

Investigating the Performance of the University Preparatory Year English Program Instructors at Ahfad University for women Sudan

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Abstract

The paper based on interviewing 30 English instructors of university preparatory program at Ahfad University for women. The study aims to investigate the program as perceived by the instructors. Specially examine the problems that often encounter in teaching different four English skills. It also explores attitudes and perceptions of the instructors towards the program.

Major results: *Most of the instructors are males of young age and part-timers regular appointment, they have an average of eight years experiences of teaching English preparatory year. The problems that encounter teaching different skills analyzed by the instructors as follows, Lack of knowledge of sufficient vocabulary was the main problems facing teaching speaking, individual differences in listening skills and classroom environment are the main problems in teaching listening skill. Reading texts do not interest the students, it contains too many unknown words and finally Students feel stressed when they are given writing assignments. Majority of instructors strongly agreed that participation in teaching have exposed them to many examples of various students. Management of the program and the system of assessment emerged as problems encountered by the instructors. The study concluded that the qualifications, experiences and commitments of instructors play an important role of acquiring skills of English language. Moreover, the analysis of the problems of teaching different English skills can play crucial roles of promoting teaching methods of different skills. It recommended that different kinds of methods and techniques should be tried out to make teaching better.*

Keywords: Teaching English, English Four Skills, English Preparatory Year

BACKGROUND

Preparatory English course is a solution to the low performance of English language among students of Sudanese 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. This need for English is found to be urgent even in Arabic-medium universities and for future postgraduate studies, but most of all it is necessary in the universities that opted for English as the medium of instruction in all faculties. Alammar, S. (2009) Ali, A. M. (2009)).

According to Amna Bedri (2012)) Sudanese universities are facing the problem of how to upgrade their students' level of English. A possible solution could be to implemented English course (University Preparatory Program), which provides students with the language knowledge and skills to undertake their main.

Arabic is the most widely spoken language in Sudan. Arabic is very important in Sudan. The policies that accompanied Arabization, such as the closing down of training centers, change of curriculum, the withdrawal of extensive reading activities from the curriculum and the decrease in contact hours in secondary schools, still exist today. English, which has become the most widely used language in almost every area of our age, continues to have an importance as a worldwide language. In Sudan, English is literally regarded as an equivalent for the term foreign language. English language at general education in Sudan would not effectively prepare the students for English instruct University (Hala (2012) Ahfad university for women is one of the universities persist to English as medium of instruct despite the weak English standard of students who come from general education. Ahfad university for women the major instruction media is English. So due to the weak English standard of secondary students who enroll every year in different schools of the university Ahfad has established the Preparatory year to improve the English performance of the students. . Although AhfadUniversity Department of English Preparatory Program has been serving since 2000 it hasn't been subject to any program evaluation and development process or any study to be conducted into the program's purpose, content, learning and teaching process and dimensions of evaluation up to now. It is necessary to determine whether this program meets requirements or not because this program is significant for students success in the program they are supposed to attend after preparatory education-(AmnaBedri 2012. Hence, Ahfad university for women since 2000 has introduced preparatory year to improve English standard of new intake students, known now as

UPP. AmnaBedri (2012) Despite the importance attached to preparatory English programs in Sudan to bring university students up to an adequate level in terms of English and to help students use English internationally in various fields (Toker, 1999), the preparatory school programs have many problems. A few program evaluation studies recently carried out in the context of preparatory years at different universities revealed many issues that need to be improved for a more effective English preparatory school program in Sudan; (Brown, H. D. (2004).. One of the determinant of effectiveness of English Preparatory Program is performance of the instructors Therefore, this article investigates the performance of the instructors of preparatory year at Ahfad University for women The aim of this study is to determine effectiveness of the performance of the instructors of Preparatory Program to prepare students for their specialization study of university six schools.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the qualifications and experiences of instructors.
- To know the opinions of the instructors on the performance and capabilities of students.
- To investigate instructors' evaluation to preparatory English classroom.
- To investigate the problems encountered in teaching process of different English skills(Writing -Reading -listening –speaking)
- To investigate the instructors' assignment of the impact of preparatory year on English performance of the students
- To reflect on the problems related to the programs
- To identify suggestions of the instructor to improve the methods and tools of teaching the course

METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive quantities research to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions of the research .Sample of the study are 30 instructors who are participating on teaching on UPP were purposively selected.

RESULTS DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF INSTRUCTORS DATA

1-Profile of the Instructors

The study was conducted with 30 English instructors from University preparatory program at Ahfad University for women .67%of the instructors

are between 30 and 39 years old. They are 67% males and 33 % females. 53.3% of instructors are regular part-time teaching appointment, while 43.3% of them are full time teaching appointment. 80.0% of them have working experience between 6and 10 years (see table (1) below.

Table (1) Distribution of Respondents according to Different Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	percentage
Age		
25-29	7	23.0%
30-39	12	40.0%
40-49	3	10.0%
50-59	3	10.0%
More than 60	5	17.0%
Total	30	100%
gender	Frequency	Percentage
male	25	67.0%
female	5	33.0%
total	30	100.0%
Employment status in this university system		
Regular full-time teaching appointment	13	43.3%
Regular part-time teaching appointment	16	53.3%
other	1	3.3
total	30	100.0
Qualification		
Year of experiences		
1-5	2	6.7
6-10	24	80.0
11- 15	3	10.0
more than 15	1	3.3
total	30	100.0

The instructing work

2. Number of the students in the class

Table (2) below shows the number of the students in the class .it is clear from the table that 93.3% of the respondents confirmed that the number of the students in the class are greater than 30 .

Table (2) The frequency distribution for the study respondents according to the number of the students are in class

Answer	Number	%
Less than 30	2	6.7
30	28	93.3
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

3-The Levels of the Students in Your Class?

Table (3) The frequency distribution for respondents according to the levels of the students in class

Answer	Number	%
Most are above average	6	20.0
Most are average	4	13.3
Most are below average	4	13.3
Their levels varies greatly	16	53.3
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

Table (3) shows that 53.3 % of the instructors confirmed that the level of their students are varies greatly

4-Problems Encounter during Teaching Different English Skills

4.1Speaking Skills

Based on the results illustrated in the table below 33.3% of the respondents answered Lack of knowledge of sufficient vocabulary whereas 10.0 % of them answered students' self-confidence and limited use of English in daily life. See table (4)

Table (4) Frequency distribution of respondents according the problem encountered when teaching speaking skills

Answer	Number	Percent
students' self-confidence	3	10.0
Lack of knowledge of sufficient vocabulary	10	33.3
the difficulty in pronunciation	4	13.3
limited use of English in daily life	3	10.0
insufficient class hours	5	16.7
insufficient activities in textbooks	5	16.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

4.2. Listening Skills

Can you give examples of the problems you encounter during your activities to teach listening?

Based on the results presented in the table below there has been 33.3% of instructors who answered that individual differences in listening skills whereas 10.0% of the respondents answered time and lack of concentration.

Table (5) Frequency distribution of respondents according the problem encountered when teaching listening skills

Answer	Number	Percent
Time	3	10.0
individual differences in listening skills	10	33.3
classroom environment	9	30.0
lack of concentration	3	10.0
listening practices in books are not in the appropriate levels	5	16.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

4.3. Teaching Reading Skills

The results have shown 66.7% of the instructors admitted that Reading texts are about themes that do not interest the students it contains too many unknown words, whereas 33.3% of them say that students read just for the sake of reading. See table (6)

Table (6) Frequency distribution of respondents according the problem encountered when teaching Reading skills

Answer	Number	Percent
Reading texts do not interest the students contain too many unknown words	20	66.7
students read just for the sake of reading	10	33.3
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

4.4. Teaching Writing Skills

The results displayed in the table below indicate that 40% of the instructors confirmed that Students feel stressed when they are given writing assignments. See table (7)

Table (7) Frequency distribution of respondents according the problem encountered when teaching writing skills

Answer	Number	Percent
Students feel stressed when they are given writing assignments	12	40.0
Students feeling that writing assignments are unnecessary	5	16.7
students do not do preparation for the writing assignments	5	16.7
lack of creative writing courses	8	26.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

5-Assessment of the program by the instructors.

UPP acquire the student with vocabularies needed to continue their studies According to table (8) below 53.3% of the respondents said that UPP acquire the student with vocabularies needed to continue their studies while 46.7 % of them said No.

Table (8) Frequency distribution of respondents according to the vocabularies acquired to students

Answer	Number	Percent
Yes	16	53.3
No	14	46.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2021

6-How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the school improvement program in the UPP:

Six items of the questionnaire were designed to measure the school improvement program in the UPP. by choosing one of these answers (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree) ;As is shown below 46.7% of the instructors strongly agree with “The steps for improving instruction are carefully staged and sequenced “,while40.0%of the instructors agreed that “ The Steps that teachers should take to promote classroom improvement are clearly outlined”” ,whereas 36.7% of the instructors have strongly agreed that “Instructional goals for students are clearly defined” also 80.0% of them strongly agreed that “My participation has exposed me to many examples of the kinds of student work the program is aiming for”,in addition 46.7% of the instructors strongly agree that “My participation has exposed me to many examples of the kinds of classroom teaching the program seeks to foster” Furthermore 36.7%of instructors agreed that “The staff of a comprehensive school reform program provided me with many useful ideas and resources for changing my classroom practice”.

Table (9) Frequency distributions of the respondents according to their agreement to some statements evaluating the program

statement	Strongly agree%%	agree %	strongly disagree%	disagree%	total %
1. The steps for improving instruction are carefully staged and sequenced	46.7%	20.0%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%
2. The Steps that teachers should take to promote classroom improvement are clearly outlined	40.0%	23.3%	20.0%	16.7%	100.0%
3. Instructional goals for students are clearly defined	36.7%	30.0%	13.3%	20.0%	100.0%

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4. My participation has exposed me to many examples of the kinds of student work the program is aiming for	80.0%	26.7%	13.3%	10.0%	100.0%
55. My participation has exposed me to many examples of the kinds of classroom teaching the program seeks to foster	46.7%	26.7%	13.3%	13.3%	100.0%
6. The staff of a comprehensive school reform program provided me with many useful ideas and resources for changing my classroom practice	36.7%	23.3%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%

7-Assessment of Facilities Available to Program

Result of table (10) below indicated that 40.0% of the respondents say that the problems of the program related to Management of the program while 6.7 of the respondents thought that the problem related To The assessment dimensions of the program.

Table (10) distribution of respondents according to facilities available to program

Answer	Number	Percent
Availability of learning resources	5	16.7
Teaching process	3	10.0
The assessment dimensions of the program	2	6.7
Management of the program	12	40.0
The time	8	26.7

DISCUSSION

The profile of instructors in the interview indicated their young age with average 8 years experiences in addition to most of them part timers. This because Ahfad university usually depends on par timer instructors on teaching UPP because of the use of small group of the class. Problems encounter during teaching four English skills identified by the instructors.

The four skills of language (also known as the four skills of language learning) are a set of four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend and produce spoken language for proper and effective interpersonal communication. These skills are Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. In the context of first-language acquisition, the four skills are most often acquired in the order of listening first, then speaking, then possibly reading

and writing. For this reason, these capabilities are often called LSRW skills.(Bryne, D. (1991).)

Speaking skills

Lack of knowledge of sufficient vocabulary was main problems facing teaching speaking skills another problems like insufficient class hours and activities in textbooks are also mentioned by the instructors .This result goes with other result by Celce-Murcia. M. (2001) He revealed that the challenges instructors encountered most in teaching speaking are students' lack of vocabulary, pronunciation problems.

Listening skills

The instructors indicated that individual differences in listening skills and classroom environment are the main encountered problems in teaching listening skills. Shimaa M. Hwaidar (2015) also found class room environment as main problem encountered teaching listening states that it is basically essential to establish an appropriate physical and psychological atmosphere in classrooms.

Some studies found as Chaudron, C. 1983.) Mentioned Foreign-language learners usually devote more time to reading than to listening, and so lack exposure to different kinds of listening materials.

Reading skills

The instructors found Reading texts do not interest the students contain too many unknown words as encountered problems of teaching reading skills. Yana Yana (2015) found that The teaching reading comprehension, there were four problems encountered by the instructors in teaching reading: lack of students' vocabulary mastery, lack of motivation in reading, students were not used to read a lot on a regular basis and teaching time allocation. With reference to the findings, it is recommended for English teacher to select appropriate technique in teaching reading, which is relevant to the students' needs. In addition, the teachers also are expected to improve their ability in teaching practice. It can be done through joining some trainings and workshops about techniques in teaching, reading a lot of sources, and sharing information with others teachers.

Writing skills

Instructors confirmed that Students feel stressed when they are given writing assignments because they not do prepare for the writing assignments. According to Dang Thi Ngoc Anh(2019)writing is commonly known as the most difficult but the least liked skill although it plays a crucial role in language production

Evaluation of the UPP by the instructors

Most of the instructors strongly agreed that their participation in teaching have exposed them to many examples of the kinds of student work the program is aiming for. The students enroll in the UPP come from different social background and specializations and their levels vary greatly.

Management of the UPP mentioned as main problems in addition the instructor indicated the problem related to assessment dimensions of the program. The teachers are working in a situation that forces them to look for less and produce less competent students, with, limited resources and insufficient time allocated, not to mention many other factors (Elsheikh, A. (2010))

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded from the study that the qualifications, experiences and commitments of instructors play an important role of acquiring skills of English language. Moreover, the analysis of the encounter problems of teaching different English skills can play crucial roles of promoting teaching methods of different skills. Finally, it can be concluded that good classroom environment is basically essential to establish an appropriate physical and psychological atmosphere of teaching English .

The study recommended that different kind of methods and techniques should be implemented to make teaching better.

Instructors should find different ways to teach a new lesson or concepts.

Instructors should prepare lessons and materials prior to class, to show students that they are serious about teaching and that sets the tone so that they will be serious about learning.

There should be good interaction between the instructors and manager of the program to avoid some related problems might affect teaching and performance of the students.

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