



Linguistic Interference, Learning Difficulties, and English Language Acquisition: An Analytical Study of Teaching Strategies among Arab Students

Muneera Hadi Alshawi

University of Zawia – Nasser College – Department of English Language

m. alshawi@zu.edu.ly

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7305-5522>

تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/05/05 - تاريخ المراجعة: 2026/05/28 - تاريخ القبول: 2026/06/07 - تاريخ النشر: 2026/06/16

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of EFL instructors' motivational practices on undergraduate students' motivation toward English language learning at the University of Zawia. It focuses on practices such as encouragement, positive feedback, supportive classroom interaction, meaningful activities, goal-setting, and reducing language anxiety. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical design and uses a questionnaire to collect data from undergraduate students studying English as a foreign language. The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and Cronbach's Alpha to examine the relationship between instructors' motivational practices and students' motivation. The study is expected to provide useful insights into the classroom factors that enhance learners' interest, confidence, participation, and persistence in learning English. Its findings may help EFL instructors improve their teaching practices and support more motivating English language learning environments in Libyan higher education.

Keywords: EFL instructors, motivational practices, students' motivation, English language learning, University of Zawia.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي أثر الممارسات التحفيزية لأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في دافعية طلبة المرحلة الجامعية نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الزاوية. وتركز الدراسة على عدد من الممارسات، مثل التشجيع، والتغذية الراجعة الإيجابية، والتفاعل الصفّي الداعم، والأنشطة التعليمية الهادفة، وتحديد الأهداف، والحد من قلق تعلم اللغة. وتعتمد الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، باستخدام الاستبانة أداة لجمع البيانات من طلبة المرحلة الجامعية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وسيتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الإحصاءات الوصفية، ومعامل ارتباط بيرسون، وتحليل الانحدار، ومعامل ألفا كرونباخ، وذلك لقياس العلاقة بين الممارسات التحفيزية للأساتذة ودافعية الطلبة. ومن المتوقع أن تقدم الدراسة مؤشرات مفيدة حول العوامل الصفّية التي تعزز اهتمام الطلبة وثقتهم ومشاركتهم واستمرارهم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الممارسات التحفيزية، دافعية الطلبة، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الزاوية.

1. Introduction

Arab students often face complex challenges when learning English as a foreign language. These challenges go beyond the memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, as they are closely related to the process of language acquisition itself. One of the most important factors that explains many of these difficulties is linguistic interference. This interference occurs when learners transfer elements, rules, or patterns from their first language, Arabic, into the target

language, English. As a result, learners may produce errors at phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels.

Linguistic interference is particularly significant among Arab learners because Arabic and English differ in their sound systems, sentence structures, word order, and patterns of meaning. For example, some English sounds, such as /p/ and /v/, do not exist as separate phonemes in many Arabic dialects. Therefore, Arab learners may pronounce pencil as bencil or very as fery. Similarly, Arabic nominal sentences may appear without an equivalent of the verb to be, which may lead learners to produce sentences such as He teacher instead of He is a teacher.

The problem becomes more serious when linguistic interference is associated with learning difficulties. Learners with weak working memory, poor phonological processing, or limited attention may find it harder to notice differences between Arabic and English. In such cases, they may rely more heavily on familiar Arabic structures as a compensatory strategy. This reliance increases interference and makes English acquisition more difficult.

The relationship between linguistic interference and learning difficulties is therefore not simple or one-directional. Linguistic interference can intensify learning difficulties, while learning difficulties can increase the learner's dependence on the first language. This creates a circular relationship that negatively affects English language acquisition. For example, a student who has difficulty discriminating between similar sounds may repeatedly confuse /p/ and /b/. Over time, this error may become fixed if teaching strategies do not provide appropriate corrective and supportive intervention.

This issue raises an important question concerning the teaching strategies used in English as a foreign language classrooms. Traditional methods that depend heavily on repetition, memorization, and direct translation may not be sufficient to address the needs of learners with learning difficulties. In some cases, these methods may even reinforce interference errors if incorrect patterns are repeatedly practiced. In contrast, modern approaches such as communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, and multisensory instruction may provide more effective support because they involve learners in meaningful language use and reduce dependence on literal translation.

This study focuses on the connection between three main variables: linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and English language acquisition among Arab students. It also examines how current teaching strategies respond to this relationship and proposes adaptive practices that may help learners overcome barriers to effective English acquisition.

2. Research Problem, Questions, and Objectives

2.1 Research Problem

The research problem lies in the inadequacy of many traditional English teaching strategies in addressing the interaction between linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and English language acquisition. Arab learners with learning difficulties often experience persistent errors because the influence of Arabic interacts with cognitive and developmental difficulties such as weak working memory, poor phonological processing, and limited attention.

Traditional teaching strategies, especially those based mainly on repetition, memorization, and translation, may focus on correcting visible errors without addressing their deeper causes. As a result, learners may continue to produce the same errors in pronunciation, grammar, and meaning. This problem becomes more evident among students with learning difficulties, who need more flexible, contextualized, and multisensory forms of support.

Therefore, the present study seeks to analyze the relationship between linguistic interference and learning difficulties and to evaluate the effectiveness of current teaching strategies in reducing their impact on English acquisition among Arab students.

2.2 Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the relationship between linguistic interference and learning difficulties, and how do they jointly affect English language acquisition among Arab students?
2. What are the most common phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic patterns of linguistic interference among Arab learners with learning difficulties?
3. To what extent do current teaching strategies used in English as a foreign language classrooms address linguistic interference and the needs of learners with learning difficulties?
4. What adaptive teaching practices can be proposed to reduce linguistic interference and improve English language acquisition among Arab students with learning difficulties?

2.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify the interactive relationship between linguistic interference and learning difficulties and their combined impact on English language acquisition among Arab students.
2. To analyze the most common patterns of linguistic interference that appear among Arab learners with learning difficulties at phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels.
3. To evaluate the extent to which current teaching strategies in English as a foreign language classrooms consider the psycholinguistic dimension of linguistic interference and the special needs of learners with learning difficulties.
4. To propose adaptive teaching practices based on communicative, task-based, and multisensory approaches in order to reduce linguistic interference and facilitate English language acquisition.

3. Significance of the Study

3.1 Theoretical Significance

This study is theoretically significant because it addresses an important area in English language teaching and applied linguistics. It connects linguistic interference with learning difficulties rather than treating each variable separately. Many studies have examined first-language interference among Arab learners, while others have investigated learning difficulties in second language acquisition. However, fewer studies have focused on the interaction between these two factors and their combined effect on English acquisition.

The study also contributes to the development of an integrative theoretical framework that connects interlanguage theory, communicative competence theory, and theories of developmental learning difficulties. This connection helps explain why some learners continue to make interference-based errors even after repeated exposure to English instruction.

In addition, the study provides a basis for reinterpreting criticisms of communicative language teaching. Instead of viewing students' resistance to communicative activities as a reason to reject such approaches, the study considers this resistance as an indication of deep reliance on translation and first-language structures. Therefore, the issue is not the abandonment of communicative approaches, but their adaptation to suit learners' cognitive and linguistic needs.

3.2 Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study lies in its usefulness for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational decision-makers. For teachers, the study provides a clearer understanding of how linguistic interference appears among Arab students with learning difficulties and how it can be addressed through adaptive teaching practices.

For curriculum designers, the study highlights the importance of developing learning materials that reduce dependence on literal translation and provide gradual, meaningful, and multisensory support. Such materials should include activities that help learners notice differences between Arabic and English without increasing anxiety or cognitive pressure.

For educational institutions and ministries of education, the study emphasizes the importance of teacher training programs that focus on linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and adaptive teaching strategies. Teachers need to be trained not only to correct errors, but also to understand why such errors occur and how to prevent them through appropriate classroom practices.

3.3 Operational Definitions of Terms

Linguistic Interference: Linguistic interference refers to the transfer of linguistic elements, rules, or patterns from Arabic into English, resulting in systematic errors in pronunciation, grammar, meaning, or language use.

Learning Difficulties: Learning difficulties refer to developmental difficulties that affect the learner's ability to process, store, retrieve, or use linguistic information. In this study, they include difficulties related to working memory, selective attention, phonological processing, and visual discrimination.

English Language Acquisition: English language acquisition refers to the process through which Arab learners develop the ability to understand and use English effectively in communicative contexts. It includes grammatical accuracy, meaningful communication, contextual appropriateness, and actual language performance.

Adaptive Teaching Practices: Adaptive teaching practices refer to flexible instructional strategies that respond to learners' linguistic and cognitive needs. These practices may include task segmentation, multisensory support, communicative activities, visual aids, and gradual reduction of dependence on translation.

4. Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

4.1 Linguistic Interference: Concept and Types

Linguistic interference is one of the central concepts in second language acquisition. It refers to the influence of the learner's first language on the use of a second or foreign language. In the case of Arab learners, Arabic may influence English production in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and meaning. This influence can lead to systematic errors when learners transfer Arabic rules into English contexts.

The concept of linguistic interference is closely related to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which was developed through the works of Weinreich and Lado. According to this view, errors in second language learning can often be explained by differences between the learner's first language and the target language. When Arabic and English share similar structures, learning may be easier. However, when the two languages differ significantly, learners may transfer Arabic patterns into English and produce errors.

Among Arab students, linguistic interference usually appears in four main forms: phonological interference, syntactic interference, semantic interference, and pragmatic interference.

Phonological interference occurs when the sound system of Arabic affects the pronunciation of English sounds. For example, the absence of /p/ and /v/ as separate phonemes in many Arabic dialects may lead learners to replace them with /b/ and /f/. As a result, words such as pencil and very may be pronounced as bencil and fery. This type of interference becomes more serious among learners with phonological processing difficulties because they already struggle to distinguish and process similar sounds.

Syntactic interference occurs when learners transfer Arabic sentence structures into English. Arabic and English differ in word order, tense marking, auxiliary use, and the use of the verb to be. For instance, Arabic nominal sentences do not always require an equivalent of the verb to be. Therefore, some Arab learners may produce sentences such as He teacher instead of He is a teacher. This type of error becomes more persistent among learners with weak working memory because they may rely on familiar Arabic structures instead of processing new English forms.

Semantic interference occurs when learners transfer Arabic meanings or expressions directly into English. This often appears in literal translation. For example, the Arabic expression افتح النور may be translated as Open the light instead of Turn on the light. Such errors show that the learner is not only translating words, but also transferring Arabic patterns of meaning into English.

Pragmatic interference occurs when learners use English expressions in ways that are grammatically correct but socially or contextually inappropriate. For example, a learner may say Give me the pen in a situation where Could you please give me the pen? would be more appropriate. This type of interference is connected to differences in politeness strategies and social use of language between Arabic and English.

4.2 Learning Difficulties and Their Relationship to Language Acquisition

Learning difficulties are developmental difficulties that affect the way learners receive, process, store, and use information. In language learning, these difficulties may influence reading, pronunciation, memory, attention, grammar acquisition, and communicative performance. When learning difficulties are combined with linguistic interference, the process of acquiring English becomes more complex.

One important difficulty is weak working memory. Working memory allows learners to hold and manipulate information while performing a task. In English learning, students need working memory to remember sentence patterns, apply grammar rules, and produce meaningful utterances. When working memory is weak, learners may fail to retain new English structures and may return to Arabic patterns as an easier alternative.

Another important difficulty is phonological processing deficit. This refers to difficulty in recognizing, distinguishing, and manipulating sounds. Learners who have this difficulty may struggle with English sounds that do not exist in Arabic or that are not clearly distinguished in their first language. For example, a learner may continue to confuse /p/ and /b/ even after repeated correction because the problem is not only linguistic but also cognitive and auditory. Selective attention difficulties also affect English acquisition. Learners with attention difficulties may not focus on the relevant features of input, such as tense markers, articles, or auxiliary verbs. As a result, they may overlook important differences between Arabic and English. This may reinforce interference errors because the learner does not notice the specific English forms that differ from Arabic.

The relationship between linguistic interference and learning difficulties can be described as an exacerbating cycle. Interference increases the cognitive load on learners, while learning difficulties reduce their ability to process English input effectively. As a result, learners rely more on Arabic structures, and this reliance produces more interference. Therefore, interference and learning difficulties reinforce each other and make English acquisition more difficult.

4.3 Historical Background of Teaching Methods

The development of English language teaching methods has passed through several stages. Traditional methods often emphasized grammar, memorization, repetition, and translation. These methods treated language learning mainly as a process of habit formation or rule memorization. Although they helped learners acquire some grammatical knowledge, they often failed to develop real communicative competence.

In the 1960s and 1970s, applied linguists began to criticize methods that focused only on form and repetition. Scholars such as Hymes, Halliday, Widdowson, and Wilkins emphasized the communicative function of language. They argued that knowing a language does not simply mean knowing its grammatical rules, but also knowing how to use it appropriately in real social contexts.

This shift led to the development of communicative language teaching. The communicative approach views language as a tool for meaning-making and social interaction. It focuses on fluency, appropriateness, context, and authentic communication. Later, task-based language teaching developed as a practical extension of communicative language teaching. It uses meaningful tasks to encourage learners to use language for real purposes.

This historical development is important for the present study because it shows that teaching strategies must move beyond mechanical repetition. Learners with learning difficulties need

structured support, but this support should not be limited to drills. They need meaningful, contextualized, and adaptive activities that reduce interference and help them use English communicatively.

4.4 Hymes' Communicative Competence and Its Relationship to Linguistic Interference

Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence as a response to views that limited language competence to grammatical knowledge. Communicative competence means the ability to use language correctly, appropriately, and effectively in real contexts. This concept is highly relevant to linguistic interference because interference affects not only grammar, but also meaning, context, and performance.

According to Hymes, communicative competence includes several dimensions. The first dimension is formal possibility, which refers to whether an utterance is grammatically possible. Linguistic interference may affect this dimension when learners produce forms such as He go instead of He goes or He teacher instead of He is a teacher.

The second dimension is feasibility, which refers to whether the learner can actually process and produce the utterance. This dimension is especially important for learners with learning difficulties. A grammatical structure may be correct in theory, but too difficult for a learner with weak working memory to process. In such cases, the learner may avoid the structure or replace it with a simpler Arabic-influenced form.

The third dimension is appropriateness, which refers to whether an utterance fits the social and communicative context. Pragmatic interference may appear when Arab learners transfer Arabic patterns of politeness or request-making directly into English. For example, a direct command may be grammatically correct but socially inappropriate in certain English-speaking contexts.

The fourth dimension is actual performance, which refers to the learner's ability to use language in real communication. A learner may know grammar rules but still fail to use them in spontaneous interaction. This often happens when instruction focuses only on repetition and written exercises without giving learners enough opportunities for authentic communication.

In light of this framework, linguistic interference should not be treated as a simple grammatical problem. It should be understood as a wider communicative problem that affects accuracy, fluency, appropriateness, and performance. This is why teaching strategies should address both form and meaning, especially for learners with learning difficulties.

4.5 Teaching Strategies: Traditional and Modern Approaches

Teaching strategies play a crucial role in either reducing or reinforcing linguistic interference. If the teaching method focuses only on repetition and correction, learners may continue to repeat incorrect patterns without understanding the differences between Arabic and English. However, if the teaching method provides meaningful input, communicative practice, and appropriate support, learners may gradually reduce their dependence on Arabic structures.

The Audio-Lingual Method is one of the traditional methods that depends heavily on repetition, memorization, imitation, and drilling. It is based on the behaviorist view that language learning is a process of habit formation. According to this method, correct language habits can be developed through repeated practice, while errors should be corrected quickly to prevent bad habits.

Although the Audio-Lingual Method may help learners practice certain structures, it has several limitations. It may ignore the cognitive causes of interference, especially among learners with learning difficulties. If a learner repeatedly practices a structure without understanding its meaning or use, the method may not lead to real acquisition. Moreover, if errors are repeated during practice, they may become more fixed.

Task-Based Language Teaching represents a more modern and communicative approach. It is based on the idea that learners acquire language more effectively when they use it to complete meaningful tasks. A task may involve solving a problem, giving directions, planning an activity, comparing information, or completing a real-life communication goal.

Task-Based Language Teaching may be more suitable for learners with learning difficulties because tasks can be divided into smaller steps. Visual aids, peer support, gestures, examples, and repeated exposure can also be used to reduce cognitive load. Instead of forcing learners to memorize isolated forms, TBLT allows them to use English in meaningful and contextualized ways.

Table 1 presents a comparison between the Audio-Lingual Method and Task-Based Language Teaching in relation to linguistic interference and learning difficulties.

Table 1: A Comparison between ALM and TBLT

Aspect	ALM	TBLT
Theoretical Basis	Behaviorist: repetition and drilling are used to form language habits.	Cognitive-interactionist: meaningful tasks promote language use and learning.
Stance on L1	Attempts to minimize or eliminate the influence of the first language through repetition.	Reduces reliance on the first language through task-based immersion and meaningful communication.
Cognitive Load	High, due to mechanical repetition and memorization.	Lower, as language is acquired through purposeful and contextualized tasks.
Effect on Interference	May reinforce errors if incorrect patterns are repeatedly practiced.	Helps prevent interference by engaging learners in meaningful language use.
Suitability for Learners with Learning Difficulties	Limited, because it depends heavily on repetition and accuracy-focused drills.	More suitable, as it provides contextualized practice and communicative support.
Type of Treatment	Symptomatic, as it focuses mainly on correcting visible errors.	Preventive, as it reduces the causes of interference through meaningful language exposure.

The comparison shows that TBLT is more effective than ALM in addressing linguistic interference, particularly among learners with learning difficulties. While ALM relies on repetition, memorization, and habit formation, TBLT encourages learners to use language meaningfully in communicative contexts. Therefore, TBLT does not merely correct errors after they occur; rather, it helps reduce the conditions that lead to interference in the first place.

4.6 Previous Studies

Previous studies related to the topic can be divided into three main areas: studies on linguistic interference among Arab learners, studies on learning difficulties and second language acquisition, and studies on communicative and task-based teaching strategies.

4.6.1 Studies on Linguistic Interference among Arab Learners

Al-Khresheh examined error analysis and linguistic interference among Arab learners of English. The study showed that many grammatical errors made by Arab students can be explained by the influence of Arabic structures. Such errors include omission of the verb to be, misuse of articles, and transfer of Arabic word order into English. This study is relevant because it confirms that Arabic interference is a major factor in English learning difficulties among Arab learners.

Mahmoud investigated phonological interference among Libyan EFL learners. The study indicated that many Libyan learners substitute English sounds that do not exist in Arabic with closer Arabic sounds. For example, /p/ may be replaced with /b/, and /v/ may be replaced with

/f/. These pronunciation errors may persist even among advanced learners if they are not addressed through explicit and multisensory pronunciation training.

4.6.2 Studies on Learning Difficulties and Second Language Acquisition

Kormos studied the second language learning processes of students with specific learning difficulties. The study emphasized the role of working memory, phonological processing, and attention in foreign language learning. It showed that learners with such difficulties may struggle with grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and fluency. This supports the idea that linguistic interference becomes more complex when learners have cognitive processing difficulties.

Kormos and Smith also highlighted the challenges faced by students with specific learning differences in language classrooms. Their work stressed the need for inclusive and adaptive teaching methods. They argued that learners with learning difficulties can succeed in foreign language learning when teachers provide appropriate support, reduce cognitive load, and use multisensory strategies.

4.6.3 Studies on Communicative and Task-Based Teaching Strategies

Studies on communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching suggest that meaningful language use can reduce dependence on the first language. Ellis explained that task-based learning encourages learners to use language in purposeful contexts, which helps them focus on meaning while gradually developing accuracy. Willis and Willis also emphasized the value of task sequencing, interaction, and learner engagement in developing communicative competence.

Norris and Sanches investigated the use of task-based language teaching with learners who have dyslexia. Their findings indicated that task-based instruction can improve fluency and reduce some interference-related errors when tasks are properly structured and supported. This finding is important for the present study because it supports the use of adaptive communicative practices with learners who have learning difficulties.

4.6.4 Research Gap

Although previous studies have addressed linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and teaching strategies, many of them have treated these variables separately. Studies on interference often focus on errors without deeply analyzing the cognitive difficulties that may intensify them. Studies on learning difficulties often focus on general learning challenges without connecting them to Arabic-English linguistic transfer. Similarly, studies on teaching strategies may discuss communicative methods without considering how these methods should be adapted for learners with learning difficulties.

Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the tripartite relationship between linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and English language acquisition among Arab students. It also seeks to evaluate teaching strategies in light of this relationship and propose an adaptive model that responds to both linguistic and cognitive needs.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Approach

The present study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach. This approach is suitable because the study does not aim to conduct an experimental intervention, but rather to analyze the relationship between linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and English language acquisition among Arab students. It also seeks to evaluate the suitability of current teaching strategies used in English as a foreign language classrooms.

The descriptive part of the study focuses on identifying the forms of linguistic interference that appear among Arab learners, especially those with learning difficulties. It also describes the cognitive and linguistic difficulties that may affect English acquisition, such as weak working memory, poor phonological processing, and limited selective attention.

The analytical part of the study examines how these variables interact with one another. It also evaluates whether traditional and modern teaching strategies can reduce linguistic interference and support learners with learning difficulties. Therefore, the study combines theoretical analysis, review of previous studies, and proposed field-based procedures.

5.2 Data Collection Tools

The study relies on three main tools for collecting data: content analysis, a teacher questionnaire, and a diagnostic test for students. These tools are designed to provide a comprehensive view of the problem from different perspectives.

Table 2 presents the main data collection tools used in the study.

Table 2: Data Collection Tools

Tool	Target Group or Material	Purpose
Content Analysis	English textbooks used in Arab EFL contexts	To examine whether textbooks address linguistic interference, communicative competence, and support for learners with learning difficulties.
Teacher Questionnaire	English language teachers	To identify teachers' awareness of linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and the teaching strategies they use.
Diagnostic Test	Arab students with and without learning difficulties	To measure phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic interference errors.

5.2.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is used to examine selected English language textbooks used in Arab educational contexts, particularly in Libya and Saudi Arabia. The purpose is to identify the extent to which these textbooks consider communicative competence, linguistic interference, and the needs of learners with learning difficulties.

The analysis focuses on the following criteria:

1. The presence of activities that help learners distinguish between Arabic and English structures.
2. The inclusion of communicative tasks that encourage meaningful language use.
3. The use of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic support.
4. The availability of activities that reduce dependence on literal translation.
5. The presence of gradual and scaffolded tasks suitable for learners with learning difficulties.

This tool is important because textbooks influence classroom practices. If the textbook depends mainly on mechanical drills, translation, and isolated grammar exercises, it may fail to reduce interference errors. However, if it includes communicative and multisensory tasks, it may support learners more effectively.

5.2.2 Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire is designed to collect data from English language teachers who teach Arab students in secondary schools. The questionnaire aims to identify teachers' perceptions of linguistic interference, their awareness of learning difficulties, and the strategies they use in the classroom.

The questionnaire includes three main axes:

Table 3: Axes of the Teacher Questionnaire

Axis	Focus
Axis 1	Common interference errors among Arab students.
Axis 2	Teachers' awareness of learning difficulties and their impact on English acquisition.
Axis 3	Teaching strategies used to address interference and support learners with learning difficulties.

The questionnaire may include items related to pronunciation errors, omission of the verb to be, literal translation, misuse of English word order, and inappropriate pragmatic expressions. It may also ask teachers whether they use repetition, translation, communicative activities, visual aids, task-based learning, or multisensory techniques.

The validity of the questionnaire can be checked by presenting it to a panel of specialists in applied linguistics, English language teaching, and special education. Reliability can be tested using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency.

5.2.3 Diagnostic Test

A diagnostic test is proposed to measure the types and frequency of linguistic interference among Arab students. The test should include students with learning difficulties and students without learning difficulties in order to compare the two groups.

The diagnostic test includes four parts:

Table 4: Components of the Diagnostic Test

Component	Purpose	Example
Phonological Component	To measure pronunciation interference.	Distinguishing between /p/ and /b/, or /v/ and /f/.
Syntactic Component	To measure grammatical interference.	Producing sentences with the verb to be, third-person singular, and correct word order.
Semantic Component	To measure literal translation errors.	Choosing the correct expression: Turn on the light instead of Open the light.
Pragmatic Component	To measure appropriateness in context.	Using polite requests instead of direct commands.

This test is important because it helps identify the specific areas in which interference is strongest. It also helps determine whether learners with learning difficulties produce more interference errors than learners without such difficulties.

5.3 Study Sample

The proposed sample of the study consists of three groups: students with learning difficulties, students without learning difficulties, and English language teachers. The inclusion of these groups helps the researcher compare learner performance and examine teachers' classroom practices.

Table 5: Study Sample

Group	Number	Description
Students with Learning Difficulties	50	Arab secondary school students diagnosed or identified as having learning difficulties.
Students without Learning Difficulties	50	Arab secondary school students used as a comparison group.
English Language Teachers	60	Teachers with at least three years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language.

The comparison between students with and without learning difficulties is essential because it allows the researcher to determine whether linguistic interference becomes more frequent or more severe among learners with learning difficulties. The teacher sample is also important because teachers' awareness and classroom strategies may either reduce or reinforce interference errors.

5.4 Data Analysis Methods

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Qualitative analysis is used to examine textbook content and interpret patterns of teaching practices. Quantitative analysis is used to analyze questionnaire responses and diagnostic test results.

The main methods of analysis include:

Table 6: Data Analysis Methods

Method	Purpose
Qualitative Content Analysis	To analyze textbooks and identify the presence of communicative, contrastive, and multisensory activities.
Descriptive Statistics	To calculate frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.
T-Test	To compare interference errors between students with learning difficulties and students without learning difficulties.
ANOVA	To examine differences related to teaching strategies and their effect on interference.
Cronbach's Alpha	To test the reliability of the teacher questionnaire.

These methods help provide a clear and systematic analysis of the research problem. Descriptive statistics show the general patterns of responses and errors, while inferential statistics help determine whether differences between groups are statistically significant.

6. Expected Results and Discussion

6.1 Expected Results

The study is expected to show that Arab students with learning difficulties experience higher levels of linguistic interference than students without learning difficulties. This is because learning difficulties may reduce the learner's ability to process English input, retain new structures, and distinguish between English and Arabic patterns.

First, phonological interference is expected to be more frequent among learners with phonological processing difficulties. Such learners may confuse English sounds that do not exist in Arabic, especially /p/ and /v/. They may continue to produce pronunciation errors even after repeated correction if teaching does not include auditory, visual, and kinesthetic support. Second, syntactic interference is expected to appear clearly in sentence construction. Learners may omit the verb to be, misuse English word order, or fail to mark the third-person singular. These errors may increase among students with weak working memory because they may find it difficult to hold English grammatical rules in mind while producing sentences.

Third, semantic interference is expected to appear in literal translation from Arabic into English. Learners may transfer Arabic expressions directly into English without considering idiomatic or contextual differences. This type of error may be more persistent among learners who rely heavily on translation as a learning strategy.

Fourth, pragmatic interference is expected to appear in inappropriate language use. Learners may use direct expressions in contexts that require polite or indirect language. This may be especially difficult for learners with attention or social communication difficulties because they may struggle to notice contextual cues.

6.2 Expected Findings Related to Teaching Strategies

The study is also expected to show that traditional teaching strategies are not fully effective in reducing linguistic interference among learners with learning difficulties. Methods based

mainly on repetition, memorization, and direct correction may address the surface form of errors but not their underlying causes.

The Audio-Lingual Method may help learners repeat correct forms, but it may not develop deep understanding or communicative use. If learners repeat sentences mechanically, they may not notice why English differs from Arabic. In some cases, incorrect forms may become fixed if learners repeatedly practice them without meaningful feedback.

In contrast, communicative and task-based strategies are expected to be more effective because they encourage learners to use English in meaningful contexts. Task-Based Language Teaching may reduce dependence on Arabic by engaging learners in activities that require real communication. It also allows the teacher to divide tasks into smaller steps, provide models, and use visual or physical support.

Multisensory strategies are also expected to be effective, especially for learners with learning difficulties. Visual aids, gestures, colored cards, sound discrimination activities, mind maps, and movement-based activities may help learners process language through more than one channel. This can reduce cognitive load and support memory.

6.3 Discussion

The expected findings suggest that linguistic interference should not be treated as a normal error that disappears through repetition alone. For many Arab learners, especially those with learning difficulties, interference is connected to deeper cognitive and linguistic processing challenges. Therefore, teaching strategies should address both the linguistic source of the error and the learner's cognitive needs.

The relationship between interference and learning difficulties can be understood as a circular relationship. When learners find English structures difficult, they rely on Arabic. This reliance produces interference errors. These errors increase the difficulty of English learning and may reduce learners' confidence. As a result, learners return again to Arabic as a safer and more familiar system.

This cycle cannot be broken through mechanical repetition alone. It requires meaningful exposure, guided practice, and adaptive support. Learners need to notice the difference between Arabic and English, but they also need opportunities to use English without excessive fear of error. This is why implicit feedback, task segmentation, and multisensory support are important.

The findings also suggest that criticisms of communicative language teaching should be reconsidered. Some teachers argue that communicative approaches are difficult to apply in Arab classrooms because of large class sizes, limited resources, and students' dependence on translation. However, these challenges do not necessarily mean that communicative teaching should be abandoned. Rather, they show the need to adapt communicative methods to local classroom realities.

For example, instead of asking students to perform long communicative tasks immediately, teachers can divide tasks into short steps. Instead of using only oral communication, teachers can support tasks with pictures, cards, sentence frames, and group work. Instead of banning Arabic completely, teachers can gradually reduce translation and help students move toward more independent English use.

6.4 Discussion of Critiques of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching has been criticized in some EFL contexts because it may be difficult to apply in large classes, examination-oriented systems, and classrooms with limited resources. Some teachers also argue that students are not ready for communicative tasks because they are accustomed to translation and teacher-centered instruction.

However, these criticisms should not lead to a complete rejection of communicative teaching. Instead, they reveal the depth of the problem that communicative teaching attempts to solve. Students' dependence on translation is itself a sign of strong first-language interference. Their

resistance to communicative tasks may reflect anxiety, low confidence, and fear of losing the support of Arabic.

Similarly, teachers' resistance may reflect a lack of training rather than the failure of communicative teaching itself. If teachers are not trained to adapt communicative tasks for learners with learning difficulties, they may view these tasks as unrealistic or time-consuming. Therefore, the solution is not to return to purely traditional methods, but to develop adaptive communicative practices suitable for Arab EFL classrooms.

An adaptive version of communicative teaching can combine structure and communication. It can provide clear models, guided practice, visual support, and gradual movement from controlled to freer language use. This approach may help learners reduce interference while still developing communicative competence.

7. Recommendations: The Hybrid-Adaptive Teaching Model

Based on the theoretical discussion and the expected findings of the study, it is recommended that English language teachers adopt a hybrid-adaptive teaching model. This model combines the strengths of communicative and task-based teaching with specific support strategies for learners with learning difficulties.

The proposed model is based on the idea that linguistic interference cannot be reduced only through correction and repetition. Instead, learners need meaningful language exposure, gradual practice, multisensory support, and opportunities to use English in real communicative situations. At the same time, students with learning difficulties require additional support that reduces cognitive load and helps them process language more effectively.

Table 7 presents the main components of the proposed hybrid-adaptive model.

Table 7: The Hybrid-Adaptive Teaching Model

Component	Description	Purpose
Task Chunking	Dividing communicative tasks into small and manageable steps.	To reduce working memory load and help learners complete tasks gradually.
Multisensory Support	Using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic aids such as pictures, colored cards, gestures, and movement.	To support learners with phonological, memory, and attention difficulties.
Contrastive Awareness	Comparing selected Arabic and English structures in a guided way.	To help learners notice differences between Arabic and English without relying fully on translation.
Immediate Implicit Feedback	Using recasts, reformulation, and modeling instead of direct criticism.	To correct errors while reducing anxiety and maintaining communication.
Gradual Reduction of Translation	Allowing limited use of Arabic at early stages, then gradually increasing English-only practice.	To reduce dependence on the first language and build confidence in English use.
Contextualized Practice	Practicing language through real-life communicative situations.	To reduce semantic and pragmatic interference and improve communicative competence.

7.1 Task Chunking

Task chunking means dividing a language task into smaller steps. This is especially useful for learners with weak working memory because they may struggle to process long instructions or

complex activities. Instead of asking students to complete a full conversation at once, the teacher can divide the task into stages: understanding the situation, learning key expressions, practicing short exchanges, and finally completing the communicative task.

For example, if the lesson is about asking for directions, the teacher can first present a map, then teach key expressions, then model a short dialogue, and finally ask students to practice in pairs. This gradual structure helps learners focus on one part of the task at a time and reduces the pressure that may lead them to rely on Arabic.

7.2 Multisensory Support

Multisensory support is important for learners with learning difficulties because it allows them to process language through more than one channel. Instead of relying only on listening or reading, the teacher can use pictures, colors, gestures, movement, and physical objects.

For example, to teach the difference between /p/ and /b/, the teacher may use colored cards, mouth-position pictures, and repeated listening activities. To teach tenses, the teacher may use a timeline on the board or physical movement to represent past, present, and future. These strategies help learners understand abstract language forms in a concrete and memorable way.

7.3 Contrastive Awareness

Contrastive awareness does not mean returning to full translation-based teaching. Rather, it means helping learners notice important differences between Arabic and English. This can be done through short and guided comparisons.

For example, the teacher may show learners that Arabic can say هو معلم without a verb, while English requires He is a teacher. The goal is not to translate every sentence, but to make learners aware of the structural difference that causes interference. This awareness can reduce repeated errors because learners begin to understand why the English structure is different.

7.4 Immediate Implicit Feedback

Immediate implicit feedback is useful because it corrects learners' errors without interrupting communication or causing embarrassment. Instead of saying "This is wrong," the teacher can reformulate the learner's sentence correctly.

For example:

Student: He go to school every day. Teacher: Yes, he goes to school every day.

This type of feedback helps learners hear the correct form in context. It is especially suitable for learners with learning difficulties because it reduces anxiety and allows them to continue participating in the task.

7.5 Gradual Reduction of Translation

Many Arab learners depend heavily on Arabic translation when learning English. Although translation may be useful at early stages, excessive dependence on it can increase linguistic interference. Therefore, teachers should gradually reduce translation rather than ban it suddenly.

For example, the teacher may begin with five minutes of English-only practice, then increase the time gradually each week. The teacher may also allow students to brainstorm ideas in Arabic at first, but require them to produce the final response in English. This gradual process helps students move from dependence on Arabic to more independent English use.

7.6 Contextualized Practice

Contextualized practice means teaching language through meaningful situations rather than isolated sentences. This is important because many interference errors occur when learners translate Arabic expressions directly into English. By practicing English in real contexts, learners become more aware of appropriate expressions.

For example, instead of teaching the phrase Could you please...? as a grammar pattern only, the teacher can place it in a classroom situation, a shop conversation, or a request between friends. This helps learners understand not only the structure but also the social use of the expression.

8. Pedagogical Implications

The findings and recommendations of this study have several implications for English language teaching in Arab contexts.

First, teachers should not treat linguistic interference as a simple mistake that can be corrected through repetition alone. Many interference errors are connected to deeper differences between Arabic and English, and some are intensified by learning difficulties. Therefore, teachers need to identify the source of the error before choosing the appropriate strategy.

Second, English language teaching should balance accuracy and communication. Learners need to know correct forms, but they also need to use these forms in meaningful contexts. Teaching grammar without communication may produce learners who know rules but cannot use them effectively.

Third, learners with learning difficulties need structured and supportive instruction. This does not mean simplifying the curriculum excessively, but it means presenting language in smaller steps, using multisensory materials, and providing repeated exposure in meaningful ways.

Fourth, teachers need training in both applied linguistics and inclusive education. They should understand how Arabic interference appears in English learning and how learning difficulties affect language acquisition. Without such training, teachers may misinterpret repeated errors as lack of effort rather than signs of cognitive or linguistic difficulty.

Fifth, curriculum designers should include activities that reduce interference and support communicative competence. Textbooks should not rely only on grammar drills and translation exercises. They should include tasks, dialogues, visual materials, pronunciation support, and activities that compare Arabic and English structures in a guided and practical way.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between linguistic interference, learning difficulties, and English language acquisition among Arab students. It argued that linguistic interference does not operate in isolation. Rather, it interacts with learning difficulties such as weak working memory, poor phonological processing, and limited selective attention. This interaction creates a circular relationship in which learners rely on Arabic structures because English is difficult to process, and this reliance produces more interference errors.

The study also showed that traditional teaching methods, particularly those based mainly on repetition and memorization, may not be sufficient to reduce interference among learners with learning difficulties. Although such methods may help learners practice specific forms, they often fail to address the cognitive and communicative causes of interference. In some cases, they may reinforce incorrect patterns if learners repeat them without meaningful understanding. In contrast, communicative and task-based approaches offer more effective possibilities because they encourage learners to use English in meaningful situations. However, these approaches should be adapted to suit learners with learning difficulties. Adaptation may include task chunking, multisensory support, implicit feedback, contrastive awareness, and gradual reduction of translation.

The study therefore recommends the adoption of a hybrid-adaptive teaching model that combines communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and inclusive support strategies. Such a model can help reduce linguistic interference, lower cognitive load, and improve English language acquisition among Arab students, especially those with learning difficulties.

Ultimately, the future of English language teaching in Arab contexts should not depend on returning to purely traditional methods, nor on applying communicative approaches without adaptation. Instead, effective teaching requires a balanced model that considers the linguistic background of learners, their cognitive needs, and the communicative goals of language learning.

References

- Al-Khresheh, M. H. (2016). A review study of error analysis theory. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 2(1), 49–59.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Penguin.
- Kormos, J. (2017). *The Second Language Learning Processes of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties*. Routledge.
- Kormos, J., & Smith, A. M. (2023). *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences*. 2nd ed. Multilingual Matters.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press.
- Al-Souri, L. M., Abuadla, A. M., Mubarak, J. R., Al-Qablawi, S. S. K., & Makari, I. M. (2026). Developing a Critical Inquiry-Based E-Educational Model (CIEM) to Enhance Critical Thinking Skills among High School Students: A Mixed-Methods Study in the Libyan Context. *Al-Farooq Journal of Sciences*, 2(4), 525-540.
- Mahmoud, A. (2022). Phonological interference among Libyan EFL learners. *Libyan Journal of English Studies*, 5(2), 12–28.
- Norris, J., & Sanches, A. (2021). Task-based language teaching for learners with dyslexia. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(4), 512–530.
- Piepho, H. E. (1981). *Establishing Objectives in the Teaching of English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Van EK, J. A., & Alexander, L. G. (1980). *Threshold Level English*. Pergamon Press.
- Weinreich, U. (1953). *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. Mouton.
- Wilkins, D. A. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Edward Arnold.
- Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing Task-Based Teaching*. Oxford University Press.