

Full Length Research Paper

Challenges facing instructors when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds from their point of view

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges facing instructors at three Jordanian universities: Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaytoonah University, and Mutah University when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds, and also to know the effect of gender, experience, and qualification of instructors on their point of view. To achieve the aim of this study a questionnaire was distributed among 100 English language instructors (49 males and 51 females) working at the three universities. The questionnaires were collected and data was analyzed statistically using suitable statistics. The results of the study showed that English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds was negative, results also showed there were statistically significant differences in English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds and there were also statistically significant differences in English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds due to their qualification and due to their experience. But results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds due to their gender. The researcher wrote some recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, language variety

INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and of discourse. This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the rules of the participants, the information they share, and the functions of the interaction. Only in a full context of this kind can judgment be made on the appropriateness of a 'particular utterance', as mentioned by Brown (2000). Lyie Bachman's (1990) sociolinguistic competence comprises aspects, which deal with factors such as politeness, formality, metaphor, registers, and culturally related aspects of language. For students learning English in Jordan, sociolinguistic competence should take into account those aspects as proposed by Bachman. Broersma (2001) stated that the process of learning sociolinguistic competence is challenging even in one's first language. He also proposed that evidence

of this can be found in the popularity of "Miss Manners" columns. Having good sociolinguistic competence means knowing how to "give every person his or her due." It means knowing when to be quiet, and when to talk, when to give compliments to others, and when to apologize. It also means being able to read situations and know what is the right thing to say or do. There are an infinite number of combinations of roles, tasks, contexts, and feelings that govern what is appropriate in any given encounter.

The standard variety of English used in Jordan is the variety that is taught formally in schools and the Standard British English is the linguistic model in the education system of Jordan. However in Jordan, English, being a foreign language, is learnt for a functional purpose. The most important measure of success when a language is learnt for a functional

purpose is communicative effectiveness; that is, whether the language enabled the learners to achieve the purpose of learning. A dialect is a language variation spoken by a particular ethnic, social or regional group and is an element of the group's collective identity (Ogbu, 1999). Each dialect within a language is just as logical, complex and rule-governed as the standard form of the language which is often called standard variety.

Though the use of Standard English is very much desired, one must not dismiss the significance of other varieties of the language. Students must be made to realize the importance of Standard English in academic and formal settings; but at the same time be conscious of the communicative function of English as a foreign language. EFL helps learners to bridge the gap between the use of acrolect (prestigious dialect or variety of a language) among proponents in an academic setting and the basilect (a less prestigious dialect or variety of a language) used among their peers to facilitate understanding.

Statement of the Problem

Students studying in Jordanian universities came from different sociolinguistic backgrounds, they came from different countries and these countries have different levels of English. In fact, some countries such as Iraq and Libya don't focus on English and this affects the level of its students in English language competency. Instructors in Jordanian universities face challenges when dealing with these students from different linguistic backgrounds, the researcher tried to investigate these challenges they face.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges facing instructors at three Jordanian universities: Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaytoonah University, and Mutah University when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds, and also to know the effect of gender, experience, and qualification of instructors on their point of view.

Questions of the Study

1. What are the challenges facing English language instructors at Jordanian Universities when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds from their point of view?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their gender (Male, Female)?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their experience (less than 5 years, 5 years or above)?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at

Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their qualification (Master degree, PhD)?

Definition of Operational Terms

Sociolinguistics: Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistics can help us understand why we speak differently in various social contexts, and help uncover the social relationships in a community. <https://sites.google.com/a/sheffield.ac.uk/all-about-linguistics/branches/sociolinguistics/what-is-sociolinguistics>

Language variety: In sociolinguistics, a general term for any distinctive form of a language or linguistic expression. Linguists commonly use *language variety* (or simply *variety*) as a cover term for any of the overlapping subcategories of a language, including dialect, idiolect, register, and social dialect. <http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/Language-Variety.htm>

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to all English language instructors at three Jordanian universities which are Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaytoonah University, and Mutah University in the academic year 2014/2015.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ersony (2013) conducted a study entitled "Attitudinal Dispositions of Students toward the English Language: Sociolinguistic and Sociocultural Considerations" This exploratory study investigated the attitudes of Turkish students toward learning and using English language as they lived and pursued their university degrees in a northeastern city in the United States. The study examined students' attitudinal dispositions toward English based on sociolinguistic and sociocultural considerations. Methods: The study included 8 student participants (4 male and 4 female) who were born in Turkey and spoke Turkish as their native language. They were all enrolled in a state university studying different programs in Engineering Sciences and Social Sciences. Data were collected conducting in-depth interviews with students over a two-month period. Participants were interviewed twice individually, and 16 interviews were conducted in total. Each interview took 50 to 60 minutes and was transcribed by the researcher. Data analysis included (1) intensive (re)readings of interview transcripts and identifying attitudinal themes and patterns in the data through emergent coding; and (2) making qualitative connections among themes and patterns through identifying their consistency by applying axial coding. Coded dataset was then descriptively interpreted in its entirety. Findings: Participants displayed mostly positive dispositions toward learning and using the English language; however, their attitudinal patterns varied with regards to sociolinguistic and sociocultural considerations.

While they described English as a beautiful language, their perceptions about the beauty of the language associated with different interpretations regarding linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of English, such as euphonic sound system and lexical richness, and English as the language of global connection in different discourses (i.e., academia, media, and corporate world). On the other hand, participants viewed English as a threat to cultural and linguistic identities at the individual and societal dimensions. Devaluing the native language against English and the recent phenomenon of lexical penetration of English words into the Turkish language engendered participants' patriotic feelings about their native language and surfaced their nationalistic ties with their cultural and linguistic identities. Lastly, participants attached a variety of instrumental and survival values to the English language. They felt restricted expressing their feelings in English when they engaged in affective conversational discourses with native speakers. These attitudes, as well as the patterns they demonstrated in enacting such attitudes differed across genders significantly.

El-Dash and Busnardo (2001) investigated the prestige and vitality of English as a foreign language in Brazil from the perspectives of adolescents. The study found that the majority of the participants perceived English more favorably than they did for their native Portuguese, and they acknowledged English as an international language. Thus, the study showed that native speakers of Portuguese attributed more privilege and prestige to English as opposed to their native language.

Low *et al* (2010) conducted a study entitled "A sociolinguistic profile of 100 mothers from middle to upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds in Penang-Chinese community: what languages do they speak at home with their children?" This paper reports the findings of a survey of 100 mothers of Chinese children aged between 6 and 36 months from middle to upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds in Penang, Malaysia. The findings include the language backgrounds of these mothers, their contextual uses of multiple languages and their language choices with their children. Through this survey, the mothers' multilingual language use practices with their young children were profiled. The primary function of this profiling was to identify the type of language learning context experienced by the mothers' young Penang-Chinese children and to assist in predicting the pattern of language shift taking place in their households.

Graham (2004) investigated the relationship between attitudes and the level of achievement in the language. She focused on the perceptions of students who were native speakers of English, toward the French language and how they perceived the factors that underlay their level of achievement in French. The study concluded that the students who attributed success to effort, high ability, and effective learning strategies had higher levels of achievement, and thus viewed French positively.

Marley (2004) investigated the language attitudes of high school students and teachers toward French, Arabic, and bilingualism in Morocco. The study showed that both students and teachers were widely in favor of a return to Arabic-French bilingualism within the education system and approved decisions to introduce foreign languages at an earlier stage in the curriculum. Thus, participants all displayed positively receptive attitudes toward Arabic and French and, in turn, more orientation toward learning both languages at the same time. The study demonstrated that the positive and favorable attitudes toward languages, as demonstrated by the majority, can in fact give more agency and autonomy to these languages at the pedagogical and even in educational policy levels.

Villa (2002) indicates that language attitudes of people may lead them to suppress or change the use of particular languages that people do not favor or perceive positively. His study suggested that the use of Spanish language in the U.S. for instance, specifically in the education domain, has been going through a deliberate change due to the unfavorable attitudes of some scholars toward the language. Therefore, devalued perceptions of Spanish language use in educational platforms have practically accounted for the decreased use of this language in relevant discourses.

White (2002) examined the attitudes of Fijians using English in conversations with peers, and the extent to which peer culture valued or devalued the use of English language. The study found that English was viewed by many Fijians as a language of another culture and its usage in informal contexts was deemed inappropriate. That is, using English words and concepts among peers of Fiji was regarded disparaging by the participants. The finding also alluded to the sociocultural tension within the society as a result of the increasing popularity of the English language in the country.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all the instructors of English language who are working at Jordanian universities.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of 100 instructors, 49 males and 51 females from the English departments at three universities: Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaitoonah University, and Mutah University.

Instrument of the Study

A questionnaire was distributed among the instructors of English language in the three universities: Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaitoonah University, and Mutah University and this questionnaire was designed by the

researcher himself, it consisted of 25 items. Many variables were included such as the gender of the instructors, experience, and qualification.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the questionnaire reliability, the researcher applied it to a pilot sample of (20) instructors excluded of the study sample in the same three universities with a two-week period between the first and second time it was distributed. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using correlation coefficient and it was found 0.91 which is suitable for conducting such a study.

Procedures of the Study

A questionnaire about challenges facing instructors at Princess Alia University College when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds was given to 100 instructors (49 males, and 51 females). After that the researcher collected the questionnaires and collected data, and then this data was analyzed statistically.

Statistical Analysis

The results were analyzed for each item in the questionnaire using suitable statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation. The researcher also used figures to clarify the results more.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges facing instructors at three Jordanian universities: Al Balqa Applied University, Al Zaytoonah University, and Mutah University when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds, and also to know the effect of gender, experience, and qualification of instructors on their point of view. A questionnaire was distributed among 100 instructors, 49 males and 51 females at the three universities. Means and standard deviations and T-test were used to analyze the results.

To answer the first question about the challenges facing instructors: What are the challenges facing English language instructors at Jordanian Universities when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds from their point of view? A questionnaire was distributed among them and means and standard deviation were calculated. Results were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows there are statistically significant differences in English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds at the universities of Al Balqa, Al Zaytoonah and Mutah. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (100) instructors about their point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that question 22 got the highest mean which was (4.63); question 11 comes next with a mean of (3.97).

Table 1: English language instructors' point of view about challenges facing them when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	4.61	.698
Q2	4.49	.715
Q3	4.42	.805
Q4	4.49	.858
Q5	4.33	.848
Q6	4.32	.767
Q7	4.59	.693
Q8	4.51	.732
Q9	4.18	.907
Q10	4.43	.877
Q11	3.97	1.000
Q12	4.23	.884
Q13	4.47	.905
Q14	4.46	.880
Q15	4.30	.837
Q16	4.41	.806
Q17	4.47	.759
Q18	4.39	.879
Q19	4.54	.741
Q20	4.44	.784
Q21	4.33	.945
Q22	4.63	.679
Q23	4.52	.755
Q24	4.54	.672
Q25	4.42	.812
QALL	4.42	.584

Standard deviation for question 22 was (0.679) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for question 11 was nearly the same; it was (1.000) which is also statistically significant.

It is clear in Diagram 1 that the mean of question 22 was the highest mean, question 1 comes next. The mean of the (4, 8, 19, and 24) are nearly the same, so English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds is positive.

To answer the second question about English language instructors point of view and gender: Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their gender (Male, Female)? Means and standard deviations were computed and Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 shows there are statistically significant differences due to gender variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (100) English language instructors about their point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Means and

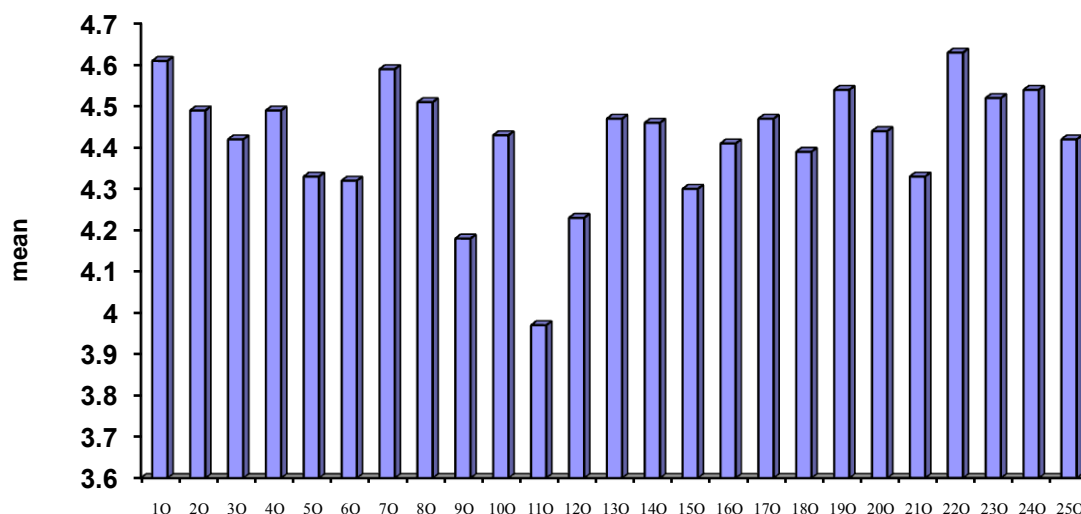


Diagram 1: English language instructors' point of view about challenges they face when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to gender variable

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	49	4.31	.685	-2.542	168	.012
Female	51	4.53	.425			

standard deviations were calculated and results show that female instructors got a higher mean than male instructors which was (4.53, and 4.31) respectively; this indicates that the gender have an effect on instructors' point of view.

Standard deviation for female instructors was (0.425) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for male instructors was higher; it was (0.685) which is also statistically significant. So, **Table 2** shows there are statistically significant differences due to gender variable in favor of females.

Diagram 2 shows that male instructors got lower positive point of view about the challenges they are facing when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds.

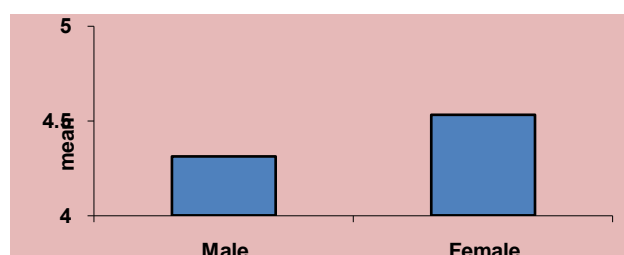


Diagram 2: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to gender variable

To answer the third question about instructors' point of view and experience: Are there any statistically

significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their experience (less than 5 years, 5 years or above)? Means and standard deviations were computed and **Table 3** shows the results.

Table 3 shows there are statistically significant differences due to experience variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (100) English language instructors about their point of view about challenges they are facing when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that English language instructors whose experience less than 5 years got a lower mean than English language instructors whose experience above 5 years which was (4.26, and 4.55) respectively; this indicates that experience have an effect on instructors' point of view.

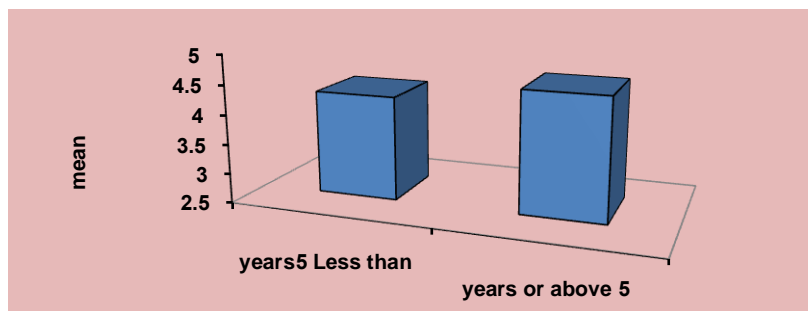
Standard deviation for English language instructors whose experience less than 5 years was (0.722) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for English language instructors whose experience above 5 years was lower; it was (0.385) which is also statistically significant. So, **table 3** shows there are statistically significant differences due to experience variable in favor of five years or above.

Diagram 3 shows that English language instructors whose experience is 5 years or above got more positive point of view about challenges they are facing when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds than English language instructors whose experience less than 5 years.

To answer the fourth question about English language instructors' point of view and their qualification: Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of view of English language instructors at Jordanian Universities about challenges facing them due to their qualification (Master degree,

Table 3: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to experience variable

Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Less than 5 years	47	4.26	.722	-3.387	168	.001
5 years or above	53	4.55	.385			

**Diagram 3:** Means, standard deviations and t-test according to experience variable

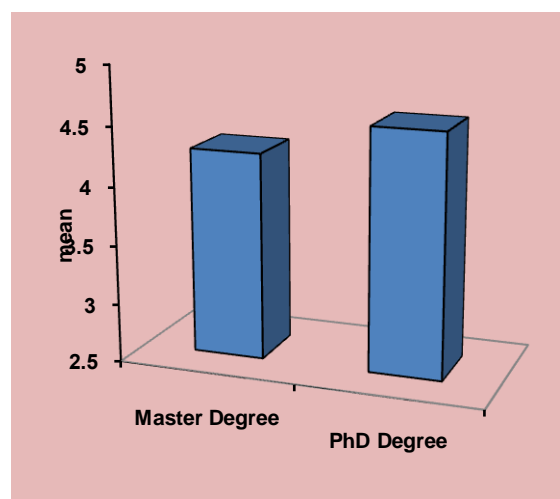
PhD)? Means and standard deviations were computed and table 4 shows the results.

Table 4 shows there are statistically significant differences due to qualification variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (100) English language instructors about their point of view about challenges they are facing when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that instructors who hold PhD degree got a higher mean than instructors who hold Master degree which was (4.47, and 4.22) respectively; this indicates that qualification have an effect on English language instructors' point of view.

Standard deviation for instructors who hold PhD degree was (0.482) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for instructors who hold Master degree was higher; it was (0.853) which is also not statistically significant. So, table 4 shows there are statistically significant differences due to qualification variable in favor of instructors who hold PhD degree.

So, Table 4 shows there are statistically significant differences in English language instructors' point of view due to qualification variable in favor of instructors who hold PhD degree.

Diagram 4 shows that instructors who hold PhD degree got more positive point of view about challenges they are facing when dealing with students of different sociolinguistic backgrounds than instructors who hold Master degree.

**Diagram 4:** Means, standard deviations and t-test according to qualification variable**Table 4:** Means, standard deviations and t-test according to qualification variable

Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Master Degree	25	4.22	.853	2.299	168	.023
PhD	75	4.47	.482			

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that sociolinguistic competence offers more insights in learning a language. Problems may arise for students' who may not be familiar with the various context of language use. By means of getting acquainted with the various cultures of Englishes and updating their knowledge about language learning, students may be better able to accomplish the goals of engaging themselves in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purpose. It is important that the English language instructors in Jordan be familiar with sociolinguistics. Teaching language is not just about learning the rudiments of the language but also various cultural refinements. Students must be made aware of formal and informal language use. They should be knowledgeable as to appropriate expressions for different context. Students must be mindful as to when they can resort to colloquial language and when formality is necessary. Lastly students

need to be made aware that mastering English does not mean acquiring native proficiency but rather having universal intelligibility.

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