these reform projects and their contribution to the lives of learners and individuals as well as the realm of educational bodies around the Arab World.

The interest in preserving lifelong learners to maximise opportunities in community development is an utmost goal and aim to many educational systems around the world. This, however, is coupled with many challenges and obstacles, among all, achieving effect learning in students.

Although the scope of this review article is English language education in Jordan, some insights into the status of students' performances in core subjects in Jordanian schools are introduced in order to capture the current educational system outcomes. International educational organisations have paid extraordinary efforts to understand the performance of school students, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA). For example, report of Mullis, Martin, Foy, and Arora (2012) on TIMSS assessments between 1999 and 2011 indicated that the achievement of eighth-grade students in Jordan is declining, as shown in Figure 1, and was one of the lowest among participating countries (Mullis et al., 2012). PISA reports also indicated that Jordanian students in 2009 scored lower than international average in reading, science and mathematics (PISA, 2012b).

Before presenting the status and the challenges of English language education in Jordan, a brief overview of the education system in the country is presented and illustrated.

Figure 1. Trend in mathematical achievement from Mullis et al. (2012).

Trend in Mathematics Achievement

	1999	2003	2007	2011
Trend in Mathematics Achievement	428	424	427	406

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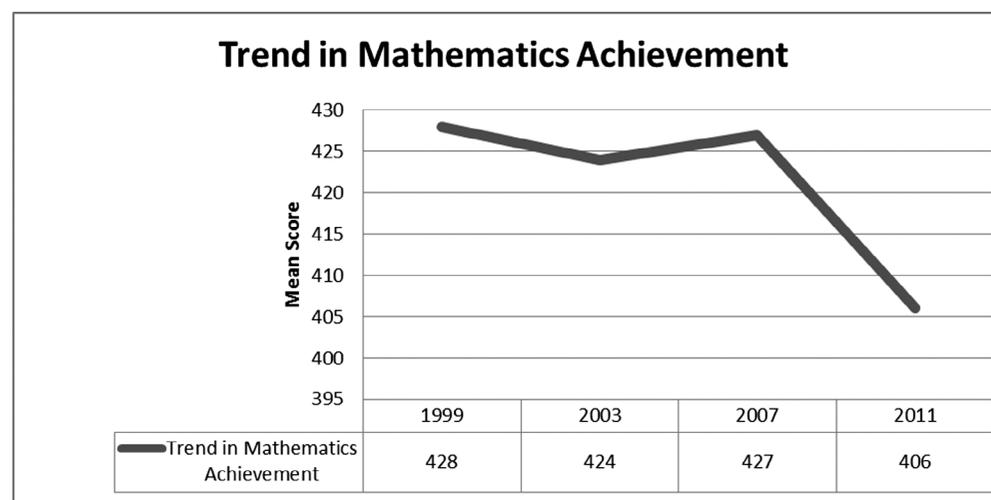
1.1. Education system in Jordan

According to the statistics department in the Ministry of Education in Jordan (Ministry of Education, 2014), the number of schools has reached 6,614 in 2014, with 1,846,963 students. The Ministry of Education in Jordan takes an increasingly vigorous role in delivering education to students from Kindergarten to 12th Grade. The Basic Education stage, which is a compulsory one, comprises grades 1–10 where all students are entitled to free education. In later stages after the Basic Education, the scores of the 8th, 9th and 10th grades are calculated to determine which track the students are eligible to apply for. Examples of these tracks are academic elementary and vocational elementary education. Prior to students' grades calculations process, students are asked to submit an application of which track they would like to take. However, the Ministry of Education has the final decision upon determining students' tracks according to their final year marks in all the three years. The academic and vocational streams end with General Secondary Education Examination (*Tawjihi*). The vocational stream is comprised of professional courses, which aim to prepare skilled and qualified students (manpower) to the local and regional markets. This stream is administrated and operated by Vocational Training Corporation and the Ministry of Education.

1.2. National and international data on English language assessment in Jordan

For many years, Arabic and English languages took the front seats in higher education arenas in the country. Yet, English language demonstrated by K-12 schools took the back seat and deteriorated financially, pedagogically and politically. The latest results of high school examinations in English language subject in Jordan have revealed that 18% have successfully passed the test in one only particular stream, Arts (Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, 2015b), whereas 15% of the total test takers in the same academic stream have successfully passed the exam in 2014 (ibid). Similarly, a national evaluation of basic language skills in both Arabic and English was carried out by the Ministry of Education among first-, second- and third-grades' students in Jordan. The results revealed that 22% out of all students was not able to read in Arabic and English (ibid).

The impact of such findings can be drawn from data available by international organisations which showed that English language proficiency as a product of the current educational system in Jordan is deteriorating compared to global levels. One of these international organisations is the Education First English Proficiency Index[1] (EF EPI) that examines and ranks the average level of English skills in the Middle East and North African (MENA) youth (Education First English Proficiency Index, 2014). The most recent report of EF EPI indicates that MENA states scored lower than 70 countries around the world in English proficiency. Specifically, the EF EPI 2014 report indicated that "since 2007, MENA's average English proficiency level has dropped 2.66 points" (p. 28). As shown in Table 1, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have scored lower than the global average between 2013 and 2015 and ranked as very low proficiency regions during the same period.

Test scores of students who took IELTS in the year 2014, as shown in Table 2, were not better than other data presented earlier. It can be noted that the average of the test takers score, across years,

Table 1. Education first English proficiency index 2013–2015 for Jordan and Saudi Arabia				
Country/year	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**Global 2015**
Jordan	46.44	47.82	47.33	52.74
Saudi Arabia	41.19	39.48	39.93	

Note: EF EPI is criticised for sampling issues.

Table 2. Test takers' performance in IELTS					
Year	**Listening**	**Reading**	**Writing**	**Speaking**	**Overall**
2014	6.0	5.7	5.4	6.1	5.8
2013	5.8	5.6	5.3	6.1	5.8
2012	5.9	5.6	5.3	6.1	5.8

deemed the lower band and were ranked, as well as the rest of the Arab countries, the lowest in language proficiency (International English Language Testing System, 2013–2014).

In the same vein, findings from Pearson English on Global English Business English Index report (2011) showed that employees across Middle East companies have the lowest ranking average (3.5 out of 10) for business English competency.

In the Arab regions at large, school students continue to struggle with their learning journey and encounter increasingly accountability needs. It is essential in such contexts to identify instructional strategies that are accountable for true developments in their learning. These results have made educators in school and tertiary levels alike express their deep concerns regarding the increase of school students' dropout. Rather educators should help those who struggle in their learning and help them approach effective English language learning (Bailey & Damerow, 2014). Taking Jordan as a representative case, the drop is significant: 57% in academic stream passed the exam in 2010 compared to 29.6% in 2014 (Jordan Times, 2015). This has opened eyes regarding the capability of the education system in Jordan in producing independent learners.

Statistically speaking, the number of students who did not pass the entrance exam for English language requirement and, therefore, enrolled for English language development courses has almost doubled in the period of 2007–2013. For example, in Jordan University while the number of students who registered for English language courses was 534 in 2007–2008, in 2012–2013, the number was 967.

The frustration of students' English language proficiency level continues to be voiced in higher education institutions across the Arab World (Ghaith, 2003). Complaints of the earlier from university language lecturers about poor performance of students in skills required for higher education have been common (Freahat & Al-Faoury, 2015). This promotes a critical question regarding school students' readiness for academic life and, hence, lifelong learning.

1.3. Historical overview of English language education: an assessment of practices

It has been more than four decades since the introduction of English language education in Jordan. Some educationalists argued that English language education dates back to 1920s when political movements started to take place over the Emirate of Transjordan. Similar to many other countries in the Arab region, English language education is regarded as a prestigious foreign language to be learned. The oldest assessment of English language education in Jordan dates back to the 1970s by Harrison, Prator, and Tucker (1975). The focus of the assessment was directed towards examining English language education's compatibility, specificity, scope and clarity. They concluded that the areas investigated were neither operationally defined nor approached realistic compatibility with the actual demands of English language education at Secondary Education stage. Harrison et al. (1975) indicated that a large portion of investment at that time was spent on education and, particularly, in the dissemination of instruction of English language.

1.3.1. Recent changes: challenge to envision language education landscape

The World Bank report on educational reforms stated that Jordan far exceeded its counterparts from the Arab countries in educational reforms (World Bank, 2007, 2008). For example, a five-year Education Reform for Knowledge Economy project (ERFKE) 2003–2008 was carried out to develop many sectors of the educational system. One of the main areas that the project focused on was introducing new curricula that emphasise critical thinking, group work and research. Earlier in this work, statistics included in section 1.2, the number of children who were not able to read in both Arabic and English, put some more pressure on preparing pre- and in-service teachers for a very challenging teaching job. However, a closer look at the results of teachers qualifying examination to teaching job entry in Jordan held by Ministry of Education showed that only 74 out of 297 (24.9% percent) graduates of English language majors have passed the qualifying examination (Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, 2015a). This may suggest that preparing English language educators for

teaching professions is not adequately addressed professionally and this may in turn carry out possible caveats against school students learning. Not only do students at higher education system have inadequate preparation programmes, but a large portion of in-service teachers are also teaching with very little in-service teacher training (ibid).

In a study by Al-Khatib (2008), the author has pointed out the importance of changing policy in curriculum reform that took place in 2000. The introduction of English language education to the first grade through four was, according to him, a significant shift in learning English language to most Jordanian school learners at public schools. He concluded that lack of national guidelines and standards in English language education, protecting and preserving burnout and intentions to leave among competent teachers and limited financial resources are among the problematic issues to English language education.

2. English language teaching in Jordan: the current play of the state

2.1. Policy and language education

The policy of education at schools level asserts that school students should master basic reading skills. However, the results and statistics from international organisations such as PISA (2012a), IELTS (2013–2014) and local media reports have highlighted that schools' results suggest low performance of school students' learning (Malkawi, 2014). The most noteworthy viewpoint is that there is a problem with school learners' learning and performance. Taking this into account, this paper argues that fostering lifelong learning and, thus, benefiting the communities, policy should not neglect the significant role of educators and teachers. Rather than looking at the role of teachers as mere conduits of the policy, policy decision-makers in Jordan need to understand that the role of teachers should include them as key policy-players. It is in the classrooms that policy-makers' decisions most directly influence the learning and teaching. By designing and delivering language instructions, teachers may sense the enormous influence on the development of school language education. The former claim was sensed from the results of USAID's (2008) report on the new paradigm of teaching and learning implemented in *Discovery Schools*. The project simply aimed at understanding the implementation of e-content (teaching subjects with the use of ICT like e-Math and e-English) in pilot schools (or Discovery schools). In short, the report concluded that "the general nature of practice is still teacher-centred" (p. 25). Despite the fact that teachers were trained and supported with necessary tools to make this "paradigm shift" to occur, the result has revealed that teachers remain on the extensive use of teacher-centred approach. This rejection and the trend to remain using "teacher-centred approach" were discussed[1] with the teachers. The responses of teachers reflect that authoritative power of others to implement a policy that turns a deaf ear to their roles as teachers and policy-making key players is what demotivates them to take it seriously. Two teachers stated that they would like to see a wider space for their roles as classroom teachers to decide upon the best practices that meet learning differences in their classrooms.

It could be concluded from former notions that policy-makers and educational researchers should widen their own understanding of the conception of policy-making process in order to more efficiently include the role of classroom teachers. Likewise, teachers need to redefine the view of their roles (as receivers of instructions) and overlook policy not as a series of static instructions written by outsiders to the classrooms reality but as key players in the policy-making process. If this occurs, teachers' involvement in policy will develop, as will the possibility of fostering inquiry into effective language education teaching. The context of the Arab needs inquiry-driven, context-specific professional development programmes that have the greatest potential to develop how they meet the learners' learning needs.

2.2. Why English language is an increasingly important language in Jordan

From a socio-economic perspective, English language is increasingly a prerequisite requirement to job market in Jordan (Hamdan & Hatab, 2009) that adds more complications to students as well as educational bodies' current practices of teaching English. For example, international humanitarian

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and non-humanitarian organisations have entered the Jordanian economic field. These organisations are run by international individuals to whom English language is the medium of communication, and the need for qualified candidates with good command of English language is one of the most important factors for securing a job in these organisations. This need is increasingly in demand due to the need for these candidates' knowledge of the context and other regional-related issues (e.g. Syrian crisis, communication with them in Arabic and reporting to the organisations what was happing in the field in both Arabic and English). This has led to growing numbers in private English language institutions which have witnessed an increased number of individuals who aim to develop their English. Private schools across MENA have become increasingly popular in the past decade. Statistics show that 8% of all students are in private schools compared to 6% in 2008 (British Council, 2015). In Jordan, the number of private schools has increased by average 6.09%, while public schools had lower average growth rate of 2.31% (Ministry of Education, 2014). Interestingly, the growth rate of private schools was 10.65% in 2010–2011, more than double any year depicted in Table 3. Further, the growth rate of private schools across the years was more than double of the growth rate of public schools. This increase might be because of the Syrian crisis in which hundreds of thousands of children fled to Jordan.

Furthermore, the tourism sector has also opened its doors to more job vacancies that also require advanced level of English language level because English language is the dominant language in this sector. The number of jobs, as shown in Figure 2, has drastically increased from 21,000 in 2002 to more than 42,000 jobs in 2010 (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010). Again, those interested in gaining entry to the field are required to have advanced level of English language that forces them to seek professional bodies that hold true development in their learning English language.

From an educational perspective, the number of students who are studying abroad (i.e. online and face-to-face education) has witnessed a dramatic increase in recent years. The statistics of Ministry of Higher Education showed that 27,451 students are studying abroad (Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research, 2010). Those education systems have strict requirements for foreign students coming from Arab region. That is, students have to master English language through proven

Table 3. Number of private and public schools between 2009 and 2014		
Year/Sector	Private	Public
2009–2010	2,140	3,371
2010–2011	2,368 (10.65%)	3,433 (1.83%)
2011–2012	2,478 (4.64%)	3,486 (1.54%)
2012–2013	2,600 (4.92%)	3,545 (1.69%)
2013–2014	2,708 (4.15%)	3,694 (4.20%)
Average growth	6.09%	2.31%

Notes: figures in brackets represent growth rate. Growth was calculated using the following: (baseline-new)/baseline*100, average growth is the summation of each year growth divide by the number of years. Data for 2014–2015 are not available. (Growth rate is authors' calculations).

Figure 2. Number of jobs across years in tourism sector (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010).
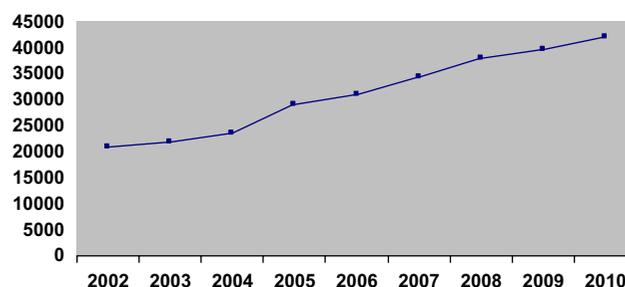
international recognised tests (e.g. IELTS and TOEFL) in order to apply, which, on the other hand, adds on to the increasing demand of mastering English language by the attendees.

2.3. The need for English language standards and guidelines

More often in Jordan, media headlines on high school examination (i.e. *Twjeehy*) focus more on the decreasing results (Al-Khatib, 2008; British Council, 2015) than the ineffective literacy instructions perceived as early as their education start (Asassfeh, 2015; Emam, 2014). Students' literacy skills are not preserving a pace with the growing demands of functioning in a rapid growing technological era that displays no indication of slowing. Simply put, literacy skills delivered in public schools settings are far beyond insufficient (British Council, 2015), where both reading and technology skills required of schools students are continuing to increase in difficulty and complexity (c.f. International English Language Testing System, 2013–2014; PISA, 2012a).

The inadequacy of English language skills has been reported as one of the problems of English language education in Jordan (Al-Khatib, 2008) because educators have pointed out that a crisis of not having an educational body that is responsible for national standards and guidelines does exist. Unfortunately, what begins as the absence of such an important body ends up finishing the textbooks or missing key components that are important to students, training students on effective learning strategies, for example (Asassfeh, 2015). Therefore, schools and teachers sense that they are left by their own, leaving them lost for what approaches they have to consider for the twenty-first-century multiple literacies needed to their students.

2.4. The effect of text book instructions

In this section, we articulated the term textbook instructions through its operational practices in Jordanian EFL classrooms. Teachers in Jordanian schools miss an articulation of national guidelines, standards, skills and strategies to be taught, and instructional materials to be employed which may affect the students' achievements (British Council, 2015). Currently, a textbook accompanied by a workbook are being used in schools classrooms, both of which condense the entirety of students' acquisition of knowledge that ought to occur in English language classrooms. The direct effect of the aforementioned setting is unknown due to missing adequate empirical research. However, PISA assessment of students' achievements results showed that Jordanian students are lagging behind their peers around the world in core school subjects (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010; PISA, 2012b; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009) which may indicate a provisional impact of the current EFL teaching practices (Asassfeh, 2015).

The reflections that have been brought to the field due to a missing body that holds responsibility for English education development accounted for adequate and effective reading comprehension being missed from EFL classrooms. It has been, and still, believed that the content of EFL textbooks in Jordan should be covered from cover to cover with insignificant attention to the skills, strategies and competences that students should be trained for during learning process in classroom (Asassfeh, 2015; Hammouri, 2003; Smadi, 2013). This belief, to finish the textbook, has been long held by teachers in most countries in the Arab World (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Esseili, 2014; Ghaith, 2003) due to many reasons, among all, the pressure received by school administration, which is of course also placed by education departments, to teach the content of the textbook: in other words, to finish the book being taught. Students also now, who rose up in schools from early years in such a way of teaching, finishing the book, hold beliefs that the mission of teachers in classrooms is to teach English, among other subject's, from cover to cover. What also seems to occur is "one-size-fits-all" assessment and, therefore, neglects, as Locke (2010) warned, "cultural and linguistic differences" (p. 89). Anyone observing the schools' outcomes recently, specifically, high school results, might agree that a decrease in school students' achievement in final exist examinations is observable (see school exist standards for more details).

Above that, Jordanian school students are exams-oriented and their acquisition for knowledge is only temporary (Brombacher, Collins, Cummiskey, Kochetkova, & Mulcahy-Dunn, 2012). They rely on

memorisation rather than understanding (Asassfeh, 2015). Skills to demonstrate knowledge acquisition are absent because students were not trained on using strategies of learning (Hammouri, 2003). Most probably, those involved in school education field would agree that the outcomes of high school learners are decreasing in Arab countries. For example, in Jordan, the percentage of students who successfully passed the final high school exist examination has decreased dramatically. In one subject, English language, the percentage of students who passed the examination decreased dramatically in recent years (56.3% in 2013 compared to 40% in 2014) (Malkawi, 2014). In local media, the blame was directed towards the current teaching practices that hold much of the responsibility of the current situation, but the truth is beyond the teaching practices as well (Emam, 2014). It seems that the result of text-driven instructions is obvious and needs immediate action that holds accountable effective and adequate implementation of learning and teaching reform. There is no ambiguity in that students are being victims of the weak performance of stakeholders to take some responsibility for future generation learning.

3. English language teachers' preparation programmes

The lack of delivering quality teachers' preparation programmes is one of the most persuasive issues that have resulted in low performance of EFL students in Arab countries (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Bailey & Damerow, 2014). In most educational institutions, teachers with a bachelor's degree in English language and literature are offered teaching positions without having adequate onsite training in teaching methodologies, and this is most dominant in the less affluent private schools and in many Arab World public schools (Al-Hazmi, 2003), specifically in our case, the Jordanian ones. Graduates of the English language and literature often lack teaching skills because they were not trained on how to teach and how to deal with the various challenges of teaching students in schools. These conditions translate themselves to classrooms where the English language spoken is laden with pronunciation, grammatical and structural errors, where students are taught employing the similar pace and the similar approach and where the teacher fully controls the teaching process. Further, teachers of English language are not requested to undertake qualifying national examination that qualifies/allows them to gain entry to the teaching field. As such, the whole process turned to be more about teaching rather than learning (Kaagan, 2008).

In teaching languages, teachers are expected to master in-depth knowledge of the subject being taught. Additionally, language teachers should have adequate knowledge of pedagogical principles including classroom management, learning and teaching methodologies, psychology and curriculum. Thus, in the Arab EFL context, the utmost aim of pedagogical knowledge centred in preparing future teachers is to provide them with experience, knowledge and skills that operate effectively in employing practices in their classrooms. Furthermore, the knowledge gained in the subject matter being taught and the effective use of the best practices are the two important factors for achieving excellence in classroom experience. Considering one part of the former claims, knowledge of the subject matter may result in classrooms that are teacher centred, as currently practised in educational systems of most Arab countries, which deprived the Arab students of the strategies that professional teachers use to prepare them advance their linguistics skills by practicing the language and by having control of their learning (Syed, 2003). Additionally, having a solid structure of the best teaching practices in the classrooms without adequate awareness of the articulation of the content area, or in our case, without sufficient knowledge of the English Language, will lead to learning situations that do not offer a learning model for producing the language in syntactically and semantically correct means. Thus, missing opportunities in creating and developing the skills, e.g. reasoning, in language learners, will take course and result in weak independent learners for uncertain future.

Thus, there is an urgent need for training programmes that require English language teachers to accept the teaching position at public schools. Additionally, there is a need for a national subject matter test that demonstrates teachers' mastery of the English language. Furthermore, teachers of English should have a consistent training course which should be related to educational and technological pedagogies that can prepare them for the current changes and development in ELT. These procedures may encourage an effective interaction between schools and universities' professionals

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who are willing to help in setting up continuous professional development courses that may improve and prepare English language teachers to become twenty-first-century educators and, most importantly, connected to the recent developments in educational pedagogy. Hence, the following section describes the current professional development courses that are set up by the Ministry of Education in Jordan without an effective connection to universities and other educational organisations.

3.1. Professional development: is it overcoming teachers' preparation programmes?

One of the main aspects that defines quality in education delivered in learners' early years of education and, generally, education at large is the quality of professional development delivered at school level. Research has shown that the impact of professional development in order to enhance school's outcome is significant and plays a crucial role in enhancing students' learning and well-being (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2015). This ideal scenario has not been given adeaute attention by researchers in the Arab countries. The often heard complaints from school teachers are the lack of professional development workshops and the absence of professional individuals, if any, who are able to deliver onsite professional development workshops. These concerns might emerge due to the policy followed by the Ministry of Education in Jordan in respect to its expenditures on training course or professional development. Statistics in Table 3 showed that expenditures on training courses (professional development) between 2012 and 2014 were 0.27% to 0.24%, respectively, have witnessed a slight decrease (Ministry of Education, 2014). At the same time, these statistics showed insignificant attention to professional development training for secondary stage educators, whereas basic education educators have received a very small portion of the total expenditure on training courses as shown in Table 3. Given these facts, there seem to be discrepancies in allocating funding among education stages as shown in Table 4. This might delay preparing and updating educators in general and, especially, language educators of recent trends and advancements in the field of language education.

Further, school teachers express deep concerns regarding the lack of educational resources available to them as well as their students to support alternative choices for learning and teaching. The latter has been regarded as an important factor in enhancing students' learning. Above that, advancement in learning in this era has also placed some more challenges to the current situation. Thus, with the absence of adequate professional development delivered to the teachers and needed educational resources to allow learning diversity take place, the hope of having equipped students with adequate knowledge is endangered. Perhaps "competent teachers hard to keep" can be partly understood if former notions are effectively dealt with. It seems there is an agreement on this notion as Manuel (2003) indicated that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries faces serious issues in staffing. She stated, "we need to understand more fully the reasons why good teachers stay, and the reasons why good teachers go" (p. 141). This is because efficacy and excellence in education are achieved and developed by effective teachers (Manuel, 2003).

Table 4. The Ministry of Education actual expenditure (in JD*) on scientific and training courses for each education stage of expenditure for the years 2012–2014

Education stage/year	2012–2013	2013–2014
Vocational education	0	0
Educational athletics and social activities	0	0
Special education	4,055	4,198
Kindergarten	600	0
Basic education	2,006,157	2,051,641
Secondary education	4,820	4,999
Total expenditure	758,925,392	842,489,254
% of the total expenditure	0.27%	0.24%

Notes: JD: Jordanian Dinar, 1JD= 1.40 US dollars.

4. Research-based English language resources and instructional materials

In this article, the focus on reading, as one of the skills where Jordanian and may be EFL learners in other Arab countries, is given as an example to demonstrate the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers in schools. Teachers involved in teaching reading skills in the Arab World have historically been disadvantaged when it approaches the availability and the quality of instructional resources and materials. Most of these resources are teacher-centred and grammar-based where teachers are not supported in their teaching of reading skills (Asassfeh, 2015). Up to date, research on the effectiveness of reading texts used in the textbooks and their current standards and quality are not adequately addressed. The term reading texts refers to the information and knowledge embedded in EFL textbooks which function as reading passages and associated exercises and drills. Freahat and Al-Faoury (2015), in this regard, assessed high school (11th and 12th grades) and university textbooks and found out that there is a gap between the focus of reading lessons among both levels. That is, training on reading skills at school level tends to give considerable attention to skimming, locating ideas and pre-reading activation, whereas university-level textbooks focus more on identifying main ideas, writing and scanning. This leaves high school students, who aim to get access to higher education, without proper preparation to knowledge acquisition (Asassfeh, 2015), as well as leaving Jordanian students with negative attitudes towards learning English (Abu-Melhim, 2009; Asassfeh, 2015). This learning scenario may leave a negative prior experience in language learning process which in turn may affect their aptitude and motivation to learn English in further education stages (Asassfeh, 2015). Prior knowledge in learning process is effective in acquiring new information (Maier & Richter, 2014). When students receive adequate training on how to acquire information and hold positive values towards learning a specific topic, they might use this experience to build on new information (Mayer, 1998). Otherwise, learning new information might be hampered.

Above that, teachers' knowledge of quality and standards (e.g. content, production quality, linguistic and pedagogical theory and authenticity) of reading texts currently used and knowledge of developing such materials and resources are not addressed yet. The current work suggests that research on the former notions is urgently needed in the Arab World and specifically in Jordan. What is urgently required is to revisit English reading texts to upgrade their standards and quality. What is also missing is teachers' ability to develop their own reading materials and resources in order to be used in their reading classrooms.

5. The traditional conditions of the Arab homes

While students in the Arab world, generally, spend around two-thirds of their day in homes, the other portion is spent in schools. The environment surrounding Arab students at their homes is considered to be an influential factor in students' academic and life experience. Therefore, educationalists have significantly recommended providing a rich and safe environment that fosters students' lifelong learning. However, in 2003, the Arab Human Development Agency concluded that the dominant upbringing styles in the Arab world are mostly overprotective and authoritative, both of which, as has been debated, prevent the students from developing various skills such as decision-making, creative thinking, self-reliance and critical thinking skills (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). These results are expected because the current setting does not hold true support neither from the school nor from home. Students in such setting cannot be expected to blindly obey such authoritative power and cultivate an advance in academic life that is rich in creativity and innovation, empowered with adequate information at the similar instances. This practised and spread authoritarian rule in and out schools is no surprise to educationalists as this power is a true mirror of most authoritative regimes that most Arab families live in. As such, it could transfer itself, authoritarian rule, to school contexts and, particularly, to be practised by teachers in classrooms.

Thus, an urgent call for research is voiced out in order to examine the effects of upbringing students following such styles on students' achievement and performance in schools. Involved parties in the students learning process should get together to initiate proactive awareness education to all students. Classrooms in best families and communication means including promoting families'

awareness of providing some wider space for students' motivation to learn without practising the authoritative power acquired are key to reshape the paths for most students in the Arab World.

6. Schools exist standards

Leading on from the above-discussed issues, there is belated recognition that practices of teaching English language at the tertiary level in Jordan are consuming time and budget, unsustainably expensive and learning English language could be to Jordanians more economically worthwhile in schools. Not only is it costly, but its effectiveness, teaching English language practices, is questionable as there is strong evidence that the current practices of English language teaching in Jordanian schools have failed to produce efficient proficiency in English language among schools students (Smadi, 2013). High failure levels in learning English language are endemic. This is obvious because it has been reported that almost half of high school students fail in the final exist English language examination (Malkawi, 2014), and test takers from Jordan earned low overall scores according to the statistics by International English Language Testing System (2013–2014).

Poor performance in English language contributes to low achievement levels at schools. The radical solution to such systematic failure is at the present realised to lie in partial immersion in developing the practices of English language teaching from kindergarten, driven by exasperation among policy-makers of education sector at the seeming imperviousness of the current school pedagogic and school-based curricular interventions to any perceivable developments in the learning of English among school students.

7. Key proposal to English language education in Jordan

To understand and to create pathways for developing students' learning and language learning in specific within classrooms, there is a need to consider a setting that supports successful and independent learners. Thus, it is possible to negotiate and compare between the weak learning environment and the desirable learning one in schools. In current setting, like the Jordanian one, students are disengaged learners because they do not possess cognitive skills that help in productive and independent work and study (Asassfeh, 2015; Hammouri, 2003). Additionally, some of them possess learning skills but lack necessary concept to unleash knowledge acquisition and curiosity. Traditional thoughts of mastering new concepts are spread. That is, they are not willing and do not have the desire to engage in mastering new ideas and concepts. Above that, they believe that new information should be explicitly indicated in textbooks and without that understanding and comprehension of texts in their books is difficult to occur (Asassfeh, 2015). Finally, as argued earlier, social collaborative learning in these classrooms is not valued. As a result of this, gratification originated from communicating literacy activities with others is at a minimal level. This current setting in Jordan suggests hampering the future of learners through the current teaching and learning practices.

Instructional frameworks designed and aimed to help students to comprehend texts more efficiently are, somehow, neglected to be used by many teachers (Liang & Dole, 2006; Swan, 2003). This is apparent in the traditional outset of the school and classroom environments in the Arab world. Although the space in the current review is limited, touching upon the instructional frameworks and the motivation behind selecting one is necessary. Many instructional frameworks tend to focus on a major component, either learning process such as Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) or understanding content such as Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE). Other frameworks lack integration of learning content materials, increasing motivation and learning and using reading strategies. For example, SRE instructions are provided to help students to understand individual texts. On the other hand, CRS focuses on teaching strategies and uses them when students come across any kind of text. However, Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), as a comprehensive framework, aims to teach students comprehension strategies in the context of intensive and extensive reading of several texts about a specific topic. Hence, the goal strives far to help students to access information from many sources through using strategies learnt.

Therein, the earlier viewpoint opts to propose CORI as a comprehensive framework that addresses the issues discussed above, especially those related to the weaknesses of EFL Jordanian students. There are some reasons behind proposing CORI to the Jordanian context. First, several issues are problematic to the Jordanian English language learning ranging from lack of motivation, strategy use and reading comprehension. Second, the inclusion of curricula coherence found in CORI is not included in most content-based approaches (Swan, 2003). Third, there is a possibility of adjusting CORI instructional practices as needed in the classrooms (Swan, 2003).

CORI is a set of instructional principles that stimulates learner motivation and interests to read. Four stages are followed in CORI classrooms: (1) a main theme is promoted and engagement is driven within the topic discussed, (2) multiple sources are used to gather necessary information corresponding to the theme promoted, (3) strategy instructions are delivered and encouragement to use them among students is performed and (4) tasks and assignments are requested to assess learning outcome (Swan, 2003). Furthermore, significant features appear in CORI to prompt learners to read. This can be supported by strategy instructions to enhance inputs from different information resources (Guthrie et al., 2000). Thus, expectations of comprehension activities' implementation and use such as extensive reading are also incorporated in this framework. In the development of CORI stages, learners engage in activities and content discussions that require purposeful use of strategies learnt. Such strategies can include activating background knowledge, synthesising information and graphical representation(s) of information acquired (Guthrie et al., 2000). Explicit instruction is delivered to develop these strategies where students are engaged in learning about new topics or ideas from texts. Teachers support students' learning processes through modelling, scaffolding and extensive practice (Guthrie et al., 2000).

An important characteristic of CORI is curricular coherence. Coherence in CORI is operationalised by the continuous supply of content materials that support students' engagement, by encouraging students to establish links across texts and other subjects (Guthrie et al., 2000). Above that, CORI coherence features in the feasibility of transforming strategies learnt and master other topics of interests and teachers' guidance in constructing upon past knowledge and interests. Motivation in CORI is also addressed. CORI specifies five motivational constructs that signify goals and aims for the instructional intervention. Relevance, choice and collaboration, for example, are used to infuse students' engagement and motivation. In choice, for example, students are entitled to experience "like to learn" about a topic of their own choice. Such processes, motivational processes, are rarely exercised in EFL Jordanian classrooms. These processes are silent and neglected in the current teaching and learning practices because of dominant traditional approaches of teaching and learning in such classrooms.

8. Conclusion

Almost half of the school graduates in Jordan are eligible to apply for universities and half of that portion is accepted. One of the most prominent issues plaguing today's learners is lack of adequate up-to-date effective instructions at the classroom level. Compromising their future, students in the Third-World countries are exposed to unsafe educational practices and pedagogy. Year after year, for issues yet to be examined and understood, large portion of high school learned graduates find themselves in a state in which they do not have the desire to move on in their education, and if they do, they lack motivation towards learning. Indubitably, the absence of effective instructions can lead to feelings of discontentment and frustration and can encumber well-being and productivity of independent learners and lifelong learning environment.

What is needed in the context of the Arab countries is that English language researchers and educators should act more effectively in the policy process and, therein, they will be actual informers of the setting being developed rather than recipients of the policy. As researchers in such problematic context, it is needed to turn our attention to language education not only to understand pedagogical practices that are efficient in improving language learning, but also to observe how to perpetuate and define English language education outcome hierarchies through policy mechanism. Researchers

and educators should have an awareness that struggling learners are, in fact, individuals whose problems should be of a major concern for authorities in the Ministry of Education, teachers in schools and parents at their home. The education they perceive at schools is solely the production of theory and policy, which, in turn, directly influence the ways of learning opportunities that are open to them. Arab researchers and educators should remain aware that decisions through policy and instructional designs eventually add to the production of certain kinds of school learners. It remains the responsibilities of Arab researchers and educationalists to take part in research and policy processes with an increased consciousness that permits them to overlook both the schools learners at the centre of their work and the big picture of the educational setting.

In terms of empirical research, what is needed urgently is longitudinal research that focuses on learning and teaching generally and specially, language learning. Researchers might be interested in the interplay between home, school and classroom factors that could hold effects on students' learning processes. For example, educational researchers might consider the examination of the influence of teaching practices (classroom level and teacher characteristics), parental involvement (home level) and students' achievements (students' level) using multilevel data and analysis (refer to Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) in order to understand the functional role of each context or level on students' achievement.

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Note
1. Conversation with four teachers from discovery schools over the phone asking them about their ideas of recent evolution of education initiative in Jordan.

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