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# **Language Policy and English Learning Development: Suggestive Language Policy for the College of Education / Ibn Rushd**

**Fatimah Al-Asadi**  
Curriculum & Instruction  
University of Wyoming  
USA

## **ABSTRACT**

Language policy is a collection of regulations which aims at the achievement of a planned change in the language use in a certain environment. It is the first block of initiating a strong program to teach English. The Department of English at the Colleges of Education/Ibn Rushd, as other educational institutes in Iraq, lack the good procedures of planning their programs. This problem is a product of the restricted policies of ministries and the great need of the exploration of the new methods of curriculum design adopted by other countries. This article evaluates the mission of the College of Education/Ibn Rushd at the University of Baghdad and suggests a language policy which can enhance the process of learning English.

## Introduction

Educational institutions represent the most vital elements of every society because they need to be updated to cope with the changes modeling the process of education over time. This process of change and update was halted for about 35 years in Iraq due to the isolation of the country from the outside world. This isolation caused the fossilization of the curriculum and methods of teaching. The purpose of this study is to describe the educational environment and curriculum adopted in the Department of English at the College of Education/Ibn Rushd at the University of Baghdad and suggesting a language policy that can help support the process of English Education.

## A Glance at the Construction of the Department of English

This Department aims at graduating teachers of English as a foreign language. Its program is a mixture of theoretical and practical materials. The theoretical part of the program involves linguistics and literature courses. The practical part includes courses which are related to the profession like educational psychology, methods of teaching, assessments, application practicum, and research writing. The curriculum is fixed and united in the departments of English in all Iraqi universities. The courses are distributed over the four years of study. In the fourth year, students should go to schools and practice teaching for one month before the final exams.

Students enrolled in the department have studied English as a foreign language for eight years in their primary and secondary education. They do not use English in their daily life. Very few of them might have an opportunity to use English to communicate with friends in social media sites. Most of the students are Arabic speakers, but there is a small population of Kurdish students whom their second language is Arabic .

The college was established in 1923 as The High Institute of Teachers. In was a two years institute which trains teachers in the human sciences specialization and mathematics. In 1937, another year was added to make the requirements three years of study in this Institute. In 1939, the Institute adopted the Act No. 55 of High Institute to be a four years Institute. And in 1941 a department for teaching English was added to its programs. In 1958 the name of the Institute was changed to be "The College of Education". In 1988, the College was divided into two separate colleges:

- 1- The First College of Education (Which was called later College of Education-Ibn Rushd) which includes the departments of human sciences.
- 2- The Second College of Education (Which was called later College of Education Ibn el-Haitham) which includes the departments of pure sciences.

The Department of English at the College of Education – Ibn Rushd followed a British educational system since its establishment. The curriculum did not encounter any changes since that time. Instructors have to follow that central system because any changes should be done by a central committee and then be applied to all departments of English in all Iraqi universities. The mission and goal of the department is the same as of the University of Baghdad, which is to “build the individual to be a teacher and educator who has all the theoretical and practical knowledge in psychological and human sciences.”

Over the course of most of its history, the ELI has not had much in terms of a language policy. The main focus is building a teacher’s personality without paying attention to the development of language skills for the future teacher who should be aware of those skills and how to develop and assess them in EFL students. No indication of language policy appears in the mission statement of the Department or of that of the University itself.

### **Best Policies for Language Instruction**

Language policy is a group of ideas and regulations which are “intended to achieve a planned change (or stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities” (1). This planning comes in three different kinds: corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning .

In the case of the Department of English at the College of Education – Ibn Rushd, one aspect of corpus planning is very necessary to be considered. That aspect is modernization of languages. Texts from the 19th century and Shakespeare’s works are still taught without considering the use of Middle English. Students explain the meaning of extracts from these works and memorize their interpretation without being able to discuss themes or learn certain linguistic items. Since instructors cannot use other textbooks they can add short works by modern writers who use modern English in order to expose students to modern authentic materials.

Looking at the political changes in Iraq, a status planning is so important in colleges’ language policies. British system was followed at the departments of English in Iraqi universities and schools because of the colonialization era and the British occupation. Since 2003 the country has another foreign entity which uses another version of English. Even if educational institutions has its central curriculum committees instructors should pay attention to this political change and consider exposing students to American English in one way or another because such status planning encounters “primary social issues and concerns and hence are external to the language(s) being planned” (1).

Acquisition planning is the “means by which members of the polity will be encouraged, induced or provided the opportunities by which to learn the language(s) that are the objects of language planning” (2). This last part of planning does not contribute a lot to language policy. And in the particular case of this proposal, where everything is not clear for instructors, it does not add anything more than the idea that students have to master grammatical rules in order to be able to teach students at secondary schools to pass the exams .

Those three types of planning lead to the next important element in the language policy, which is the curriculum. The student is the core of the curriculum according to modern ESL curriculum theories, which means that student’s needs, experiences, and abilities are the main focus of the teaching/learning process. The mission of department does not imply this goal. In the real educational situations, instructors are still the center of the education process. Instructors present information and have students take notes and memorize them in order to be tested .

The best way of integrating students’ needs into the educational curriculum is by considering the best ESL theories in the classroom in question. In the case of the Department of English / College of Education – Ibn Rushd, one of the essential theories to be considered is the Foregrounding Theory because of the literature courses offered for students. The concept of foregrounding includes all literary devices which deviate from the linguistic norm to take an aesthetic one giving a specific characteristic to the style of the author (3). Those foregrounded elements represent a significant “textual strategy for the development of images, themes and characters, and stimulates both effect and affect in a text’s interpretation” (3). Which means that they provide complex meanings which are not usually found in everyday language ?

Another theory which is important for literature course is Transactional Reader Response Theory. After exposing students to the foregrounding devices, the student should transact the “reading experience by attending to his own feelings, memories or images that the text evokes” (4).

The transaction and transfer process which takes place, as it is explained according to this theory, “is seen as a mutual influence between the L1 and L2 in both directions, as reverse transfer” (5). Generally, in literature course, instructors prefer the “English only” policy with students neglecting the different levels of students they have in the classroom. If the two theories mentioned above are to be adopted, which I am aiming at in this language proposal, instructors should be aware that “L1 and/or bilingual options are not only effective but necessary for adult ESL students with limited L1 literacy or schooling and that use of students’ linguistic resources can be beneficial at all levels of ESL” (6), let alone with EFL students !

The issue of first language use in the classroom should be used for the sake of improving the target language. I should mention here ‘translation’ and how it can benefit the teaching/learning process. In this particular educational environment, ‘translation’ and Grammar Translation Method will be of great use when teaching classical works which has Middle English terms. Grammar courses require the deductive explanation of grammatical rules, so I don’t deny its usefulness. In this respect I do not agree with some researchers who assume that “students “tuned out” their weaker language and consequently learned very little of that language” (7b). When students “develop their abilities in two or more languages...they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively.” (7a). This fact entails that developing both L1 and L2 skills and the use of L1 to improve students’ abilities to analyze texts is partly dependent on the comparison students do between their L1 and L2 and what they infer from similarities and differences of the two languages.

Another important fact that should be considered with literature course is the high cognitive and cultural loads. Students are exposed to those texts without a good introduction about the culture of the communities studied or the concepts and views adopted by the author due to his/her unique cultural environment. Which is why using the mother tongue sometimes “contributes in important ways to lowering the cognitive barrier, for content knowledge acquired through the first language aids the English learner to interpret the meanings of lessons received through English.” (8). The same use of L1 can decrease the cultural load to some extent, but with this kind of knowledge there is an urgent use of images, videos, and other means of expanding the culture and the cultural indications of words used in English .

Whether in linguistics or literature courses, social constructivism should be indulged in the language policy because all the theories mentioned are regarded as part of this view, as well as pedagogy and discourse theories which have a similar applications to the transformation and foregrounded theory. Other prominent ESL classroom theories is

- 1- Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis, which claims that “consciousness, in the sense of awareness of the form of input at the level of “noticing“, is necessary to subsequent second language acquisition (SLA).” (9), form.
- 2- Form focused instruction, which draws students’ attention to linguistic elements, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication (10).

Those theories, if combined to language issues, can establish a strong foundation for the proposed language policy and will guide instructors to the suitable assessments to be used and how well they measure students’ progress in the target language.

## Language Policy of the English Department / College of Education – Ibn Rushd at the University of Baghdad

### Introduction and Purpose

This language policy addresses the following:

- 1- Mission of the College of Education/Ibn Rushd and proposed mission of the Department of English
- 2- The curriculum of the Department of English
- 3- Professional development
- 4- Submitting the proposed language policy to the Department of English and College of Education/Ibn Rushd community
- 5- Future goals

### Mission of the College of Education/Ibn Rushd and proposed mission of the Department of English

The Mission of the College of Education is “Building the individual to be a teacher and educator who has all the theoretical and practical knowledge in behavioral and human sciences to secure a sustainable human development that features human abilities which meet the modern needs throughout initiating qualitative specializations to satisfy the needs of society.” (Directly translated from Arabic). In my proposed language policy I have to say that my Mission statement will add to that: Inspiring youth as cultural educational community to achieve life-long learning that will help them educate a new understanding open minded generation of leaders .

According to this suggestive mission statement, this language policy is hoped to fulfil each point of the mission statement as follows:

### Inspiring youth as cultural educational community

Although English is the language of instruction, the language policy allows the use of the first language and stresses its role in the learning process. The language policy values the equal status of all languages. It provides an awareness of the culture and language of the English speaking communities and ensures that students value their identity and mother tongue by teaching Arabic at the first stage and consider comparison that highlight similarities and differences of the two languages in all courses offered. The Arabic course reinforces literacy and cultural identity.

## **Achieve life-long learning**

Life-long learning is promoted by this language policy. Students acquire the ability of solving problems and evaluating situations when they developing their language learning skills. They will acquire critical thinking abilities and creativity as well. This progress in language skills empowers students to understand, interpret, analyze, and respond to attitudes and feelings.

## **The curriculum of the Department of English**

### **Pedagogy**

The department aims at improving its students listening, speaking, reading, and writing English language skills. All instructors, whether teaching literature or linguistics courses, are responsible of facilitating language acquisition and developing communication skills through their grade level and content area classes.

### **Assessment**

Instructors assess all language skills regularly. Formative and summative assessments are used to measure linguistic progress. Students who are identified as requiring additional support in English will be offered supporting lectures by a committee of staff members who work with the instructors to stand on the real situations of such students.

### **Professional development**

The department offers on-going training and invites speakers to offer educational workshops and seminars to instructors throughout the year. Training sessions will be in all content areas and the department will make sure to circulate the attendance of all instructors according to their progress in their courses.



## **Submitting the proposed language policy to the Department of English and College of Education/Ibn Rushd community**

The proposal will be introduced to the scientific and administrative committee in the Department and will be discussed with other staff members in the Department meetings. Then the committee will discuss it with the College Committee which meet every month.

### **Review process**

The language policy will be reviewed yearly as part of the curriculum committee agenda and as part of the yearly improvement plan of the Department.

### **Future Goals**

Through the implementation of this language policy, the Department of English seeks empowerment of young English teachers through developing their language skills in a way that will help them express themselves and take a great role in society by taking decisions and responding to others. Those skills will enable them teach their students not only how to use the target language, but also to respect the language and culture of other communities. This goal will be achieved through the type of quality instruction that will be modeled by the program of the Department of English in this college.

### **Implications and conclusions**

This proposal aims at improving English language skills and highlights the importance of English as a vital way of communicating internationally through building on students' successful language learning which they accomplished in their previous years of studying English as a Foreign Language. It aims at exposing students to the culture of English speaking communities through literature which represents the experiences of people from many countries and times. This exposure is matched with students' needs and themes related to their daily life.

The proposed policy stresses how English students develop their language skills and how they use these skills to express themselves, their feelings, and their own points of view to others effectively. Students will learn how to be enthusiastic and critical readers of literary works, visual images, and media texts. Studying English in this way will enable students to understand how language works by looking at its

structures and parts, adapt this understanding to what they say and write in different situations, and respect others' languages and cultures. All these skills and abilities will create a generation of leaders who can lead a new generation of students and develop their language skills as well as open their minds to accept and understand others through language and culture.

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