

# TIRF TODAY

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Promoting research and effective practices in English language education for the global knowledge economy in the 21st century

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## Interview with Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Mahmoud Abdel Latif

**Editor's note:** Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Mahmoud Abdel Latif was the first doctoral candidate to complete his PhD with the support of the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowship. For the complete version of this interview, please go to <http://www.tirfonline.org/community/interviews/abdel-latif/>.

**TIRF:** One of the main purposes of the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships was to promote effective teaching and learning of English in the Arab world. How did your study contribute to that goal?

**Dr. Abdel Latif:** Well, involving a sample of Egyptian student-teachers in my study simply means that it is particularly related to English language education in the most populated Arab country, since Egypt has nearly a quarter of the population of the Arab world. The way my study contributes to promoting effective teaching and learning of English in the Arab world can be summarized as follows:

- It provides a comprehensive picture about the explanatory variables of Arab/Egyptian EFL university students' writing processes and products.
- It presents a detailed description of the composing behaviours and processes Arab learners may use while composing in English.
- It draws teachers' attention to how to help Arab EFL students overcome their writing problems at both the process and product levels.

My study suggests some techniques for dealing with Arab students' English writing problems. In the last three years, I have published three articles derived from my doctoral research. I hope all these publications can promote writing research and pedagogy in the Arab world.

**TIRF:** How important is English language learning for young people in the Arab world?

**Dr. Abdel Latif:** As in many other parts of today's world, English is the most widely taught foreign language in Arab countries. Both children and adults are interested in learning English to be part of the globalized world and its culture. English is used as the medium of communication in many Arab business corporations, as well as in media channels. Three decades ago, there were a few schools in Egypt and the Arab world in which English was used as the medium of instruction – *language schools* as they are called. At present, I think they account for about 25-30% of schools in the Arab world. Likewise, English is the medium of instruction in many universities in the Arab world. Generally speaking, Arab parents are interested in helping their children enter these schools and universities, or even in sending them to study in English-speaking countries, because they want them to have excellent spoken and written English. With this increasing interest in learning English, more English language education research is needed in the region.

**TIRF:** What role(s) do you think TIRF could play in promoting English language learning and teaching in the Middle East?

**Dr. Abdel Latif:** TIRF can focus on promoting English language education research in the Arab world and help members of TESOL Arabia address important issues in English language teaching to speakers of Arabic. Such efforts might include sponsoring large-scale English language education research projects in the Arab world, sponsoring an Arab journal of ELT research, and helping create networks among English language education researchers in the Arab world.

**TIRF:** What words of encouragement would you offer to someone who was considering providing scholarship funding similar to that of the Sheikh Nahayan Doctoral Dissertation Fellowships?

**Dr. Abdel Latif:** I would say that English language education is the key to enhancing mutual interaction between Arab students and their international peers. Research can play an important role in promoting English language education in the Arab world. While English language education research is funded by different organizations in some parts of the world, it receives little financial and organizational support in our Arab world. That is why substantial donations to TIRF, like the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships, have the potential to assist local researchers in identifying effective English language education practices in Arab countries and beyond.

## 2011 Doctoral Dissertation Grants Competition Now Open

Each year students who have been advanced to candidacy in legitimate PhD or EdD programs are invited to submit proposals for TIRF's Doctoral Dissertation Grants (DDGs) for support of up to US \$5,000. To apply for a grant, applicants must submit a proposal which is clearly related to TIRF's research priorities. For 2011, these priorities are (1) bilingualism/plurilingualism in business and industry, (2) language assessment, (3) language teacher education, (4) optimal uses of technology in the delivery of English language instruction, and (5) students' age and effective English language education in schools. Applications are due by May 16, 2011. For more information, visit [http://www.tirfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TIRF\\_DDCall\\_2011\\_25January2011.pdf](http://www.tirfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TIRF_DDCall_2011_25January2011.pdf).



Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Mahmoud Abdel Latif

# TIRF

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Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF

## British Council Initiatives Parallel TIRF's Mission

By Michael Carrier

**Editor's note:** From time to time, TIRF will include pieces regarding organizations whose work is related to TIRF's mission. This update on the British Council was written by TIRF Trustee, Michael Carrier, who is Head of English Language Innovation for the British Council.

At the British Council we believe, like TIRF, that research plays a fundamental role in supporting the teaching and learning of English worldwide. We aim to support and sponsor new research and also to disseminate and promote awareness of key research findings -- which is why we are so delighted to be able to work with TIRF to support TIRF's work in creating new knowledge about the world of second language learning and teaching.

To achieve this goal, we decided to embark on some pragmatic projects to help teachers gain access to the latest research, and I'd like to share two of them with TIRF's network, in case any of the research components are of assistance to colleagues.

We identified a problem for most English teachers in accessing research. Although scholars have access to online databases that enable them to find academic

research papers, most of these are not accessible to teachers, or are too expensive to subscribe to as an individual teacher.

We wanted to do something about this problem, if possible, and to use technology to make research available easily and without cost.

First we created an online database, called the **Directory of ELT Research** and invited all ELT academics in every UK university to submit details and a summary of their current and recent research projects (focusing on the period 2005-2008 in the first instance).

The Directory project is initially focused on research done by academics with a connection to UK universities (not necessarily in the UK), simply because of the scope of resources we have available compared to the massive global task that will eventually be addressed.

The website for this database (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/elt-research>) allows scholars and teachers to search the database of research projects, find the project and the academic colleague that they are looking for, and may wish to make contact with.

The database was developed in conjunction with the University of Warwick. To broaden the range of people who could access this information, we also produced a printed version of the Directory, with further summaries of the research. This print version is available in book form and will be updated regularly (next edition late 2011).

Our other research focus is what we call the **ELTRA**, which stands for English Language Teaching Research Awards. In this project we invited scholars who are in some way connected to UK universities to bid for research funding in the areas of ELT that are at the top of the world agenda for ELT research. Our current topics include multilingualism, early years learning, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), teacher development, and curriculum.

For 2011, we are looking for new submissions from scholars and hope to find new ways to disseminate this research amongst teacher communities. Creating and sharing new knowledge is what we aim to do with this project, which will be presented in more detail at TIRF's panel presentation at the 2011 TESOL Convention in New Orleans.

## TIRF Announcements: Deadline Extended & Discover Languages Month

TIRF has extended the deadline for case contributions until February 28, 2011 for its upcoming commissioned report, *English at Work: Case Studies of English Language Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce*. The report will examine English language training programs in the workplace. To read the Call for Cases, visit [http://www.tirfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TIRF\\_CallForCases\\_25Jan2011.pdf](http://www.tirfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TIRF_CallForCases_25Jan2011.pdf).

Join TIRF and The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in celebrating *Discover Languages Month* in February! ACTFL founded *Discover Languages Month* in order to "raise awareness about the cognitive, academic, social, cultural and economic benefits that language learning provides our nation's students." For more information, please visit <http://www.discoverlanguages.org>.

## Report from the Chair — New Year's Resolution

January — named for Janus, the old Roman god of doors. He is portrayed as having two faces — one looking forward, one looking back. Thus, January is a time to remember the old and celebrate the new. In some cultures, this month is a time for making resolutions, and in this month's Chair's Report, I want to share mine with you.

If you visit the webpage that lists TIRF's donors, you will find that there are currently fifteen corporate donors and 114 individual donors (<http://www.tirfonline.org/donate/>). And, as you can see, the distribution of those donors across the categories is predictably uneven. We have many more "Supporters" than "Founders".

I have two New Year's resolutions in my role as TIRF's President and Chair. The first is to find five new corporate donors, to share with them TIRF's vision, and to get multi-year

commitments for support. We must do this while retaining our existing corporate donors, showing them how their donations have been used and how valuable they have been. I also pledge to increase the number of individual donors by 50%, which means we need to find 57 new people who have not previously contributed to TIRF. We need to share with them the passion and the enthusiasm of TIRF's Board for supporting research in our field, for sustaining young researchers pursuing their doctorates, and for reaching out to policy makers and the corporate world and trying to influence them with the findings of research on language learning and teaching.

To accomplish these goals, we need your help. Here's an example: In December 2010, I sent an appeal to UCLA faculty and alumni to contribute to the Russ Campbell Fund. Russ was a professor at UCLA and one of TIRF's founders, a visionary

who touched many lives. (Each year the highest ranked proposal for TIRF's Doctoral Dissertation Grants is selected for funding in his honor.) Donna Brinton worked with Russ for many years, and to support that fund, in addition to making her own donation this year, Donna posted the appeal on her Facebook page. The result thus far has been five new donors, but we hope that number doubles. Thank you, Donna!

Please can you help us, just as Donna did? Please talk to someone about TIRF. Please share this newsletter with people who would be interested. Please contact us if you have ideas about possible corporate sponsors by writing to [info@tirfonline.org](mailto:info@tirfonline.org). Please remember to send your own contribution. And in return, I pledge to report on our progress in keeping these New Year's resolutions. Thank you.

*Kathi Bailey*