

Needs Analysis and Syllabus Design in Moroccan Tertiary Education: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to reconsider the perceived English language needs of Moroccan students in a general English language program, known as ‘the common core program’ (CCP). The researcher deployed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to re-examine this obligatory four-credit course offered to all English majors, for which an English for General Purposes (EGP) syllabus is proposed by the Ministry of Education. The sample included 120 students and 12 teachers, conveniently chosen, with a multilevel sampling relationship. The research tools consisted of a questionnaire and two types of interviews [e-mail and one-on-one interviews]. The questionnaire’s internal consistency subscales were measured via Krippendorff’s alpha and demonstrated a good level of internal consistency. Structured interviews provided in-depth details about the courses students appreciated the most, appreciated the least, and pointers on how to modify the syllabus design. The results revealed that the students considered speaking as the most important component of the language which the most needed practice, whereas they cited grammar as the component that they mostly abhorred and had the least expertise in. Besides, they perceived reading comprehension courses as the least useful, while they considered writing courses as the most problematic ones. The students also showed great concerns over the time allotted to the coverage of the common core program courses. The findings from the present study will guide Moroccan university teachers and syllabus designers in re-designing the current language program to address the present gap and generate a “negotiated syllabus”.

Keywords: Tertiary Education, Morocco, Syllabus design, English for a specific purpose, Education.

Introduction and Background of the Study

The enormous proliferation in science and technology, after the Second World War, urged the use of English in all domains of life and society. The mushrooming led to the rise of the English language as an international language, used as a primary means of communication, through which assorted thoughts and ideas were shared in different areas, mainly in science and technology. This emergence significantly affected the areas of education and engendered a great demand for non-native speakers to learn English to communicate in a variety of contexts. This expansion generated the advent of a new approach, widely known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 6), two leading figures in this regard, delineated that with the upswing of English as an international language of science and technology, the learners, across the globe, became “au courant” of the way they need to use the English language and in which situation they need to use it. Most tertiary institutions offer English language programs to get students ready not only for their current academic studies but also for their future jobs (Köksoy, 2000; Sinanoğlu, 2004).

The Common Core Program, a major component of the new LMD (Licence, Master, and Doctorate) reform, was adopted by Moroccan higher education institutions in 2003. By definition, the Common Core Program is referred to as “the set of common courses required of all undergraduates and considered the necessary general education for students, irrespective of their choice in major” (Core curriculum, n.d.). Speaking of academic achievement under the new LMD system, students’ low performance and lack of achievement have been a problem for many institutions. The LMD system, as new reform, has been scathingly criticized by various research reports on the governance system reforms in higher education in Morocco (Kouhlani & Ennaji, 2012). Previous studies (Bouaziz, 2014; Kifani, 2014) argued that the new LMD system was not informed by students’ needs. Considering the lack of a comprehensive investigation regarding students’ “real language needs”, less achievement on the students’

part was the ultimate by-product. Therefore, the identification of students' language "necessities" and their "current lacks" and their future "wants" may enable curriculum developers to prepare more efficient programs for learners (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p.12). The primary aim of this study is to conduct a needs analysis research at the Department of English Studies, in the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLHS), Meknes, to improve the design of the existing common core program. In line with literature on the topic, and to design effective programs, students' language needs should be examined from different points of view, such as those of teachers' -either disciplinary teachers or language instructors- students', or program administrators'. It is not easy to cover all these stakeholders in a small- scale needs analysis study. Therefore, researchers should carefully and purposefully select the participant groups (Brown, 1995). For this study, the participants were the disciplinary teachers and their corresponding students. Since the primary goal of language programs should be to prepare students for the demands required from them in subject-matter classrooms or their academic studies (Jordan, 1997), perceptions from different discipline teachers and students can provide a good deal of data for curriculum developers about the actual needs of students in their disciplinary studies. With this in mind, this study is geared towards viewing and reviewing the English courses offered under the common core program at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Meknes. Given the necessity of determining students' needs as a key step in syllabus design, development, and modification, the objectives of this research project were to:

1. Identify students' language needs, gauge the utility of the courses offered under the common core program, and the suggestions students consider desirable for course modification.
2. Investigate the perceptions of content teachers about the common core program.
3. Draw an analogy between students' and teachers' perspectives to highlight and posit feasible guidelines for the design of an effective syllabus.

Review of the Literature

1.1 ESP: History and Development

One of the most significant discussions in applied linguistics is the history of teaching language for specific purposes (LSP). Arguably, Dudley-Evans and ST Johns (1998:1) asseverated that LSP dates far back to the Greek and Roman empires. Joining the debate, Strevens (1977) enunciated that LSP came into existence "at least half a century". There is a myriad of published studies delineating the scope of English for Language Teaching (ELT). The literature on the topic promulgates that ELT is oftentimes dissected into ESP and EGP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). ESP is assumed to be more focused, practical and object-oriented (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) as compared to EGP. Traditionally, it has been argued that ESP, a part of a more general movement of teaching LSP, came into clear view in the 1950s and 1960s. ESP has emerged as a distinct field in the 1960s. Various are the scholars (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987 ; Brindley, 1989; Tarone and Yule, 1989; West, 1994; Seedhouse, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998) who argued that ESP is not a planned or coherent movement, but quite a phenomenon that rose out of a number of converging trends, and cited different compelling reasons to the emergence of all ESP.

1.1 Origins of ESP

Interestingly, ESP, as a distinct field, surfaced, functioned and operated in diverse ways around the world. In this regard, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) divulge that there are three common reasons for the emergence of ESP: *the demands of a brave world, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner.*

A superabundant amount of literature has been published on the demands of English as an international means of communication. In consonance with Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the end of World War II and the subsequent western finance and knowledge were the two key factors that brought ESP to life. In a nutshell, after the end of WW II, the New World witnessed an age of massive and unprecedented growth in all the activities, especially the economic, technical, scientific, and academic ones, instigating a demand for a revolution in linguistics.

As for the second reason, Fatihi (2003) underlined that there were so many scholars who contributed to setting the first pillars of the "Communicative Syllabus Design". The switch of attention to communication highlighted the learner's role and their needs in modern educational systems and demonstrated that language plays a major part in a broader theory of communication. That is to say, the use of English differs and changes according to the context. Yet, traditional linguists (Chomsky as a case in point) embarked on describing the features of the language. On that account, several linguists, language specialists, and educators disclosed the urgent exigency to re-shape and re-think the teaching and learning methodologies on the grounds of the language specificities of each situation, averring that the English needed by police officers, cabin crew, engineers, and doctors are poles apart. To identify and analyze the linguistic characteristics of a specialist area, be it work or study, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 8) exhorted the guiding principle of ESP "Tell me what you need English for, and I will tell you the English that you need". To come to the point, this revolution in linguistics had an impact on the emergence of ESP, spilling much ink over the primacy of learners' needs in the teaching-learning process.

The third and final reason was the focus on the learner. Duly, Strevens (1977:152) propounded that "the existence of a major 'tide' in the educational thought, in all countries, exerts an influence on all subjects and their corresponding teaching

methodologies, on a wide scale, as well. The movement, being invoked here, is a global trend towards learner-centered education.

To recapitulate, as a by-product of *the demands of a brave world, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner*, learners' needs became, equally across the globe, over time, increasingly important key determinants, along with the methods used to distribute linguistic knowledge, in the teaching-learning process. Designing specific courses to better meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this build-up thinking.

1.1 ESP Classification

Browsing the literature (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Munby, 1978; Robinson, 1991), shows that scores of sub-divisions exist within the realm of ESP. ESP, traditionally, was splintered into two main fractions [English for Academic Purposes or EAP and English for Occupational Purposes or EOP]. Consistently, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 6) devised a tree diagram for ESP, which divides EAP and EOP according to discipline or professional area. Figure (1) cleaves ESP into academic and occupational mainstreams, Professional Purposes being a subcategory of Occupational Purposes.

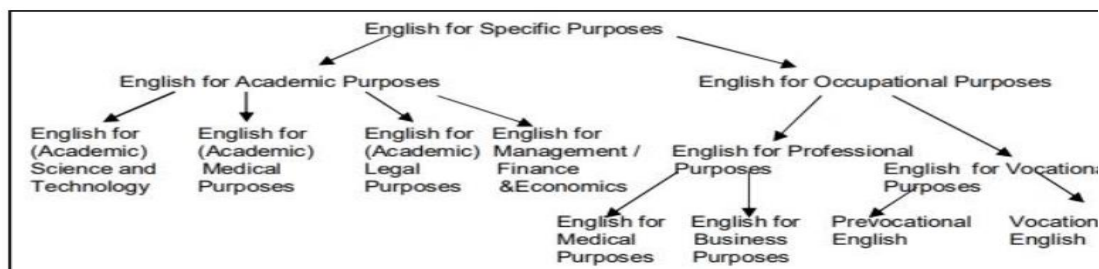


Figure 1. ESP classification by professional area by Dudley-Evans & St John (1998)

In other words, these types of ESP are uniquely concerned with the anticipated future English needs of the main stakeholders. From a syllabus design perspective, opting for one type of ESP instead of another has to be decided upon on accounts of the interpretation of results from a needs analysis of authentic language needed in target settings.

1.1 Needs Analysis

Invoking semantics, the term *needs* is not as straightforward as it appears. Brindley (1984:28) postulated that the term is sometimes deployed to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements. Major works in ESP [Munby, 1978; Richterich and Chancerel, 1987; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987] often proclaim that a need is conditional on the stakeholders' perceptions, and the needs, wants, values of the target audience. Teachers, learners, employers, parents, and other *stakeholders* may thus all have different views as to what needs are or are not. In turn, West (1964) avowed that the term, "analysis of needs", first appeared in the 1920s in West Bengal, a province of India. That being the case, Michael West introduced the concept of "needs" to allude what learners will stand in need to do with the foreign language in the target situation and how learners might become proficient in the target language. Thence, the term appeared again in 1960 and was quoted perpetually here and there. Ceremoniously, the term "needs" and the concept 'ESP' appeared at the Makerere Conference (Commonwealth Education Committee in 1961). Then, the research community recognized Needs Analysis (NA) as an effective step in the process of generating an ESP or GE course. Again, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) attempted to decipher "needs-based philosophy" of language teaching from different backgrounds. Previous studies acknowledged that Needs Analysis is a process that includes accumulating information on individuals or groups of individuals who are supposedly expected to learn a language, engendering a more improved language syllabus (Richterich, 1983; Richards and Rogers, 1986). Unequivocally, in the orbit of needs analysis, the focus may either be put on the general parameters of the syllabus or the special needs of the learners.

In line with traditional forms of English language teaching, teachers are recurrently deemed as the main stakeholders. Systemically marginalized, learners are often overlooked. Such biased forms of instruction failed to address learners' needs in precise terms. To set the record straight, syllabus designers were invited to ascertain that courses are aligned with the learners' requirements, prospective needs, deficiencies, and preferences. Etymologically speaking, NA, as a language teaching term, was first coined in the 1920s (West, 1997, as cited in Songhori, 2008). In sharp contrast with the current view of Needs Analysis, it used to refer to the process of unraveling the needs of learners of General English (GE), identifying the motives and the needs of learners in terms of language use required for day-in-day-out communication. The literature on NA suggests that the latter is deeply rooted in language teaching. It was first proposed by the council of Europe Modern Language Project group

before the 1970s and was developed across phases. Thus, the first phase was devoted to grammatical analysis. The grammatical complexity of sentence structures was analyzed to design structurally graded syllabus, but this syllabus was lambasted for contravening learners’ needs (Fatihi et al, 2003). Further, the second phase of the communicative approach specifies the syllabus designers and began to focus on identifying the learners’ needs (Munby cited in Richards and Rodgers 1986). Having a different frame of mind, Munby (1978) set in motion a new NA model, which was given immense credit by syllabus designers (Fatihi 2003). A distinctive feature of this model was the very fact that both the data respecting learners’ profiles and the language needs of the participants were easily within reach (Munby 1978 cited in Nunan 1988). Over the years, there was a significant shift from a narrow approach to a broader approach regarding NA, it has broadened the scope of NA and has resulted in a wide range of frameworks for NA. Currently, multitude of NA frameworks have been devised and suggested, as user-friendly manuals, to map out needs and wants of the target language learning program stakeholders .

Research Methodology

The study is geared towards viewing and reviewing the English language courses offered under the common core program at FLSH, Meknes. The study at hand aims at improving the design of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university common core program using **needs analysis**. The study was conducted using a pragmatist philosophical paradigm, a deductive research approach, a survey research strategy, mixed methods research convergent parallel design, a cross-sectional time horizon, and concurrent qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This research uses a mixed-methods design for **complementarity, compensation, diversity** (Creswell, 2003; Zachariadis et al., 2013). To recapitulate, this study has applied the convergent parallel mixed-method research choice, wherein quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques have been used to collect and analyze the data concurrently. Quantitative data were collected utilizing a questionnaire, and analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a robust quantitative statistical software. However, qualitative data were collected with the use of two types of interviews [e-mail and one-on-one interviews]. NVivo, a sophisticated qualitative content analysis software package, and thematic analysis have been applied to analyze the data accordingly. To collect primary data, the questionnaire survey technique was used. Figure 2 clearly illustrates the study research process in detail.

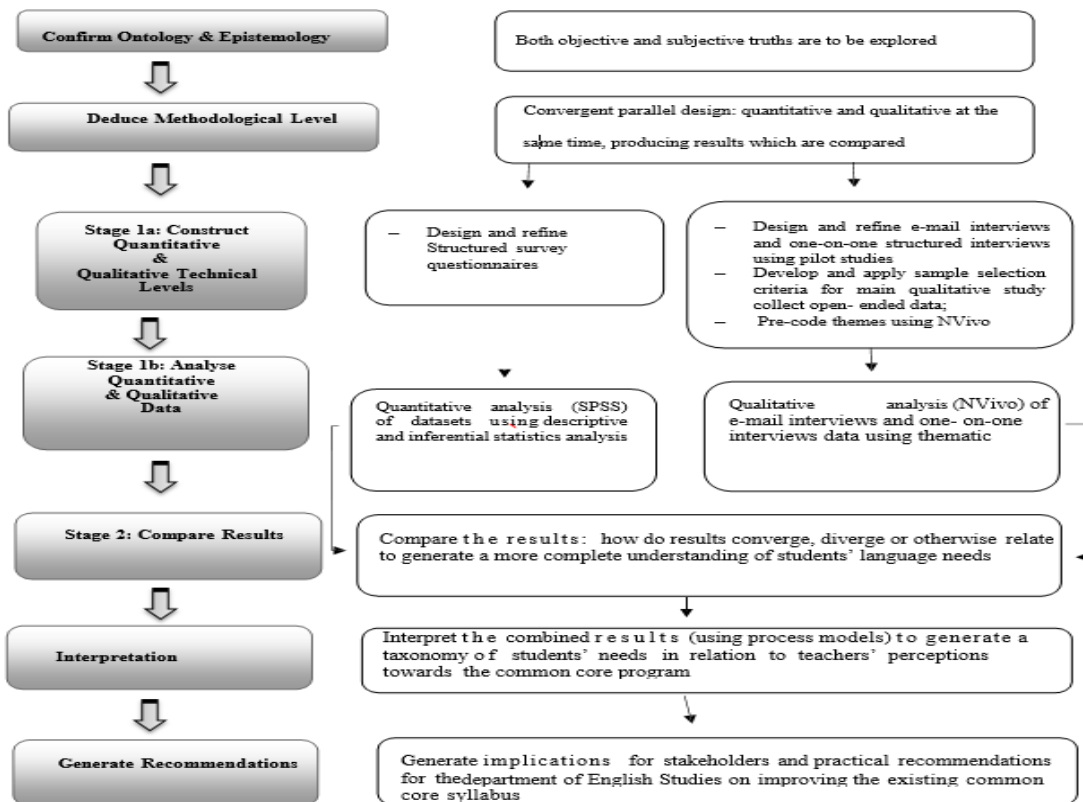


Figure 2. Research Process Flow (Adapted from Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2011)

3.1. Research Questions

Both quantitative and qualitative research questions were utilized. According to Creswell and Plano (2011), they are necessary for a mixed-method study because both quantitative and qualitative data collection is central to this form of inquiry (p. 162). Four key research questions were examined during this study: two questions were quantitative and two were qualitative. The quantitative research questions were: 1) What are semester four (S4) undergraduate students' language needs vis-a-vis the existing common core program?, and 2) How do (S4) undergraduate students perceive the existing common core program in general, and suggested courses in particular? The qualitative research questions were: 1) what are the disciplinary teachers' perceptions about the existing common core program courses? and 2) How can the existing common core program courses be improved to serve undergraduate students' language needs?.

It is important to note that the current study does not test any specific relationships between variables because it is descriptive in nature. The literature on the topic (Neuman, 2003) confirms that descriptive research is a useful method of gathering information about rare phenomena that could not be reproduced in a laboratory or about subjects that are not well understood. In the early stages of research, it might be difficult to form a hypothesis, especially when there is not any existing literature in the area. This applies to the current research context, the absence of Needs analysis studies in a tertiary EGP context.

3.2. Sampling

For this study **convenience sampling** is selected. Convenience sampling (also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling) is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the study (Dörnyei, 2007). For time constraints, the researcher opted for convenient sampling to recruit participants that were the easiest to access during the course of the study. The method proved to be sufficient in sampling for heterogeneity which looked to understand how the existing common core program is perceived by different university teachers and S4 students belonging to the Department of English Studies.

3.3. Participants and Settings

Two main reasons influenced the decision of selecting the study samples [University professors and S4 students]. Speaking of S4 students, the choice was justified because they have been exposed to all the courses offered under the umbrella of the common core program during their university studies at FLSH, Meknes. In addition to this, linguistically speaking, this category of students is proficient enough to verbalize and discuss their English language needs. The study was conducted at FLSH (Faculty of Letters and Humanities) in Meknes during the second term of the 2018-2019 academic year. The first sample comprised of 120 (S4) students. 51,67% of them were male students, whilst 48, 33% were female students. The majority of participants' age (51, 67 %) was between 22 and 25. Another key figure was that 46, 67 % of them aged between 18 and 21, while only 1.67 % were aged between 26 and 29 years old. It is noticeable that they are then mature enough to articulate their needs and interests. As for the second sample, it included 12 university professors. They were conveniently chosen to be interviewed based on ease and availability. 33% of them were males, while 70% were females. Of the twelve professors, only 2 preferred email interviews due to time availability. While the rest of them showed no objection to sitting in one-on-one interviews.

3.4. Time period

This research is a cross-sectional study as it attempted to identify students' language needs at a specific time (Babbie, 2013). The research was conducted during a short period of time, during the second term of the 2018-2019 academic year. Hence, a cross-sectional analysis is a valid assessment for a point in time. This research does not focus on showing changes over time, which would be a longitudinal study design (Babbie, 2013).

3.5. Data Collection

In harmony with the study design, the researcher concurrently used questionnaires and interviews as the main data collection instruments in the study. Abiding by the guidelines and recommendations of concurrent designs, the two research instruments received equal priority and weight. For this study, closed-ended questions were designed to call for responses, which narrowed down the field of inquiry as the respondents choose among fixed responses. They also help the researcher efficiently analyze the data since the responses are directly compared and easily aggravated (Patton, 1990). The questionnaire was used as a method of inquiry to investigate the English language needs of S4 students at FLSH, Meknes. For the research instrument, in question, choice, the majority of studies in NA used the questionnaire as the primary data collection method because of the numerous advantages it offers. Semi-structured questionnaires were designed and administered to a total of 120 conveniently chosen S4 students to collect data necessary to answer the research questions.

3.6. Reliability and Validity

To measure the reliability of the scales included in this questionnaire, a pilot test was used. A purposive sample group of 20 participants was selected, and following the academic guidelines of pilot testing adopted in human sciences, this number is highly acceptable (Adams and Schvaneveldt, 1991).

Table 1: A Summary of the Questionnaire Scales Internal Consistency

Scales	Krippendorff's Alpha
<i>Common Core Program (15 items)</i>	.743
<i>Common Core Program Experience (39 items)</i>	.828
<i>Common core Program Modification (8 items)</i>	.752

In this regard, Tavakol and Dennick elucidated that “the Internal Consistency describes the extent to which all the items in a test measure the same concept or construct and hence it is connected to the inter-relatedness of the items within the test” (2011, p. 1). Krippendorff’s alpha is expressed as a number that ranges from 0 to 1. Values range from 0 to 1, where 0 is perfect disagreement and 1 is perfect agreement. Krippendorff suggests: “[I]t is customary to require $\alpha \geq .800$. Where tentative conclusions are still acceptable, $\alpha \geq .667$ is the lowest conceivable limit (Krippendorff 2004, p. 241). As stated, a test or a scale with a total alpha loading of 0.6 or more is said to be internally consistent and thus reliable. As it is shown in the table above, the scales of the questionnaire demonstrate a good level of internal consistency. Hence, the study questionnaire is scientifically reliable.

In order to provide validity and reliability to the outcome of the research investigation a number of critical aspects were considered in the design of the two strands of research (survey and interviews). Before the final survey was constructed a pilot was introduced. A pilot study enables the researcher to refine the questions, evaluate their validity, ensure that the data collected matches the research questions and assists in developing the final version of the survey (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The pilot was initially conducted in order to reconfirm the necessity for the research, at one level and at a second level, to test the individual questions and overall validity of the survey. The two errors and the two biases didn’t occur in the study participant bias, researcher error, researcher bias, participant error). Validity was established through two measures **Piloting and Conceptual Frameworks**. Simply, the validity of the measuring instrument represents the degree to which the scale measures what it is expected to measure. It is not the same as reliability, which refers to the degree to which measurement produces consistent outcomes. Validity is all about the genuineness of the research regarding the validity, internal validity was not at stake seeing the research study was not mean to establish any no causal relationship. By the same token, External Validity by the sample choice (S4). The sample was representative as it concluded 120 out of 900. Likewise, the qualitative data sample was more than representative as it invoked 12 university teachers out of 32.

Since this study aimed at developing themes using the knowledge, experience, and opinions of university teachers who have taught the common core program courses, it was imperative to conduct the interviews in such a manner as to encourage truthful replies. Interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce and Neale, 2006). With this in mind, interviews were much needed as a data collection instrument. Two different types of interviews, email interviews, and one-on-one interviews were used as a follow-up to complement the questionnaire. Similar to the survey investigation, the researcher needed to ensure reliability within the interview data. Therefore, a series of conceptual frameworks, which can be used to help design the strategy for formulating valid interviews were considered. The researcher opted for a valid framework that has been put forward by Foddy (1993:22).

Data Analyses

In terms of quantitative data, the responses were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. The latter provided the statistical techniques which are recommended for giving answers to the research questions, generating both descriptive statistics. The frequencies procedure produced summary measures for categorical variables in the form of frequency tables, bar charts, and pie charts. Concerning the qualitative data, respondents’ answers were processed using NVivo 12 and thematic analysis. Data findings [presentation] were illustrated employing eminent qualitative data display techniques, specifically word clouds, word trees, boxed displays, flow charts, ladders, matrices, and comparison and convergence diagrams. The aforementioned techniques were used to visually display themes and illustrate participants’ narratives. According to the convergent parallel database mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2003), the survey data are analyzed separately in the first step and are then combined with the qualitative data in a second step to identify the extent to which students and teachers’ perceptions of the common core program converge or diverge. The statistical analyses that were carried out looked to evaluate three constructs among the sample population data obtained: Common Core Program (reasons, expectations, and responsiveness), Common Core Program Experience (utility, complexity, and difficulty), and Core Curriculum Tentative Modifications and Overall Impression. These sections of these

questions were analyzed using a combination of SPSS operations to provide numerous visual representations to engender an easy interpretation of the numerous variables throughout the study. It is important to acknowledge that the sample size of 120 set at a 95% confidence interval level provides a 5% margin of error, meaning that although the results offer a deeper insight into the sample profile, inferences, in regards to the whole population, should be made with caution and much care (Belia S, Fidler F, Williams J, et al.,2005).

Results and Discussion

5.1. Quantitative Research Questions

Seeing that the questionnaire consists of three major constructs, including Common Core Program (reasons, expectations, and responsiveness), Common Core Program Experience (utility, complexity, and difficulty), and Core Curriculum Tentative Modifications and Overall Impression, it is not within reach to report data pertaining to 26 university courses. That being said, data would be reported in a more holistic way touching upon 62 items involved in the study (See Appendix A). Results from the quantitative data analyses showed that students' needs are disregarded by the syllabus (common core program) designer. Quantitative data (a questionnaire) confirmed that there was a gap between students' language needs and the courses offered under the current common core program. For these reasons, they fail to upgrade their cognitive and linguistic abilities in the English language. Consistent with this view, Hutchinson, and Waters, (1987) and Robinson, (1991) pointed out that to accurately gauge students' prospective achievement in the target language, it is imperative to carry out a Needs Analysis investigation.

Research question 1: What are undergraduate students' language needs vis-a-vis the existing common core program?

In concert with the quantitative results, it is noticeable that English was very important for students in their field of studies; also they have expressed a favorable attitude towards English learning at the beginning of their studies. They stated compelling reasons for taking the common core courses, and they had great expectations in this regard. The results affirmed that the English language aspects that students would most like to put more emphasis on are *communication skills, technical vocabulary, academic writing, specific grammar, and speaking skills*. Students showed a strong preference for speaking with correct pronunciation, but the course does not offer much practice in pronunciation. The students have emphasized the role of communication. It seems what is needed from our General English courses is more communication-based courses. Students' high preference for grammar may derive from placing much emphasis on grammar instruction at previous levels. As many students have suggested adaptations to be made into the curriculum or syllabus so that the general English courses may be offered for specialized courses rather than general courses for general classes of students. Students' general dissatisfaction, with some of the common core courses, points to a need for making changes to the "what" and the "how" in such classes. These are the "de rigueur" language aspects students' cognize as of the essence to guarantee successful functioning in the target situation. In this respect, Nunan, (1989) contests that the attitudes and expectations of the learners coupled with the official curriculum specifications will determine and transcribe the efficiency of a language program (p. 176). Given that, most students revealed that the current English language course is not based on predetermined objectives and they would like to get the maximum benefit from the EAP type of English course. Moreover, the results indicated that one semester is not enough to cover up the course load nor to gain the desired proficiency in English. When designing an ESP course, the majority of the respondents affirmed that they should give priority to speaking and communication. Dudley Evans and St. John (1997) noted that the language choices of the students are inevitable and are always affected by the emphasis given to fluency or accuracy. Inline, Strevens (1998) accentuated that it is mandatory for materials and methods to be specific, in theory and practice, in order to address the special needs of the students. The self-same point of view was authenticated earlier on by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) when they underscored that the materials need to be instruments for both language use and language teaching.

Research question 2: How do undergraduate students perceive the existing common core program in general, and suggested courses in particular?

Given that students' needs are not taken notice of by the syllabus designer, there is a gap between their needs and the courses in use. Consistent with this view, Nunan (1989) points out that "the effectiveness of a language program will be dictated as much by the attitudes and expectations of the learners as by the specifications of the official curriculum" (p. 176). In light of this, almost all students responded negatively to the usefulness of the Common Core program courses (Tables 4.3-4.6) in terms of meeting their needs. This reveals the gap between the common core program in use and the needs and interests of students, which in turn calls for the need to design well effective and efficient CCP courses based on needs and interests of students.

From the analysis of the previously mentioned instrumental tools, several issues have been raised. The concerns are quite serious and seem to result in dissatisfaction among students. The results supported the research perception of the current EGP teaching/learning situation in the department. Based on their personal and academic experience, students spotted an array of weaknesses in the Common Core program of English in the Department of English Studies. These are outlined below:

- The time allocated to the modules does not seem to be enough.
- The content of the syllabus does not relate to the students' needs and wants.
- Insufficient feedback from teachers
- Teaching methodology related issues
- No coherence between the course's academic format and pedagogical approach

There is a mismatch between students' real needs and the goals and objectives of the Common Core program, and this is the case of undergraduate students in the Department of English studies at FLSH, Meknes. The current weaknesses in the nature of the common core program call for attention from all the stakeholders to be solved. If they are not taken into account, they may result in more frustration and dissatisfaction on the students' part.

5.2. Qualitative Research Questions

Qualitative results (interviews) contested that there is an incongruity between students' real needs and the Common Core program. Based on post-course feedback, students developed much interest in some courses and less interest in others for a conflicting set of reasons. The integration of the results from the quantitative and qualitative data led to further interpretations that provided support for students' language needs and teachers' pointer to modify the existing common core program so that it would be more responsive to students' needs and wants. Analysis and interpretation of the interview data also led to further information concerning teachers' suggestions for integrating new instructional courses within the current Common Core program

Research question 1: What are the disciplinary teachers' perceptions about the existing Common Core program courses?

This question sets out to investigate university teachers' views and needs from an English as a Foreign Language program in a public university regarding demands, interests and lacks based on the methodology of needs analysis. There were few mismatches, however, between the students' responses and the teachers' confirmations as far as the scale of difficulty and degree of usefulness of some courses. The participants had great concerns over the following common core program courses: *grammar, writing courses, reading comprehension courses, and French.*

In harmony with students' views, teachers put much emphasis on learning grammar, defined as the rules that govern how language sentences are formed (Thornbury, 2000, p. 1). In so doing, their perspectives intersect with Savage, Bitterlin, and Price (2010) articulated that "students must master grammar to be competent in the four language skills because incorrect use or lack of understanding of grammar might hinder communication either in speaking, writing, listening, or reading". However, teachers put forward that grammar is the most difficult language aspect for students in this study. Therefore, it is suggested to further reflect on this issue when teaching this language component. It would be advisable to expose students to proper practice to prepare them for written grammar exams.

Students claimed that they face problems with speaking. In contrast, teachers affirmed that writing is the students' main obstacle. Additionally, teachers confirmed that it has been a common complaint in the Department of English Studies that university students are incapable of articulating themselves understandably in writing. Odds are that students' problems in writing may be chalked up to several factors. They argued that one of the causes of the challenge might be the complex nature of the writing skill itself. In this respect, Byrne (1988) states that "certain psychological, linguistic and cognitive factors make writing a complex and difficult discourse medium for most people in both native and second language" (p.4). Interviewees stressed the importance of including writing in any syllabus modification. One important reason is that: writing helps learners learn. In line with this, Hedge (1988) also promulgates that "a good deal of writing in the English language classroom is undertaken as an aid to learning" (p.50).

In terms of **reading skills**, teachers reported that students find reading a demanding activity. This is one of the reasons they do not appreciate reading skills courses (reading comprehension and reading in culture). Reading was not listed as a priority among the set of language needs. These findings are not comparable with Chia et al.'s (1998) in which reading was considered as the most necessary skill. The literature on the issue tells that reading instruction is overall complex, especially when we admit that reading skills are influenced by several factors (Dickinson and McCabe, 2001; Linnakylä, Malin, and Taube, 2004).

Relating to the course '**Languages**', the study results revealed that the majority of the undergraduate students investigated are negatively disposed to learn French as a foreign language course in the university curriculum. Results demonstrated that most of the university teachers involved in the study believe that language policy in higher education is unwise and generally irrational and random. Based on the interview overtones, it can be concluded that subsequent unclear short-sighted educational language policies have put the future of Moroccan university students at stake. Undoubtedly, English becomes the language of academia and makes a significant contribution to the pluralism of the Moroccan language situation. The linguistic authority is no longer placed by French alone. In this respect, Lahlou (2009) contested that the Moroccan education system and university lack a clear identity (p. 4). By the same token, Zouhir (2014) cogitates that: The emergence of English as a second language in

Morocco gave way to a drastic reduction of the space of French, and changes in the structure of the curriculum were quite common. English has also been damned as a “killer language”, responsible for the extinction of the French language, which has enjoyed an important role for a long time.

With reference to the interview data and the major themes, the participants, i.e. university teachers, contested that the courses illustrated under figures (3 and 4) are the least and the most appreciated courses vis-à-vis the common core program. Teachers’ frequent contact and informal talks with students served as pieces of evidence in this regard. The participants cited different reasons to justify why students complain about or appreciate certain courses most of the time. The major reasons were related to the nature of the course content, main stakeholders’ poor background level, and negative attitudes towards certain courses.

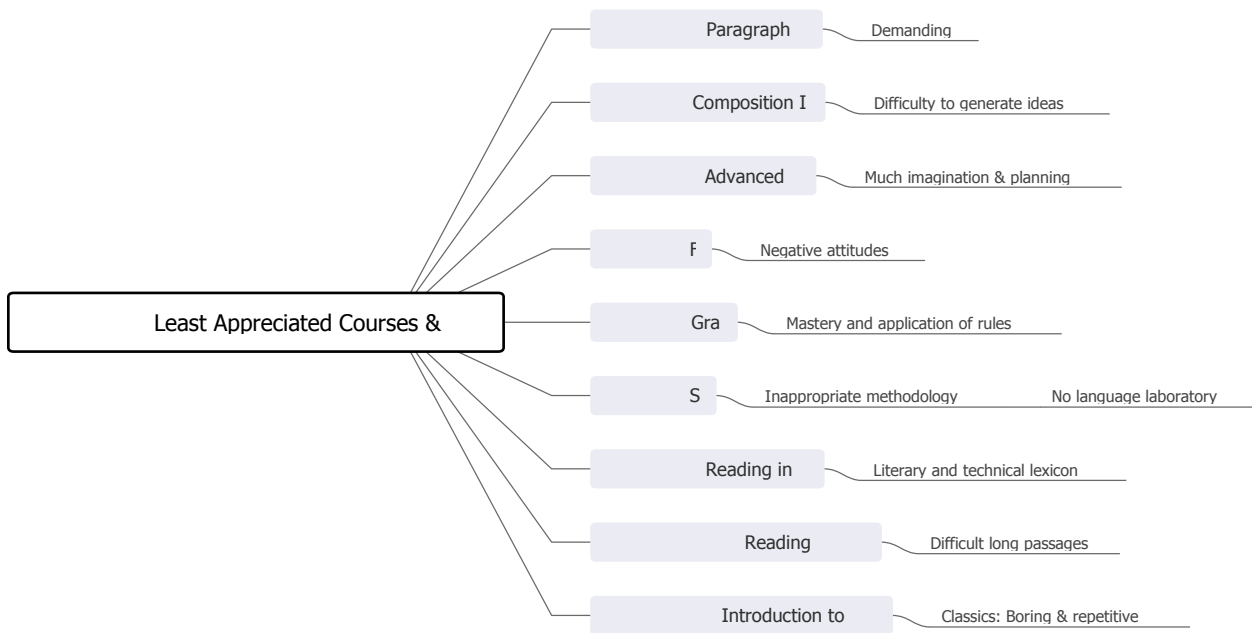


Figure 3. Least Appreciated Courses and Reasons

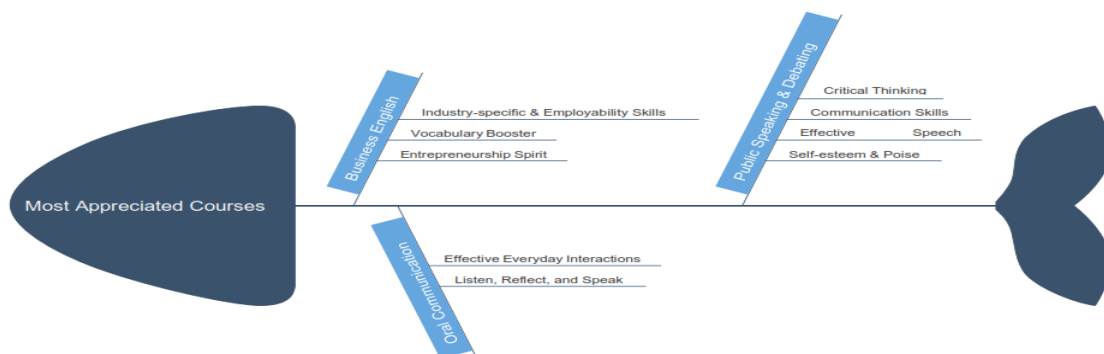


Figure 4. Most Appreciated courses and Reasons

Research question 2: How can the existing common core program courses be improved to serve undergrad students’ language needs?

Apropos interviews, Fraenkel and Wallen (2010) confirm that researchers, across the globe, are always concerned with the opinions of people on different topics and issues. Axiomatically, they ask many questions, all related to the issue in question to

come up with well-founded answers. Thus, a Needs Analysis study should not only be considered as a pre-stage for the design of language courses. In fact, it is an “on-going process” (White, 1998:91) and, like evaluation, it can be used to design, improve and implement language programs. Based on teachers’ perspectives and views, the existing current program can be improved by enacting a change in language policy and syllabus design.

Results suggest that there is a need for a change in language policy. In consonance with Shohamy (2006), critical perspectives on language can be determined by regulations that respond to two orientations: top-down and bottom-up. Depending on the informal discussions with students and instructors from this common core program, one of the most problematic issues they face is related to their curriculum design process since they have a national curriculum applied in all departments of English Studies in common core programs. It is thought quite challenging to decide on the syllabus that will appeal to their learners who come from different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds with different levels of English, needs and wants. Research tells that language programs should be analyzed carefully, and great attention should be given to the syllabus design process before being put into practice. The status quo, in the Department of English Studies, is no more different than the following scenarios put forward by Breen and Littlejohn (2000), in which they propounded "a negotiated syllabus" as a panacea.

- "Where the teacher and students have different backgrounds,
- Where time is short and the most useful choices must be made,
- Where there is a very diverse group of students and there is a need to find common ground,
- Where initial needs analysis is not possible" (p.272).

On account of the aforementioned conditions, the situation of the common core program at FLSH, Meknes, necessitates "a negotiated syllabus". The latter would be useful and practical. If "a negotiated syllabus" is implemented carefully and in a planned way, it would be a great helping hand for teachers and learners alike. Following the study findings, students and teachers verbalized the "how" to modify some courses, omit others, and introduce new ones to the common core program catalog. Figures (5 and 6) outline teachers’ perceived needs, suggested as a roadmap to modify courses proposed under the umbrella of the common core.

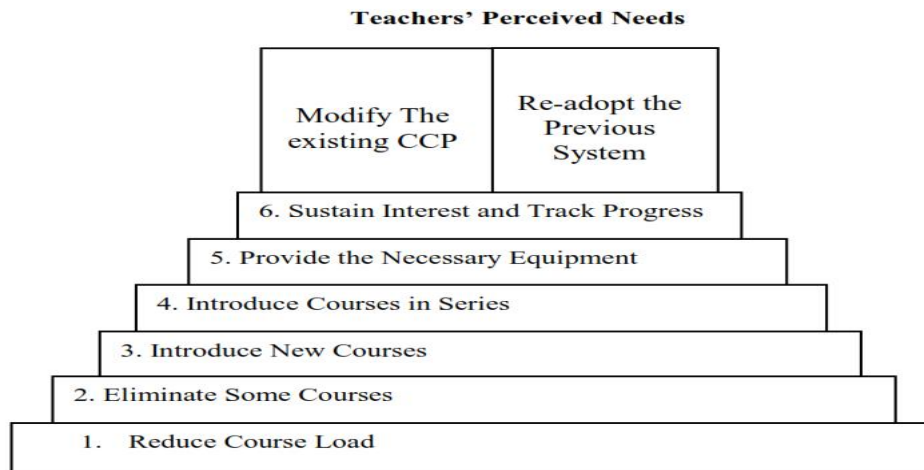


Figure 5. Teachers' Perceived Needs

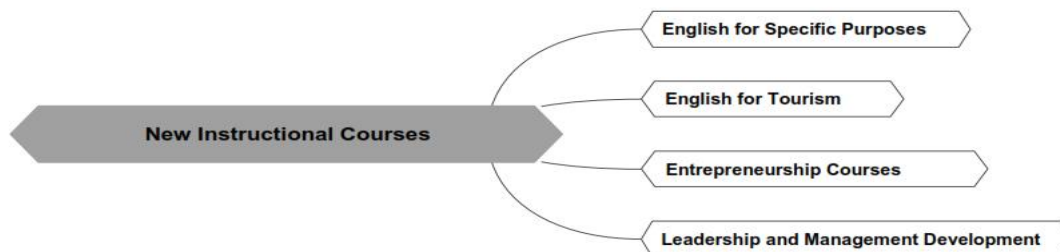


Figure 6. New Instructional Courses

Integration

In consonance with the separate analysis of all quantitative and qualitative instruments, in a mixed-methods study, the results are then merged and integrated to make inferences. Inferences in mixed methods research are conclusions or interpretations drawn from the separate quantitative and qualitative strands of the study as well as across the quantitative and qualitative strands, called meta-inferences (Creswell and Clark, 2011). A major technique for merging qualitative and quantitative data, in this regard, is comparing the quantitative and qualitative findings after separate analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data collected (Fetters et al., 2013). That being so, analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data were merged at this point to provide interpretation about the overall results of this study. Results from the quantitative survey (questionnaire) identified students' weaknesses, lacks, and wants. Interviews conducted with university teachers [based on their frequent interactions and small talks with students] provided much insight into students' language needs, shedding light on students' preferences with regard to the English language courses offered at the department of English studies, at FLSH, Meknes. Results from the questionnaire showed that students differ to a great extent with regards to both expectations and reasons for taking the common core courses. Analysis of the questionnaire indicated that students are convinced enough of the role of English as an international language. The latter is the main reason why they favor the Department of English Studies over other departments. Speaking of the courses offered under the Common Core program, students seem a bit dissatisfied with the 'menu approach', the pre-determined set of courses for each semester, and frustrated with the period devised to cover up the courses suggested at every semester.

Merging results from the questionnaire and interview showed that students and teachers seem to hold the same views with respect to experience with the common core program. The courses that were rated as useless were approximately the same courses that teachers argued, based on their frequent contact and small talks with students that their students complain about most of the time. There was a single disparity regarding students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulty of common core program courses. The findings suggest that the majority of teachers argue that their students complain about grammar courses, citing different reasons. However, quantitative data tell a different story. Students rated grammar as a useful course, which is not difficult. The majority of teachers and students seem to agree on the need to modify the language course by introducing other foreign languages.

The findings elicited from the four research questions offer a perspective from which to identify "the gap between what is and what should be" (Brindley, 1989, p. 65) with regard to S4 undergraduate students' language needs, more specifically, regarding the significance of English language for their studies, the difficulty of the English language courses, the areas of language use that they need training in (wants), and their preferences for the English language course. Such results emphasize that the students are aware of the significance of English in tertiary education. In terms of common core program students' English language needs, students considered English language to be important for their studies, also they perceived reading comprehension, listening, and writing courses (composition I, II, and Advanced Composition), reading courses (reading comprehension and reading in culture, Grammar, Spoken English, and French to be the most difficult and least appreciated. In contrast, students confirmed that Business English, Oral Communication, and Public Speaking and Debating as the most interesting and appreciated courses. Along the same line, they expressed the view that they would like to improve proficiency in all the language skills. Regarding students' preferences for the English language courses, the findings show that students are more inclined towards studying new courses such as English for Academic Purposes, English for Tourism, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship and Management Development.

Limitations of the Study and Future Works

As in most research, this study had some limitations that were beyond the researcher's control. One limitation is that the data were all self-reported. Therefore, it is conceivable that students may not have answered truthfully or completely within the provided data collection packets (i.e. demographics, reasons, expectations, needs, and wants). Even with interviews, teachers may not have answered truthfully or completely for a variety of reasons. Additionally, as required by academia, the entire study was based on voluntary participation through every phase of the study. Not all teachers completed the e-mail interview questions. Also, some teachers were willing to be interviewed, be it via e-mail or in person. Another limitation relates to the study's geographical location. The research was conducted in one open-access university known for having a large population. The generalizability of the results may not be reflective of different types of populations and universities. Some examples of other types of populations to consider in future studies to increase generalizability might include other universities in a comparative study. The convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used to try and minimize some limitations to the study. Triangulation of data through the use of mixed methodology adds strength to the validity of the design, but possible limitations of the study need to be addressed in future work. In this regard, prospective studies should be more qualitative in nature. There ought to be more focus on conducting a more in-depth interview with students, and class observation with the teaching staff to approach students' language needs from different perspectives

Recommendations

The findings of this study engendered a set of recommendations, based on the study implications. More importantly, the following recommendations and suggestions should be taken into account in so far as the study context is concerned:

1. University teachers, syllabus designers, and curriculum developers should recognize the importance of conducting NA as a key step in every language program. Concerning the study context, NA, if appropriately conducted, can boost the existing common core language program, and provide constructive feedback, irrespective of the implementation phase, be it before, during, or after the enactment of a language program.
2. The current EGP common core program must be shifted to an ESP program to meet the specific needs of students.
3. When re-designing the common core program, the priority should be given to speaking, communication, and writing skills among the other language skills.
4. Update the common core program by introducing new courses like English for Academic Purposes, English for Tourism, Entrepreneurship, and Leadership Management Development.
5. The duration (time allotment) of courses should be increased so teachers would cover up the course content and students would get the maximum benefit from the courses. Two hours per week are not enough to cover the content of the EGP course.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study attempted to report the findings of a needs analysis project. This study adds to the existing literature and knowledge in needs analysis to syllabus design (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Witkin and Altschuld, 1995; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). Sparing thought to the main concepts and frameworks of needs analysis, the researcher relied on the different contributions developed by specialists such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and John (1998), and Richards (2001). The researcher put in practice NA as a tool of investigation as a basic method in the study of students' language needs in an EGP context, the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Meknes, Morocco. Recently, the English language has become an essential requirement in the academic domain and the workplace. The study concludes that English language courses taken by the Department of English students did not meet students' needs and did not enable them to use English effectively. Thus, proficiency in English does need to be treated urgently, that is to say, the students do need help based on their needs and wants. The researcher agrees with Richards et al. (2002) in that carrying out an NA research makes use of both subjective and objective information (e.g. data from questionnaires, tests, interviews, observation) and seeks to obtain information on: a) the situations in which a language will be used (including who it will be used with), b) the objectives and purposes for which the language is needed, c) the types of communication that will be used (e.g. written, spoken, formal, informal), and d) the level of proficiency that will be required (p.354). What is more, in terms of learners' needs, the findings revealed that the present language program, common core program, is inappropriate to the students. It is hoped that the study outcomes would serve as decisive guidelines to what should be done in the re-design of the EGP syllabus offered at the Department of English Studies at FLSH, Meknes.

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Appendix

Appendix (A) Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of an academic research project. Your cooperation will be a major contribution to the research project. The researcher promises to maintain the strict confidentiality of your information. Your department, the course coordinators, and the head of department will highly appreciate your answers. The results will be analyzed and used to further development and modification of the courses suggested under the umbrella of the existing common core program [S1, S2, S3, and S4]. Thank you.

Please put a tick on the correct options & write information if required.

Part A. Demographic Information

1. Please provide the following information:

a) Your age:

- 1) 18-21
- 2) 22-25
- 3) 26-29
- 4) 30+

b) Your gender:

- 1)Female
- 2)Male

Part B. Common Core Program (history, reasons, expectations, and responsiveness)

2. Reasons for taking the core curriculum courses

- 1) Role of English as an International language
- 2) English for career prospects
- 3) English for postgraduate studies abroad
- 4) English for postgraduate studies in Morocco
- 5) Participation in International mobility and exchange programs (ERASMUS, FULLBRIGHT, etc.)
- 6) To sit for language tests (e.g. TOFEL, TOEIC, IELTS)
- 7) Other:

3. Prior Expectations to the core curriculum courses:

- 1) Introduction to English for academic purposes (EAP)
- 2) Mastery of subject-specific vocabulary
- 3) Extensive grammar practice
- 4) Training in receptive skills (listening & reading)
- 5) Training in productive skills (speaking & writing)
- 6) Focus on communication skills
- 7) Develop grammatical & syntactical accuracy
- 8) Develop fluency
- 9) Other:.....

4. Do English courses at your department, offered under the core curriculum, reflect your language needs?

- 1) Yes 2) No 3) To some extent
- 6) To sit for language tests (e.g. TOFEL, TOEIC, IELTS)
- 7) Other:

3. Prior Expectations to the core curriculum courses:

- 1) Introduction to English for academic purposes (EAP)
- 2) Mastery of subject-specific vocabulary
- 3) Extensive grammar practice
- 4) Training in receptive skills (listening & reading)
- 5) Training in productive skills (speaking & writing)
- 6) Focus on communication skills
- 7) Develop grammatical & syntactical accuracy
- 8) Develop fluency
- 9) Other:.....

4. Do English courses at your department, offered under the core curriculum, reflect your language needs?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) To some extent

Part C. Core curriculum Experience (Utility, Complexity, and Difficulty)

5. How useful are the common core English language courses with regard to your English language needs?

Very useful (VU) Useful (U) Somewhat useful (SU) Useless (U)

Semester I.

Course	VU	U	SU	U
1) Reading comprehension (1)				
2) Paragraph writing				
3) Grammar 1				
4) Spoken English				
5) Guided reading				
6) Study skills				
7) Languages (1)				

Semester

C ourse	U		U	
1) Reading comprehension (2)				
2) Composition (1)				
3) Grammar (2)				

II.



4) Oral communication				
5) Reading in culture				
6) Business Communication				
7) Languages (2)				

Semester III.

Course	VU	U	S U	U
1) Extensive reading				
2) Composition 2				
3) Grammar (3)				
4) Public speaking & debating				
5) American/British cultures				
6) Initiation to translation				

Semester IV.

Course	VU	U	S U	U
1) Intro. to Literature				
2) Adv. Composition & Intro.to Research				
3) Intro. to Linguistics				
4) Intro. to Media Studies				
5) Intro. to Cultural Studies				
6) Translation (Ar-En/En-Ar)				

6. Do you think that the time allocated to the common core courses is enough?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

7. Which instructional course was the most difficult for you? Jot down a corresponding number in the space given.

Semester I.	Semester II.	Semester III.	Semester IV.
1) Reading comprehension (1) 2) Paragraph writing 3) Grammar 1 4) Spoken English 5) Guided reading 6) Study skills 7) Languages (1) Semester I: _____	1) Reading comprehension (2) 2) Composition (1) 3) Grammar (2) 4) Oral communication 5) Reading in culture 6) Business Communication 7) Languages (2) Semester II: _____	1) Extensive reading 2) Composition 2 3) Grammar (3) 4) Public speaking & debating 5) American/British cultures 6) Initiation to translation Semester III: _____	1) Intro. to Literature 2) Adv. composition & Intro.to Research 3) Intro. to Linguistics 4) Intro. to Media Studies 5) Intro. to Cultural Studies 6) Translation (Ar-En/En-Ar) Semester VI: _____

8. Why was the course difficult? (Please, tick all that applies).

- 1) The time allocated is not enough
- 2) Course content is difficult or inappropriate
- 3) No coherence between the course's academic format and pedagogical approach
- 4) Unclear course objectives
- 5) Insufficient amount of feedback from teachers
- 6) Teaching methodology related issues
- 7) Tardiness & Irregular attendance
- 8) All
- 9) Other:.....

Part D. Core Curriculum Tentative Modifications and Overall Impression

9 Suggest any modifications you consider desirable for each course listed below:

Course	Keep as presented	Modify	Eliminate	Unable to comment
Reading Comprehension (1)				
Paragraph Writing				
Grammar 1				
Spoken English				
Guided Reading				
Study Skills				
Languages (1)				
Reading Comprehension (2)				
Composition (1)				
Grammar (2)				
Oral communication				
Reading in Culture				
Business Communication				
Languages (2)				
Extensive Reading				
Composition 2				
Grammar (3)				
Public Speaking & Debating				
American/British Cultures				
Initiation to Translation				
Intro. to Literature				



Adv. Composition & Intro_to Research				
Intro. to Linguistics				
Intro. to Media Studies				
Intro. to Cultural Studies				
Translation (Ar-En/En-Ar)				

10. Which aspects of the English language would you suggest to be focused on in the common core program (you can choose more than one)?

- 1) Specific grammar
- 2) Technical vocabulary
- 3) General vocabulary
- 4) Reading comprehension
- 5) Listening comprehension
- 6) Speaking Skills
- 7) Writing skills
- 8) Communicative skills
- 9) Critical thinking skills
- 10) All
- 11) Others (please specify):.....

Appendix (B): Teachers’ Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- 1) Please provide the following information: name, age, and years of teaching.
- 2) Which instructional courses do students mostly complain about? Could you possibly tell us why students feel so?
- 3) Which instructional courses do students appreciate the most? Could you please state any reasons for such a preference?
- 4) In an attempt to update the existing common core program, which “new” instructional courses would you like to be integrated? Could you possibly provide some justification?

