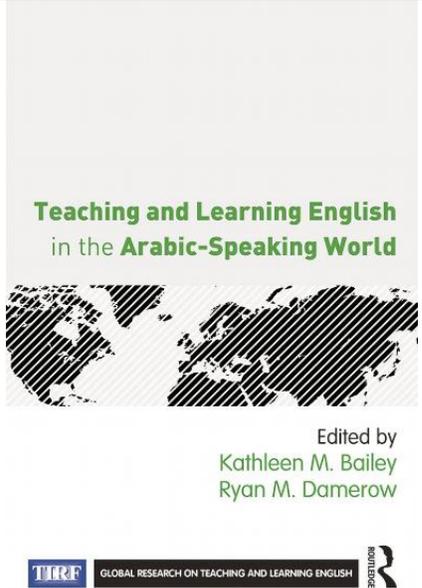


## Book Review

**Title: Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World**

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 <p>Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World</p> <p>Edited by Kathleen M. Bailey Ryan M. Damerow</p> <p>TIRF GLOBAL RESEARCH ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH ROUTLEDGE</p>	<p><b>Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World</b></p> <p>Edited by: Kathleen M. Bailey &amp; Ryan M. Damerow</p> <p>Published: 2014</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-415-73564-3</p> <p>Paperback: US \$44.95</p> <p>200 pages</p> <p>Publishers: Co-published by Routledge and The International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF)</p> <p>NY, New York</p>
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Global research done on language learning, though valuable, isn't always relevant or applicable to teachers and learners in the Arab world. There are only a handful of books that are specifically devoted to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Arab countries. *Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World*, however, is a book that contributes to the necessary, yet somewhat limited, educational research pertaining to a region which is experiencing rapid modernization, and accordingly has an increasing need for skillful English speakers.

The book is intended for teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and policy makers within the Arab world. It also serves as a valuable resource for English language professionals seeking job opportunities in that region and researchers interested in how education and EFL in Arab countries compare to other parts of the world. It is a research-based book containing twelve chapters written by different authors on educational research related to teaching EFL in six different Arabic contexts: Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The work is organized into three main parts: An introductory chapter that is written by the editors to demonstrate the need for this work and to map out the forthcoming studies in the book, followed by ten chapters of original research performed by professionals in the region, and a concluding chapter to summarize and provide general observations about the preceding studies. Although each chapter represents a separate research topic, there are some recurring themes, such as teaching academic writing at a college level (Chapters 2 & 3), the effects of first language transfer and common difficulties faced by Arab students (Chapters 2 & 4), teacher education (Chapters 5 & 6), and common challenges for teachers in that region (Chapters 6 & 7). There also themes that stand alone, such as the perceived role of the English language in the region (Chapters 5), instructional techniques currently used in the region (Chapter 8), vocabulary learning (Chapter 9), language assessment tools (Chapter 10), and factors effecting language learning (Chapter 11). Another trend throughout the book is the urge for change and advancement of EFL teaching and teacher training methods, as well as the need to move teaching away from traditional teacher-centered practices (those relying on rote-teaching and memorization drills) towards implementing more communicative and interactive teaching practices.

The book provides much insight on the EFL situation in the Middle East and challenges some perceptions about Arabic-speaking language learners and language learners in general (Chapters 2, 5, & 11). Although almost all the studies included in the book are geared towards adult learners and teachers of EFL (due to the fact that English in many Arab countries is introduced around seventh grade), implications from the studies extend to younger language learners as well. Moreover, the chapters of the book are similarly structured using the following subheadings: Issues that motivated the research, context of the research, research questions addressed, data collection and analysis procedures, findings and discussions, and implications for policy, practice, and future studies. Even though not all chapters fit into this structure neatly, it makes it easier for the reader to follow and predict subsequent segments.

There are, however, some drawbacks. While the studies are based on empirical research, chapter 7 by Esseili appears to be lacking objectivity when discussing challenges in foreign language teaching in Lebanese schools and in some cases contains biased statements that are not based on empirical evidence. An example of that is the statement that “Parents do not seem to be doing anything at home to help their children learn the language.” (p. 111). Another shortcoming is observed in chapter 5 by van den Hoven’s overuse of direct quoting throughout the chapter resulting in drowning out the author’s own voice. Nevertheless, each chapter provides worthy observations that enhance the readers’ awareness of underlying issues and concerns that are prevalent in the region.

Among the informative research is an intriguing study by Al-Thubaiti that explores the effectiveness of starting foreign language education at an earlier age in Saudi schools (Chapter 11). The results of the study challenge the Critical Period Hypothesis (which suggests that

success in language learning is determined biologically by starting at an early age) by suggesting that the quality of instruction and input are more important than age in affecting proficiency, especially in foreign language settings. In addition, the author's commendable use of the term "target-like" in describing the students' performance, rather than referring to the abstract notion of "native-speaker proficiency," provides a more realistic, measurable, and attainable goal for language learners (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997).

Another interesting study is in chapter 6 by Gardiner-Hyland which addresses the crucial issue of teaching reading in English within Arabic-speaking countries. The chapter demonstrates complications that Emirati pre-service teachers face in their attempts to abandon traditional teacher-centered methods, which are common in most Arab settings, and adopt a Constructivist approach that cultivates the culture of reading for pleasure. The study explores these challenges practically, providing the reader with experiences and observations of teachers who were able to successfully apply the new approaches, others who were able to integrate new techniques with traditional ones that their students were familiar with, and some who unconsciously resisted this change. The investigation is valuable because many teachers who were educated in a traditional setting find it challenging to shift to an interactive approach. It was found that when new teachers felt overwhelmed in the classroom, they reverted to the type of teaching that they were familiar with, repeating the cycle of ineffective teaching that they themselves rejected as students and as pre-service teachers. The author emphasizes the importance of teacher education programs in the Middle East that provide transformational experiences so that future English reading teachers are able to develop their identities beyond their past experiences as students in a traditional setting.

I would suggest this book for English language professionals who are searching for research opportunities in the Arab world as it offers a breadth of subjects as well as suggestions for future research.

#### Reference

Leung, C., Harris, R., & Rampton, B. (1997). The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities. *Tesol Quarterly*, 31(3), 543-560.