Identifying problems and difficulties in teaching English for zero beginner adult learners

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Abstract

English is regarded as the global language in the modern period because of its broader implications for social and economic issues. For this reason, several governments are working to ensure that English is taught in order to break down barriers to communication and connection with other populations. Due to a number of issues and challenges, teaching English to adult beginners is a challenging process. Thus, the purpose of this research was to conduct a current overview of the key issues and challenges associated with teaching English to adult beginners. Using contemporary research from 2019 to 2023, the study conducted a comprehensive literature review and identified many facets of acquiring a second language. The review's conclusions clarified the main issues and challenges in teaching English to adult beginners who have no prior knowledge of the language, including a lack of confidence and the presence of anxiety, a lack of vocabulary in the language, a lack of understanding of basic English concepts, a lack of time and exposure to the language, and differences in educational backgrounds, cultures, and ethical systems.

Keywords— English, second language, systematic literature review, Zero beginner, adult learners

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that English has become a universal language in the twenty-first century and has expanded unprecedentedly [1]. This explains why English has become widely accepted, encouraging early language learning. Nonetheless, considering the larger implications of learning English as a second language, it is a significant issue for adult beginners [2]. The growing importance of English is shown by the fact that learning the language is a global government priority, according to [3].

There is no denying the English language's growing importance in the globe these days. English has swiftly evolved into a worldwide language that unites people from all origins and civilizations, as [1] point out. Its quick development and position as the most frequently spoken language in the world have made it an indispensable tool for anybody wishing to communicate with people from all over the world and

take advantage of a variety of opportunities. Because of this, even for adult learners, English has emerged as the dominant language of choice worldwide.

Even while learning English has many benefits, it's crucial to recognize that teaching adult beginners this language has its own set of difficulties and complications. Beyond its widespread use, English as a second language has far-reaching ramifications, as [2] have shown. These implications include the complex process of teaching and learning the language to those who have no previous knowledge or experience in it.

Government focus on English learning around the globe has been highlighted by [4] as more evidence of the significance of English training. These days, many countries have made English literacy a top priority in their governments due to the realization that learning this language may greatly improve both individual and group capabilities. One of the most important aspects of current language-in-education policies globally, according to [5], is the growing integration of English

into the curriculum for higher education. The demand for English language instruction at all proficiency levels, including zero beginner adult learners, is increasing due to the language's widespread adoption as a basic component of university curricula in a globalized world.

Numerous reasons have contributed to the rise of adult learners' starter English learning and instruction, as noted by [6] and [7]. Notably, it is a result of the realization that adult cognitive growth and language learning may have significant positive social and economic effects. Adults who want to expand their horizons, participate in global debates, or access new career prospects find that learning English is an essential first step. The motivation to start their language learning journey from scratch is fuelled by a strong desire to access the immense reservoir of information, cultural interchange, and economic advantages that come with becoming proficient in English.

This study explores explore the primary issues and challenges associated with teaching English to adult learners who are at zero proficiency level, taking into account these significant influences and the language's increasing significance in today's society. Since these students are beginning from zero, they have particular difficulties that educators and institutions must help them overcome as they go through the language learning process. By looking at these difficulties, we can have a deeper understanding of the subtleties involved in teaching English to adult learners and create practical plans that can speed up their learning.

Probably one of the most important trends in language-in-education policy in the globe today is the widespread inclusion of English in higher education curricula [8]. Because of its role as the universal language [9], educational policy makers see the English language as a fundamental generic ability and a necessary part of university curriculum in an increasingly globalized society [10]. This is primarily a significant role in the rise of adult learners' beginner-level English learning and instruction. The other factors are increased proficiency in obtaining social and economic advantages and cognitive growth ([6]; [7]).

These facts serve as the foundation for this study's attempt to identify the primary issues and challenges associated with teaching English to adult beginners. The study used a systematic literature evaluation to achieve this goal and get the research objective. The article proceeds with explaining the relevant details about the methodological procedure with the help of systematic literature review.

II. METHODS

This study examined a wide range of research on issues and challenges related to English learning and zero beginners that were presented in esteemed peer-reviewed publications. The research took into account articles published between 2019 and 2023 in order to exclude any out-of-date material on current issues and challenges. Academic databases including Emerald, Science Direct, and Springer were employed in the research. The first step in creating abstracts was to look out relevant keywords like "English learning, English teaching, beginner level, zero learners, and adult learners." The investigation identified 100 relevant papers, but after eliminating those that didn't meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria—duplication and irrelevance—it only discovered 15 publications. According to [11], a research was considered included if the majority of participants did not speak English, and it assessed adult learning from the perspective of a zero beginner. On the other hand, commentary, meta-analyses, and book chapters were not included.

According to [12], an academic discipline requires pertinent literature to execute effective research. In this regard, a systematic literature review (SLR) helps to map out current knowledge and identify any gaps that relate to the issues raised by the underlying research effort [13]. This ultimately helps to expand the knowledge base in a particular dimension. Apart from a conventional narrative review of literature, SLR employs a scientific, reproducible, and consistent procedure to extract the findings of existing studies. It is preferable to gather all pertinent publications and papers that match the defined inclusion criteria to completely handle a certain study issue. The study initially developed am evaluation criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies. The study outlined the following features to include the articles rather focusing on exclusion [14].

- The searching through keywords was not the focus of the paper.
- The article selection was based on the teaching and learning levels rather than individual levels.
- The articles were chosen because they were pertinent in highlighting the primary issues

and challenges associated with teaching English to adult beginners.

- The essays examined the primary issues and challenges associated with instructing adult beginners in English.

This screening criterion helped to select the final number of papers for the SLR that were 100 and published between the 2019-2023.

The prime objective of the SLR is to reduce the likelihood of bias during the process of "search, identification, assessment, integration, evaluation, and summation of studies". The study has employed the SLR due to its convenience in employing clear yet systematic techniques. The other rationale for using the SLR is its execution throughout the research process, which is ensured to be carried out correctly with low prospects of inaccuracies [15]. Thus, decision-makers and academic experts can follow the accurate findings and recommendations from the underlying study to take the required actions to improve learning of zero beginner's adult learners considering the role of English teachers.

The review incorporates publications that were published between 2019 and 2023 about English teaching and learning of adults in different English, linguistics, and educational journals of three major sources, including Emerald, Science Direct, and Springer.

The review is based on publication developments, for instance, the variation is ensured by considering studies of learners with different language backgrounds. The study has classified the methodological approach to include divergent research publications from peer-reviewed journals. Correspondingly, the SLR approach has been used to draw valuable insights regarding the use of different English teaching techniques to cope with the difficulties of zero beginners.
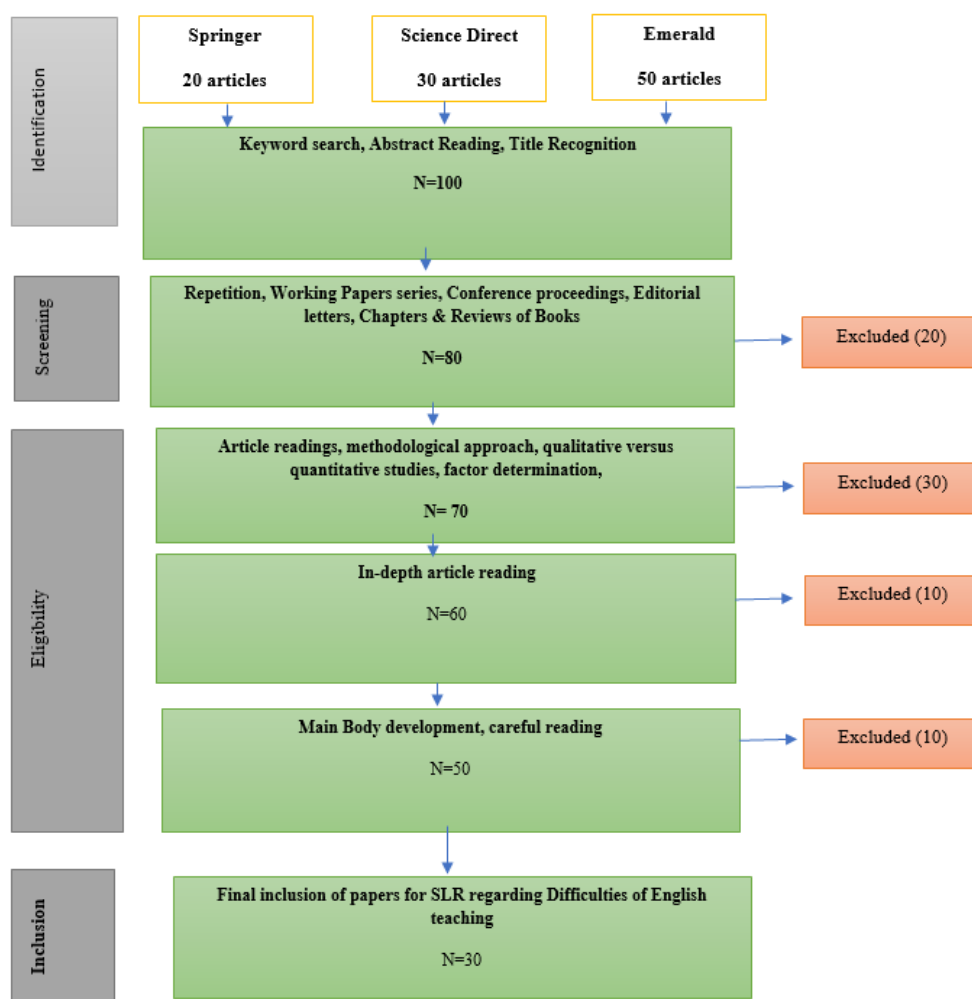

Fig.1: Flow Diagram for SLR

Source: Ahmad & Kusumawati (2020)

Following the procedure of [13], the study followed the four-step procedure to synthesize the existing literature. Figure 1 portrays the procedure of SLR through identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

The study ensured a unified criterion to include and exclude research articles for SLR following the research aim and objectives. For inclusion of studies, individual, contextual, and opportunity-based variables were identified that had association with student's performance. Whereas the studies were excluded due to duplication, abstract extensions (similar papers with change in years), inconsistency to fit precisely with the required difficulties and issues in the context of zero beginner adult learners.

The first and foremost step is identifying research articles which require to search the targeted databases for papers on English teaching and zero beginners' adult learners. Therefore, the researcher has adopted the well-recognized identification criteria and used Google scholar for Emerald, Scient Direct and Springer based articles. The study followed thematic approach which allowed to distributed papers into different themes. The themes were factors affecting English teaching, problems to zero beginners, and identification of key problems for teaching English to beginners.

The study has used different search words such as "English teaching", "challenges", zero beginners" "English language", and "factors," The words were required to "appear in the title, abstract or keywords". Thus, the study has finalized 100 publications including books, chapters, book reviews, articles, and research publications.

The next phase initiates with the general screening procedures and the order of opting for pertinent material. Initially, a total of 100 documents were gathered, while in the screening phase. The number of research studies was reduced to 80 articles. The exclusion of 20 papers at this stage was subjected to repetition, working paper series, chapter and book reviews, editorial outlines or articles, conference proceedings, and extended abstracts. The eligibility stage initiated with the article reading using a methodological approach. The studies were evaluated and selected based on qualitative dimensions. This helped to determine the relevant aspects or factors of the study. This has reduced the number of studies to 80 while the rest of the studies (20) were excluded due to dearth of relevance for this study. Following in-depth

article reading, categorization of studies based on methodologies, and excluded publications, only 70 studies met the required inclusion criteria. In the same phase, the key body of the literature was developed with more careful readings regarding the English teaching. This step excluded 10 more studies, and 60 fulfilled the eligibility criteria. Following the screening and eligibility criteria, the study ends up with 30 studies in the final stage. The other 10 were excluded due to overlapping to identify the problems.

The search parameters and the study's objectives determined the number of studies for SLR, or the number of publications included in the analysis. The number and types used for publishing searches had a significant impact on the number of studies (included) for analysis as well Additionally, the quality of SLR relies on the screening criteria that is based on four quality assessment-oriented questions.

The first questions allow that whether the reviewer has described the appropriate inclusion and exclusion criteria or not. The second question regards the coverage of reviewed articles in the context of relevant aspects of the topic under consideration. Third, whether the researcher has adopted the peer-reviewed research publications to ensure the quality and validity of the study or not. The fourth question inquires that whether English teaching and zero beginner adult learners were explained effectively to explore in the articles or not."

The literature included in the study would provide recent behavioural and contextual components. These would help to contribute to comprehensive understanding of what difficulties were faced by zero beginners.

III. RESULTS

Following the assessment of selected studies, the findings of the study have been distributed into three major sections. The first section argues about some relevant factors that affect the English teaching o zero beginners. The second sun-section looks into the problems of zero beginners that were exclusively incorporate in different studies to provide a background to the study. The third section outlines the main problems and difficulties in teaching English precisely to the adult learners that are zero beginners.

3.1 Factors Affecting English Teaching

A plethora of factors influence the process of teaching and learning of the zero beginners. This could initially

be attributed to the fact that such students do not study English in their early schooling and only utilize it in some higher education courses [16]. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the learning process is greatly influenced by the environment and family history. For instance, the educational background is modest in nations like Saudi Arabia, where the bulk of the population lacks formal schooling [17]. Furthermore, the parents have little interest in providing their kids with a solid education or in promoting their education [6]. This is the fundamental cause and influencing element in education. Second, the facilities, such as the classrooms, laboratories, and other school buildings, may not be nearly sufficient. Numerous additional sociolinguistic or pedagogical problems may arise in relation to English instruction in different non-English economies [18].

3.2 Problems of Zero Beginner Adults

There are several issues that zero beginners face while studying the English language. First of all, listening and speaking skills are not taught to them in their childhood in their everyday interactions at home, at school, at colleges, in universities, in markets, or in public spaces [31]. Students' development is stunted and such circumstances dampen their spirits. Some learners manage to attain a very high degree of spoken English fluency on their own. However, they dreadfully fall behind in writing, another active skill. According to [19], the majority of students often struggle with handwriting. In another study, [20] enumerated that majority of students taking EFL lessons struggle with oral communication since they often make glaring lexical mistakes. In addition to difficulties with speech and hearing, zero beginners also have difficulties when comparing and contrasting objects in other languages with those in their own dialectal [21].

Errors are made because there is no one-to-one correlation between two languages. An arabic sentence has a very different structure than an English one. For instance, the Arabic language often does not accept the forms is, am, and are for the verb "be." As a result, when a student translates "ana waladun," he sometimes interprets it as "I boy." Without a doubt, translation may help with second or foreign language acquisition, but it takes a lot of effort and long-term practice. Furthermore, it is impossible to translate every word in the native language. Notably, translation may sound awkward at times. It used to be possible to translate the phrase "traffic jam" as " "jyow-tong" " or " jiāotōng." The translation tool translated "jam" as "sweet soft food" instead of "many people or vehicle."

"Meanings" might be communicated in this way, but there's a good probability of distortion or incongruity. Furthermore, using one's mother tongue to understand and learn lexical elements might result in incorrect word collocations in the target language.

3.3 Problems and Difficulties in Teaching English

3.3.1 Lack of courage and Anxiety

[22] pointed out the aspects of courage and anxiety as adult learners. According to the author, students who are zero beginners sometimes lack the courage to study English as they are afraid of making mistakes. [23] indicated that learning a new language might cause anxiety and self-consciousness in adults. Their fear of being misinterpreted or criticized might prevent them from actively engaging in language-related activities, such as speaking and writing exercises [24].

3.3.2 Insufficient English Vocabulary

[25] highlighted the issue of insufficient vocabulary among English learners at the beginner level. According to research by [26], these students usually begin with a relatively little vocabulary, which makes it challenging to communicate successfully. The learning of language may be difficult and move slowly as a consequence of this lack of vocabulary.

3.3.3 Lack of Knowledge of Foundational English principles

In every beginner-based study, the issue of knowledge to foundation of English has been highlighted. Grammar rules, sentence structure, pronunciation, and other basic English language principles are sometimes difficult for zero beginners to grasp. [27] highlighted how difficult it is for students who have never studied English before to understand these basic concepts.

3.3.4 Lack of Time and English Exposure

A lot of adult learners who are just starting off in zero degree often have hectic schedules and little time to devote to studying a language. Their little exposure to English outside of the classroom coupled with this time constraint may hinder their language learning. [28] underlined the value of regular practice in language acquisition.

3.3.5 Differences in Culture, Ethical and Educational Backgrounds

There are no adult beginners from different backgrounds in terms of culture, ethics, or education. [29] performed a review that highlight how these variations might result in different expectations, learning preferences, and past educational experiences.

Educators need to manage these differences to establish a welcoming and productive classroom.

3.3.6 Incompetence to Communicate in Real-Life English Scenarios

Adult learners who are zero beginning often find it difficult to use their language abilities in everyday scenarios. [16] pointed out that not being able to communicate well in everyday situations may be discouraging and may result in a lack of useful language usage.

3.3.7 Building Language Skills Is Difficult Gradually

When learning a language like English for the first time, the essential foundational abilities must be built gradually. [30] research emphasizes the difficulties and possible sources of annoyance that come with this slow process.

3.3.8 Restricted Access to Learning Materials

Adult learners who are at zero may sometimes have restricted access to high-quality learning materials. [31] emphasized how resource availability affects language learning. A deficiency of language immersion programs, internet resources, or textbooks may impede advancement.

3.3.9 Lack of Good Learning Tactics

Adult learners who are zero beginners may not have any study habits or good learning tactics. According to [32], they could not know how to approach language acquisition, which would result in inefficiency and sluggish growth.

3.3.10 Setting and Reaching Language competency Goals might Be Difficult

Setting and achieving language competency goals might be difficult for zero beginners. [33] explained that earners may find it difficult to track their development and maintain motivation throughout their language learning process in the absence of clear standards.

These obstacles draw attention to the complexity of teaching English to adult learners who are at zero proficiency and emphasize the necessity for specialized teaching strategies to meet these particular issues.

IV. DISCUSSION

The review's conclusions imply that, despite their great desire to speak English, the majority of adult beginners' experience anxiety while trying to converse in the language [22]. It is a challenging challenge for teachers to examine their pronunciation and improve on their phonetics [34]; [35]. Teachers must therefore deal with the challenges on an individual basis in order to guarantee that students acquire the English language [24].

Furthermore, none of the novices have a large vocabulary, which limits their ability to comprehend even the most fundamental rudimentary English phrases. As per [25], a notable obstacle for educators is the scarcity of familiarity with foundational English and terminology. As a result, they must begin at the beginning and gradually increase the pupils' vocabulary and understanding of grammatical structures [36]. Recent research has also shown that beginners in the English language often have little to no exposure to the language [37]; [38]. This may be explained by the fact that they would rather converse in their mother tongue while doing everyday duties. As a consequence, learning would be incomplete or inefficient as they would be unable to keep up with the speed of instruction throughout their sessions. In this sense, teachers struggle to incorporate the learners' limitations with the learning resources at their disposal [32]. Because of this, students were unable to acquire the practical skills and cultural awareness necessary for proficiency in the English language, as stated in reference [27]. Teachers also need to interact with individuals who have various cultural origins, ethical perspectives, and educational attainment. As a result, it is challenging to create a curriculum that is appropriate for everyone without compromising these delicate subjects [33]. Thus, trustworthy material and real-world examples are useful in addressing this problem and fostering a learning environment among zero novices.

There is no dilemma when it comes to learning a language; it only takes time and costs the student. (31) underlined that 0 newcomers often have busy schedules and don't set aside the necessary time to study the language. Their obligations to their families and jobs, which force individuals to set aside time for second language acquisition, might be another factor [28]. The adult brain's diminishing neuroplasticity and students' lack of interest in textbooks that make minimal but believable connections for students are the additional challenges facing educators [29], [18], and [16].

Despite their great desire to learn and speak English, the majority of adult beginners who have completed the review seem to be anxious about speaking in the language [22]. For educators, this emphasizes how

crucial it is to handle students' fears and confidence problems in addition to teaching English. Furthermore, zero beginners may find it especially difficult to practice phonetics and pronunciation [34]; [35]. Teachers must implement ways that address these issues on an individual basis, acknowledging that every student may have different anxieties and concerns, in order to guarantee that the English language is acquired [24].

Adult learners who are zero beginners sometimes encounter a major obstacle in the shape of a limited English vocabulary, which hinders their capacity to comprehend even the most fundamental phrases in elementary English. It has been noted that teachers have a significant burden because of this constraint [25]. In order to tackle this issue, educators need to begin at the very beginning by gradually expanding their students' vocabulary and assisting them in comprehending basic grammatical rules [36].

Since they often choose to utilize their native language for normal work, many adult learners who are zero beginners have little or no exposure to the English language in their daily life [37]; [38]. Because it is difficult for teachers to incorporate this restriction with the learning resources that are currently accessible, this poses a serious obstacle to successful learning. Consequently, students can encounter inadequate or inefficient language learning situations [32]. Although developing English language proficiency and cultural awareness is important, it gets more difficult in some situations [27].

The range of educational, ethical, and cultural backgrounds among adult learners who are zero beginners is another significant problem. These variations may affect their expectations and educational experiences. These differences must be navigated by educators as they may have an impact on the creation of a standardized curriculum that is appropriate for all students. In order to tackle this problem, trustworthy information and real-world examples might be useful instruments for fostering a learning culture among adult learners who are zero beginners [33].

Zero beginners often have busy schedules and little time to dedicate to learning a new language. They could be forced to set aside less time for language study due to obligations to their families and jobs [28]. Teachers may also face difficulties due to the adult brain's diminishing neuroplasticity and students' disinterest in textbooks. Even though they may not seem like much,

these elements can have a big impact on students [29]; [18]; [16].

V. CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this research was to examine the key issues and challenges associated with teaching English to adult beginners. To achieve this goal, the study used a systematic approach for reviewing the literature and examined many published research articles in order to construct a thorough evaluation that took into account adult learners who were zero beginners. Adhering to the specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, the investigation examined current research conducted between 2019 and 2023. The study's conclusions showed that instructors struggle to educate adult beginners because of their extreme nervousness and lack of confidence while speaking English as a second language. Furthermore, adult learners often lack the vocabulary and fundamental English understanding necessary to comprehend simple phrases. Recent research has concentrated on the reality that adult novices have little to no exposure to English in their day-to-day lives. Instructors also have to deal with individuals who come from a variety of ethical, cultural, and educational backgrounds, which makes it challenging to maintain the standard of learning.

Because of the difficulties and barriers involved in establishing an inclusive learning environment for adult learners, the research's conclusions advise educators to adjust current procedures to accommodate adult learners. Furthermore, in order to keep their students engaged and inspired and to optimize the learning settings for adult learners, instructors must use dynamic and contemporary teaching tactics.

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