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HISTORY OF EDUCATION SYSTEM AND TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN YEMEN

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Introduction

English language in Yemen is being taught as a foreign language, but it has a great importance in a major transition in different areas of life. Learning foreign language is not an easy process. It inevitably requires a lot of efforts by students, for this reason, students learning foreign/ second language must effectively and continually practice the target language in order to improve their linguistics competence whatever the language problems and difficulties they faced. This paper tries to highlight the history of teaching English language and the learning system in primary, secondary, and tertiary education through different historical stages in Yemen before and after the unification in 1990 up today.

Key words: Pre- Unity Period, the Post -Unity Period, Current period.

Pre- Unity Period

Yemen was divided into two independent countries, the Northern part called (Mutawakili Kingdom of Yemen) from 1918-1962, and the Southern part called (South Arabia) which was occupied by the British from 1839-1967. In South Arabia (South Yemen), during the British occupation before 1967, the education started in the early thirties of the 19th century by the British, which was available only in Aden. During this period, the educational system consisted of three stages of education: 4 years of primary, 4 years of intermediate, and 4 years of secondary school. The situation was different in the north of Yemen where imamate regime has isolated it from the rest of world in order to protect it from the British colonialism which was in the south Yemen. The people have isolated from education and it was limited to prestigious families and clerks. Education was very traditional and limited to religious education provided by Islamic scholars and was attached to mosques only, there is no presence for English language teaching in north Yemen till revolution age. Thus English language teaching started in the early seventies. In 1962, after revolution against the monarchy ruling system, North Yemen became a republic called (Yemen Arab Republic) and the first educational system started. This educational system started with three stages of education: 6 years of elementary, 3 years of preparatory and 3 years of secondary school (Saif, 2013).

South Arabia obtained its independence from Britain In 1967, and became South Yemen. In 1968, the former educational system changed into 6-3-3: 6 years of integrated schools, 3 years of preparatory and 3 years of secondary school. In 1970s, several education plans were made for the new republic called the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The English language was adopted in all southern government as an official language, which was available only in Aden. It was taught in schools as a compulsory subject and during this period, the educational system consisted of: 8 years integrated school, 4 years of secondary school (Al-Amri, Annuzaili and Al-Deram, 2003). Secondary education had a choice of academic for 4 years, Vocational for 5 years, technical or teacher training education for 2 years. This binary education system continued till the proclamation of unification of Yemen in the year 1990.

Since, the education system and English language teaching had undergone different scenarios in the two countries till the proclamation of unification in 1990.

History of Teaching English Language in Pre- Unity Period

1. Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen)

The students spend eight years at the unity school and four years in secondary school. English language was taught from grade five of the unity stage to eight years till the final year of secondary stage. The syllabus adopted in primary school was called (English for the unity school) while in secondary school was (The Yemeni Readers for secondary school). These were structural syllabus, providing students with strong foundation in grammar and vocabulary knowledge. They were published by some Yemenis experts in collaboration with the well-known Indian linguist professor N. Krishnaswamy of CIEFL, Hyderabad. These syllabi continued till 1990. English teachers were British, Indians, Sudanese, and a few Yemenis in secondary schools.

The time allotted for teaching English subject ranges from 4 to 6 classes weekly. In secondary school, students were exposed to read short stories, write composition, study reading passages and sentence structure to be prepared for the final examinations in which English subject success is a must" (first education congress, september, 1975) cited in (Al- Hittari, 2002, p.4).

After those two stages the higher education come and in this stage teaching English language was emphasized and was importance than before, especially after establishing Aden University at the early seventies with some affiliated colleges like education, agriculture, medicine and engineering at the late of seventies. English was taught as an independent specialty at the colleges of education where students had to spend either two years or four years of study. Students who graduate from the colleges of education, with English specialization, join teaching English subjects in either primary schools or secondary schools. English language was used as a medium in teaching sciences like chemistry, physics and biology in such college of education. In college of medicine and engineering, all subjects were taught in English. Thus, there is no doubt that students should be proficient in English language to be able to cope with understanding content topics.

2. Arab Republic of Yemen (North Yemen)

Before the revolution in 1962, the primary educational system was based on six years. There was no presence of English language i.e. English was not taught in that system. After revolution, primary school was six years and three years of preparatory education. English language was brought as a subject in curriculum by a group of Egyptian teachers during the school year 1963-1964 (Al-Mekhlafi, 1999). It was taught as a compulsory school subject from the seven-year at preparatory stage of education. The syllabus was introduced through Egyptian school textbooks "The progressive Nile Course of English and English for Use" until late 1960s. By 1970, "The Nile Course of English and English for Use" course was replaced by "Living English for the Arab World".

Afterward, the Ministry of Education was developed the text book in collaboration with British Council in Yemen in 1980, the syllabus was called "English for Yemen". Students were given only 4 to five classes weekly to learn English language subject. The students who completed the preparatory stage, they were eligible to join secondary school which was based on 3 years only. The first year in secondary school was general; at second year students can decide which section (literary or scientific) they like to continue their two year of study in secondary school. English was a compulsory subject and students had to pass it in the final national examination of secondary school to be able to join college. The syllabus was used the same series of text books "English for Yemen" for several years, then it was developed by the government with the help of some Arab expert too.

In 1970 it was the first step in developing the higher education system was the foundation of Sana'a University. English language was taught as an independent specialty in the college of education as it was in

the south of Yemen, but there was a slight difference that English language was not used as a medium in teaching sciences like chemistry, physics and biology in college of education in north of Yemen. Arabic language was used instead of English language.

The Post-Unity Period

English language has witnessed tremendous radical changes after reunification in 1990, when south and north of Yemen become one country. The two education systems of north and south of Yemen were integrated into a single system which comprising of two stages, the first stage basic education consisting nine years and the secondary education comprising three years. English language was taught as a foreign and compulsory language in schools, but it was taught as official medium of instruction before and subjects are produced in English too.

So the new education system after unification was (9-3) primary and secondary school. In secondary school, there are two sections; literary and scientific, starting from the first year of schooling. According to this system English language subject was taught at the seventh grade up to twelfth grade level with average of 4-5 classes per a week and the time of per class about 45 minutes.

The Ministry of education made a great effort to upgrade English teaching in the education in Yemen since 1994. It aims to improve students to listen, speak, read and write English proficiently. New material was adopted to enable students to be part of the changing competitive world. This course is called Crescent Series (English Course for Yemen) instead the first course (Yemen for English).

The current English text book series is prescribed for both elementary and secondary schools which were introduced at elementary schools in 1994 and at the secondary schools in 1999. It adopts the functional approach to English language teaching and learning and it is centred on learning themes not on sentences patterns and structures of language as the older syllabus did.

During 1990 to 2000 tertiary education in Yemen had witnessed fundamental changes; there are seven public universities in Yemen: Sana'a, Aden, Hodeida, Taiz, Hadramaut, Ibb, and Dhamar; and 5 private universities, and religious universities. There are also two community colleges in Sana'a, and Aden. University education is for about 4 years except Engineering and Medicine, which require 5 to 6 years respectively. Any student graduated from the colleges of Education is eligible to join a school as a teacher either in the primary, or secondary schools.

In the present time teaching subjects in scientific department in college of education have been taught in Arabic language and English is compulsory subject that has been taught only at first year as a one subject and all other subjects in Arabic, therefore students are very weak in English in these departments as explained by Al-Mansoori (2008). In Medicine and Engineering College, the instruction and subjects in English language. Recently there are many institutes have been founded for teaching English language.

Current English language Teaching in Yemen

A large number of Yemeni Population believes that knowing English is essential in contemporary times. English language was taught as a foreign language and as school subject in Yemeni schools. A Most of the Yemeni students start learning English at seven class up to twelfth class with an average of 3-4 hours per week at government schools, while those who has chance to study in private school they started learning English from nursery level which may result speaking English fluently as a second language. The Ministry of Education prescribed textbook series of English which is called Crescent "English Course for Yemen" (CECY) in elementary schools (7-9 grades) and secondary schools (10-12 grades). Aspects of the Structural and Communicative Approaches to ELT underlying this course so the content of CECY is a combination of language items (e.g. tenses) and language functions (e.g. describing) with some explicit focus on grammar (Bose, 2002). In primary and secondary schools, the English teachers focus on grammar rules and neglect the other skills rules to meet the requirements of the formal exams. Unfortunately, English is tackled as a school subject that needs to be memorized and tested rather than a tool for

communication. After the six years of learning English, most English teachers who teach at primary and secondary schools complain about their students' weakness in English writing. The teachers concentrate on the importance of grammar as a part of any grammar lesson rather its importance to be the main component of an English course, as a whole. So students succeed to state a grammar rule and formed a sentence following the rules, but fail to apply the rule while speaking or writing. After completed secondary school, the student may register in any of Yemeni universities. University education is of 4 years at the colleges of education and five to six years is required at engineering and medicine colleges.

At college of education ,the English department curriculum are included Linguistics, language skills, ELT Methodology, English Literature, General education taught in Arabic such as Arabic language, Measurement and Evaluation, Psychology and so on. Lecturers should prepare student-teachers of English by equipping them with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge as well as professional skills.

Some students before enrolling on studying at college they improve their English language by registering at English institute so at the college of education , English department it is not possible to find a fluent English-speaking student, but most students face difficulty in writing English. The teachers at English department may not spend more time on teaching this skill due to the time limit of the course they are teaching and Practice is ignored or given less importance which deserves and students are not given chances to practice the grammar items during writing English essays thus Yemeni English student-teachers are not able to write English essays that are correct grammatically, properly punctuated and effectively organized. They produce written language which is full of errors, is clearly observed from the students' performance results in the written samples that were collected for this research

There is no doubt that English language has recently become very necessary in the Yemen for two things. First, the college graduates are not allowed to join higher education unless they achieve a certain score in the Common English Proficiency Assessment (CEPA). Second, many private schools in Yemen require applicants to possess the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or (TEEF) to help him to get job. So, success in learning English might help the ones to get good career and to determine his professional status.

To conclude, a large number of Yemeni Population believes that knowing English is essential in contemporary times. It is necessary to speak English proficiency to study business, sciences, medicine and information technologies or continue higher education in countries where English language is their mother tongue.

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