Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Libya

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Abstract - Teaching of English in Libya goes back to 1940s after the end of the World War II under the British administration in the northern part of Libya. On 19.02.1968, the Minister of Education made a decision to form a committee for revising the Libyan educational system. It aimed at making English the language of instruction of scientific courses in the secondary school and university. The first English language series used in Libya was *Basic Way to English* by KC Ogden. In the 1960's, a new English language programme and textbooks were needed to change and improve the whole process of teaching that foreign language in Libya. The series, written by Mustafa Gusbi, was entitled: *English for Libya*. For the secondary stage, Gusbi, in combination with another writer Roland John, had another series entitled *Further English for Libya* in which they adopted the English culture as a vehicle for teaching the English language. In the school year 1998/1999 a new series of *English for Libya*, published by Garnet Education was in use in both preparatory and secondary stages. After the air-raid against the Gaddafi regime led by the United States of America and the United Kingdom in mid of April 1986, and as a consequence, the Minister of Education made the decision No. 195/1986 to stop teaching foreign languages in Libya. The decision badly affected the future of education in Libya. English language teaching was resumed again in the Libyan educational system in the year 1993/1994. In 2005/2006 a new English text-book was introduced to 3rd primary class. English was taught in the 3rd class for only one year. It was stopped but introduced to 5th and 6th classes in the year 2006/2007. Historically, there was some kind of training led by the universities and with the cooperation of the UNESCO. Teachers were regularly sent abroad for training. Since stopping the teaching of English in 1986, many problems are encountering the process:

- shortage of qualified teachers,
- shortage of teaching aids for the language,
- no language laboratories at schools, and
- absence of programmed language training for the teachers,
- absence of computer training that makes the teachers able to use the computer and Internet in the language laboratories.

The researcher recommends that it is necessary to establish language training centres in different cities with the cooperation of some British or American universities and the British Council. The Ministry of Education has to revise its plans for teaching foreign languages, of which English comes at the top. Practical solutions for such problem should be made in order to reform the whole process of teaching English as a foreign language in Libya.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the history of teaching English as a foreign language in Libya. It shows the different plans applied in this field. Some political problems had severe effects in a way that teaching English was stopped for some years. Currently, there are different problems such as the absence of training for teachers as well as the unavailability of the necessary number of the teachers.

II. TEACHING ENGLISH SINCE 1940S TILL 1986

Teaching of English in Libya goes back to 1940s after the end of World War II. Exactly after the establishment of the British administration in the northern part of Libya; the southern part of Libya was administrated by France (El-Haddad; 1997), it was a part of the British policy to teach and spread the English language in the area. Intensive English language courses were interesting and were liked by the inhabitants.

The first English language series used in Libya was *Basic Way to English* by KC Ogden, which concentrated on teaching English through vocabulary of 850 words. Besides two other reading and comprehension books entitled *Basic Reading Book* by L.W. Lockhart were used (Hashim; 1997).

Early in the 1960s, a new series was introduced to replace the series mentioned before, for the post primary stage; i.e. 4th and 5th class. It was entitled *New Method* by Michael West who was then an English language inspector in Libya. This series was written about Arab culture. It was used until 1957 when it was substituted by new textbooks entitled *Modem Reader* written by A. Johnson who was at that time an English language inspector in Egypt (Hashim; 1997).

On 19.02.1968, the Minister of Education made a decision to form a committee for revising the Libyan educational system, some months later as a consequence some vital changes took place in the programme of teaching English in preparatory and secondary schools. This step was intended to make English the language of instruction of scientific courses in the secondary school and university. The decision was a source of fear among intellectuals due to national reasons; in particular that it may act negatively on the Arabic language and threatens its existence in Libya.

In the 1960's, a new English language programme and textbooks were needed to change and improve the whole process of teaching that foreign language in Libya. The series, written by Mustafa Gusbi, was planned to be able to respond to the Libyan

learners' linguistic and cultural needs, this series was entitled *English for Libya*. It included three textbooks; Book 1, 2 and 3, as well as three workbooks and three teacher's handbooks. In the handbooks the author explained in detail the steps a teacher should follow in the classroom, visual aids that can be adopted and the teaching hours necessary for teaching each book in addition to other means that can help in the teaching process. These three books were designed for the preparatory level, i.e. levels 7, 8 and 9 (i.e. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd preparatory) in the current fundamental education. These textbooks were the first of their type that were locally produced and intelligently cared for the learner's culture. The preparatory series focused on local culture of Libya for which the students feel familiar to the material they learn. This series continued being in use till mid1980s.

For the secondary stage, Gusbi, in combination with another writer Roland John, had another series entitled *Further English for Libya* in which they adopted the English culture as a vehicle for teaching the English language, sensing that the learner (the student), in this stage, is ready for that. These series were used along the 1970s and first half of 1980s, i.e. till the time when the teaching of English language was fully stopped in all Libyan schools and universities.

Due to some political reasons, and after the air-raid against the Gaddafi regime led by the United States of America and the United Kingdom in mid of April 1986, and as a consequence, the Minister of Education made the decision No. 195/1986 to stop teaching foreign languages in Libya. The decision badly affected the future of education in Libya. Till the time of writing this material; very serious consequences relating to that decision are still active.

III. TEACHING ENGLISH SINCE 1986 TILL NOW

Teaching of foreign languages, English and French, was stopped in 1986. English language teaching was resumed again in the Libyan educational system in the year 1993/1994, but in the beginning, due to the gap existed then in the teaching and learning the English language, it was necessary to consider that all students in both the preparatory and secondary stages as learners of English for their first time; therefore it was necessary to use the same course-book *English for Libya* in both stages. The book was formerly used in the preparatory school. Many problems occurred such as a great lack of English language teachers. It was very difficult to fulfil the needs with a sufficient number of qualified English teachers.

In the school year 1998/1999 a new series of *English for Libya*, published by Garnet Education was in use in both preparatory and secondary stages. In 2005/2006 a new English text-book was introduced to the 3rd primary class. English was taught in the 3rd class for only one year. It was stopped but introduced to the 5th and 6th in 2006/2007. Right now, English is a compulsory course from the 5th primary class up to the 3rd secondary class; i.e. it is taught for 8 years.

The introduction of *English for Libya* Preparatory 3, Teacher's Book (Frino; 2008: 6) states that "the books have been written with the specific needs of Libyan students in mind. This means that the contexts and topics in which the language is presented have been chosen to draw upon their knowledge and experience of the world, as well as their personal interests." The content and tasks have also been specifically designed for students taking into consideration the previous experience in English language.

The material in the series is built accumulatively in a way that the learner or the student should have been mastering the previous part of the series. The language is carefully graded and manipulated through presenting different topics that students have in other school subjects such as geography, science, history, environment, achievements and technology. The course is composed of four parts; the course book, the workbook, CD, and the Teacher Book. But the CD is not given to the students in most cases. Coloured pictures and drawings are used to make the students understand the lessons.

The course books are divided into units in which each of them includes some lessons starting with introducing and revising the target language through some exercises in the course book and the workbook. The course depends heavily on the students' performance and his activity in the class either personally or in groups. The tasks include speaking, listening, reading, writing, role-playing, and sometimes playing games.

IV. TEACHING ENGLISH IN LIBYAN PRIMARY AND PREPARATORY SCHOOLS

The number of periods for teaching English is 4 periods per week, each period lasts for 45 minutes. Teachers are available for most of the primary school, but the problem is that most of them are not very qualified due to many reasons such as lack of in-service training or long-term training. This gives no good results for the learners in the primary stage. In general, they may only learn the alphabet, the first ten or twenty numbers.

In the preparatory school, there is a sharp deficit in the number of teachers which reflects badly on the students. They get few vocabularies and in most cases no real language acquisition. As they do not have a good background in English in the primary stage, they suffer a lot in the preparatory school. They strive to get a larger part of language. But unfortunately, they get nothing except small amounts of language.

The school-year is divided into two terms, each lasts for four months. In each term, students sit for a mid-term exam, and sit for a final exam. In order to pass the whole year, they must pass all the courses. 50% of the total mark for each subject is necessary to pass the course. But the student has to satisfy another condition; i.e. to obtain at least 40% of the marks devoted for the final exam. Students who fail final exams can have another chance to sit in the second session, provided that the number of the subjects is not more than two. If a student fails any three subjects or more, then he/she must spend another year in the same class, they are obliged to study all courses. To pass a subject in one term, students have to get at least 50% of the total marks. However,

for the final result in any subject, students have to score at least 60% of the total marks in order to pass a subject. In the third year which is the final class of the preparatory stage, students attend exams for the certificate of ending the stage. Final exams of the third preparatory are organized at the level of the Ministry of Education. Those who pass the final exams receive a certificate by which they can join the secondary school.

V.   TEACHING AIDS

Teaching aids are devices presenting units of knowledge through auditory or visual stimuli or both with a view to help learning. They concretize the knowledge to be presented and help in making learning experience appear living and vital. They supplement the work of the teacher and help in the study of textbooks (Tiwari; 2008: 221). There are different types of useful materials, devices and symbols that make the study of a subject more comprehensible and interesting. Audio-visual aids are effective tools that "invest the past with an air of reality." They provide the learners with realistic experiences, which capture their attention and help in the understanding of the historical phenomena. They appeal to the mind through the visual auditory senses and thereby enliven the past (Tiwari; 2008: 221). Teaching aids ensure a proper grasp of the subject and develop imagination; they bring the past into present. They present an experience or a unit of knowledge through audio-visual stimuli and help in quick and effective learning.

They help in the proper understanding of terms and concepts ideas and institutions and the variety of historical phenomena, making an appeal to the auditory and visual senses of the pupils. They invest reality to the past, increase pupil's interest in the subject, and supplement verbal explanations of the teacher (Tiwari; 2008: 221).

VI.   AVAILABILITY OF TEACHING AIDS IN CLASSROOM

Teaching aids in classroom play an essential role in teaching language, they can be a good source of help for both the teacher and the learner. Simply, some bulletins and cards and even posters can show the students some features of the language and its home-land.

Computers can help too much in the classroom, some accompanying CDs could be played in a way that each student can have their own headphone to hear the sounds directly. Students can be directly exposed to the materials recorded on tapes or saved on CDs or online materials from some language websites. Also, the teacher can use computer for teaching the listening skill. The student's listening comprehension could be tested.

But the use of computer in the classroom requires that the teacher should be qualified in using computer, which means he has to have the required knowledge of computer. He must be able to manage the whole class when using computer. He listens to each of the students, observes their performance and corrects their mistakes and misunderstandings. On their side, students have to be knowledgeable of using computer in language laboratory. This process requires the students to be in small groups of 15 – 20 students for each, so that the teacher can allocate a part of time for each of them. If the number of students is higher than 15 – 20, the quota of time per each student will be less. Another tool that came into use is the interactive board, which is connected to a smart board and the teacher can present the lesson on that board.

VII. TRAINING

Sa'eidi (2006) defines training as a set of organized and planned activities that aim at developing the skills of the trainees and to provide them with new experiences to develop their efficiency and performance. In the field of English language, training of teachers of English is to teach them to use different techniques in teaching language in a way that enables their students gain more vocabulary and linguistic knowledge.

Training in all fields is a very essential requirement for developing the performance of individuals and organisations; for instance educational organisations. It is to transfer the experience of those who spent longer times than the others in the same field or those who have higher academic levels. Training programmes must be organized frequently by the administration of the educational sector to prepare and include different members of the sector; i.e. teachers, for a period of time. Programme of training must be intensive and well-prepared either in the aspects of training or the trainers.

Training is achieved in order to increase both the productivity and efficiency of the trainees. But those to be trained should be selected according to some conditions and priorities; in other words there should be a training policy for short and long terms. Those who obtain higher records during the training courses have to be awarded in a way that they become supervisors to the colleagues and to work harder, they could be given a chance to contribute in developing the courses and the instructional methods used in schools.

Training policies must have goals and must be organised chronologically; i.e. in fixed time terms. Training must also include internal and external programmes. Training enables the teachers to be more qualified and efficient, which reflects directly on their students. But, training only is not enough to get satisfactory results among the students in the field of learning English as a foreign language; it is very important to supply the necessary materials for the classroom that help teaching and learning language.

Educational inspectors have to perform regular visits to schools and meet the students and their teachers in the classroom during the time of the lessons, to have a direct look at the actual level of the students and the instructional procedures and methods followed by the teachers. They can see on which the teachers focus more; more on the grammatical features of the language or on

the intellectual (cultural) content. What remains in the minds of the learners and becomes a part of their personality is the knowledge. Teachers must be keen on presenting this knowledge to the students. The process of presenting the material is better to be accompanied with the help of other tools; such as video, TV, computer show, etc.

The Ministry of Education has to establish educational training centres in the different governorates, to provide training programmes for the teachers of English. This can take place in cooperation with the British Council and with the British universities. For training programmes, teachers have to be provided with some printed and audio-visual materials besides the lectures and workshops during the course of training. These materials can be used at home to retrieve what they have been presented to.

The academic level of the teachers must be taken into consideration for the training programmes. Teachers who have no university grade must be included in promotional programmes of one year or two years in one of the teacher training colleges. Of course, they will be better.

VIII.   TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

In 1970s, there was an educational system which included a teacher training programme; general teacher training institutes, directly after the primary stage for 5 years for preparing students to be teachers for different subjects in the primary school. At the end of this stage, the students got a diploma for teaching in primary schools, i.e. the first six years of the fundamental education.

Another system but leads to the same result is that a student who had already finished his preparatory stage could join a teacher training programme in which he studied only for 2 years. This system led to the same result as the first one. In this college, students studied different courses that provide them with the necessary backgrounds for different courses in the primary stage. They also study teaching methods. In the last two years, students have two periods of practical training at school. This system did not aim at graduating students to be teachers of English or other special courses. They were prepared to be able to teach all primary school courses.

For supplying teachers for the preparatory stage, there was a system; specialised teacher training institutes, that received students who have finished the preparatory stage. These institutes have different specialisations; e.g., Arabic, social sciences: history, geography, English, science and mathematics. Students spend 4 years in these institutes during which they study different courses besides concentrating on their specialisation. At the end of this stage, students get a diploma that enables them teach in preparatory schools.

There is a third system at the university level; i.e. higher teacher training colleges, after the secondary stage. It receives students who have finished their secondary study besides it also receives students who have got a diploma from specialised teacher training institutes. In the 4-year system of specialised secondary school or the current 3-year system, students study different courses that prepare them to be qualified teachers in secondary schools. These colleges have different specialisations. Later on, these colleges were changed into faculties that teach different courses.

One of the problems that encounter the process of teaching English in Libya is that older teachers need some qualifying training to refresh their experience and to practise teaching the new text-books. There must be an intensive programme for this training. Teachers should be encouraged to join the training courses. New graduates can have special programmes to teach them the more recent techniques for teaching English. Due to the shortage in the number of teachers of different courses for all school stages, many teacher training institutes were founded in the 1990s, they comprise 4 years. These institutes help graduating students; would-be teachers, in different specialisations. These institutes have been transferred into colleges of education.

The United Nations of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; shortly UNESCO, provided a lot of assistance to Libya in 1960s and 1970s to establish different educational systems, including establishing higher teacher training colleges (Al-Shibani; 2001: 353). Training of English teachers in the preparatory stage has extended over the period of 1960s and 1970s. There were many training courses organised by the Ministry of Education in 1960s through cooperation with UNESCO and the British Council and the American Peace Corps. There were also in-service courses for preparatory school teachers in July 1966 (Barton; 1968: 3).

Barton states that another type of training was provided by the British Council through courses in the orientation of teachers in July 1966. A course for some preparatory teachers at the University Faculty of Teacher Training was conducted in July 1966. In 1968, a course for 30 preparatory school teachers in English language was held in the United Kingdom. There was also a training department in the Ministry of Education which bore too many responsibilities in the field of training of English teachers in Libya. At the same time, the ministry continued sending teachers of English abroad every year (Barton; 1968: 3-4). Along the 1970s and 1980s there were three faculties of education in the Libyan universities in Tripoli, in Al-Beida, and in Sabha.

In 2006 some short summer training courses for the English teachers were organised, but the teachers were not very aware of the benefits of training. In general, they were not so active that they shared in those courses. The timing of the courses was not suitable for the teachers as they believe it is time for summer-vacation. Training courses are very important for developing the abilities of the teachers, but the teachers themselves have to be encouraged for participating such courses.

For training, the main point here is that the teacher of English must be aware and believable (convinced) in the goals of what he/she teaches. This makes him/her more serious and cautious for the burden of what he/she is in charge to do. Teachers have to be well–recognised towards the plan of teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers – through the directorate of

inspection and control - must be partners not only in the teaching but also in making plans for teaching and developing the course-books.

Now in the time of Internet, there could be information networks mounted in schools. This can help the teaching staff of the different school courses to benefit from the materials published. Those who teach English can, on their counterpart, share their experience with their colleagues in the whole world. Using social networks, as Facebook, teachers can create their groups to share experience with their colleagues. They also can have other Facebook groups to provide their students with material in their subjects.

IX. TRAINING THE TEACHERS

Training is a very important component in improving the performance of the targeted personnel and in human development. In the educational system, the teachers are the main pillar in the education process, so without training teachers cannot develop their students and societies.

The National Report on the Development of Education in Libya, 2008, stated that the teacher being one of the most important elements of the education. The Ministry of Education paid attention to the teacher, by preparing and developing the skills and knowledge he needs to be able to keep pace with global developments in the areas of curriculum and teaching methods and the use of modern educational techniques. For achieving this strategy, a specialised centre was founded for this purpose under the name (The General Centre for Teacher Training) in 2006.

The General Centre for Teacher Training, affiliated to the Ministry of Education in Libya, on its website states that it aims at:

- Improving the quality of education
- Promoting the performance of all members of the ministry through training programmes:
    - Changing the paths (routes) of the teachers
    - Improving the quality of the educational system
    - Upgrading the performance of the workers in the educational field
    - Treating the deficit in the performance of staff
    - Qualifying non-educationally qualified *teachers*
    - Using and training on the use of new technologies in the field of telecommunication

The Educational Inspecting Centre has not organised any training courses for the teachers of English in 2008. For promoting the performance of teachers; among 18433 trainees, only 43 were teachers of English! Could this programme qualify all the Libyan teachers of English at a very high rate? How will this number affect and develop the process of teaching English in schools? It is very necessary to prepare a practical training programme that covers most of the teachers in very short times, for instance two years.

How much training do the teachers of English in preparatory schools get? Who evaluates the results of the training courses of the teachers? Who observes the targeted teachers in their schools when they teach their pupils and students?

The Educational Inspecting Office in the Ministry of Education is responsible for following up and evaluating the educational process at schools, the gain of students, and the performance of the teachers. The inspectors have regular tours for schools and they meet the students and teachers. They make their own recommendations on the process of inspection. The Educational Inspecting Office has its training centre for teachers to upgrade the efficiency of the teachers.

The researcher thinks that it is very necessary to organise seasonal regional and international training conferences which the Libyan teachers of English can attend and contribute. They also can have local seminars and training workshops in which printed materials are distributed. They can benefit from the experiences of their colleagues in other countries.

X. PROBLEMS FACING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN LIBYA

There are many problems facing the educational system in general and the teaching of English in particular. The researcher, through his experience in the field of teaching English in the university level, has been in direct contact with great numbers of students who belong to different social ranks and geographical areas. The performance of most of the students is poor in language, so that they cannot have real language.

Due to different problems in teaching English in the different school stages, university students are still weak in this language, as they cannot use materials which are written in English. Teachers who teach English for the different specialisations in the university as a course for specific purposes in general have no knowledge about specialised English in which students are exposed to texts concerning their specialisations, for example a teacher who teaches English for Physics students does not have the necessary knowledge of physical terms.

Many teachers still teach about grammar and general texts for reading which add no real thing to the students. Students themselves believe that English language does not fall in their specialisation and they complain that they were not taught English correctly at school. This situation propagates negatively and has bad effects on the performance of those students in the field of work after graduation.

Included in the educational system is the teaching of foreign languages, mainly English. The Libyan society, through the

Ministry of Education, is aware of teaching English as a foreign language in the different stages of the educational system, but due to many factors and problems, the educational system is still suffering a lot of problems in teaching this language as follows:

a. The necessary conditions are lacking (time, classrooms, teaching aids, native speakers, and direct language exposure).

b. The performance of students is unsatisfactory, and their capabilities are insufficient.

c. Some teachers have an idea of teaching language through grammar; i.e. they focus heavily on grammatical rules on one hand, but they neglect to somehow the language itself.

d. Some teachers think that the right method to teach language is through the language itself; i.e. they avoid using the mother tongue – for instance Arabic – in the class. They keep teaching in English.

e. After eight years studying English as a foreign language in Libyan schools (2 years in the 5th and 6th primary Classes, 3 preparatory classes and 3 secondary classes), most students have got no real acquisition of the language. They just have passed the courses of this language. This is a great problem as millions of Libyan dinars are spent for nothing.

f. Employing not-well qualified teachers of English has badly added to the process of teaching English. They have to be exposed to a long term training.

The above-mentioned problems have their own reflections on the academic future of the students when they join universities or programmes for graduate studies, especially those who go abroad. They find themselves unable to get satisfactory results in the language tests. For them, doing an academic thesis in English is going to be something unseen and unpredictable. Many of them go back home and then try to go somewhere else where they can do their researches in Arabic. Those who go to work, either in public sector or for their own, find themselves poor in English which means they lose the chances of work in organisations that they consider will gain too much through work in them.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education has to revise its plans for teaching foreign languages, of which English comes at the top. Practical solutions for such problem should be made in order to reform the whole process of teaching English as a foreign language in Libya. For the near coming years, the Ministry has to borrow some hundreds of foreign teachers from different countries such as Egypt, South Africa and India. It had many experiences in 1970s and 1980s when there were many teachers from India and Ghana.

XII. CONCLUSIONS

The teaching of English has started in 1940s. Then, there were ambitious plans for teaching English and other foreign languages, viz. French. Different problems such as the shortage in the number of specialised teachers, insufficiency of training for the teachers are also there.

Due to some political changes in the end of 1960s and later, the teaching foreign languages witnessed different problems that may not be solved easily and in the coming short period of time. The worst event in the history of teaching English in Libya took place in 1986 when the minister of education decided to stop teaching the foreign languages, including English, in Libya. The problems in this field are continuing to generate and in fact there is no real solution.

Teaching aids as a main element in the process of teaching in the class are discussed. Another major component is training, for which it raises the ability of the teachers and provide them with the necessary skills for teaching and for good performance.

Cooperation with other countries may help in supplying qualified teachers of English for Libyan schools in order to cope the current problems.

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