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Understanding and Facilitating Middle Eastern College Students' Experiences Learning and Using English

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

As recent immigrants to the United States from the Middle East who did not speak English at the time of immigration, we, the authors, experienced challenges in adapting and adjusting to the United States educational system. In particular, we have observed that other Middle Eastern first-generation college student immigrants struggle when they cannot fluently speak English.

This study incorporates an autoethnographic methodology that includes each author interviewing the other using the survey and interview questions about Middle Eastern immigrant students' language needs and experiences that we have previously created based on our own personal experiences. The key questions that we try to answer are: how do communication skills and norms change from the period immediately after arrival to the United States compared to a year later? How does the language background affect immigrants' experiences at school, work, or the wider community? And what are the most useful methods to address these communication challenges? We believe that using this method reveals different insights compared to just anecdotally thinking about the issue at stake by shedding light on the details that can otherwise be missed. Then, we further explain how Middle Eastern college students are underrepresented in studies that focus on immigrants' academic progress regarding language and how there should be more research on their experiences due to their growing percentage in the American society, as we have identified a gap in scholarly studies of Middle Eastern students. Through comparison to studies of second language learning and from our own experiences, we draw conclusions about Middle Eastern immigrants' English language learning needs and offer several possible solutions to meet them.

INTRODUCTION

We, the authors, Sara Henes and Monica Hanin, are part of the Middle Eastern community since we were both born and raised for most of our lives in Egypt. We both moved to California when we were in our mid-teenage years and so we have personally been through the whole process of transitioning and adapting to the new lives that we were suddenly expected to adapt to. The United States is a multicultural land that accepts people from different origins and backgrounds. However, those who move to it seem to experience several hardships adapting to its culture, especially regarding language. Therefore, researchers need to dive deeper into this topic because it is essential to understand how this issue can be resolved. Although there is a body of existing research on immigrant students' experiences, we have identified a gap in scholarly studies of Middle Eastern students. Since so many studies have been conducted to help newcomers from other regions around the world, we aim to fill the identified gap by including the Middle Eastern community due to their growing percentage in American society.

First, we begin by explaining our own personal experiences transitioning to the United States and all the circumstances that occurred while trying to adapt to our new lives and while trying to develop and enhance our language abilities. Second, we incorporate an autoethnographic methodology that includes each author interviewing the other using the interview questions that were previously prepared by us, the authors. This methodology yields a refined analysis because it helps in discussing and re-interpreting what each author determined about the other. Finally, we investigate existing programs that aid in the transition of newcomers to the United States and discuss what could be potentially more beneficial.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously mentioned, there had been several studies done on other ethnic groups in terms of their transition to the United States and their journey in learning the English language. Due to the limited studies conducted that focus on the Middle Eastern sector of the American society, we, the authors of this paper, decided to study the methods implemented by those studies in order to learn about their level of efficiency in helping newcomers' success in the United States. Our aim is to provide the best, most accessible, and rewarding path for the Middle Eastern community to develop their language. The next few paragraphs examine some studies which target a similar issue as the one we are attempting to focus on in this project.

Of particular relevance to this study is *Educating English Language Learners* (2006), which both outlines the challenges language learners face in their path toward language proficiency and also addresses methods to address these needs. An essential aspect of this book is that it highlights the importance of studying the education of English language learners since "the level of academic achievement for students with limited proficiency in English in the United States has lagged significantly behind that of native English speakers" (Genesee et al. 1). Such observation highlights the problem at stake with newcomers facing some overwhelming challenges which hinder them from becoming fully proficient. One program that had been suggested in this book to help solve this problem is an English as a Second Language (ESL)-oriented program model called sheltered instruction, which is often found in school systems with English language learners from multiple language backgrounds. This holds true since it helps with teaching core content courses in English through instructional strategies which make the concepts accessible to those learners through developing their level of academic English (Genesee et al. 6). Additionally, this program can be combined with other program alternatives

to reach the goal, of leveling out newcomers' level of proficiency with fluent speakers, faster and in a more accurate way.

In addition, the book focused on addressing English language learners' proficiency in oral English since it is essential not only their academic life, but also for their ability to form conversations. The reason why the book focused on this particular aspect of newcomers' language-learning skills is that "of the approximately 150 studies on oral language development, fewer than two thirds reported actual oral language outcomes" (Genesee et al. 22). This realization proves that there is a big gap in newcomers' process of acquiring the English language in all aspects of their life. This book was also concerned with newcomers' level of acquiring vocabulary, control over grammar, and level of understanding of the subtle semantics of English. All of those aspects are important in one's personal success before focusing on their academic or intellectual improvement. The researchers portrayed the importance of daily oral English language instruction until newcomers achieve a minimum level of proficiency at the very least. Looking at how researchers gathered together to highlight the areas of weakness in the process of the acquisition of English language learners of specific aspects of the language was very successful in helping them suggest accurate methodologies. Similarly, this is a goal of our project: to incorporate methods which help in speeding up the process of acquiring the spoken English language in order to ease Middle Eastern newcomers' transition to the United States.

Similarly, "Learning Strategies in Foreign Language Instruction," written by Anna Chamot and Lisa Kupper, touches on some useful strategies and classroom applications that significantly help individuals learn a new language. There were a total of 67 participants that came from all different backgrounds, and the languages investigated in their study of learning outcomes were Spanish and Russian (Chamot and Kupper, 2). Its primary purpose was to help

students gain effective techniques to become independent language learners beyond the classroom (Chamot and Kupper, 1). There is no doubt that the classroom setting is an essential factor to consider when starting to learn a new language. However, sometimes it does not give all the necessary techniques for someone to be able to practice the language in the outside world beyond just the setting of the classroom. Chamot and Kupper show that while many students are able to learn and comprehend the language in a classroom setting, they sometimes find it difficult to transfer those strategies to other tasks like oral communication with their peers in the outer world (Chamot and Kupper, 1). Thus, our current study explores what strategies should be implemented with classrooms to help individuals gain the confidence to store and apply everything they learn in the real-life setting. This is important and beneficial to look into because it allows us to see new methodologies that research work on to help the students advance in their language proficiency.

Chamot and Kupper's study was carried out in three different parts. The first was a descriptive component that was used to identify competent learning strategies to learn a foreign language. Second, a longitudinal component distinguished effective and ineffective language learners. Finally, their study had a component on a language development course that was taught by multiple instructors to help lead students into the right path to applying effective strategies outside of class (Chamot and Kupper, 2). The results of the descriptive research showed that the advanced students were the ones that used various statuettes compared to the beginner's level that just stuck to one strategy (Chamot and Kupper, 2). This ultimately shows us that it is important to select more than one approach to use, as this will enhance one's learning ability and lead to significant successful results. The method that was used for the longitudinal study consisted of interviewing the beginners and advanced level of students as well as administering

them with some typical language learning activities to help with applying it to learning the language (Chamot and Kupper, 3). Results for the longitudinal study showed that advanced students were able to take the learning strategies more appropriately and with a greater variety, which in return helped them through the tasks, and the researchers also concluded that the different tasks for languages that were administered to the participants yielded different strategy applications (Chamot and Kupper, 3). For example, the self-monitoring and elaboration tasks were important for vocabulary learning and comprehension, while the writing tasks were significant to metacognitive strategies of learning and self-evaluation (Chamot and Kupper, 3). This part of the study suggests several ways in which learning could yield to more effective results in a classroom and beyond. Thus, teachers might want to help students use a cooperation strategy to enhance their learning outside of the classroom. Finally, the results that were found from the development course that was taught by multiple instructors to aid with students developing their skills outside of class yielded some significant results. It showed that teachers can profit from the students' awareness and the use of the learning strategies they provide them to develop even newer and potentially more powerful techniques to help broaden their strategies in place (Chamot and Kupper, 7). Thus teachers need to help plan some activities that will help develop students' abilities to apply what they learn in a classroom in a real-life setting. These activities that teachers create can significantly help students, and can provide a sufficient practice to allow students to utilize newer techniques within their learning.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

We, the authors, Sara Henes and Monica Hanin, are part of the Middle Eastern community since we were both born and raised for most of our lives in Egypt. We both moved to California when we were in our mid-teenage years and so we have personally been through the

whole process of transitioning and adapting to the new lives that we were suddenly expected to adapt to. Language was one of the primary factors that we both experienced a hardship adjusting to. Even though both of us went through different circumstances along the way, we both managed to find the methods that could work best with us to overcome this hardship. We were both looking forward to learning about what other people went through in their transition to the United States from their home countries. We offer our own stories to illustrate how each of us learned how to adapt to the new culture and to learn the new language.

Sara Henes: I moved to the United States in June of 2013, when I was 15 years old. Just to give you a silly background of how I used to live my life: I would just say that I am a very boring person who absolutely hates change and is often afraid of trying new things. That explains why people always find me going to the same restaurants, same hang-out spots, and even eating the same kinds of food. I was never big on changing anything routinely in my life or going out of my way to try new things. That is why, between both my parents and my sister, I was the only family member against this immigration step. However, as many people would correctly guess, this step was absolutely crucial for a promising future for my sister and I. My parents were well aware of the worsening situation in Egypt[1]; and therefore, at one point, this step seemed almost inevitable.

I remember the day I set foot in LAX and how scared I was of starting a new life away from the home I'd come to know my entire life. I remember being scared of starting from scratch in a new place; but most importantly, I was scared of failure. With each day that passed by, I remembered the importance of my success here in the United States just so I could fulfill the

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[1] On the 25th January Revolution, in 2011, a revolution took place in Egypt, where the youth revolted against the current regime, resulting in its resignation. The primary purpose of the revolution was to end the president regime and his emergency law. After the revolution ended, the Muslim brotherhood took the rule of the country, which lead to the corruption of Egypt. It became hard to live in the country as it was not as safe for citizens.

purpose that my parents moved from Egypt for. They were extremely supportive and encouraging at first. They even enrolled me in two English classes over the summer to get adapted to the school environment in the United States, given how different it is from the one we had back home. I remember how, each time I would return home from my summer classes, my mom would always tell me to face my fears and be open to the new opportunity that I had been granted.

I've always been a good student, even when I was little; and therefore, it wasn't hard for me to follow instructions or even do homework that I've been assigned in school. However, I began to notice that I wasn't capable of maintaining good grades and being on top of my assignments like I had previously. Thus, I had to pinpoint the reason that was hindering my success in school, only to find out that it was an obvious obstacle: my limited knowledge of the English language. My sister and I used to go to a French school back in Egypt, where the first language learned was French, second one was Arabic, then English, which was an optional language to learn. Many people assured us that we will be able to pick up the language fast since it is not as hard as the ones we were already fluent in. However, I personally felt like depression was taking over my life at the moment to the point that learning a small task that might not seem hard to most people was, in fact, pretty overwhelming to me.

Even with significant exposure to the classroom environment in the United States, I never seemed to gain the language knowledge I expected to get from the two ESL classes that my parents made me take over the summer. I can't deny the fact that both classes were helpful in improving my reading and writing skills. However, I never felt confident enough to express myself in English and always seemed to shut down any conversation I had to start in English with anyone. I remember not waiting until I get to go home so I can go back to my comfort zone:

talking to the people I know with the language I'd grown up using. Along with the burden of learning a new language, I also seemed to struggle so much with making friends. Many people may assume that this was because I never felt comfortable speaking the language that most people communicate in the United States, which was true for the record. However, another important factor in that struggle was the fact that I was constantly getting bullied because of my accent and lack of the proper words to use in many situations. There were not many immigrant students in my school, and so I feel that this was mainly a personal struggle.

In the beginning of fall semester of my 10th grade, with my grades not meeting the standards I was used to and my constant inability to make friends with anyone, I came to realize that I needed to step out of my comfort zone. I will never claim that this was an easy process: it was very tiring and even gruesome at times to the point that I felt like quitting every time things got tough. However, what made this process a thousand times more difficult was the fact that I never turned to someone, other than my sister, who shares the same difficulty I was experiencing. Therefore, I had to encourage myself and start the hunt for methods that could help me not only increase the little knowledge I had about English, but to also boost my confidence levels communicating with it. It is important to note that what helped me throughout this process was my parents. I always thought of them and the sacrifices they had to make in order to ensure my success here in the United States; and that, by itself, made me want to walk an extra mile just to make their efforts worthwhile. I was fortunate enough to enjoy reading, so I consulted with my counselor in high school to request recommendations for a couple of books that would help me get used to the language. She was also kind enough to suggest movies to watch just so I could observe the way people communicate and address certain issues in the American culture. She

even used to read my school essays and help me edit them so I could improve my writing skills and learn some useful vocabulary.

I tried my best to follow her remarks and suggestions throughout high school and my life seemed to be a little less difficult. I started gaining my confidence back with friends that come from the same culture as me and who shared similar struggles. The journey seemed long and tiring, but now looking back at all that I had to go through, I can finally say that I am making my parents proud with what I have accomplished. I now enjoy writing essays, even with the limited vocabulary I have and use, I enjoy reading English novels even more than Arabic ones, I enjoy getting to know people who are not necessarily of my background, and I look forward to practicing English at home and even helping my parents become fluent at it too. I most importantly, look forward to sharing my journey and the obstacles I faced with other newcomers.

Monica Hanin: I was born and raised in Egypt for most of my life. I moved to the United States in September of 2013, when I was also 15 years old. Unlike Sara, I am a person that loves change, and I tend to get bored quickly if my life is a continuous routine. This is not to say that having a routine is a bad thing. However, in my life, I feel that change is necessary and an essential factor for me to keep going and to stay motivated in what I do. Thus, when my parents made the decision for us as a family to move to the United States, I viewed it as an amazing opportunity for my family and I to start new. That being said, I was also partially in a state of teenage defiance and anger, frustrated at the prospect of starting an entirely new life in a foreign world. I was unsure of how leaving behind the rest of my family, my lifetime childhood friends, my connections, and the house where I was born and grew up in would affect me as a person and my inner feelings. However, knowing how hard my family worked and how much they

sacrificed to be able to make such a move possible made me look at the move in a different way. They indeed made this decision to secure for us, their children, a better life and a more rewarding education. Thus, I decided to take matters in my own hands and just go with the flow, accepting that I would no longer live in the place I came to know as home and that I would have to start a whole new chapter in my life in a completely new foreign world.

I can vividly recall how excited, yet worried, I was on my first day here in the United States. I was excited to start a new life. Still, I was very worried about how life would go and if I was going to be able to succeed in life and if I was going to be able to engage and accept the completely new culture that I suddenly found myself immersed in. At the time, I thought to myself, starting new was definitely easier said than done. There was not a chance for me to go back to my old life. Inside of me, just like any other kid my age, I was worried about whether I would be able to succeed and make my parents proud; however, like I said before I accepted the change and was eager to see what life had to offer me.

Something, however, that I later came to find out, which definitely hit me hard, was how my limited knowledge of the English language took away many opportunities from me at the beginning of my high school career and life in America. I remember my first day at Rancho Cucamonga High School, where I was given so much paperwork to fill out so that I could enroll in the school, and that was the first time I recognized how limited I came to see myself with both speaking and understanding the language. For example, I had no idea what the word 'maiden' meant, and I was too shy to speak up at the time and ask the staff because I was doubting the fact that I was going to be able to deliver a spoken message to them that they would understand. Thus, this was the beginning of me knowing that I was going to have a hard time understanding the language and communicating with others. In the beginning, I was definitely hurt a lot of

times by the down looks I received from my classmates and by the fact that I was not able to form friends and live a normal high school life as my other peers did. Those hurtful feelings that I went through on a daily basis were due to my minimal knowledge of the English language and its vocabulary. It was a very tough period in my life that has definitely caused a huge wide turn in it. Knowing that I had no other choice than just to accept reality and the life that I was faced to live with, I had to take a step into finding how I could improve myself and make a better, more enhanced version of who I was. I knew that being in the state of anxiety/depression that I witnessed was not going to get me anywhere and that my case was going to worsen if I did not do something about it. So, I knew that I had to go out there and conquer my struggle with language, by finding a way to improve it beyond just the courses that were recommended for me. Personally speaking, I felt that I needed more in my life than just sitting in a classroom learning a whole new language that is not my mother tongue from scratch. Communicating in an entirely new language is tough, and when the time comes for us to apply what we learned in class in real-life settings, it is very tough and not assuring that everything will work out.

That being said, I went above and beyond and started searching for a path that would help me improve my language and not doubt my skills. First, I started by going to my school counselor to seek help because this was the only person that I knew really well in the United States, and she was the one who helped me big time with my transition and settling. She knew how to speak a little bit of Arabic, and was able to keep up with my heavily accented English. I talked to her about my insecurities and how I doubted my spoken English, and I shared with her how I wanted to make a change about that. So, she recommended for me to watch various movies that would not only help my language improve, but would also help me develop a better understanding of the American culture and how teens my age live their lives in this country. This

was an important factor in her eyes because she told me at the time that I would be able to better understand my community through the eyes of people in the movies, which in return would help me find new passions, common interests that I could share with my peers at school, and generally speaking, see for myself how people live their lives in the States. She also recommended a bunch of books and apps to help me with improving my vocabulary. Finally, she introduced me to a club in my Junior year that was particularly made to help newcomers ease their transition. In this club, I gradually started opening up about my experience with not speaking the language, and how I had a very tough time adjusting. So, the other club members and I were able to create a department in the club that was devoted to helping newcomers with language difficulties. I felt that, alongside what this club had to offer for newcomers, language was a factor that was particularly important to help newcomers because that is definitely one of the aspects that many people struggle with in a new country. Within the club, we tried to come up with several methods for other members to follow so that we can help with their language development. While trying to design and implement this department within the club to help others, I found myself growing and improving in my language abilities. Months later, I did not doubt myself as much anymore and I was starting to regain back the confidence which I had lost initially.

By the end of my high school career, in my senior year, I was able to become the vice president of the club with a greater emphasis/focus on the language department because I was the one with the help of another member that was able to articulate the idea and later on implement it. Within the language department, we were able to develop programs and suggest the use of various applications to assist newcomers. Along that, on a weekly basis, students were given the chance to experience real life communication settings, where they got a chance to talk with other

people and experience being in an uncomfortable situation to conquer any fears they had. This form of learning gave them a chance to see for themselves that it is not too hard to open up to experiences and go out of their way to work towards a goal, which in that case was to improve their language proficiency skills. I feel that this was an essential component of the club because there was a significant number of immigrants in my school that moved to the United States at the time, and thus, this department became relevant to them because they were trying to learn English. This was not an easy path, and for anything to become successful, it is important to work very hard for it. I, personally, had the vision to work hard and improve myself. Later on, I grew to become involved and willing to help and ease other's transition with a language barrier, and I can successfully say that I succeeded. Now, in my personal life, I enjoy reading a lot, I enjoy learning synonyms and antonyms to various words in the English language, and I enjoy going out and surrounding myself with both people that speak the language fluently and people that were once just like me at the beginning of my life here in America. This is a way that I recommend many people to follow to apply what they learn in school in this environment because only through that path that they will be able to develop their language, grow in confidence, and move on to bigger and better things like helping other newcomers move on with their life just like they did with themselves.

METHODS

Our original plan, developed in consultation with our faculty mentor, was to collect data from 50 participants by using the survey and interview questions that we, the authors, created. The target population that we were aiming to gather data from was Middle Eastern first-generation college students who had been living in the United States for at least one year. The survey was intended to gather information about each participant's gender, pre-immigration

exposure to American culture, pre-immigration knowledge of the English language, and their self-evaluation of their proficiency in writing, speaking, and reading English. The interview questions targeted common situations that the participants would most likely experience in the work environment, school, and their general social life. Also, we made sure to include a part in that process that addressed the transition that most newcomers experience. In that part, the participants would judge and reflect on their experience with language when they first moved to the United States and years after their transition. Lastly, we dedicated a portion of the interview to address what other useful methods and resources should be implemented from each interviewee's perspective to help other newcomers with their language as needed.

However, due to the current events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that was taking place at the time of this study, we had to adjust our methodology. We decided to follow the autoethnographic methodology, where we would use our previously designed interview questions to interview each other in order to reflect on our personal experiences regarding all three factors that the interview questions aim to address. By following the autoethnographic methodology, our aim was to be able to do more than just think about the issue of newcomers transitioning to life in the United States and incorporate it anecdotally, to instead recognize things that we would otherwise miss and become more analytical about how the details of our own experiences reflect larger patterns.

FINDINGS

After interviewing one another, we concluded that, given that we both have similar backgrounds, our answers were very much alike. When each one of us put herself in the shoes of an actual interviewee, it was in fact an eye-opening process to the countless obstacles that we each had to go through in order to achieve our goals. Also, it made each one of us explore the

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process of the transition to the United States, our emotions throughout it as if we, ourselves, were put in these specific circumstances. Not only that, going back and through all the circumstances that each one of us had to go through, as explained previously, was also very crucial in identifying the possible improvement options that can be incorporated to make one's transition smoother. In the following paragraphs, we present the interview questions and explain how we, as interviewees, would have described our reactions in each of the situations presented.

The first set of scenarios included situations that would most likely occur in the school setting. The first scenario that was given involved being assigned to give a presentation about healthy eating habits to a group of students from New Orleans, who are known for having a distinct accent and dialect. At the end of the presentation, the presenter finds out that the students were unable to understand his/her accent. From this scenario, we, the interviewees in this case, both seemed to prefer finding a video with a speaker who has an accent that the students will be able to understand. A common theme that arose when asked to react to this scenario was that the presenter in this case would try to find a fast and accurate method to deliver the message of the presentation without making herself look bad in front of the crowd. The second scenario included imagining a situation where we were given a particular image to describe in detail, but were not able to do so due to finding lacking the necessary vocabulary. Given that scenario, we, as interviewees, concluded that we would try to describe the image to the best of our abilities using the limited vocabulary we had. Later on, we would try to enhance our vocabulary by looking into other wording alternatives that could have been used in place of what we knew at the time. Therefore, if we are ever faced with another similar situation, we would be able to confidently speak using the necessary vocabulary that would, in other words, help us deliver the message more clearly.

The second set of scenarios involved situations that one would most likely experience in a work setting. The first scenario in that category asked the interviewee to imagine him/herself getting lost on his/her way to a job interview and being unable to clearly get help from others or better directions to get to the place. Both interviewees explained that the best way to get to the interview on time in this case was to call the interview place to request an office guide or anyone who can help with directions. Again, it was common in that scenario how we both insisted on the importance of getting to the interview on time in order to avoid any bad impression on our part. The second scenario involved being assigned a task at work but having a hard time understanding or correctly interpreting the supervisor's instructions. When responding to this scenario, we both clearly explained that we would try to gain as much knowledge as possible about the task without looking bad in front of the supervisor, as he/she is someone that we would want to impress at work. Therefore, we would try to ask our coworkers about clarifications concerning what the supervisor explained.

The third set of scenarios included situations that one would most likely experience in a social setting. The first scenario in this category asks the person to imagine him/herself going out for lunch with a friend at a new restaurant, and the server decides to suggest some popular dishes from the menu. Still, the interviewee was unable to comprehend what the server was saying. When both of us, the interviewees, responded to this scenario, we both explained how we would ask the server to try and slow down and repeat their suggestion. If we were still confused after that, then we would most likely look at the pictures provided in the menu or look up pictures online from dishes that looked interesting to both of us. The second scenario in this category included having the interviewee imagine that they were given important paperwork to fill out, but they neither understood the terms nor the explanations. When both of us responded to this

scenario, we explained that we would look up the terms that we do not understand, and it is likely common to find that other people googled the same terms, which would personally make us feel better about ourselves. The third scenario in this category asks the person to imagine that they were pulled over by a police officer, and felt unable to verbally justify their actions. When we both, as interviewees, responded to this scenario, we said that we would try to explain to the police officer that English is not our first language. Maybe the officer could sympathize with the situation or perhaps, would allow us to call a relative and have them become involved to explain the situation better.

For the fourth set of scenarios, the purpose was to gather information regarding the interviewee's suggestion on any improvement methods that can be implemented in order to ease the process of transition for newcomers from the Middle East. This part of the interview process was especially important in helping the interviewees reflect on their own personal struggles to find out what worked best for them. The interviewees were asked to recommend a method that would help a newcomer complaining about his/her struggles in transitioning to his/her new life in the United States Again, both answers from both authors - interviewees in this case - included recommendations of methods that this newcomer would be able to be able to use in daily life. Outside of school and work, each one of us insisted that it is very crucial for the newcomer to be able to use various strategies regularly to help in his/her transition. For example, we both wanted to encourage him/her to read books on topics that he/she is interested in. Also, to watch movies with English subtitles so he/she can be able to see the word and hear how it sounds simultaneously. Furthermore, another recommendation was to watch language improvement tutorials and practice having conversations in English with people that the newcomer is most comfortable with.

The scenario in the fifth and final part of the interview is intended to gather information from the interviewee about their transition within a job. The interviewee is first asked to imagine him/herself instructed to give a tour guide for the first time in his/her job, and knowing that he/she lacks certain vocabulary, he/she starts doubting his/herself and his/her language skill. When both of us, as interviewees, responded to this scenario, we said that if we were not put on the spot, then we would try to prepare for it and maybe run lines in our heads before the tour begins. If this task was given on the spot, then we would most likely go with the flow and hope for the best without messing up so that we would not look bad. The second part of the scenario asks the interviewee to imagine themselves still in the same job, but no longer as a new employee. Thus, this scenario is intended to show the interviewees transition from how they would perform their tasks for the first time at their job and whether they would perform it differently gaining experience. When we responded to this second part of the scenario, we agreed that we would most likely grow in confidence and familiarity with the job because practicing giving multiple speeches or information needed within the job over time would most likely make us develop the sufficient vocabulary to communicate with others. Thus, we both concluded that we would most likely not be as anxious while performing our job because we would grow familiar with how everything runs.

OUR VIEWS ON KEY ISSUES

Looking at the answers obtained from the work and school categories in the interview process, it became apparent that no newcomer wants to look bad in front of people. Even though Middle Eastern newcomers tend to struggle with their level of proficiency in the English language, they would avoid any situation that will result in them feeling inferior in the new community they moved to. We, the authors, believe that educating the American society on the

obstacles that newcomers go through and tend to face throughout this process can help them feel less like outsiders. As we both have mentioned before from our personal experiences, transitioning to a new country is a worrisome process by itself because newcomers feel like they do not belong to the new place. In fact, they tend to spend a tremendous amount of time and effort to prove to themselves and to other people in their new community that they can adapt and flourish no matter the hardships. Not only that, they also try so hard to avoid any situation that will make them look or feel inferior to other people, which is a pattern that we saw when having to give a presentation in front of a group of students or following a supervisor's instructions. The reason why newcomers tend to experience more difficulty in the school and work environments is because these two settings are where a newcomer is expected to prove him/herself.

From the several scenarios that we designed and responded to, we both concluded that an important factor that will most likely ease the transition of Middle Eastern newcomers to the United States is to have, wider American society become more mindful of the obstacles they have to overcome just to avoid feeling inferior. There is no doubt that not being able to speak the language of one's new country already represents a burden. Therefore, if people in this new society become aware of the things that bombard a newcomer's mind, especially in school and work, then this will definitely represent a great help to their transition. One can never deny that the intellectual help offered by many schools and community colleges is greatly important in improving the newcomer's ability to learn the English language; however, this should never negate the psychological help that those newcomers greatly need. By combining both approaches, the intellectual and the psychological, one can ensure that all the factors that ease the Middle Eastern newcomers' transition have been met.

Moreover, we feel that the focus on learning a new language should readily take place beyond just sitting in a classroom, and learning a whole new language from scratch. Communicating in the real world requires one to develop certain language criteria to be able to get along with others. So, by implementing and surrounding oneself with both fluent speakers and native speakers, one can easily catch on the language and better see for themselves how the language is communicated and what goes on beyond the classroom settings. We, the authors of this paper, personally feel that we were taught a lot by going out there and placing ourselves in an uncomfortable setting to be able to grasp on the language and learn to develop it more. When we discussed this particular area of language development together, we found that courses did indeed play a huge role in helping us learn the basics of the language, and completing the assignments were also crucial to our learning in the classrooms. But we both concluded that if we did not go beyond classroom learning, then we definitely would not be where we are today. We felt that the purpose of ESL courses is to learn the basics of a new language, complete the assignments that are assigned with the goal of moving on to the next level of English course which is where the native and fluent speakers are usually placed. But, for us and that should be the case for everyone around us, it is more than that. English is the language that most people use within the United States to communicate every day in their lives. Whether one has to speak it at the grocery store, at school, at work, at a public service place, or at social interactions/gatherings with other people, English is essential. It is very vital for us to make a move beyond sitting on a chair in a class surrounded by other peers and just making some effort to go through the course to be able to pass it and move on to the next level. That being said, classes should try create some group projects that involve students going out there and experiencing for themselves how practicing the language is actually like. Thus, teachers should try to contribute to students

developing their language skills beyond the classroom because many people are left with the thought that to learn a language and be able to communicate with other people, they should basically sign up for a couple of courses and that will potentially serve this purpose. Still, while that is partially true, decontextualized language instruction will serve them no good when they are asked to communicate with their peers or other people in real-world settings.

Another essential factor that should be considered for ESL courses is the need for multiple levels so that students are not forced to suddenly level up and be in the same course with more proficient students in the language. The reason we, the authors of this paper, mention that, is because we feel that when students are initially placed in ESL courses, they do not meet the requirement to be in a regular English course. Thus they take it to improve their language or perhaps learn the language from the beginning. Sometimes when these students level up after they have completed their ESL course, they may be ready according to the course's criteria, but mentally they are not prepared to be placed with advanced students. So, to ensure their readiness and their mastering skills within the advanced course, ESL should have three levels where students are placed within the level that best matches the category they fall into based on an examination. The lowest level of the ESL class should be given to students that have no exposure to English and are there to learn everything from scratch. The middle-class level should be for students that have a rough background of the language and are more advanced in both communicating and writing the language, but not in a proficient way. Finally, the highest level of the ESL course should be for students that have mastered the previous two levels, and are ready to advance on but are not at the same level of regular English class. Instead, they will get a sense of how it feels to be placed in an advanced class while still surrounded by other English learners. This process will definitely help expose them to the environment gradually rather than at an

instant where, as we mentioned above, they could be prepared according to their mastering skills in the course. But still, they are probably not mentally prepared to face taking a course with fluent students.

Another important conclusion that we, the authors, wanted to reflect upon from the interview process was the fact that technology has started to play an important role in soothing the transition process for newcomers. It hasn't only provided them with some on-the-spot-solutions to several problems they may encounter, but it has also helped them connect and grow closer to other Middle Eastern students that are experiencing similar circumstances. Furthermore, with the growing population of students using smartphones and the expansion of the use of technology in classrooms, we believe that implementing the use of educational applications can be extremely helpful. The reason why those applications can be beneficial, is due to the fact that they can be downloaded and used on smartphones anywhere and anytime a student would like to. Encouraging Middle Eastern students to develop the habit of relying on their smartphones with their language learning process can speed it up in an unremarkable way.

As we previously addressed the needs of Middle Eastern newcomers to fit in their new society, we should understand the level they are at with their language proficiency and accommodate their needs to improve it. Consequently, with the world quickly developing around us, there has to be some effort done to utilize its advancements to the benefit of those who need them the most. Thus, in the next section, we look closely at several language learning methods that can provide all-around support (socially and intellectually) for newcomers as they work on learning/improving their level of proficiency in English. Lastly, we suggest some educational applications which may be helpful in improving newcomers' communication skills using English

in their social lives. Furthermore, we suggest other programs that have been proven successful in improving newcomers' intellectual abilities in classroom work.

IMPROVEMENT METHODS

Drawing from the approaches conducted by some previous studies on other ethnic groups, we suggest some methods that we have personally used and found effective. The first program, which has been widely used by several newcomers to the United States is called Rosetta Stone Language Library[2]. This program is a set of multimedia second language instructional materials which emphasize the comprehension of spoken language. It was founded in 1992 by Lexia Learning, the leader in the literacy education space, to help students build fundamental reading skills. Rosetta Stone's language division is designed to use cloud-based solutions to help all different types of language learners read, write, and speak more than 30 different languages. As explained by Allen Stoltzfus, one of the founders of Rosetta Stone, this approach is often referred to as the "comprehension approach" or the "natural approach" since it represents the first step for a language learner to acquire fluency. The International Symposium on Automatic Detection of Errors in Pronunciation Training explained that this program is "an online product delivered through a client computer's web browser using Flash technology" (Stoltzfus, 18) which is a very convenient way given the spread of technological advancements around the globe.

The way this program is set up is by referencing a number of language learning theorists to identify seven core themes of this comprehensive approach. Rosetta Stone addresses the two core problems that many teachers are facing in the process of implementing the comprehension

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[2] Website: www.rosettastone.com, www.rosettastone.com/lp/about/.

approach. The first core problem faced by teachers is that they are often unable to present a rich context that extensive classroom speech in the target language can be understood. Consequently, Rosetta Stone solves this problem by using "thousands of pictures in carefully chosen contexts and sequences to present a rich, meaningful context." Those pictures will convey the meaning which is contained in the spoken language (Stoltzfus, 2). The second problem hindering the implementation of the "natural, comprehensive approach" is that teachers usually have a hard time verifying comprehension by each student in the classroom. Therefore, Rosetta Stone, being a computer program, allows individual comprehension checking where the student will identify the speech that describes the picture or the picture that's being spoken about and learns whether his understanding is correct.

Soltzfus explained that "[t]he Rosetta stone is based on this idea: the best model for learning a new language is the natural way in which we learned the native language" which is an important way of tackling a newcomer's struggle in learning the language (Stoltzfus, 2). It is important for a new learner to approach this new language in a familiar way which tends to make this process easier and smoother. Also, it is especially essential to decipher this language-learning process in a simplified manner in order for the learner not to feel that the process will be overly complicated. Therefore, Rosetta Stone Language Library focuses on learning English the same way one would learn his/her native language. This is done "by hearing simplified speech in a context which provides the cues that make this speech comprehensible" and it does so by using "thousands of carefully selected pictures to create contexts where the meaning is clear" (Stoltzfus, 2). Not only that, Stoltzfus also points out in his report that "[t]he program elicits the student's response and gives instantaneous feedback, confirming the comprehension that has taken place" (Stoltzfus, 2). This technique makes the program less of a behind-the-screen tutorial

and more of an interactive language tutor. Thus, implementing this program in classrooms or at least providing students with this program can represent a solution to newcomers' fear of not succeeding in their language-learning process. With their ability to tackle the language from its basics, a student or a job-seeker can have more chances of succeeding in their future careers.

The second program that we recommend is Pimsleur, which is an American language development program established in 1963 by Paul Pimsleur, and one of the most popular programs that newcomers use when they move to the United States (Pimsleur, 1). This program was designed to help people utilize self-instruction, and the founder of this program wanted to establish a place that developed and distributed useful language courses to everyone available to be taught digitally (Pimsleur, 1). This is a positive aspect of the program because it means that a broader range of people can have access to the program. This program is intended to help everyone accelerate in their learning, further increase their understanding, and activate new neural pathways (Pimsleur, 1). It is available in many languages and it is also straightforward to navigate. One of the main factors that usually determine the effectiveness of a program is the fact that not a lot of things are thrown at a person at once while learning a new language. Thus, this program has a person learn a language step by step because too much material at once can slow down the process of the brain, leaving one to be discouraged from learning the language (Pimsleur, 3). It is critical to progress through learning a new language gradually because it helps one immensely to give their brain a chance to intake each word or phrase before moving on to the next material. Gradually the process of learning a new language becomes easier on the person. So when one is presented with a heavier load of vocabulary, later on, they will be able to comprehend and naturally and easily grasp the information that they are being presented with since they will already be exposed to the process. The unique method that Pimsleur offers for its

subscribers that want to learn a new language is that it makes one identify which language they are fluent in, and which language they wish to learn. It brings both languages together by speaking out multiple sentences in each language in the audio module presented within the course.

The audio module speaks one sentence at a time in the language you know, and then it repeats the same sentence in the new language you desire to learn. For example, the community that we focus on within our research is the Middle Eastern community, so a person from this region, if they wish to use this program, would select the option to learn English for Arabic Speakers. The items introduced within the new language are given within the form of a context or exchange. This, in return, helps with learning and retention within the brain, and it immerses prompts within your memory. It can also help learners develop their conversational skills at a fast pace. The length of each module is 30 minutes long, and there are 30 modules available for each language (Pimsleur, 4). Another advantage that distinguishes this program from others is the fact that everyone's life outside of class is busy enough, and so learning a new language through this program can be learned while performing other tasks. A learner can listen to the module while driving, cooking, or doing laundry, and thus does not necessarily need to be sitting in front of the course while it is running. This flexibility offered within this program can encourage a lot of people to consider using it.

Furthermore, aside from the multiple distinguished programs that we talked about which aid students intellectually in schools and work, it is vital to further look at some apps that are accessible for newcomers to use. The reason we also talk about applications is because this is a method that students can easily access and navigate. Many applications are available to be downloaded on any device, and this is an advantage because it means that learners will be able to

access the application at any time, which in return will help them further enhance and develop their language skills as needed. The first app we examine is Duolingo an online language-learning platform which was launched in 2012 and offers courses in 27 different world languages. What makes it more accessible is that it is available as a mobile app on android, iOS, and Windows. Duolingo's mission is to help beginners learn a language while simultaneously using their language learning exercises to translate the web. According to a review done in University of Western Sydney, Australia, Duolingo helps beginners learn the language through translation since it is as effective as any of the leading language learning software (Garcia, 19). Not only that, when evaluating Duolingo' effectiveness, it was discovered that Duolingo takes the sentences from any document in a web, translates them, and inserts the target version back into the document which makes it less complicated for beginners in the language to interpret several texts (Garcia, 24). Even though this application is still a work in progress, several developers are working very hard to make the system functional and successful, especially with it being in an accessible form for all language learners to benefit from.

A very important study has been conducted to confirm the effectiveness of Duolingo as an application that helps promote beginners in acquiring two languages simultaneously. What makes this study very relevant in this paper is the fact that it had been done on an Arabic-speaker subject whose age is 12 years old and lives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study first discussed the frequency of users largely depending on smartphones, tablets, and computers to learn a new language, which draws attention to the potential success of incorporating the use of applications such as Duolingo. Therefore, it suggested it to be one of the most popular applications among the students that prefer the use of technology in aiding them throughout their language learning process (Ahmed, 257). Furthermore, the study examined one male participant who had been

observed intensely for two months while using the app Duolingo to learn English and Spanish simultaneously. He was then interviewed to address his attitude towards the application and his scores of English and Spanish tests were collected. As mentioned before, the subject was an Arabic native speaker who had basic knowledge of English, but had never learned Spanish before. The subject practiced for a total of 16 hours at the end of the study and was tested three times during his language learning process. The results of the study show that his Spanish learning abilities had substantially developed over two months, while his English skills made little progress compared to Spanish (Ahmed, 260). In addition, the subject acknowledged that he would not only depend on Duolingo to be an expert in the language, but that it is definitely a success as a supplemental source in his day-to-day life. Lastly, this study shows that relying on an application should not be the only means for beginners to learn a new language or improve their basic knowledge of one. Therefore, Duolingo can be recommended to be adopted at schools since it is beneficial for learning a second language. While not completely sufficient, it can definitely represent an accessible addition to those who desire learning a new language in their day-to-day lives.

Another useful method that is used among many newcomers to the United States that we would like to feature is called Babbel. This application was released in 2007, and it has become the number one selling app across all language learning apps (GmbH, 1). Babbel has a mission to provide its learners with various strategies to teach them a variety of foreign languages. This application is commonly known for how it combines communicative didactics, cognitivism, behaviorism, and constructivism (GmbH, 2). The lessons that this application provides its learners are made in the form of building blocks, where everything aims to build on top of each other. It guarantees all learners a fast-paced route that helps enhance their learning capabilities.

Babbel provides an audio method to ensure that all learners can listen to native speakers and train themselves on how the language is supposed to be spoken, gain the correct pronunciation, and ideally be able to communicate the language confidently. A vital aspect of the application is its speech recognition software, which aids in exposing all learners to practice pronunciation and emphasis to ensure that all learners are well off before they experience real-life communications. Babbel does not support binge learning, so they design their lessons to only be 15 minutes long to ensure effective learning. All classes are tailored based on the learner's native language (GmbH, 3). This allows learners to effectively learn a new language regardless of their background and proficiency level. Babbel application is distinguished among other applications because it provides its learners with various techniques to learn the material and immerse it in the long-term memory (GmbH, 3). According to a recent study, new information learned tends to stick to the human brain within seconds (GmbH, 3). Babbel capitalizes on this by having the application set to reintroduce words through six memory stages, using the technique of repetition to ensure that the learner is exposed many times to the new vocabulary learned (GmbH, 2). The repetition technique is beneficial when it comes to learning a new language because it allows the learner to hear for themselves the phrases multiple times, which in return helps move it from their short term to their long-term memory.

Many researchers, individuals, schools, and investment groups are always looking for useful language learning apps, so studies are conducted regularly to examine the most effective application to recommend to these users. A recent study was conducted on Babbel to evaluate the efficacy of learning a new language through this application. When Babbel was first introduced, it became known for its unique approach to being the shortest path to real-life conversations (Vesselinov and Grego, 4). A study examined a sample of Babble users aiming to learn Spanish.

The participants took a placement Spanish language test and then studied Spanish for two months using Babbel, and then they retested to see if there were any improvements (Vesselinov and Grego, 4). The majority of the participants improved their language proficiency over a two-month period equivalent to 21 hours of Spanish exposure (Vesselinov and Grego, 2). The results were not affected by any factors such as age, gender, native language, or education. Having been previously exposed to the language did not matter. In fact, all users had similar results regarding moving up onto the next level. In conclusion, this study clearly demonstrates to us how effective Babbel is among all its users regardless of the learner's level of proficiency and how successful it is with getting its learners to lead a full-on conversation in a real-life setting. This is what we the authors aim for when we say that it is essential to get out there and put yourselves in actual real-life conversations, so that you can improve and develop your language skills. Thus, being available to all its users constantly, Babbel will help serve the purpose as an aid to all its users to help them easily lead a conversation and with confidence.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to not only study the issues that newcomers from the Middle East go through once they move to the United States, but also to elucidate what methods can ease such a process for them. This is an essential factor, in our opinion, because we know that it will help take many obstacles off their shoulders besides what they already have to face once they move to the United States. From the interview process, we came to realize that it is as equally important to focus on the psychological needs of newcomers from the Middle East as their intellectual needs in the classrooms. From the scenarios that were presented and analyzed, we were able to draw a couple of conclusions regarding the feelings of Middle Eastern newcomers to the United States. Newcomers tend to avoid any situations that will result in their inferiority in the

community they moved to, especially in the beginning when they have a low sense of belonging to this new place. As a result, we were able to look, through the scenarios in the interview, at the amount of effort those newcomers tend to put in order to prove themselves to the people in their new community. Therefore, we both concluded that one of the important factors that will most likely ease the transition of Middle Eastern newcomers to the United States is to have wider American society become more mindful of the obstacles newcomers have to overcome just to avoid feeling inferior.

Another important conclusion that we drew from the scenarios is that sitting in a classroom and learning a whole new language from scratch is not enough. In reality, to ensure proper communication in a new language, one would have to conquer a real world setting and see for themselves how people use the language to interact with one another. This facet was especially apparent with the social component of the interview process because it required one to put themselves in uncomfortable situations to be able to grasp on the language and develop new language skills. While educational programs can be crucial in learning a new language, we have come to realize that they are not sufficient by themselves in enhancing the communication skills of a new language learner. In fact, with the spread of technology in the world we live in today, the use of applications can represent a great help to those programs, especially when it comes to real-world situations. Therefore, when looking for more accessible methods that can help those newcomers attain this goal, we realized that the use of applications can be a very beneficial tool due to its availability anywhere and anytime.

Due to the added necessity of apps, we looked into a few of them that were popular and proven to be the best among all the apps used nowadays. Through the several examples and reviews that we looked at, we found that Duolingo and Babbel were two distinguished apps that

provided people with the necessary and sufficient sources needed to enhance their ability to speak a new language. However, with any successful app there is always a room for improvement, and we took this into consideration and we aimed to look for some of the drawbacks that were presented in these apps by reading people's reviews regarding what they would want to see improve.

Thus, with this project we aim to highlight some of the weaknesses presented within the apps, and to present some methods that can otherwise help refine the apps and make them a finer version. This will greatly help enhance the growth of the application because it will keep them up to date with some of the necessary services that people tend to look for nowadays. That being said, some of the lacking services pertaining to Duolingo include its ineffectiveness in equalizing the learning ability of the user in two languages simultaneously. As previously shown in the study done on the subject from Saudi Arabia, the subject's test scores significantly improved in Spanish after the full period of using Duolingo, while those for English did not show any change throughout this time. Therefore, we believe that in order for this application to be more effective, it needs to ensure that the language learners will be equally learning both languages and making the same progress towards excelling at both simultaneously. The steps taken to teach the user a new language should be as strong as those taken by the same user to improve a language that he/she already acquires. As a result, the user's ability to improve a language that he/she may be previously exposed to will be more likely just like the application ensures his/her ability in learning a fresh new language from scratch. Furthermore, a disadvantage that we came to conclude from the application Babbel is that for less popular languages, the application provides less content for the learner. Thus, we believe that it is essential for the application to upgrade the content of all the languages it offers. The application must ensure that it provides its

learners with equal and excellent quality and quantity material for all the languages offered

within the application so that they can learn any language at the same level and find equal

content available as for all other popular languages.

      After this substantial research, with the many setbacks that we were presented with, and

the extensive research that we conducted on previous similar situations to the one we overcame,

we can proudly say that we were able to further understand and educate ourselves about some of

the struggles that newcomers tend to go through when they transition to a new life in the United

States. Furthermore, we were able to understand, elaborate, and present some ideas that

newcomers can utilize to manage and ease their process of transition. Through the use of the

autoethnographic methodology, we, as the participants in our own study, were able to

incorporate our own experiences as former newcomers to the United States, which helped widen

our scope of interest and focus on more obstacles that we were not originally aware of. Putting

oneself in the situation of an interviewee did serve us a great deal of help when looking at helpful

ways that can make those challenges less intimidating. Moreover, the use of this

autoethnographic methodology has allowed us to develop a richer understanding of how people

might behave in similar situations. Through our thorough and detailed interview that we were

able to administer to one another, we were able to further understand things from other people's

reactions that we might have not concluded if we did not develop our own standpoint. This is

vital for our study because it demonstrates to us a point of view that we might have not

concluded if we, the authors, did not put ourselves in the interviewees' position.

      We believe that this project will definitely set a stepping stone to more research on the

Middle East in general as it is a very underrepresented sector in the American society. When we

looked at studies done on other ethnic groups, we were able to conclude that newcomers in

general, no matter what their initial background was, seem to share common obstacles once they set foot in a new culture. However, while Middle Easterners share some obstacles with other ethnic groups, they also have their own distinct barriers that need to be looked out for, addressed and cared for in order to help ease their transition to the United States. With the continuous growth of the Middle East population here in the United States, we believe that dedicating some research on this population can help immensely raise people's awareness of the difficulties that such a population face, along with the psychological and intellectual needs of this population, and some ways that can ease their transition.

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