



# The Challenges Encountered by Young Adult Students in Learning the English Language: The Case of a Higher Education Institution in Bahrain

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the current study is to explore various challenges young adult learners experience in developing English language proficiency in the higher education setting of Bahrain. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was used in the study, which included 104 undergraduate students from Bahrain Polytechnic. Surveys and in-depth interviews were implemented to obtain an extensive picture of the learners' struggles and experiences.

The theoretical framework of the investigation included foundational concepts of Second Language Acquisition, Socio-Cultural Theory, Foreign Language Anxiety, and the concept of Identity Investment. Instruments for data collection consisted of a validated English Language Learning Challenges Survey and semi-structured interview – both tools had undergone expert assessment and pilot testing.

The results of the survey revealed that the students struggle with the moderate level of obstacles in four-dimensional subscales: linguistic challenges, first-language interference, teaching approach, and the level of technological implementation. The students showed the highest levels of challenges in the grammar of the English language subscale and interference from the first language subscale, which proved to undermine the efficiency of the studying process. The dimensions also negatively moderate cognitive learning, emotional aspect and operational language skills, with the domination of speaking anxiety and performance stress.

# 5th WORLD CONFERENCE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION



15 - 17 May 2026

London, UK

The statistical analysis shows significant variance of the challenge level between different age groups and students of different academic years, while the group separation by gender and multilingualism background showed no significant differences. The strong intercorrelations of all kinds of challenges indicate the high intertwining of the related problems.

According to interviews, the over-crowdedness of the classrooms, cultural impediments to communication, low-rate existence of the real-world English exposure, and high levels of academic pressure were named as contributing factors. Many students expressed their willingness to participate in less-formalized lessons, smaller class sizes, more practice options, and the implementation of supportive tools and technology in teaching.

Since the study descriptively argued the issue using a single-institution approach and a cross-sectional methodology, it aimed to guide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in their efforts to better English instruction in multilingual educational settings in the Gulf.

**Keywords:** young adult learners; language challenges; English language; higher education; Bahrain; multilingual education; pedagogical approaches