

English Language Proficiency in Jordan : Educational, Socio-Economic and Other	العنوان:
دراسات - العلوم الإنسانية	المصدر:
الجامعة الأردنية - عمادة البحث العلمي	الناشر:
Mukattash, Lewis	المؤلف الرئيسي:
مج 7, 2ع	المجلد/العدد:
نعم	محكمة:
1980	التاريخ الميلادي:
يونيو	الشهر:
7 - 31	الصفحات:
657021	رقم MD:
بحوث ومقالات	نوع المحتوى:
HumanIndex	قواعد المعلومات:
تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية، الأحوال الاجتماعية، الأحوال الاقتصادية	مواضيع:
http://search.mandumah.com/Record/657021	رابط:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
IN JORDAN :
EDUCATIONAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND OTHER
FACTORS

by
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ملخص

الهدف من هذا البحث هو تحديد المستوى اللغوي لمجموعات مختلفة من الطلبة الأردنيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الانكليزية، وبيان العلاقة بين تحصيل الطلبة في اللغة الانكليزية وبعض المتغيرات التربوية والاجتماعية والجغرافية، وبالتحديد المتغيرات التالية: ١ - نوع المدرسة الثانوية (حكومية، أهلية محلية، أهلية أجنبية)، ٢ - التخصص في المرحلة الثانوية (علمي، أدبي، تجاري، صناعي، ترميض)، ٣ - المنطقة الجغرافية التي أنهى الطالب فيها دراسته الثانوية (المحافظة / اللواء)، ٤ - المرحلة التي ابتدأ الطالب فيها بدراسة اللغة الانكليزية (الروضة، الأول ابتدائي، الخامس ابتدائي)، ٥ - سن الطالب، ٦ - جنس الطالب، ٧ - الوضع الوظيفي لوالدي الطالب، ٨ - عدد أفراد أسرة الطالب، ٩ - استعمال الطالب للغة الانكليزية خارج المدرسة، ١٠ - الزيارات التي قام بها الطالب لبلدان لغتها الأم الانكليزية.

بنيت هذه الدراسة على اختبار موضوعي في قواعد اللغة الانكليزية يحتوي على ١٥٠ سؤالاً تغطي احد عشر مجالاً من مجالات النحو المختلفة، هذا وقد تم استخراج معامل الصدق للاختبار بواسطة «صدق الفرضية» حيث وجد أن قيمة ت الاحصائية تساوي ٨,٨، ومستوى دلالة التمييز ١٪. أما معامل الثبات للاختبار فقد

تم استخراجه بطريقتين: (أ) الطريقة النصفية حيث استخدمت معادلة بيرسون للارتباط وكان معامل الارتباط ٠,٩٥، (ب) معادلة كودر - ريتشاردسون رقم ٢٠ حيث وجد أن معامل الارتباط يساوي ٠,٩٨.

تم تطبيق الاختبار على ٤٨٣٥ طالبا وطالبة موزعين على النحو التالي: (أ) ٩٤٠ طالبا وطالبة من الجامعة الأردنية، (ب) ٥١٣ طالبا وطالبة من معاهد المعلمين والمعلمات، (ج) ٣٣٨٢ طالبا وطالبة من ٤٨ مدرسة حكومية وخاصة موزعة على جميع المحافظات والألوية في الأردن.

هذا وقد تم تحديد ودراسة العلاقة بين مستوى تحصيل الطلبة اللغوي وكل من المتغيرات المذكورة في الفقرة الأولى من هذا الملخص، والجداول المرقمة (I-XI) في هذا البحث تبين نوعية هذه العلاقة.

ABSTRACT

The broad objective of this study is to explore the English language proficiency of various age-groups of students in Jordan, and to discover and describe any variation in English proficiency according to the following educational, socio-economic, and demographic variables: (i) district of schooling; (ii) type of secondary school: public, national, private, foreign private; (iii) secondary certificate specialization: science, arts, commerce, industry, nursing; (iv) length of English study; (v) use of English; (vi) visits abroad; (vii) age; (viii) sex; (ix) parents' occupation; (x) family size.

The study is based on an objective test in English grammar comprising 150 items covering eleven different areas of English grammar. The validity and the reliability of the test were computed and were found to be very high indeed.

The test was given to 4835 students distributed as follows: (1) 940 from the University of Jordan, (ii) 513 from five teachers' training institutes, (iii) 3382 from 48 secondary schools in 13 geographical areas.

The relationship between the students' proficiency in English and each of the variables listed in the first paragraph of this abstract was established as can be seen in the Tables (I-XI) in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research incorporated in this study is the offspring of a larger research project on error analysis carried out by the author over the last three years. The aims of the research project that gave rise to this study may be summed up as follows:

(i) The validation of the survey instruments and the findings of previous studies on error analysis (see Mukattash, 1977, 1978, 1980, forthcoming).

(ii) Establishing the existence of **competence** errors in the grammar of Jordanian learners of English as opposed to **performance** mistakes caused by situational constraints of test administration and other extraneous factors.

(iii) Explaining the sources and causes of grammatical errors which are typical of Jordanian learners of English.

To this end, an objective test informed by the results of previous studies in the field of error analysis (see Mukattash, 1977, 1978, 1980, forthcoming) was set up. The first version of the test consisted of 360 multiple-choice items that were tried out for purposes of pretesting and item analysis on 200 students representing most faculties in the University of Jordan. All items were analysed to determine their effectiveness in terms of three criteria: item difficulty, item discrimination and the effectiveness of the distractors. Only those items which proved to be statistically acceptable were included in the final version of the test; that is to say that they were neither too hard nor too easy and that they discriminated between good students and poor students. Furthermore, items that included nonfunctioning and malfunctioning distractors were all excluded from the final version.

The final version of the test ⁽¹⁾ consisted of 150 items covering eleven different areas of English grammar: viz. 1. Verbals (35 items); 2. Modals (9 items); 3. Prepositions (24 items); 4. Adverbs (12 items); 5. Quantifiers (12 items); 6. Articles (15 items); 7. Sentence Connectors (10 items); 8. Nominals (10 items); 9. Pronouns (6 items); 10. Relative Pronouns (8 items); 11. Adjectivals (8 items). For purposes of administration two forms of the test were typed out and put in special files. A separate answer sheet was also prepared, and it was printed on special cards for computation purposes.

The test reliability was estimated in two different ways: (i) The split-half method was used in the analysis of the answers of 100 students chosen randomly from the University of Jordan (J.U.), teacher-training institutes (T.T.I's), and public and private secondary schools. The Pearson Product-Moment coefficient of correlation was computed between the odd-and- even-numbered items and corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula, and it was found to be 0.95 before

correction and 0.97 after correction; (ii) The Kuder-Richardson reliability formula #20 was applied to the scores of 116 students chosen randomly, and the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.98. These figures indicate that the test is highly reliable.

As pointed out above, the first version of the test included 360 items covering eleven defined grammatical areas, which were informed by the results of previous studies. After the items were pretested only 150 items were retained. Those covered the eleven defined grammatical areas, which are further subdivided into various categories. In other words, the areas to be tested were explicitly defined before the test was constructed. Furthermore, the items were revised by other colleagues, and thus we might assume that the test has **content validity**. The **empirical validity** of the test, i.e. how test scores are related to some independent, outside criterion, is something we are less able to ascertain, since we know of no other test against which it could be measured for empirical validity. The General Secondary Certificate Examination in Jordan (GSCE) suggested itself as a criterion. But seeing that the stated objectives of the two tests are different, it would have been entirely unreasonable to compare the students' scores on the two tests. However, the **criterion-reference validity** of the test was computed in the following way: two groups of students were chosen from the T.T.I.'s, each group consisting of 40 students divided equally between male and female students. The first group comprised 40 first-year students not specialising in English, whereas the second group consisted of 40 second-year English majors. The hypothesis was that the performance of the second group would be higher than that of the first group. The test was given to the two groups, the means were computed and the «t» Test was used to indicate the significance of the difference between the two means. This yielded $t=8.8$, and this was significant at .01.

The test was given to 4835 students representing three main groups of the student population in Jordan: J.U., T.T.I.'s and secondary schools (final year students) all over the country. The number of students is distributed as follows: 940 from J.U., 513 from five T.T.I.'s, and 3382 from 48 secondary schools in 13 geographical areas⁽²⁾.

The first page of the answer sheet given to the examinees contained eleven questions in Arabic about the student's educational and social background. The information required of the students in these questions was as follows: (i) age, (ii) father's occupation, (iii) mother's occupation, (iv) family size, (v) school location, (vi) type of school attended, (vii) type of secondary certificate, (viii) length of exposure to English, (ix) use of English in the home, (x) visits to and study in English-speaking countries, (xi) sex.

The information referred to above was provided by the students before they began the examination itself. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the questions (i.e. those asking for educational and social information) were explained, one by one, to the students in Arabic, and were answered under the invigilators' supervision. This arrangement enabled the researcher to explain more precisely what was required.

All the social and educational data gathered from the answer sheets was coded and fed into the computer, and then correlated with the students' results in the examination. The method of correlation used was to calculate the average mark of all students who gave the same information in answer to an item in the questionnaire, and to observe the variations, checking the significance of these variations by means of the «t» Tests, which was applied to each adjacent pair of figures as appears in the tables below.

In the ensuing sections we will present all the figures obtained from the computer, and those resulting from the application of the «t» Test for each of the social and educational variables listed at the beginning of this section. All means in the tables below are given in raw scores out of a total of 150 (i.e. the number of the questions in the test). All samples are final year students from secondary schools unless stated otherwise.

2. DISTRICT OF SCHOOLING

At least one boys' school and one girls' school were visited in each directorate⁽²⁾, and from each of these a «science» stream class and an «arts» stream class were selected to take the examination. In one case, namely that of an outlying school visited in one of the directorates, there was no female science class, and in one or two other cases the female science class was considerably smaller than its male counterpart. No other irregularities in the samples were noted. Furthermore, no vocational or private schools are included in this section.

In most cases the schools visited were situated in the main towns in the directorates. Schools in outlying areas were, however, visited in the directorates of Irbid and Karak. No noticeable difference was found between these schools in the same directorate.

The following table seeks to establish the correlation between the students' competence in English and the district of schooling⁽³⁾:

Directorate	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Amman City	70.4	472	27.1	4.557 (**)
2. Mafraq	58.0	110	18.7	
3. Zerqa	56.7	157	20.3	
4. Balqa	56.4	175	19.0	
5. Amman District	55.0	127	22.2	
6. Tafileh	54.8	110	11.7	
7. Ma'an	54.6	85	15.3	
8. Jarash	52.8	136	22.0	
9. Karak	52.4	185	18.4	
10. Irbid	52.3	359	21.0	
11. Madaba	49.8	159	19.7	
12. Ajlun	49.7	123	17.9	
13. Ramatha	45.5	111	15.2	

Table (I)

As will be seen from this table, the only statistically significant difference is between the means of students in Amman City and those in Mafraq, and by implication between Amman City and all other directorates. This is not surprising as the city of Amman has the facilities and amenities to attract the best teachers, and also, being the capital, provides students with more opportunities for mixing with foreigners than anywhere else.

The difference between Amman City and other districts should not, however, be over-emphasized. As will be seen in Table (I) above, the standard deviation for the scores of the sample from Amman City (viz. 27.1) is considerably larger than for elsewhere, suggesting a wide range of scores within the sample. On further investigation, it was found out that there was a significant difference in the proficiency of two student groups within the city of Amman itself. In his sampling, the researcher took two schools with a very good reputation from a rich district of Amman and two schools from a district of a relatively lower socio-economic status. The mean for the former was found to be 75.9 and that for the latter was found to be 60.0; the value of «t» for the difference of the means between the two samples being 6.312 (significant at 1% level). Thus it will be seen that this difference (i.e. between the two groups of students in poor and rich districts in Amman) is not appreciably different from that between the city of Amman and other directorates, thus suggesting that the two schools visited in the rich district in Amman are possibly idiosyncratic⁽⁴⁾. Indeed, the good

reputation these two schools enjoy does draw to them students who are socially privileged.

Nothing else can really be deduced from Table (I) above. Although there is a significant difference between the directorate of Mafraq at the top of the table (excluding Amman City) and the directorate of Ramtha at the bottom (means 58.0 and 45.5 respectively, the value of «t» for the two means is 5.456), there is no significant difference between any adjacent pair of figures on the table, and there are no clear trends visible in the figures. For instance, it is not possible to say that schools in the north perform better than those in the south, or vice versa. One reason for this inconclusiveness is that the questionnaire on which our data is based made no allowance for student mobility; that is to say, the possibility that a student could have lived in more than one district and attended many different schools.

In conclusion, then, it needs to be said that if any clear indication of regional trends in schooling is to be obtained, a far more detailed picture needs to be built up of the students' academic history, including a list of schools attended and possibly the number of English teachers he has had and their academic qualifications and teaching experience.

3. TYPE OF SCHOOL

3.1. Public and Private Schools:

The following table lists four types of schools and compares the means of the students who were attending these schools when the test was administered⁽⁵⁾:

Type of School	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Foreign Private	112.4	141	17.8	6.389 (**)
2. National Private (I)	94.0	108	27.5	8.148 (**)
3. Public	70.4	472	27.1	11.111 (**)
4. National Private (II)	47.5	197	15.8	

Table (II)

As can be seen from this table, there are significant differences between the four types of schools listed, and following the table we can assert the following descending order of English proficiency in the various types of secondary

schools: (i) foreign private schools, (ii) national private (I) — i.e. the Islamic College, (iii) public schools, and (iv) national private (II) schools. This order yields no surprise but is worthy of a few comments.

The fact that foreign private schools come out on top is no doubt, at least partly, a reflection of the social privileges enjoyed by the students who attend these schools, as well as of the possibly superior quality of English teaching: frequently English teachers in these schools are native speakers. A further factor to be considered is the early start made in the teaching of English in these schools. All of them have chosen to have their students begin the study of English in kindergarten or in the earliest grade included in the school's curriculum and to continue to study it until graduation. Finally, many of the students in foreign private schools use English at home, mix with native speakers of English, and are likely to visit countries where English is the mother tongue.

The high mean recorded for students at the Islamic College is again partly a reflection of the social privileges enjoyed by the families who send their children to such a prestigious school. However, the comparatively large standard deviation recorded (see Table II above) indicates a wide range of marks, and this possibly indicates the variety of cultural backgrounds to be found in the school.⁽⁶⁾

Public schools appear third on Table (II) above. A detailed account of the composition of this sample is to be found in an ensuing section, so there is no need for much further comment here. It is worth noting, however, that the average mark for public schools in Amman City is considerably higher than that of other districts, and that the mean for public schools in some districts was lower than the mean of «national private schools — type II». However, it is probable that national private schools outside Amman have an even lower standard than those in Amman itself.

The low mean recorded for national private schools (type II) no doubt reflects the quality of students at these schools, and possibly of the teachers as well, many of whom are part-timers having a full-time job somewhere else. Students attending these schools are usually mature students who were unable to complete their education earlier as they failed to fulfil the requirements of public schools or were forced to leave school because of family or personal reasons. Therefore, the low mean recorded may either be due to low intelligence or to a disturbed family background. In addition, some of the students in these schools are holding down a full-time job.⁽⁷⁾ In the light of this, two other reasons for low scores can be adduced; namely, long absence from academic study, and the problem of finding time to study. However, these factors should be countered to some extent by the students' increased maturity.

3.2. Types of Public Schools:

The following table relates the students' proficiency in English to the type of public school they were attending. All the schools included in the sample are taken from Amman City. A sample was taken from technical schools visited in Irbid but is not included in the table below:

School System	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Academic	70.4	472	27.1	8.534 (**)
2. Comprehensive	53.5	241	20.4	4.211 (**)
3. Vocational ⁽⁸⁾	46.8	239	13.2	

Table (III)

This table shows the means of the grades of three student groups from the three types of public schools to be found in Amman. The schools placed in the category «Academic» are those public schools which only take students who are in the «science» and «arts» streams for the G.S.C.E.. On the other hand, «Comprehensive» schools are relatively new in Jordan and take students in most streams of the G.S.C.E.. In the sample analyzed, however, only fifteen students are included who were not in the «science» or «arts» streams. These fifteen were all in the «nursing» stream.

Table (III) above shows, as one would expect, a clear and significant gradation from «Academic» to «Comprehensive», and from «Comprehensive» to «Vocational» (see Section 4 below). It will be remembered from Section 2 above that two groups of academic schools were included in the sample for Amman City, and some readers may wonder whether the distinction between «Comprehensive» schools and those situated in poor districts in Amman is statistically significant. In fact one may wonder whether the distinction between «Academic» and «Comprehensive» schools in Amman is not caused by the two idiosyncratic academic schools⁽³⁾ referred to in Section 2 above. This is not, however, the case. First, the two comprehensive schools included in the sample here are in fact located in rich districts in Amman. Secondly, a «t» Test was carried out on the difference between the students' scores from «Academic» schools situated in poor districts and the scores of those students in the two comprehensive schools (means being 60.0 and 53.5 respectively). The value of «t» was found to be 3.029, that is to say, it is significant at 1% level.

4. SECONDARY CERTIFICATE SPECIALISATION

As mentioned in Section 1 above, the students' results were also compared with the type of their specialisation in the secondary certificate. For the sake of accuracy and consistency the whole sample in the following table is taken from Amman City:

Specialization	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Science	75.4	379	26.0	12.133 (**)
2. Arts	53.6	319	20.5	2.808 (**)
3. Commerce	48.9	190	13.2	4.767 (**)
4. Industry	38.8	49	10.7	2.846 (**)
5. Nursing	30.5	15	6.3	

Table (IV)

The means recorded in this table display a marked and significant gradation from students of science in first place to students of nursing in fifth.

This order of means displayed in the table above is not in any way surprising and reflects exactly students' calibre and preferences. Upon completing the first secondary class students are streamed into various specialisations according to their overall average in school in the first instance and then according to their preference. The best students are allowed to choose «sciences», the next best «arts», then «commerce» and finally «industry» for boys and «nursing» for girls. This type of streaming and preference reflects the social status of these specialisations. This also reflects some aspects of the educational system, in that at J.U., «science» students are allowed to study in any faculty. Similarly, «arts» students are allowed to join all faculties of human sciences including the Faculty of Commerce, and in certain cases female students can join the Faculty of Nursing. A limited number of students who study in the «commerce» or «nursing» stream at school, on the other hand, are only allowed to study their particular specialisation at J.U.. «Industry» students, meanwhile, are not allowed to enter J.U. at all. This may well change, however, as this specialisation is already becoming more popular than ever before and is attracting students with good academic records.

While the ranking in Table (IV) accurately reflects the quality of students pursuing the various categories of specialisation listed there, it is sad to see that

students of «commerce», «industry», and «nursing» should perform so poorly in English, when in fact the English language is at a premium in these specialisations. It would be advisable to give more emphasis to the teaching of English in these specialisations. At present students in these specialisations are given less instruction in English than «science» and «arts» students.

Before closing this section it is worth pointing out that our findings here are in agreement with those of a previous study, though of a smaller scale, carried out by the author a few years ago (see Mukattash, 1977).

5. LENGTH OF ENGLISH STUDY

The examinees were asked to indicate when they began studying English, either in Kindergarten, first primary or fifth primary. The means of each category of students are shown in the following table:

Class	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Kindergarten	84.6	434	31.9	3.910 (**)
2. First Primary	72.6	141	30.6	10.684 (**)
3. Fifth Primary	53.0	2795	20.6	

Table (V)

It is clear from the figures contained in this table that there is a direct relationship between the student's proficiency in English and the stage at which he began to study the language: the earlier he begins, the more proficient he will be. However, this statement needs some modification because of various factors. First, the examinees who started learning English in the kindergarten had had thirteen years of instruction in English when the test was administered, whereas those who began in the fifth primary had had only eight years of instruction in English. This factor should not be ignored, for an additional five years of instruction in English should make all the difference with respect to the students' proficiency in the language⁽⁹⁾.

Secondly, it needs to be borne in mind that most of the students who began English in kindergarten went to foreign private schools so other factors like social background and the quality of teaching no doubt impinge as well (see Section 3 above).

The only conclusion that one can draw from the trend indicated in Table (V) above is that students should begin to study English as early as possible. However, such a suggestion would be very difficult, if not impossible, to implement as at present there are not enough competent English teachers to meet even present requirements, let alone an indreased workload.

Finally, it would be interesting to see whether this reasonable proficiency in English which students who began learning English in kindergarten have is coupled with reasonable proficiency in the mother tongue. In other words, would it not be possible that proficiency in L2 is gained at the expense of that in L1? Some research is certainly needed in this area.

6. USE OF ENGLISH

Students were asked in the questionaaire to say whether they used English «usually», «sometimes», or «never» in the home. The means for each category (alternative) were then calculated. Only 26 students stated that they used English in the home «usually», and their mean turned out to be less than those who said that they used English «sometimes». In view of this the two groups of students were grouped together. The following table is self-evident:

Usage of English	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Usually / sometimes	76.6	459	30.5	9.316 (**)
2. Rarely	62.1	1008	26.2	12.279 (**)
3. Never	51.3	1919	20.4	

Table (VI)

Once again, in this table we can see a distinct deterioration in the standard of a student's English as he uses the language less and less in the home.

It may be argued that the students answered the questions inaccurately, especially those who stated that they used English «usually». In fact the invigilators did explain (in Arabic) very carefully what was meant by the use of English in the home. However, the fact that the decline in standard is so clear is an indication that they answered accurately. Moreover, even if it is conceded that students cannot accurately assess how much they themselves use English, their answers do indicate to some extent their attitude towards English.

The trends in Table (VI) above further emphasize the importance of a student's home background. Further research needs to be done in this area, but it would seem that progress in English does not depend wholly on the school, and therefore any changes which only have the school within their purview will not be effective. However, within the school it is quite probable that a more mentalistic approach to teaching, whereby a student is encouraged to think in and to use/practise his English not just in school but outside as well, would begin to yield fruit.

7. VISITS ABROAD

The following question was contained in the questionnaire and the examinees were simply required to give a «yes» or «no» answer: «**Have you visited or studied in a foreign country whose official language is English?**» The means for the two groups were calculated and the results are contained in the following table:

Visits Abroad	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Yes	99.3	116	31.8	18.745 (**)
2. No	56.5	3259	23.8	

Table (VII)

The difference between the means of the two groups is marked and the value of «t» confirms its significance. It must be admitted, however, that students were not asked to specify how long their visits had lasted, nor were they asked to specify whether they had stayed with Arab friends or with native speakers of English, and so it is difficult to tell how much tangible effect the visit would have had on the students' English. However, such visits, however short, do give some opportunity for the practice of English and are one more indication of the openness to, and familiarity with, English language, life and culture.

It ought to be mentioned, however, that it is difficult to isolate the role played by visiting a foreign country from the other factors encouraging and prospering a student in his endeavours to learn English.

8. AGE

The table below shows the means of the students according to age (in years):

Age	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
16	30.0	39	30.3	2.465 (*)
17	68.2	628	28.8	6.379 (**)
18	60.2	1619	25.7	11.349 (**)
19	48.7	804	18.0	2.473 (**)
20	45.3	205	15.5	
21	47.8	31	21.2	
22	48.1	13	13.9	
23	41.0	7	2.8	
24	36.0	6	6.3	
25	43.8	8	13.7	
> 25	52.0	13	21.2	

Table (VIII)

As will be seen from this table there appears to be a regular decline in English proficiency (at the secondary school level) between the ages of 16 and 20. It is true that the size of the sample varies considerably and that the standard deviations are large. However, the figures resulting from the application of the «t» Test (see column 5 in Table VIII above) carried out on each adjacent pair of figures show that the differences have statistical significance.⁽¹⁰⁾

The decline in English proficiency as age increases, indicated in Table (VIII) above, may be attributed to more than one factor. First, as pointed out earlier (see Section 3 above), students of foreign private schools have a higher level of proficiency in English than students at public schools. The former generally start school earlier (age four) than the latter, thus reaching the final year in their secondary education earlier, and probably accounting for the majority of students in the 16 and 17 year age ranges. Public school students, on the other hand, usually sit for the G.S.C.E. at the age of 18, and so the 18 year range can be taken as the norm (mean 60.2 out of 150).

Those students still at school at 19 and 20 and even older have probably had to repeat a class or two earlier, probably indicating below-average bright-

ness. On the other hand, the fact that a student is sitting the G.S.C.E. late could be because he started school late, perhaps at seven or eight. This is quite common in rural areas and small villages. Low performance in English would thus be attributed not only to age but also to cultural attitudes and family background.

Finally, the increased scores at 25 and over are probably due to increased motivation and emotional and intellectual maturity, the latter enabling the students to think more readily about the abstractions of grammar (see footnote 9). Admittedly, the sample here is very small indeed and no valid generalisations can be put forward. Furthermore, the variations in English proficiency shown in Table (VIII) above may be reflections of other factors, particularly intelligence, motivation and academic dedication.

9. SEX

The students' marks were also analyzed according to their sex. The results are shown in the following table:

Sex	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Female	59.1	1645	26.3	2.630 (**)
2. Male	56.8	1726	24.4	

Table (IX-a)

As can be seen from this table the difference in mean between female and male students is not very large. However, primarily because of the size of the two samples, the «t» Test showed the difference to be significant at 1% level. Thus we can argue that females are better achievers in foreign language learning than males are.

To further validate the findings in Table (IX-a) above, the scores of 194 second-year English majors from five T.T.P's were computed and analyzed according to sex. The following table is self-evident:

Sex	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Female	86.9	122	18.9	2.765 (**)
2. Male	78.2	72	24.3	

Table (IX-b)

The findings in this section also agree with those of a previous study carried out by the author (see Mukattash, 1977).

In passing it is interesting, though sad, to note the remarkably low scores of the second-year English majors at the various T.T.I's, who at the time of writing this paper will be teaching English at various primary preparatory schools all over the country. Although this issue is directly relevant to the present study (i.e. proficiency of English in Jordan), no hypothesis can be put forward in the absence of a large-scale field study that aims at assessing the proficiency of teachers of English in various stages of schooling. The authors of the **English-Language Policy Survey of Jordan** address themselves to this problem and make a number of feasible suggestions and recommendations concerning the training of English-language teachers in Jordan (see Harrison, et al, 1975: 170-185).

10 PARENTS' OCCUPATION

In this section the results are analyzed to see whether there is any correlation between the students' competence in English and their parents' occupation.

It must be pointed out, however, that the two tables in this section need to be regarded with some scepticism, for it is quite possible that some students did not specify their parents' occupation accurately, either intentionally or due to carelessness. Furthermore, it is to be noted that the standard deviation for each of the occupational categories listed in Table (X-a) and Table (X-b) below is considerable, suggesting a wide range of scores within each group. However, despite the possible inaccuracy in occupational categories listed in the two tables below, the tables do show a consistent and significant correlation between students' performance and parent's occupation. This is particularly true in the case of the father's occupation⁽¹¹⁾.

10.1. Father's Occupation:

Let us begin by considering the figures in the following table (see footnote 11 for definition of terms):

Father's Occupation	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
1. Professionals & Administrators	74.9	367	32.4	4.712 (**)
2. Clerical & Related Workers	63.5	254	25.0	2.020 (*)
3. Sales & Service Workers	59.6	637	26.4	5.052 (**)
4. Industrial Workers & Armed Forces	53.6	1018	21.5	3.685 (**)
5. Agricultural Workers	49.4	463	17.3	

6. Retired	57.7	275	25.4	
7. Dead	57.5	355	25.2	

Table (X-a)

It is obvious from the figures in Table (X-a) above that there is a steady and significant decline in English proficiency according to father's occupation, with «Professionals and Administrators» scoring highest and «Agricultural Workers» lowest. It is not surprising, however, that «Professionals and Administrators» score highest for they are possibly the most highly educated, and many of the engineers and medical doctors, at least, have had their university education through the medium of English. Furthermore, they tend to mix with foreigners more than any of the other groups and have to keep in contact with new ideas and inventions from abroad.

Clerical workers (second on Table X-a) are on the whole not as well-educated as «Professionals and Administrators», and not as well-paid. However, they have probably all obtained the G.S.C.E., and are no doubt in close contact with urban life. «Sales and Service Workers» (third on the table) are probably not as well-educated as «Clerical and Related Workers». However, as traders, they no doubt have considerable motivation and value their children's education highly.

«Industrial Workers» and «Armed Forces» (fourth on the table) were placed together as they represent a similar range of educational levels and have probably been equally exposed to the horizon-broadening effects of urban life, although many of them probably left school before the G.S.C.E.⁽¹²⁾. This exposure to urban life represents a considerable advantage enjoyed by this group over the «Agricultural Workers», who come out last on Table (X-a) above. This is not surprising as they are on the whole both uneducated and cut-off from

urban life and from intercourse with foreigners. On the whole, their homes are far being conducive to study, and their children have no supervision in their study.

Finally, the higher means recorded for those students whose fathers have either retired or died is probably due to their greater seriousness and motivation, but notice the remarkably high standard deviation. However, this is only a tentative suggestion and should not be given too much weight. No «t» Test was carried out in connection with these two groups as they lie outside the main body of the table because of lack of information about the father's occupation.

10.2. Mother's Occupation:

The following table shows the students' performance in English according to mother's occupation:

Mother's Occupation	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.
1. Professional & Administrators	80.7	41	31.1
2. Clerical Workers	81.5	6	42.7
3. Sales & Service Workers	63.1	14	31.6
4. Agricultural & Industrial Workers	50.9	18	14.3
5. Housewives	57.6	3226	25.1
6. Dead	56.7	55	25.2

Table (X-b)

As will be seen from this table the overwhelming majority (96%) of the examinees' mothers are housewives, and it is probably true to say that the samples found in the other categories (especially 1-4) are so small that the averages based on them would be statistically unrevealing. As this is the case, we will let the table stand as it is and comment on it briefly, not seeking to build any new argument on it.

In general outline Table (X-b) shows the same pattern as Table (X-a) in the preceding sub-section. The only noticeable difference is the good showing made by students whose mothers were «Clerical Workers». However, with the small sample size and the very large standard deviation, it would seem that one or two very high marks have pushed the curve out of shape.

11. FAMILY SIZE

The examinees were asked to state the number of their brothers and sisters in order to see if there is any correlation between the students' competence in English and size of family. All the information obtained in this connection is contained in the following table:

No. of Brothers & Sisters	Mean	Sample Size	S.D.	«t»
0	54.0	12	27.0	2.428 (*)
1	83.1	29	36.5	0.144 (ns)
2	81.9	85	39.1	0.173 (ns)
3	76.3	156	32.9	2.589 (**)
4	68.4	286	29.2	2.504 (*)
5	62.9	363	26.5	2.172 (*)
6	58.9	418	24.8	3.015 (**)
7	54.2	533	22.4	0.748 (ns)
8	53.2	504	20.4	
9	52.5	400	19.0	
10	50.7	244	19.0	
11	51.9	158	20.4	
12	50.9	72	20.9	
13	50.4	32	20.5	
14	49.1	26	14.5	
15	49.2	19	15.9	
✓ 15	49.2	34	20.7	

Table (XI)

The figures in this table seem to suggest that the student's competence in English declines in inverse proportion to the size of his family, except initially where only children seem to score very poorly.

The difference between students with one and two siblings, on the one hand, and those with two and three siblings, on the other, is not significant. However, when the number of siblings increases from three to four, we observe a decline in proficiency which is significant at the 1% level. The increase from four to five siblings and from five to six also shows a decline which is significant at the 5% level. The decline from six to seven siblings is also significant but at

the 1% level. From there on the deterioration levels off and samples become too small to be reliable.

There are many factors that could account for this deterioration in competence in English as the size of the family increases. The fact that the deterioration does not become significant until the step three to four (siblings), and that there is no significant difference between the averages of students with one sibling and those with three siblings (the value of «t» for these two averages was only 0.997) suggests that having up to three brothers and sisters is no real hindrance to a student, and that other factors like rank in the family are possibly more important (note the large standard deviations for the three categories one, two and three siblings).

When the number of siblings becomes more than six, however, other factors come into play. First, there is the probability of over-crowding in the house, making it very difficult for children to study. Secondly, there is always the possibility of parental neglect, where children do not get enough individual attention and stimulation, thus slowing down if not stunting their emotional and intellectual growth. A third possible explanation of the decline in English proficiency as family size increases is possibly due to the fact that the size of a family is generally an indication of the parents' cultural attitudes; that is to say, the parents of larger families would tend to be more traditional in outlook than those of smaller families.

Finally, it ought to be remembered that only children scored very poorly on this test, and though the sample size of only children in this study was very small indeed (12 students only), this phenomenon is linguistically interesting. The only child is linguistically deprived in the sense that he has no brothers or sisters who can speak to him, correct his speech and thus help him develop a competence in the language. However, because of the paucity of the sample one cannot state anything conclusive. Further research in this area is needed to assess in the first place the competence of the only child in his mother tongue. Finally, it could be the case that the findings here are true of other academic subjects and not just English.

12. CONCLUDING REMARKS

12.1 Limitations of the Study

As pointed out in the introductory section, the research that gave rise to this study was primarily designed to be in the field of error analysis. In other words, this paper should not be viewed as a study in either socio-linguistics or psycho-linguistics. However, since the samples providing the data of this study are

sufficiently large and possibly representative of the various sectors of student population in Jordan, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful for researchers, policy makers, and teachers of English. It goes without saying, however, that like all works of this nature, the present study is lacking in more than one respect. We are fully aware of the various shortcomings and inadequacies of the findings of the research incorporated in this study.

First of all, in spite of the fact that the reliability and the validity of the test (see Section 1) upon which this study is based are perfectly adequate, we should not assume that the test can be considered a valid tool for the assessment of student's proficiency in English. There are many reasons for this scepticism:

- (i) The test is highly selective and excludes many areas of grammar. Furthermore, some of the grammatical categories included in the test are under-represented because of time limitation.
- (ii) The test does not measure all language skills; for it does not account for the skills of speech, writing, and oral comprehension. It does not even test reading comprehension in the proper sense.

Secondly, it is obvious that the use of one type of test to the exclusion of other types imposes severe limitations and restrictions on the findings of any study. In order to attain more satisfactory results different testing techniques (e.g. essays, transformations, cloze tests, dictation, translation, reproduction, etc.) should be used. Appropriate elicitation procedures should be also employed. Furthermore, the learners' communicative competence should be assessed in actual situations.

Thirdly, it ought to be expected that the scores of the students who sat for the test as well as other related figures (e.g. means, S.D.) incorporated in this study might have been affected by three factors: (i) exam pressure, (ii) fatigue and boredom on the part of some students; and (iii) carelessness on the part of other students. It is worth mentioning, however, that during the administration of the test, all efforts were made to minimize the effects of most of the aforementioned factors; for example:

- (i) The aims of the test were explained in Arabic to the examinees, and they were given the option of not taking the test;
- (ii) The examinees were given the option of handing in their answer sheets before completing the tests;
- (iii) Those students who were noticed to answer without proper reading were in

most cases spotted by the invigilators, and their answer sheets were completely ignored.

In spite of all the measures referred to above, we should not rule out the possibility that a few answer sheets that we analyzed are the product of some careless students.

Finally it must be admitted that there are various psychological and educational factors that should be taken into consideration in a study of this sort. Such factors include: (1) the learner's attitude towards L2 and its speakers, (2) the relevance of L2 to the learner's needs and objectives, (3) the status of L2 locally, (4) the learner's first experience with L2, (5) the textbooks used and the objectives of the syllabus, (6) methods of teaching and modality of exposure to L2, (7) individual differences in language aptitude, intelligence, motivation, interests and perseverance. Other factors that might be relevant in this respect are: (i) the type and calibre of the teachers of L2, and their attitude to the teaching profession in general and to foreign language teaching in particular, (ii) the nature of the educational system in the country (for a detailed account of such factors see: Kharma, 1977: 103-111; Criper and Widdowson, 1975: 180-182).

12.2. Some Generalisations:

It must be admitted at the outset that this study includes a number of findings which an experienced teacher of English in Jordan already knows through daily interaction with his classes, but the statistical evidence in this study should settle many subjective arguments on a number of policy aspects with regard to the teaching of English in Jordan. Following are some broad generalisations that can be deduced from the figures in Tables (I-XI) in the preceding sections:

- (i) Students from the capital are clearly more proficient in English than students from other districts of Jordan. This may reflect the quality of teaching as well as socio-economic factors. This difference between the two categories of students may not, however, be peculiar to the English language; for it may be true of other subjects.
- (ii) Students from foreign private schools have a remarkably higher proficiency in English than those of national private schools (excluding the Islamic College in Amman) or public schools (see justifications in Section 3 above; see also (iv) below).
- (iii) Science students are more proficient in English than students following any

of the other specialisations in secondary school (viz. arts, commerce, industry, nursing). Thus the standard of a student's English obviously reflects his general academic ability as reflected in his specialisation in the secondary school, for it is generally the case that the scientific stream attracts the more intelligent, hard-working, and ambitious students. In passing, it would be interesting to test the students' competence in Arabic and see whether there is any significant correlation between the student's competence in Arabic and his specialisation in the secondary school, as is the case in English.

- (iv) The younger a student begins to learn English, the better his command of the language will be.
- (v) A student who is an only child or who has more than three brothers and sisters is at a considerable disadvantage in learning English. It would be interesting to see whether this is also true of Arabic as well as other academic subjects.
- (vi) Cultural attitudes and socio-economic factors as reflected in the parents' occupation and social standing may have a positive or a negative effect on the student's proficiency in the language. Again it would be interesting to find out whether there is any correlation between the student's competence in Arabic and such socio-economic and cultural variables.
- (vii) Language practice outside the classroom plays a positive role in improving the student's proficiency in the language.
- (viii) The older a student is when he takes the G.S.C.E., the worse we can expect him to do in English.
- (ix) Females are better achievers in foreign language learning than males are. Again it would be interesting to find out whether this true of the native language.
- (x) English majors graduating from T.T.I's do not have an adequate grasp of the basic English language skills. Indeed the proficiency of the overwhelming majority of the graduates of the T.T.I's is below the minimum standard desired for teachers of English. Indeed it was found out that the average facility index of the eleven grammatical areas tested (see Section 1 above) was only 0.57 for the 194 second-year English majors at the T.T.I.'s in contradistinction to a 0.77 average facility index for students of foreign private secondary schools! English language majors graduating

from the T.T.I's are bound to inculcate in their students such linguistic errors and shortcomings as they have acquired. This «revolving-door» syndrome contributes to an increasingly lower standard of proficiency in English.

Footnotes

- (1) Limitation of space has meant that we have had to withhold an appendix listing the 150 items of the test upon which this study is built. However, copies of the test may be obtained from the author. The test is also contained in Mukattash, 1979. It should be pointed out in this respect that all questions are based on the English Language syllabus used in public secondary schools.
- (2) For educational and other administrative purposes, Jordan is divided into thirteen directorates including the City of Amman (see Table I).
- (3) The following symbols are used in all the tables: (*) means figure is significant at 5%; (**) means figure is significant at 1%; whereas (ns) means figure is insignificant.
- (4) These two schools are: **Al-Hussein College** (for boys) and **Sukienah Bint Al-Hussein Secondary School** (for girls).
- (5) Jordanian private schools are of two basic types: the so-called «foreign private schools», founded by European and American missionary groups, and the «national private schools» which are operated by Jordanians. Foreign private schools employ a fair proportion of foreign staff and they start teaching English in the kindergarten. For purposes of this research we furthermore draw a distinction between two types of national private schools: (i) national private (I): this category includes the *Islamic College in Amman*, which is a locally supported private school of a very high standard. This school starts teaching English at the primary level and attracts many students from upper-class homes; (ii) national private (II) includes mostly a number of «cram schools» that work largely with mature students whose earlier education was for one reason or another interrupted, or who were not allowed to complete their education at a public school.
- (6) Students begin to learn English in the first primary class (age 6), though not as systematically and consistently as in the case of foreign private schools.
- (7) These statements are based on observation and personal experience and should not be taken as valid generalisations.
- (8) The term «vocational» is used here to refer to those public schools which take students through to the «commerce» and «industry» specialisation in the G.S.C.E..
- (9) The argument that proficiency in English is directly related to how long the students have been studying the language is given added weight by the fact that students who began in first primary did better than those who began in fifth primary. Both these groups are mostly public school students, so educational and social factors will remain constant. This remark should not, however, be taken for granted for there are other considerations which we do not intend to discuss here, in particular the appropriate age for second / foreign language learning. This controversial issue has been extensively discussed by psychologists and linguists and no clear-cut conclusions may be safely made.
- (10) The «» Test was not carried out beyond the age 20 level because at this point the sample sizes become too small to be significant, and the students' averages begin to fluctuate.
- (11) The first category (i.e. Professional and Administrators) includes medical doctors, engineers, university professors, teachers, heads of government departments, and business managers; in

fact all professional people. The category «Clerical and Related Workers» refers mainly to the range of jobs indicated by the Arabic word **muwadhaf**, which literally means **employee**, any kind of employee, but which in common usage refers more to clerical, secretarial and other routine jobs. The third category (i.e. Sales and Service Workers) refers to the many grocers and petty tradesmen to be found in Jordan. There is no doubt also a leavening of more affluent businessmen. On the other hand, the term «Service Workers» comprises mainly what in Arabic are called **mallakeen** (i.e. literally **owners**; but in common usage it refers to land owners), as well as a few hotel and restaurant owners. The rest of the categories in Table (X-a) are self-evident.

- (12) Admittedly, members of the armed forces vary considerably in education, social standing and outlook (cf. soldiers and high-ranking officers).

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