



Research Article

Language-Related Communication Stress Among Yemeni Student Diaspora in Karnataka, India

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Abstract

Foreign students, who get admission to various universities and educational institutions in various countries, undergo immense stress and struggles due to socio-linguistic and cultural barriers. Though this gets diluted in the long-run, the problems can be easily minimized. The present study looks in to the problems faced by Yemeni student diaspora in India, and as a case study in Karnataka, a southern state. The personal life, social life and especially the student life is studied based on their reactions to various statements on stress. The study found that Yemeni students undergo tremendous pressures and stress as a foreign student, due to lack of language skills, special accents, and use of native language by people they interact. The researcher suggests training in linguistic skills, openness and hard work as solutions.

Introduction

Language is the ability to write, speak and understand spoken and written words. Its mastery helps people communicate among themselves, across cultures and

countries. Effective communication helps people to transfer information using words, sounds, signs, or behaviour to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings (Rabiah, 2012).

English as an international language is the medium of instruction in universities and other higher educational institutions to encourage overseas admissions. However, this provision does not help foreign students who rarely use English for their daily communication. For example, most of the Yemeni students with their comparatively poor English competency fail adequately in communicating with teachers, officers and class mates. Working together in groups for workshops, seminars, projects and presentations becomes a problem for them. The accent and style become another major issue (Ahmed, 2018).

Yemeni students in hundreds flock into Karnataka, a southern state in India which is famous for its educational institutions, climate and living conditions. The cultural, linguistic and educational problems these students face is not researched well.

The style of speaking, writing and pronunciation creates a communication gap between the Yemeni students and others when they come to learn in the Indian states. The study results will help in suggesting some practical solutions in order to help them continue their studies in India.

Research Problem and Objective

The problem which is studied here was: What are the communication problems faced to by Yemeni students in Karnataka? Thus, the objective of the study was to understand the various communication problems faced by Yemeni students in Karnataka, especially which are related to pronunciation, accent and language.

Literature Review

Political, Linguistic and Cultural Background of Yemeni Students

Yemen is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the north, the red Sea to the west, the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea to the south, and Oman to the east and northeast, politically influenced by all these countries. Although Yemen's constitutionally stated capital is the city of Sana'a, the city has been under rebel control since February 2015. Because of this, Yemen's capital has been temporarily relocated to the port city of Aden, on the southern coast (Hill, 2017) Taking notice of political unrest in the country, in April 2015, UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2216, asking the aggressors to surrender and return to UN-facilitated political talks (UN, 2021).

The right of education for all citizens is ensured in Yemen through the government schools and educational institutions to wipe out illiteracy among its population. Yemen has about 30 million of people scattered widely over often difficult terrain. Among them 62 percent live in rural areas where educational facilities are poor. About 38 percent live in cities that has abundant opportunity to continue with higher education (World Bank Data, 2020).

Arabic is predominantly used for communication and education in Yemen. English is a foreign language in Yemen. It has been taught to students from the 7th grade. The traditional method of teaching English does not guarantee their speaking efficiency. All they know about language is some grammar as well as some words. Having three hours a week only in six years to learn English inside classrooms is insufficient for students to learn a foreign language.

Most of the aspiring Yemeni students travel to other countries; to seek university degrees are poor in English. Al-Sohbani (2013) states that Yemeni students hardly speak English and face difficulties to express themselves in real life situations.

Abdul Haq (1982) revealed that, "One of the linguistic areas in which students in the secondary cycle commit errors, is in the writing skill". Further he adds, "There are general outcries about the continuous deterioration of the standards of English proficiency of students among school teachers, university instructors and all who are concerned with English language teaching. In support of Abdul Haq's view, Zughoul and Taminian (1984) observed that Jordanian students to commit serious lexical errors while communicating in English.

In the Sudan, Kambal (1980) found errors in three types of free compositions written by first year Sudanese University students. The study gives an account of the major syntactic errors in the verb phrase and the noun phrase made by these students in an attempt to improve the quality of the remedial English program in the context of the Arabization in Sudan.

In Yemen, the situation is almost the same as in the other Arab countries. Abbad (1988) admits the weakness of Yemeni learners of English and explores that in spite of the low proficiency level in English, most applicants are accepted into the department. This is what happens in most of the Arab universities. English language departments accept high school graduates without taking into consideration their proficiency level.

Further, another important area of difficulty that Arab learners of English have is communication. Arab learners find it difficult to communicate freely. This may be due to the methods of language teaching, or the learning environment.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Cohen (2011) pointed out that barriers to effective communication can retard or distort the message and intention of the message being conveyed which may result in failure of the communication process or an effect that is undesirable. These include filtering, selective perception, information overload, emotions, language, silence, communication apprehension, gender differences and political correctness.

Language as a Barrier

Megan (2015) states that communication barriers are real problem facing people living in foreign countries. These barriers are shown in their homesickness, unwilling to attend classes, time zone annoyances, feeling like an outsider and language difficulties and cross-cultural barriers.

Methodology

The study was conducted as a case study among the Yemeni students in Karnataka state, India. As the researcher had no list of students, using Linear snow ball sampling method 100 respondents were selected. Each respondent helped the researcher to find more respondents for this study. The data was collected though a pre-tested questionnaire filled up by the researcher through telephone interview. Likert scale was used to gather respondent’s reactions to statements. The data was analysed using measures of central tendency.

Results and Discussions

The research sought to understand communication problems among the Yemeni student Diaspora in Karnataka, with regard to their communication difficulties related to pronunciation, accent and language (Table 1)

Analysing the agree and strongly agree reactions to the statements, showed that 46 respondents strongly agreed that

they felt frustrated when teachers conducted classes or spoke in their native language ie. Kannada which they never understood. Further 27 agreed to the statement too. Thus majority (73%) supported the statement.

About 67 students were saddened when their classmates laughed at them when they made a cultural or language mistake. As classmates spoke in their native language 62 students left uneasy and felt left alone. Fig. 1 shows the reactions in general showed a high frustration level among Yemeni students.

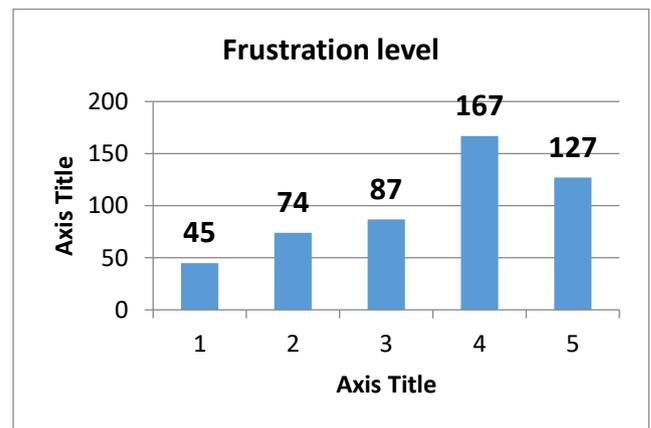


Fig.1: Frustration level among respondents

Table 1: Communication Problems during Education (N=100)

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel left out in the class when teachers teach in high level English.	11	20	11	38	20
I feel sad when teachers teach in Kannada.	11	8	8	27	46
I feel offended when all classmates speak in Kannada.	8	10	20	33	29
I often don't understand what to do regarding assignments and seminars.	10	26	12	35	17
My classmates try to avoid me	18	16	23	34	9
I find it difficult to interact with teachers due to my fear of not using the right words to speak with formally.	9	29	15	26	21
I often feel left out alone in my class	16	21	23	24	16
Always I don't find help from classmates because they might feel shy, scared or less confident to speak English with me.	12	22	18	35	13
I feel angry/less confident when my classmates often laugh at me when I make any cultural or linguistic mistake.	6	12	15	36	31
I feel difficult to communicate with office staff.	14	12	19	27	28
Language related frustration, stress and sadness (Total)	115	176	164	315	230
	(11.5%)	(17.6%)	(16.4%)	(31.5%)	(23%)

Table 2: Communication problems due to accent and local language learning

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I can't understand local people's English accent, neither can they understand mine.	8	20	25	29	18
I find difficulties in pronouncing most of the words of the local language here.	8	12	22	34	24
People laugh at my English accent	13	19	15	30	23
I get into trouble when I need to purchase something but people cannot understand what I say either in English or in their own language.	5	5	19	44	27
I feel depressed because it is very tough to learn the local language though I need it.	11	18	6	30	35
Accent and local language related stress	45 (9%)	74 (14.8%)	87 (17.4%)	167 (33.4%)	127 (25.4%)

Table 2 shows the stress level Yemeni students felt during various communication contexts. About 44 percent students agreed and 27 percent strongly agreed (Total 71%) that they underwent stress when they could not ask and get what they wanted as language barrier existed between vendors and the students. Mastering the local language seemed a tough nut to 65 percent of them. Laughing at the accent and not following the accent was a big trouble to more than 50 percent. The total stress level is presented in Fig. 2.

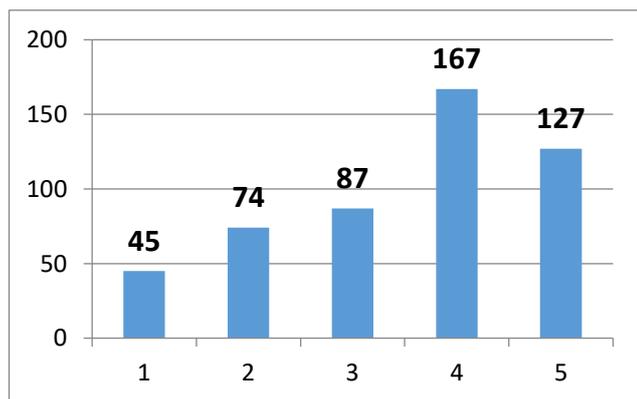


Fig. 2: Language Related Stress level among respondents

When each of the reaction to the 15 statements was assigned a value (Strongly Agree / Disagree = 3; Agree / Disagree = 2 and Neutral = 1) the total score also was vivifying the total stress and frustration of the Yemeni student diaspora. (Strongly Agree – 1071; Agree – 964; Disagree – 500; Strongly Disagree – 480; and Neutral = 251). This is presented in Fig. 3.

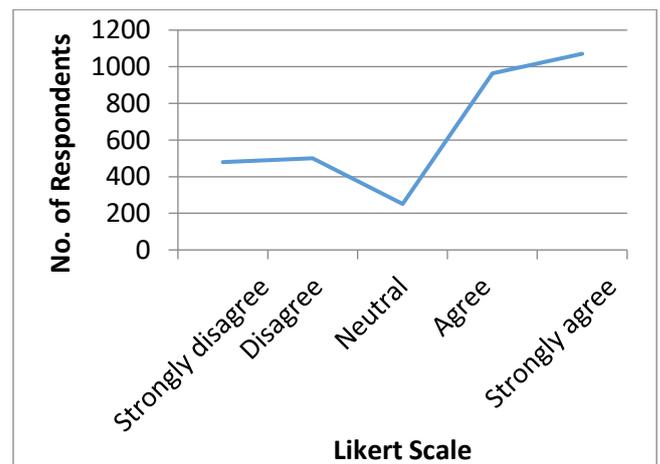


Fig 3: Total stress level

Conclusions

1. Majority Yemeni students felt that the level of spoken English used by the teachers is above their normal comprehension. Since Yemen is a conservative society with feudal societal structure, the exposure to other cultures and languages is prone to resistance due to cultural inertia. Students perceived high level of vocabulary usage as discrimination.
2. Yemeni students feel totally depressed and disturbed when Kannada is used as medium of instruction in the class. This they felt excluding, distracting and incomprehensible.
3. The linguistic barriers lead to feeling of disconnectedness, jealousy, fear, shyness, lack of confidence and loneliness. This affected

interpersonal communication and classroom communication. Lack of fluency and poor vocabulary of English language among Yemeni students interrupts their ability to express opinion or doubts in the class.

4. Less proficient communication skills of Yemeni as well as local students provide the room for to speak in English with each other.
5. Communication gap between the administrative staff and Yemeni students resulted in administrative delays which in turn affected the overall performance of Yemeni students.
6. Accent and language barriers often caused financial loss and miscommunication between people they contacted especially during shopping and social life.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the researcher suggests Yemeni education system to give more importance to English language skills. The teachers in the host countries shall use simpler English and avoid the use of native languages in the classroom that alienates foreign students from the educational communication process. Providing basic skills in the local language will make the social and personal life of the students easier. Host institutions shall provide this facility. Further, it is important for the foreign students and native students to acquire skills of understanding, friendliness and openness.

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