

# Teaching English for Police Purposes in Saudi Arabia: An Exploratory Study

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**Abstract**—This paper aims at exploring the motives of Saudi police officers to learn English. The current study reports the results of an experiment in which the researcher taught English to 24 police officers for six months, examined the reasons why they joined this session, and investigated their views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of learning English as a foreign language. Results of the study showed that this group of learners were motivated to learn English and considered it the future language whose mastery would open wide the gates of education and global communication. In addition, the participants pointed out to some shortcomings: (1) six-month sessions are boring and not very useful; (2) participants in the session were not a homogenous group and some of them were not serious about learning; and (3) the Police Training City, the location where the session is usually held, is not an adequate setting for learning. To overcome these shortcomings the participants suggested several solutions that include limiting the duration of English language sessions to three months only, restricting admission in such sessions to serious learners who, preferably, have college degrees, moving English language sessions to the campus of a local university where good facilities are available.

**Index Terms**— motivation, attitudes, ESP

## I. INTRODUCTION

Productive teaching and learning a foreign language are dependent upon influential factors such as understanding the importance of positive learning attitudes and the types of motivation students need to learn a foreign language successfully (Engin, 2009). Previous studies concluded that motivation and attitudes towards learning a foreign or second language are significant affective characteristics that can facilitate the process of L2 learning (Ellis, 1997). A prominent framework to investigate motivation and attitudes in second and foreign language learning is the socio-educational model of second language acquisition pioneered by R.C. Gardner. In this framework Gardner proposed that proficiency in a second language is caused directly by virtue of certain factors like motivation and attitudes to learning that help students achieve higher performance in L2 since they exhibit the desire to learn the second language when interacting with a particular language learning situation (Gardner, 2006). This paper reports the results of an exploratory study that examined the motivation and attitudes to learning English of 24 police officers enrolled in a six-month English language session held in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

According to the socio-educational model of second language acquisition, three basic variables are behind the mechanism of L2 learning from a social psychological perspective: motivation, integrativeness, and attitudes towards the learning situation (Gardner, 1985). Within this framework L2 motivation is defined as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (Gardner, 1985, 10). This definition is related to the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second/foreign language. Motivation is divided into two types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to “the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community” while instrumental motivation refers to the desire “to gain some social or economic reward through L2 achievement, thus referring to a more functional reason for language learning” (Norris-Holt & Shukutoku, 2001). The two types of motivation have been considered key factors that influence the rate and success of L2 learning and compensate for deficiencies in language aptitude and learning (Ely, 1986).

Students' attitudes to learning are significant aspects that can enhance their progress. Attitude refers to “an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent” (Gardner, 1985, 9). It is important to examine the learners' attitudes to learning “in the sense that if a student feels alienated and disengaged from the learning contexts in school, his or her potential to master fundamental skills and concepts and develop effective learning skills is likely to be reduced” (OECD, 2004, 110). Many educators in the field of language learning proposed that teachers should try to understand what inspires students and explore what they find difficult when they learn L2 (Merisuo-Storm, 2007). For example, teachers should consider the learners' negative attitudes and how they can be improved to create successful experiences that will enhance their learning (Hedge, 2000).

## II. CASE STUDIES

There are many studies that aimed to assess EFL and ESL students' motivation and attitudes to language learning. For example, Liu (2007) investigated Chinese university students' attitudes towards and motivation to learn English and their correlations with students' English proficiency. The study concluded that the students had positive attitudes toward learning English and were highly motivated to study it, and that their attitudes and motivation were positively correlated with their English proficiency. Some other studies examined the different roles of the affective factors in second language learning situations and foreign language learning situations (Ehrman et al, 2003; Humphreys & Spratt, 2008; Dörnyei, 2010). It has been emphasized that in ESL situations there are opportunities to master the target language through direct exposure to L2 community which may improve the learners' attitudes to and increase the motivations to learn the target language. Frequent interaction with native speakers of the target language, in addition to formal instruction in the host environment or in a multilingual setting, offers an advantage for ESL learners to speed up their L2 learning process. Foreign language situations lack this advantage because there is no target language community to interact with (Olshtain et al., 1990).

Previous studies on Arab students learning English revealed various results. For example, Arab ESL students learning English in the United States showed no integrative motivation to learn English. Rather, they were instrumentally motivated to learn English to meet the language requirements set by schools they want to join. These results indicated the significance of promoting more positive intercultural attitudes among Arab learners towards the language community in which they live (Suliman, 1993). Another study examined the motivation and attitudes of a group of 223 Arab students who pursued their higher education in the United States. The study explored the influence of direct contact with the American culture on the motivation and attitudes of those Arab learners towards English. The study concluded that direct intergroup contact with native speakers, in most of the cases, promoted the development of positive attitudes towards the American culture and high motivation to learn English (Kamal & Maruyama, 1990).

Several studies that surveyed Arab students in foreign language contexts revealed that instrumental motivation is the primary factor for learning English. Al-Shalabi (1982), for example, found that Kuwaiti EFL students were learning English for instrumental purposes. In particular, the majority of the surveyed subjects in that study mentioned that they were learning English "to be an educated person," "to get higher degrees," and "to get a better job." Other studies concluded that attitudes of EFL students towards learning English are highly influenced by the need for English for future careers. Malallah (2000) investigated the attitudes of 409 Kuwaiti college students towards learning English. He found that students of science and arts had positive attitudes towards learning English whereas students of Islamic studies did not have such positive attitudes. Malallah concluded that the students who do not need English to get a job have less positive attitudes towards learning English.

Likewise, Saudi college students showed positive attitudes towards the utility of English (Congreve, 2005). In a study that examined 179 Saudi students enrolled at King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, most surveyed students noted that they liked English which is an indicator of a source for instrumental motivation. Alabed Alhaq and Smadi (1996) conducted a study to look at the attitudes of 1,176 university Saudi students representing all universities in the country towards English as a tool of Westernization and its effect on national identity and religious commitment. The results of that study revealed that those students felt learning English is a religious and a national duty among Saudis. Moreover, the participants believed the use of English does not make them Westernized, neither weakens their national identity, nor corrupts their religious commitment (Alabed Alhaq & Smadi, 1996).

Research in the field of English for specific purposes (ESP) indicated that ESP students tend to learn English for utilitarian purposes to meet their job requirements (Alhuqbani, 2005). This means that ESP is a goal directed kind of language learning where students are not learning a certain language for its own sake, but because there is a need for its exploitation in the workplace which provides them with a certain motivation (Ibrahim, 2010). Accordingly, ESP can be considered an approach to language teaching "in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, 19). Successful syllabus design in ESP contexts, for example, should be based on a thorough needs analysis process where the learners' attitudes to learning and their necessities are accommodated (Liuoliene & Metiuniene, 2006).

Alhuqbani (2009) found that Saudi police officers are interactively motivated to learn English. In particular, the majority of the surveyed police officers mentioned that they want to learn English because it enables them to think and behave like native speakers of English; helps them recognize the lifestyle of its speakers; enables them to meet and communicate with native speakers, and because English can facilitate the process of getting new friends from English-speaking countries. Results of the same study revealed that Saudi police officers are also instrumentally motivated to learn English for a variety of reasons. Most of them felt using English is important in their higher academic studies and work fields. They thought that a person incapable of communicating in English is uneducated, and indicated that knowledge of English helps them perform their jobs effectively.

The same study indicated that Saudi police officers had positive attitudes towards learning English. In particular, most of the surveyed police officers indicated that they could benefit from mingling with people who speak English and that the process of communicating in English would be simplified if learners get to know those who speak English as their first language. They thought that the experiences of those who speak English had contributed to the development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the industrial and technical aspects. In addition, Saudi police officers showed favorable attitudes towards learning English based culture. In particular, they called for the adaptation of cultural

aspects in textbooks that contribute to the development of the necessary skills in learning English which reflected a high level of awareness of the importance of teaching English through its culture.

This is an exploratory study investigating the motives of 24 Saudi police officers to learn English. The paper examines the reasons why they joined an English language session for six months, their views regarding the session, and their suggestions of how to avoid shortcomings of their learning process. The paper concludes with several recommendations to improve the situation of similar sessions in the future.

### III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because police officers are the focus of investigation since only a few formal studies exist that addressed the situation of teaching English in military settings in Saudi Arabia. The current study reports the results of an experiment in which the researcher taught English to a group of police officers for six months. Educators and researchers should use these results to make decisions that improve the status of teaching English for police purposes. This study is expected to encourage further studies about the subject of teaching English for specific purposes and to help other researchers determine the best research design, data collection method and selection of subjects. More particularly, the data from this investigation provide insights to educators and researchers about how police officers learn English in military settings; what impacts their motivation to learn a foreign language; what challenges can negatively affect their learning, and what strategies can be used to overcome those challenges.

### IV. METHODS

The current research investigates the attitudes of a group of Saudi police officers ( $N=24$ ) towards studying English and how motivated they are to learn English for specific purposes. The police officers who participated in this study were from the Public Security sector. They were all adults, with ages ranging from 25 to 42. The researcher taught *Writing* to the participants for four hours weekly during the whole session that extended for six months. This session was the first-of-its-kind that any of the participants attended. The participants varied in their education level. Some of them were high school graduates while some others attended colleges before they joined the police. The session started at the beginning of January and finished at the end of June, 2009 covering 21 weeks of teaching, a one-week spring break, and two weeks of exams. The participants had to come early in the morning to the Training City to engage in some sort of military warm-up exercises before classes begin.

### V. INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data for this research have been collected through a five-question survey that the researcher designed to explore the participants' views regarding different aspects related to their experience of learning English prior to and while attending the six-month English language session sponsored by the Training City in Makkah. The five-question survey was administered at the end of the six-month English language session. During the data analysis procedure, the researcher identified patterns and themes in the participants' responses. Content analysis of this study indicated that the participants had both positive and negative experiences with the enrollment in this English language session. The survey questions and the participants' responses are as follows:

#### 1. Do you want to learn English? Why?

All informants mentioned they were interested in learning English for different reasons. All of them emphasized the fact that English is the number 1 spoken language in the world. Many mentioned they wanted to learn English for communication purposes. In particular, some informants referred to their desire to communicate with non-Arabic-speaking residents who work in Saudi Arabia. This indicates a positive attitude towards non-Saudis who work in this country. Other informants expressed their interest in getting in touch with other cultures through reading books and materials published in English. Moreover, learning English helps some informants have more fun. One of the informants mentioned he wanted to learn English to understand movies and do better in playing computer games.

Other informants pointed out the need to communicate in English in many places like hospitals, companies, and restaurants where Arabic is not used. Several informant mentioned that they wanted to travel abroad, but they hesitated because they did not know enough English. Some other informants expressed interest in browsing English websites to be acquainted with "different styles of news and information". All these communication-based motives to learn English suggest an increased recognition of the significance of learning English and communicating in English.

Fewer learners thought learning English is significant for job-related purposes. They mentioned they were in need to understand more English terms to use in their current work. In contrast, one of the informants mentioned he wanted to learn English to find another job. He stated: "I plan to leave my current job in the police and find a better and more respectable job which is necessary for me to achieve self-esteem."

#### 2. Why did you join the English language session?

In response to this question many informants reiterated what they mentioned when they responded to question #1. Among these responses: "I joined this session to speak good English even though we students were not taught enough English in school", "to watch TV stations that broadcast in English" and "to enhance my skills." In addition, some other informants mentioned they came to this session for different, but interesting purposes. One of the informants stated,

"joining such training session gives me a break from the daily routine of work". Another informant came here for financial benefits. He stated, "This is a six-month session and considered a good step towards earning additional monetary profits". A third informant joined the session for social motives. He wrote, "Speaking English makes me more prestigious. Besides, I don't want to look like a person who doesn't know what is going on around him in case I'm among people who speak English."

Even though all the informants emphasized the importance of learning English and the multiple advantages of being able to speak English, only a few informants stated that they joined this session for educational purposes. One of the informants mentioned he applied to this session because he intended to pursue higher studies in an English-speaking country. Three informants talked about plans to go to college. Few other informants mentioned they were there because they were willing to join more advanced English sessions after they completed this introductory session.

### **3. Did you study English after you finished high school?**

15 trainees in the English language session stated they didn't study any English after they finished high school. This explains why almost two thirds of the class had serious difficulties in fulfilling the requirements of the course. Only 6 informants mentioned they took English classes in college. They didn't give further details about the nature of those classes. Two other informants gave interesting responses to this question. They mentioned they studied English "simply" but "not officially." Such answers indicated they didn't study English formally after high school. Instead, they could have sought some kind of informal learning that didn't continue for long. Only one trainee mentioned he joined a private institute to study English formally after high school. "Now I'm a part time student in the English department at King Abdulaziz University," he explained.

### **4. Did you travel to any country where English is spoken there?**

17 of the 24 trainees mentioned that they did not travel outside Saudi Arabia which means they did not go through any situation where they needed to communicate in English. Furthermore, none of them expressed any interest in traveling abroad except one informant who mentioned he intended to go to Canada. Two of the trainees traveled to countries where English is not the official language but it is widely used. Those two informants did not mention what countries they traveled to. Only one trainee mentioned he had been to the United States and Britain where English is the first language spoken. Two informants traveled to Malaysia, one to India, and one to Switzerland.

### **5. How much did you benefit from joining this session?**

This is the question that attracted all the informants to give detailed answers. They talked about what they gained from the session, complained against several drawbacks, and offered some suggestions to deal with those drawbacks. Most trainees had positive feelings towards the English language session. Most of them indicated that they got a lot of benefit from joining the session. They expressed these feelings with phrases like "It was a good session," "I got a lot of benefit out of this session," "The session was very good in the sense that it laid the foundation for learning English the right way," and "I got benefit in refreshing my information about English that I learned in high school."

The informants talked about the specific aspects of English they learned during the session. Almost all of them mentioned that they liked studying grammar and memorizing new vocabulary. Fewer informants gave details about more aspects of language they felt they mastered like the basics of listening and speaking, sentence formation, abbreviations, and how to understand reading passages. One of the trainees wrote:

My knowledge of English was limited. Now I made good progress in grammar and writing sentences correctly and reading correctly and speaking more fluently. I wish I took this session long time ago.

Along with the positive feelings that most trainees expressed, there were few trainees who had less positive feelings about the benefit of the session. One of the trainees mentioned that he "had little benefit only." Another trainee complained that he "had no benefit." A third trainee had a similar response but gave reasons why he had that feeling. He wrote:

There was not much benefit from this session. We learned in six months what we can learn in two months. Learners want to feel they can speak English in a better way. They want to feel a difference in their ability to use English. Most trainees paid more attention to how they pass the course than getting the real benefit of improving their English.

A unique response came from a trainee who liked studying Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Grammar, but he did not like studying Writing. He mentioned:

I got benefit from Reading, Grammar, Listening and Speaking, but I did not get any benefit from the Writing course. The Writing teacher was not bad but students were not a homogenous group. I had the hope of learning how to write an essay but the sharp differences among trainees made it very hard to make a good progress in taking the necessary steps to learn the basics of essay writing.

The trainees, especially those who had less positive feelings towards the session, talked about some drawbacks related to the session and offered several suggestions on how to deal with those drawbacks. Seven informants complained that there was no specific curriculum designed for the session. This type of criticism could mean that the books assigned for the different courses did not belong to one series which distracted the trainees' attention. In addition, the trainees could have targeted the Writing course with this comment because the Writing teacher, the researcher himself, decided not to continue using the writing textbook that is part of the same series, *Interactions I*. The researcher took this decision because this particular textbook introduces writing at the paragraph level which is beyond the trainees' level of comprehension since they struggle to write even simple sentences.

It was clear throughout the six-month session that the trainees did not feel comfortable studying in a military training city where aspects of military life are given priority over educational aspects. The trainees had to sign in every morning in a routine attendance-taking process which seemed annoying and frustrating to them. Four trainees suggested that the session should be held somewhere else to be away from the military atmosphere. One of the trainees mentioned: "The way the military training city dealt with both students and teachers was negative." Another trainee complained against the ill-equipped classrooms that did not help them learn better. He stated: "This place is not good for learning because it lacks any instructional media."

Another drawback is related to the individual differences among the trainees, most of whom were weak. It seems that good students did not have a fair opportunity to learn much. Weak students were frustrated because other students were better than they were and because they felt they could not catch up and be at par with good students. Furthermore, several trainees were not serious at all. They made it clear from the beginning that they joined the session not to learn English but to get rid of the daily routine of work. What made the situation worse is that about 25% percent of the trainees' salaries were deducted for the six months without being informed and without their consent. In other words, this decision was not made clear to the trainees before the session began. When they discovered that they get less than what they should get monthly they were disappointed, which made them "hate the session and hate learning English" as one of them stated.

No doubt that such salary deduction discouraged the students and killed any motivation they might have had at the beginning of the session. Moreover, the researcher observed that the trainees lost their little motivation because of other reasons. Some students did not do well throughout the session because it was hard for them to be students again after years of disrupted schooling. They did not have the motivation and/or the power to act like students, to take notes, to do homework, or to answer questions. Another factor that could have contributed to the demise of motivation of some trainees was that they discovered that most of the teachers were younger than they were which marked an odd, or even unacceptable situation in the Eastern mentality. The widespread image of a teacher in Eastern cultures is that the teacher is always older than his students since old age stands for more knowledge and wisdom.

There were other points of criticism related to the performance of the teachers. One of the comments stated: "Some teachers were not serious." It was a short comment without any explanation. This comment might refer to cases of teacher absence that happened during the session. It might also refer to the way teachers tackled classroom instruction which supports another comment made by a good student: "Teachers taught the class as a homogeneous group which negatively affected the good students." Actually, when college professors came to teach police workers they were shocked at their performance and got stuck with them because they were not the type of students those professors were used to deal with, which made professors frustrated and maybe unserious. Among other comments related to teaching is this indirect complaint made by another good student:

It is good to select good and well-qualified teachers to teach us but they were not the appropriate choice for us. College professors are used to teach a certain type of students, college students, who are very much different from us. We started from an early stage because of the individual differences. Had we begun at an advanced stage we would have certainly made better progress.

## VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that the police officers who enrolled in this English language session were motivated to learn English and perceived English as a useful language in their life. The participants' responses also showed how English is considered the language of the future by the young generation, a language whose mastery would open wide the gates of education and global communication. The participants' input indicated some shortcomings in such learning sessions. Almost all of them complained that six-month sessions are boring and not very useful, which means there is a need to reconsider the duration of these sessions. It seems that three-month sessions are better and more appropriate for the trainees.

Who should join English language sessions is another significant aspect that should be reconsidered. On the one hand, the participants were not a homogenous group because they came from diverse learning backgrounds and different educational levels. One way to overcome this drawback is limiting admission to such sessions to police officers who have college degrees. On the other hand, several participants were not serious about learning English. They came to the session to take a break from work. Careless participants should be strictly dealt with from the beginning and, in some cases, should be dismissed.

A third downside was related to the location where these sessions were held. The Police Training City is a very inadequate setting to hold academic sessions. Basically, it is a military base designed for training newly-recruited soldiers. The few classrooms available are not good enough to teach advanced skills. Teachers of Listening and Speaking always complained that the sound system and head phones do not function properly. Many participants suggested that English language sessions should be held in the campus of Umm Al-Qura University, a big Higher Education Institution in town, where there are better facilities and equipments.

It is very important to take the participants' input into consideration. In any educational setting, student attitudes towards learning, good or bad, affect their outlook toward learning throughout life. Once educators uncover student attitudes on learning, the challenge is how to use this information to shape positive attitudes. The participants in these

English language sessions are adult students who can see the future results of their learning, such as seeking promotion or finding a better job. Therefore, participants' suggestions should be considered to create several changes to improve the situation of teaching English for police purposes and to enhance the correlation between the participants' motivation and successful second language acquisition.

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