

The Effectiveness of University English Preparatory Program at Ahfad University for Women as perceived by the Students

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Abstract

*The paper aims to determine effectiveness of Ahfad University English Preparatory Program to prepare students for their specialization study of university six schools. Stratified sampling techniques used to select 400 hundred students who completed freshman program on academic year (2019-2020) from six schools. **Major results:** 33.3% of students chosen to study English because they like English, the students faced eight difficulties of learning English in secondary school 40.0% of them mention the problem of Inappropriate Teaching Materials, while 25% indicated Improper Teaching Methods. 56.7% of the students considered the content of the program was difficult .86.7 of the students indicated the content contains of series of exercises and problems that develop different thinking skills .75% of the students see the content of the program suitable to their different specializations. 46.7 of the students indicated the course improved both their speaking and writing skills .90.0% of the students found the UPP helped them to improve the mistake of Pronunciation .Some of the students identified the negative aspects of the program that writing was so difficult because they didn't explain it fair enough, they just give us the task and I had to find a way to write them. The study concluded that Preparatory English course is a solution to low the performance of English language among students of Sudanese universities, equipping students with the necessary academic English skills for their university studies and future professional life.*

Keywords: University English Preparatory Program, Ahfad University for Women

BACKGROUND

Arabic is the most widely spoken language in the country. The English language at general education in Sudan would not effectively prepare the students for English instruction. University Nur, H., & Alsabah, A. A. (2008). Common problems of teaching English are limited teaching hours, large classes and inadequate teacher training. According to Hala (2012) When looking at the 'Common European Framework', readers will find that Sudanese students – after completing their study of English – hover between A1 to A2, which means they are graduating as basic users of English. Ahfad University for Women is one of the universities that persist to English as a medium of instruction despite the weak English standard of students who come from general education. Hence Ahfad University for Women since 2000 has introduced a preparatory year to improve the English standard of new intake students, known now as UPP. *Amna Bedri (2012)*.

All students entering AUW shall attend, complete and pass all components of the (UPP) as detailed by the School of Languages. Students in the UPP are subject to the same attendance requirements as all other AUW students. This study was conducted to assess the impact of the UPP as perceived by students.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study were students who completed the University preparatory program.

The study targeted 300 students who attended UPP of 2019 academic year. The study aims to determine the effectiveness of Ahfad University English Preparatory Program to prepare students for their specialization study of university six schools.

Stratified sampling techniques were used to select 400 students who completed the freshman program from six schools of Ahfad University. The sample was selected according to the numbers of the students of different six schools who attended the freshman program in the academic year (2019-2020).

The researcher managed to interview 317 students from the targeted 400 students due to the health situation. Face to face,

interview by the use of questionnaire was only the method of data collection.

Statistics, frequency distributions and percentages were used while for inferential statistics regression was used to analyze the quantitative data. The SPSS computer software (Version 21) aided the analysis. The results of the survey were presented using tables.

RESULTS

The reasons of choosing to study university in English

For effective language learning and teaching, both learner skills and learner assumptions should be given due attention. In promoting this idea, students should be provided with the opportunity to clarify and assess their preferences.

Preference of studying English language is an important variable that contribute to the opinion of students toward acquiring different language skills. As it can be seen from the table below, 33.3% of students chosen to study English because they like English and percentage of students 26.7 %said that they have chosen English because they got high mark in English in Secondary school, 26.7 % of them said that it gives them chance to communicate with foreigners, and 13.3% of students wanted to know different cultures.

Table (1) Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to reasons given for choosing to study English

Reasons for choosing study English	Frequency	Percentage
I like English Language	100	33.3
I have got high mark in English in secondary school.	80	26.7
It gives me a chance to communicate with foreigners.	80	26.7
To know different culture.	40	13.3
Total	300	100%

Students and English backgrounds

The students faced eight difficulties of learning English in secondary school 40.0% of them Mention the problem of Inappropriate Teaching Materials while 25% indicated Improper Teaching Methods (see **table(2)** For other difficulties)

Table (2) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to problems faced them in learning English before joined UPP?

Answer	Number	Percent
Lack of the Target Language Environment	35	11.7
Under-qualified Teachers	10	3.3
Inappropriate Teaching Materials	120	40.0
Improper Teaching Methods	75	25.0
Lack of Motivation	20	6.7
Lack of Self-confidence	15	5.0
Anxiety	10	3.3
Shyness	15	5.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The students ranked the four English skills according to their important to them writing and listening were most important to them, speaking identified as last priority (see table(3)

Table (3) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to classify the four skills in terms of importance to their learning

Skill	Number	Percent
Writing	140	46.7
Listening	100	33.3
Reading	40	13.3
Speaking	20	6.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Evaluation of teaching methods by the students

Most of the students evaluated the methods used by instructors in teaching four skills as average (see table(4).

Table (4) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the quality of teaching methods that the English teacher applied during the course.

Skills	The answer		
	Good	Average	Weak
Writing	50 16.6%	220 73.4%	30 10
Speaking	125 41.7%	160 53.3%	15 5%
Reading	45 15.0%	195 65.0%	60 20.0%
Listening	80 26.7%	260 86.7%	10 3.4%

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Evaluation of the content of the program

56.7%of the students considered the content of the program was difficult(see table (5) 66.7 of students see the length of contents was suitable (see table(6)

Table (5) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the difficulty of the content

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	170	56.7
No	130	43.3
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Table (6) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the suitability of contents of the unit

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	200	66.7
No	100	33.3
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The role of contents in the interaction of students and instructors

70% of students indicated the contents of the course encouraged them to interact with the instructors (see table(7)

Table (7) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to interact with the teacher in the light of educational material

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	210	70.0
No	90	30.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The content developed thinking skills of the students

86.7 of the students indicated the contents contains of series of exercises and problems that develop different thinking skills(See table 8)

Table (8) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to series of exercises and problems that develop different thinking skills

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	260	86.7
No	40	13.3
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The suitability of the contents of specialization of the students

Students from different specializations attended the UPP , 75% of the students see the content s of the program suitable to their different specializations.(see table(9)

Table (9) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the suitability of the content to specialization of the students

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	225	75.0
No	75	25.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The clearness of the language contents

90% of the students confirmed that the language of the course was clear (see table(10)

Table (10) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the Clearness of the language content .

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	270	90.0
No	30	10.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The diversity in course content

73.3 of the students agreed on the diversity of the contents of the course) **see table(11)** and 78.3 of the students indicated the contents added to their knowledge and raised their academic skills (see table(12) .

Table (11) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the diversity of course content

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	220	73.3
No	80	26.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Table (12) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to their academic evaluation of the course content

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	235	78.3
No	65	21.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

The Impact of the UPP in improving the four skills

46.7 of the students indicated the course improved both their speaking and writing skills(**see table(13)**. 46.7 of the students still found the speaking skill was difficult (**see table 14**) and also 45.0% found writing skill difficult .(**see table(15)**.)

Table (13) the frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the impact of the program on their productive skills

Answer	Number	Percent
Speaking	60	20.0
Writing	100	33.3
Both	140	46.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Table (14) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to their evaluation to speaking skill

Answer	Number	Percent
Easy	160	53.3
Difficult	140	46.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Table (15) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to their evaluation to writing skill

Answer	Number	Percent
Easy	165	55.0
Difficult	135	45.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Special Evaluation of the English language mistakes UPP helped to improve Speaking skill

90.0% of the students found the UPP helped them to improve the mistake of Pronunciation while 71.7% of the students mentioned the vocabulary and 78.3% mentioned the grammar (see Table(16).

Table (16) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to kind of mistakes in speaking program helped them

Skills	The answer	
	Yes	No
Pronunciation	270 90.0%	30 10.0%
Vocabulary	215 71.7%	85 28.3%
Grammar	235 78.3%	65 21.7%

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Writing skills

Table (17) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to kind of mistakes in writing the program helped them

Skills	The answer	
	Yes	No
-Spelling	250 83.3%	50 16.7%
Vocabulary	225 75.0%	75 25.0%
Grammar	210 70.0%	90 30.0%

Source: The researcher from applied study, 202

Evaluation teaching methods that the English teacher applied during this course

The results indicated the class discussion preferable by 66.7% of the student as method of teaching. 65% students found individual ; reading as fair. While 86.7% presentations as good methods used by the instructors.

Table (18) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to their appreciations to teaching methods used by the instructors

Teaching method	The answer		
	Good	Poor	Fair
Class discussions and debates	200 66.7%	75 25.0%	25 8.3%
Individual reading	45 15.0%	60 20.0%	195 65.0%
Being asked to held presentations in front of the class	210 86.7%	80 26.7%	10 3.3%

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

DISCUSSION

The students were interviewed who finished the UPP and enrolled in the freshman, their ages between 20 to 23-year-old. Most of the students selected to study university in English because they like English language in addition to high marks students got in secondary

school, also some mentioned the importance of English as language. A study conducted by Hala2012 with students from Khartoum University found that students are aware of the role of English in their life, and they need English for their studies, future jobs and for communication with the outside world.

The students ranked the four English skills according to their important to them writing and listening were most important to them, speaking identified as last priority. Matthew Ryczek, 2012 mentioned Understanding the learning needs and goals of our students is necessary in order to make the integrated approach as effective as possible.

Most of the students evaluated the methods used by instructors in teaching four skills as average. Sultan Idris 2017 Found the same results .

Majority of students found the content of the course was suitable ,but it's difficult. Majority of students indicated the contents of the course encouraged them to interact with the instructors. Natalia Montero (2014)In his study found that the syllabus is not suitable in terms of the time programmed for this course, which does not seem sufficient for students to find oral practice and grammar and listening assessment easy enough. Students indicated that the contents contain series of exercises and problems that develop different thinking skills and interaction. Interaction is critical to the process of learning a second language. According to Ellis (1999, as cited in Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003), interaction contributes to second language acquisition when individuals communicate, especially when they negotiate meaning in order to prevent communication breakdown.

The results indicated that the contents added to their knowledge and raised their academic skills.Ozkanal and Hakan 2010 found the appropriateness of the program to students' needs.

The Impact of the UPP in improving the four skills

The results of interview with students indicated that some of them found the course improved both of their speaking and writing skills but most of the students still found the speaking skill was difficult. Study by Mede and Uygun 2014found different results, who evaluated whether an English preparatory program has met students' language

learning needs. Their findings revealed that students benefited from the program in all four language skills in addition to helping them in applying different strategies to various language tasks.

Evaluation of teaching methods that the English teacher applied during this course

The results indicated the presentations as good methods used by the instructors .Gavin BROOKS* and John WILSON (2014) found Oral presentations provide teachers with a learner-centered activity that can be used in the language classroom as an effective tool for improving their students' communicative competence. The students also mentioned class discussion as preferable methods by students .most students found individual ; reading as fair method used by instructors this goes with the result of study doneby (aningtias, 2017) which , focused on the difficulties in reading comprehension.

According to Ellis (1999, as cited in Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003), interaction contributes to second language acquisition when individuals communicate, especially when they negotiate meaning in order to prevent communication breakdown.

Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003) pointed out that research on interaction is conducted within the framework of the Interactive Hypothesis, in which it is stated that conversational interaction “facilitates acquisition because it connects input; internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention; and output in productive ways” (Long, 1996, as quoted in Moss & Ross-Feldman, p. 2). Some students found the program was positive in the side of writing and vocabulary skills. The program was positive in the side of writing and vocabulary skills Balloo, K., Pauli, R., & Worrell, M. (2015) agrees with this result .

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concluded that Preparatory English course is a solution to the low performance of English language among students of Sudanese of universities. The intention of this course is to bridge the gap between weak standards of English in Sudanese schools and the expected level of university graduates, in addition to equipping

students with the necessary academic English skills for their university studies and future professional life.

Recommendations

The curriculum of the UPP should be more related to our future studies. The students found difficulties to understand the freshman courses in English they had to learn English all over again to understand what instructors were talking about. So the course should start with the student from the zero level, trying to solve every student's problem.

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