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TAYR Quarterly (ISSN 2382-2872. Impact Factor 0.805) is an indexed journal that publishes all kinds of scientific research in English Language Literature, and Civilization conducted by young researchers from all over the globe. All articles, Research Letters, and papers published are reviewed by a committee of young researchers in the first phase and then edited by an eminent researcher. TAYR Quarterly is totally free and open access to all TAYR members.

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Reflecting on Teacher Evaluation: How Students' Growth Measures Enhance Teacher Growth and development

By Noura Eloun

Abstract

A growing body of research in higher education reforms and effective teaching highlights the primacy and inevitability of designing models for teacher evaluation that would be partly based on student learning gains. This focus follows research findings that posit the teacher as the most influential factor in student learning (Wright, Horn and Sanders, 1997), with a lasting impact into adulthood (Chetty, Friedman, and Rokoff, 2011, 2013). Thus, formal methods of teacher evaluation have increasingly become critical to the internal and external considerations of the quality and rating of universities across the globe. Drawing on teacher evaluation rhetoric and theories, this paper addresses the issue of teacher accountability and the shift in teacher evaluation approaches. The leading argument is that improving student performance goes through upgrading teacher practice, as an outcome of evaluation procedures that measure teacher performance. The Value-Added Model of assessment using student test scores to compare student achievement over a period of time is particularly believed to enhance teacher growth. Within the immediate Tunisian context of university and more specifically LMD reforms, I believe raising the issue of teacher evaluation is relevant. Adopting a policy that measures teaching effectiveness can only upgrade the level of the students and universities, and stimulate a higher teaching performance.

Keywords: teacher evaluation, student growth measures, accountability, teacher effectiveness, Value-Added Model

Introduction:

The global context of higher education is one characterized by new trends, greater challenges and shifting paradigms. Indeed, institutions are faced with non-stop technological innovation, an ever changing generation of students, employability variables, and local factors that affect educational policies. Over the last four decades, higher education has undergone profound mutations, increasingly focusing on developing and enhancing human skills. Teachers and education policy makers across the globe are aware that they are working in a highly competitive environment. In order to compete, they constantly enforce measures that would set norms for educators and teachers towards effectiveness. These measures largely rely on cultivating teacher accountability both as a policy and a self-assessment spirit, leading to what education experts call “the accountability era” (Drake and Burns, 2004). In other words, the teacher must demonstrate effective practice that would be partly measured through the students’ learning gains. For education to be meaningful, the identification of students learning outcomes is essential to improve the practice.

As such, the growing interest in higher education quality has come to center on the teaching performance and made it the pivotal factor in reform. It has been demonstrated that teacher effectiveness is tightly linked to high learning outcomes. Effective teachers do make a difference in a student’s life and career. They can make students enjoy learning and they can enhance their academic achievement. Research sustains that a high quality professional performance yields higher levels of student performance. The 1990’s saw a growing interest in theorizing education with respect to teachers’ impact on students, and their determining role in the nature of learning gains and academic achievement, leading to a learner-centered approach to teacher evaluation.

Departing from the traditional evaluation models, leading institutions across the globe are moving from “whether teachers are doing their jobs to helping them improve” (OECD 2011: 34). In order to improve, the weaknesses and the shortcomings of a particular teaching practice need to be identified, and in the new era of learner-centered approach, the analysis of students’ learning outcomes best informs the new evaluation tendency. One particular model of student growth measures is emphasized in this article as yielding specific and useful data to contribute to teacher growth. This model is the value-added method of assessing student learning gains. My aim is to highlight the importance of teacher evaluation both for accountability purposes and for teacher progress.

The paper will first explore the magnitude of teacher impact on the learning outcomes and achievement of students. Second, following the evident fact that teachers are the most important factor in student growth, the paper moves to investigate issues and forms of teacher accountability and evaluation. The leading argument is that improving student performance goes through upgrading teacher practice as an outcome of evaluation procedures that measure teacher performance. Third, I am going to present and explain the Value-Added Methodology which focuses on the impact of higher education on student learning. It measures students' growth to determine the level of teacher and institution effectiveness. Subsequently, I will bring into light the findings of the OECD extended research regarding the importance of this method of evaluation for teacher growth. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the complexities surrounding the issue of teacher evaluation and accountability, and more specifically when using student growth measures, with recommendations on the possible implementation of the VAM.

It is worth noting that Tunisian universities have witnessed an important decline in the world ranking of universities, hence, targeting quality and implementing the international standards of the reforms have become inescapable for an efficient educational reform. The LMD reform has already focused on aligning academic degrees with international standards, but it is not sufficient to construct a top performing academic system. Accordingly, there is a need to research the advances and new trends in higher education, while responding and adapting to local complexities. It is within this scope that the current research aims at suggesting the concept of teacher accountability and evaluation as a structuring principle of reform.

1. Teacher effectiveness and why it matters:

It is common knowledge and shared experience that some teachers have a lasting effect on their students. This impact stems from the way a teacher can touch and influence the students, but mainly from the teacher's contribution to the knowledge and skills of the students. Here, we are talking about teacher effectiveness. To define teacher effectiveness is to outline the traits of a successful instructional experience. Pertaining to our Tunisian context of education¹, this paper selects the following criteria of teacher quality as identified by Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005):

- ▶ Having a deep understanding of the subject matter

¹ The absence of shareholders in public higher education and the lack of institution overall objectives and philosophy rule out other criteria such as correlation with the institution mission statement, having a stakeholder-centered approach and developing an internationalized scope.

- ▶ Connecting the material to students' knowledge and experience
- ▶ Using creative instructional strategies that help students develop new skills
- ▶ Assessing student learning continuously with clear standards and adapting teaching to student needs
- ▶ Encouraging students' participation in the classroom

Additionally, Hativa et al. (2001) highlight lesson organization and planning as central in the process of knowledge transfer, resulting in more effective learning. Ultimately, Stephenson (2001) identifies 'extraordinary teachers' as those who "know what to teach, how to teach, and how to improve". They have passion for four things "learning, their fields, their students and teaching"². Thus, empathy and enthusiasm are considered important in an educational experience. Other qualities include: formal training, field specific certification and experience. Thus, a successful teacher is able to combine different teaching strategies, conduct research, and come up with original and creative work, making the best use of the resources available.

In order to verify the magnitude of teacher effectiveness regarding a student's growth and career, Wright, Horn and Sanders have conducted a pioneering research within the framework of The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment system (1996). Through the analysis of accumulated data about student progress over three years, taking into consideration the student achievement level, teacher effectiveness, class size and heterogeneity, and the institutional environment, the study revealed that top-performing teachers are the key to student top achievement. One of the major findings is that students with comparable abilities will have hugely different academic achievements depending on the teacher. Teachers with high effectiveness are able to tremendously upgrade the level of lower achieving students, compared to relatively ineffective teachers.

This pivotal research was conducted on 2 groups of students with comparable learning and achievement abilities. Over the span of three years, one group was placed with high performing teachers and the other group with low performing teachers. Revealing a huge gap between the two groups' achievement records, the results show that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Another implication of this research is that being placed with 3 effective teachers in a row has long term benefits for students' learning and achievement. Hence, "not only does teacher quality matter... but also... a teacher's effectiveness stays with the students for years to come" (Tucker and Stronge 2005: 5).

²Cited in "The Path to Quality Teaching in Higher Education", Fabrice Henard and Soleine Le prince-Ringuet, OECD, 2008, p. 17

What can be learned from this study is that “the single most dominant factor affecting student academic gain is the teacher”³, and thus “more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than any other single factor.”⁴For Sanders, the self evident solution that emerges is to improve learning opportunities for all students, primarily via enhancing teacher development. Such an advancement can be achieved by cultivating a culture of accountability and fair teacher evaluation.

2. Accountability and teacher evaluation: towards a learner-centered approach:

2.1. Teacher accountability:

The theme of teacher accountability permeates the discourse of education researchers and policy makers in an effort to set high teacher standards and better student performance. A generic definition of accountability is provided by Boven (2005) as “a social relation in which an actor feels an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct to some significant other.”⁵ Tightly linked to accountability are concepts of transparency, answerability, responsibility and sense of duty. The term has come to be widely used in the formulation of educational reforms in many countries, and has been translated into a system of performance assessment.

Among the benefits of accountability Levitt et al. (2008) mention: democratic control, enhancing integrity and improving performance. In fact, accountability “strengthens commitment to honesty and appropriate conduct and encourages consistency of actions”⁶, and thus, performance can be improved and standards are met. To illustrate the importance of accountability in the education context, the concept has been adopted as a national goal by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future in the 1996 report “What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future”, stating that: “by the year 2006, America will provide all students in the country with what should be their educational birthright: access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers”. Making it more explicit, the quote proceeds as follows: “if students are to achieve high standards, we can expect no less than from their teachers and other educators” (p18). As such, student achievement has become a fundamental measure to evaluate teacher effectiveness.

Accountability as an ethical concept deals with teacher responsibility and sense of duty. In fact, relevant to accountability is the way teachers feel about the quality of their

³ Ibid, p.5

⁴ Ibid, p.63

⁵ Cited in Levitt Ruth, Barbara Janta, and Kai Wegirch. “Accountability of Teachers: Literature Review”. General Teaching Council of England, 2008, p.5.

⁶ Ibid, p.14

teaching and the impetus to maintain and improve their performance. According to a 2009 research conducted by The General Teaching Council for England, accountability is not only in relation to teacher performance and student achievement, but it encompasses teachers' concern about the well-being of the students and their views, in addition to promoting equality. The research also notes the enthusiastic compliance of some teachers with the evaluation systems, as it is a way to do justice to the efforts of teachers who are committed to an adequate level of performance. Thus, a sense of accountability fostered by evaluation measures becomes an incentive towards improvement, which result in more effectiveness, hence better student achievement. It is within this culture of accountability that acceptance of and openness to evaluation facilitate and encourage feedback on teacher performance.

2.2. Teacher evaluation:

Teacher evaluation is defined as “the formal process of gathering and recording information or evidence over a period of time and the application of reasoned professional judgment in determining whether one or more aspects of the teaching of a teacher exceeds, meets or does not meet the teaching quality standards”⁷. It can be inferred from the definition that the aim of an evaluation is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher. The teaching quality standards slightly differ from one institution to another and from one country to another, as do evaluation methods. But roughly speaking, teacher evaluation was traditionally based on classroom observation by inspectors, assessing classroom strategies and activities (Education Research Service 1998). It was taken for granted that a good teacher performance, as determined by inspectors, equals high student achievement.

The growing interest in teacher effectiveness led to the reconsideration of traditional teacher evaluation methods. Dissatisfaction with these stems from their inadequacy. Toch and Rothman (2008) for example viewed traditional evaluation systems as “superficial, capricious, and often do not directly address the quality of instruction, much less measure students' learning” (p. 1). Other experts stress the lack of credibility and inaccuracy of the information about teacher effectiveness. Stronge and Tucker (2003) identify the limitations of this approach as follows:

- ✓ the artificial nature of the supervision
- ✓ its limited validity
- ✓ its narrow scope assessing only the instructional skills of teachers
- ✓ involving only a small sample of the teaching time

⁷“Teacher growth, Supervision and Evaluation policy”, Alberta, p. 2.
<https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626684/tgse.pdf>

As a turning point, a study by the RAND group in 1984 entitled *Teacher Evaluation: A Study of Effective Practices* (Wise, Darling-Hammond, Mclaughling and Bernstein) concluded that teacher evaluation systems do not contribute to teacher growth and the teachers themselves demanded a more specific and rigorous approach. For them, the traditional approach “provided insufficient information about the standards and criteria against which teachers were evaluated and resulted in inconsistent ratings among schools” (Wise et al. 1984: 16). By the new century, teacher evaluation has become a priority and a matter of research and legislation across the globe.

Ultimately, the absence of a learner-centered approach presents the basic flaw in the traditional inspection system. As Barr and Tag (1995) explain, the teacher is traditionally evaluated “on the basis of whether her lectures are organized, whether she covers the appropriate material, whether she shows interest in and understanding of her subject matter, whether she is prepared for class, and whether she respects her students’ questions and comments”. All these factors evaluate the instructor’s performance in teaching terms. There is no formal concern about, nor evidence for student learning.

A revolution in the assessment models then, has taken place, focusing on the students learning gains and targeting teacher professional growth. The new approaches to teacher appraisal seek “to improve learning outcomes through fostering and targeting teacher professional development and holding teachers accountable” (OECD 2011: 33). This, in the words of Kember et al. (2002: 421), reflects the shift from ‘judgmental’ to ‘developmental’ feedback and evaluation, a feedback that focuses on what needs to be improved. In the United States, it is with Obama’s 2009 initiative Race to the Top that performance-based standards for teachers relying on student growth were implemented. The U.S. Department of Education resolution was “to elevate the teaching profession, to focus on recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence”⁸ of teachers, thanks to whom students made substantial progress. What should be advocated then, is to introduce student short-term and long-term learning gains as a parameter of teacher effectiveness. It becomes clear that cultivating accountability for student achievement helps teachers reflect on and improve their performance.

2.3.Student learning outcomes:

In a 1995 seminal article, Barr and Tag accurately criticized what they called the ‘instruction paradigm’, under which the primary conception of education is to deliver lectures. For them, the end is not delivering instruction but “*producing learning* with every student by

⁸ “A Blueprint for Reform: the Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act”. United States Department of Education, March 2010.

whatever means work best” (Barr and Tagg 1995: 1). They take the concept of responsibility as the framework for the ‘learning paradigm’. Their article signals the beginning of a global tendency to review traditional education approaches concerning teachers and students, resulting in an array of learner centered policies and initiatives worldwide. Coupled with this, the rising demand for transparency and accountability has brought about shifts in focus foregrounding student learning outcomes as the major criteria in evaluation systems.

In Europe, this shift has materialized in the adoption of the Bologna Declaration 1999 by 29 European countries committed to restructure higher education modules and programs in terms of learning outcomes. Other countries around the world have followed or aligned their policies to be compatible with the declaration. Tunisian higher education for example, adopted the declaration in the form of the LMD reforms initiated in 2008. In the U.S.A., a parallel shift in higher education occurred by 2002, way after such an approach has been introduced in primary and secondary education⁹. Subsequently, the Degree Qualifications Profiles, the U.S. version of the Bologna declaration has been adopted, definitely making higher education systems around the world committed to the spirit of accountability vis-à-vis students’ achievement, developing learner-centered teaching procedures.

The ‘outcome-based education’ centers on the student in many respects. As devised by Barr and Tagg (1995), the mission and purposes of the “learning paradigm” are to:

- produce learning
- elicit student discovery and construction of knowledge
- create powerful learning environments
- improve the quality of learning
- achieve success for diverse students¹⁰

Obviously, the overall objective of the new trend is to enhance learning growth and teaching efficiency. Within the framework of a learner centered approach, there is “a constant search for new structures and methods that work better for student learning and success” that are “redesigned continually” (Barr and Tagg 1995, p.20). The teacher is no longer an agent delivering knowledge, but a member in a highly interactive environment, with a strong sense of accountability for results. The culture of accountability is then constructed around various models that measure the teacher’s contribution to the growth of the students, hence the notion of student growth measures: the evidence for progress made by students over time through

⁹ The process started with Sanders’ Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System in 1996.

¹⁰ Barr and Tagg p. 16

yielded by tests. One particular model trusted yield fairly accurate results is the Value-Added Model of assessment.

3. Value-Added Assessment:

The Value-Added Model as it suggests refers to a method of calculating contribution or an extra unit as a benefit beside the base value. Borrowed from the field of economics, the concept denotes an additional value that promotes the quality of a product or service, and guarantees their success¹¹. The concept was first introduced in the early 1990's by William Sanders, a researcher and statistics professor, who developed the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) as part of Tennessee's Education Improvement Act 1992¹². It subsequently pervaded primary and secondary education institutional policies in the U.S.A., in response to the ever growing requirements of the different stakeholders and agents involved in the educational process. The Value-Added Model encapsulates the conviction that the teacher can and should add value to each student and that each student has the right to grow.

The Value-Added Model measures students' achievement over a specific period. Tests comparing initial and graduation performance yield scores that are processed using specific equations. A change in the students' scores towards a better achievement signals a growth in the students' learning gains. Thus, it is considered by educational experts as a 'fair' indicator of the contribution of the institution and of the teacher. This contribution is set against the model of a typical effective teacher according to quality standards. What is measured is how much a teacher contributes in the intellectual skills acquired through curriculum and developed in the courses. These represent "the building blocks for essential career and citizenship roles"¹³

The assessment relies on several tools among which we find:

- standardized and faculty examinations
- tests of skills: communication, critical thinking and problem solving
- self-report surveys
- portfolios
- questionnaires for students with a criteria grid on teacher effectiveness

¹¹<http://www.economist.com/economics-a-to-z/v>

¹²Kappler Hewitt, Kimberley and Audrey Amrein-Beardsley (eds). *Student Growth Measures in Policy and Practice: Intended and Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Teacher Evaluation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 1

¹³American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "Value-Added Assessment: Accountability's New Frontier. Perspectives, spring 2006, p. 2.

The Value-added assessment model and indeed any current evaluation strategy has a double focus: the improvement function and the accountability function, that is, holding teachers accountable for their performance, while at the same time using the data collected to ensure teacher development.

There are three models of value-added assessment:

3.1. **Direct Value-Added assessment:** this model measures students' knowledge and skills at the beginning and end of college, in order to identify the learning gains, hence, the degree to which the teaching performance develops the abilities of the students.

An example would be the American Value-Added Assessment Initiative (AVAAI) in American colleges and universities since spring 2004. It submits students to a multiple choice format test in addition to real world performance tasks. It is a rewarding model as it is a direct measure of learning. However, it gives no direct information about the institution or the learning environment.

3.2. **Indirect Value-Added Assessment:** this model measures student behavior and institutional actions that correlate with student learning and success. One example is the 2000 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that collects students' self-reports on 42 aspects of their undergraduate experiences, including student-faculty interaction, level of educational challenge, the learning environment and so on.

Positively, this method yields useful information about institutional strengths and weaknesses as well as successful educational strategies and practices, and thus triggers improvement efforts. However, it does not identify actual and specific students learning gains and gaps. It also raises questions about the reliability of self-reports.

3.3. **The Applied Value-Added Model:** it measures the impact of higher education "after-the-fact", that is, at a post-graduation level. It consists in interviews with graduate students about how well their educational experience prepared them for jobs, as well as interviews with their employers on the graduates' knowledge and skills.

One example is the 1999 Collegiate Results Survey, asking 6 to 9 years out of college graduates about their jobs and skills. Accurately, this method establishes institutional profiles and reflects educational practices and policies implications for the real world. However, given the passage of time and the issue of reliability of self-reports, this approach may not yield fully accurate results.

Although these methods are considered reliable and real indicators of teacher and institute performance, there are a number of issues that surround their application, for example, low student response rate inhibits large representative sampling. This is why experts suggest the use of a variety of incentives to encourage students to participate.

4. Student growth measures do promote teacher growth:

Teachers evolve in an ever changing environment at multiple levels. The instructional strategies change, technology introduces new opportunities and the new generations of students are increasingly global and versatile, not mentioning the shifting economic, social, political and cultural scenes worldwide. As such, teachers need a constant updating of their teaching techniques and material, in addition to building new skills that match the evolution in their fields. This is what educational experts call ‘professional development’, which is enhancing “an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher.”¹⁴

Teacher appraisal using students’ growth measures is believed to help enhance teacher growth and professional development. As teachers receive feedback on their performance, a set of activities and strategies are designed to improve teacher practice. According to accumulated data through research conducted by the OECD over the span of a decade, using student learning outcomes to measure teacher effectiveness has notable and direct effects on teacher growth and professional development. This touches on many aspects hereafter outlined:

- creating opportunities for discussion and cooperation to share successful strategies
- identifying strengths and weaknesses at the level of the teaching practice
- learning about, reflecting on and developing the teaching skills
- appraisals can help teachers build self-confidence
- positive constructive changes in the learning environment
- opportunity to develop a personal annual plan for professional development and career progression
- school improvement through more informed decision-making
- updating subject knowledge in the light of the latest advances
- updating individual skills and attitudes following the latest teaching techniques
- enhancing a spirit of collaboration to help weaker teachers become more effective

¹⁴OECD. “Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environment: First Results from Talis”. 2009, p. 49.

Following the smooth communication of feedback to teachers and institutions several actions can be taken to achieve teacher development. An OECD 2009 report outlines the following options to be enforced:

- courses and workshops
- education conferences and seminars
- qualification programs
- observation visits to other institutions
- individual and collaborative research

The report recommends that professional development should be made compulsory because the skills and knowledge to enhance are considered crucial to teacher quality. As Darling-Hammond (2009) accurately puts it “the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. Teacher qualifications, teacher’s knowledge and skills make more difference for student learning than other single factor”. The most important recommendation for the effective implementation of the assessment model is to ensure evaluators have the skills required to design evaluation strategies and activities. Another crucial point is the expertise in using feedback in a way that does not inhibit, threaten or undermines teachers and their efforts.

Overall, certain conditions have to be observed for effective teacher evaluation for the sake of improvement:

- a non threatening evaluation context
- a culture of feedback
- a supportive institution
- a context of institution evaluation
- independent objective assessment of the teacher’s performance
- standards and criteria across colleges and universities
- a clear professional development plan as the outcome of the evaluation¹⁵

It is by now evident that the student voice in the form of feedback is central in a comprehensive process of enhancing teacher performance. This by no means implies giving students license to openly and inappropriately rate, judge or undermine their teachers. Questionnaires meant to acquire knowledge about the students’ educational experience need to be carefully designed, choosing the right terms that would objectively describe the teaching practice under evaluation. Thus, such a model of assessment can only contribute to upgrading

¹⁵ “Teacher evaluation: a Conceptual Framework and Examples of Country Practices”. OECD review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for improving School Outcomes, 2009, p. 8-9.

teacher performance if appropriate measures are taken in the form of career-long professional development plan, to reach objectives and meet standards.

Conclusion:

Teaching excellence has no doubt become a preoccupation for competitive universities worldwide, and it has become common practice now to provide students with a framework to judge teaching quality, as a measure to rate universities. The aim is not to rank teachers from best to worst or issue personal judgments that would create unhealthy educational environment. The aim is to measure and monitor the amount of student gain in terms of skills and knowledge. Besides, the processing of the results informs the teachers about areas of improvement and areas of excellence. Thus, teachers would continuously engage in a process of development towards a high performance.

The strategies and models advocated here are not without pitfalls. Accountability as an ethical or moral engagement is intended to yield benefits. Yet, an exaggerated form of accountability or one that is “inappropriately exercised”¹⁶ can lead to obsession with rules, rigidity and excessive control, or place heavy demands on teachers. Besides, it does not necessarily guarantee a better performance.

Additionally, debates surrounding the issue of teacher evaluation divide education experts. These include:

- to what extent teacher evaluation procedures are equitable and fair?
- to what extent should student achievement data be used as a basis for teacher evaluation?
- doesn't accountability hinder creativity and innovation?
- the grading and assessment procedures that would establish students' learning gains are controversial for some educational experts (Tucker and Stronge 2005).

Most evidently, as learning is the outcome of the interaction of multiple different factors and variables, teachers cannot be held solely responsible for the learning gains and the future performance of the students. From another perspective, skeptics postulate that ideology, bias and personal likings are the invisible and untraceable variables that might interfere in the evaluation process. The extent of this interference cannot be easily detected, but the general impression is that it is a limited phenomenon. Accurately, “evaluation that leads to professional growth requires teachers to look honestly at their weaknesses and strengths.” (Howard and McColskey 2001, p.49) Above all, this highlights the importance of

¹⁶ibid, p.9.

self-assessment, as the most efficient measure and basic condition for education improvement.

In the Tunisian context, LMD is supposed to put higher education on track with the global developments in education, so that economic development and growth follow as natural outcomes. More than ever before, it is necessary to implement a clear and practical strategy to implement Quality Assurance, whereby students receive an excellent teaching experience that prepares them for a career. Equally important, a system of recognition to reward teaching excellence needs to be put in place in the form of opportunities for career and research, and pay increase, as the VAM can accurately capture a teacher's unique contribution to student learning.

It is true that the different models of accountability many countries adopt can be considered as external monitoring, but a Tunisian model of evaluation needs not be intrusive or market led. It has to respond to the local conditions and be sensibly applied. A key factor in implementing measures of teacher evaluation will be teachers' openness to and acceptance of such measures. Even more, "Teachers in their own mirror"¹⁷ would strive for self-evaluation, reflecting on their practice and continuously seeking self-improvement.

It is believed that the most difficult part of value-added assessment is its implementation in terms of resources and investment, in other words, it requires considerable financial and logistical support as well as the personal investment of different actors. Value-added assessment literature recommends the creation of university and college committees with the necessary budget to achieve the desired objective. Yet, we all know the financial constraints that Tunisia is suffering from, and it is going to remain a continuous challenge. This is why ensuring accountability as the culture that sustains any teaching practice is the starting point in the path towards quality, then the strategies for development need to be adapted to the immediate context and realities.

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¹⁷Kremer-Hayon, Lya. *Teacher Self-Evaluation: Teachers in their own Mirror*. New York: Springer Science, 1993.

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From Scissors and Paste to Tailor-made: a Practical Adaptation of the English Language Course Designed for Pre-service Teachers in Tunisia

By Amel Meziane and Walid Hmeissia

Abstract:

Tunisian primary schools have long been plagued with gaps at various levels. One of the most serious problems is the lack of well-trained, versatile, and creative teachers who can teach young learners. Indeed, the abrupt closure of establishments that had ensured formal training programmes for future teaching staff in the 90's, led to the recruitment of inexperienced graduates from different disciplines who have no pedagogical or teaching background. In the light of such an alarming national situation, the Ministry of Education has called for a drastic reform of the Tunisian educational system. One top priority, cited in the White Book published in May 2016, is the reinstatement of a pre-service teachers training programme that aims to:

- a) Equip future primary school teachers with all the necessary knowledge, skills and strategies to teach effectively
- b) Develop their creative, critical and problem-solving thinking
- c) Improve their linguistic competence in Arabic, French and English

Despite the well-intentioned initiative of both Ministries of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research, who conjointly worked on this new study discipline, the programme design itself is beset with major structural and content-related weaknesses. As a matter of fact, the English language course design, which is more relevant to the scope of this study, is an undeniable proof of that. The present work presents a multidimensional evaluation of the current English language course design, highlights its deficiencies, and suggests a more practical adaptation based on a combination of current foreign language learning and teaching theories.

Introduction:

Any reform must stem out of the study of the current dysfunctional policies that have been established and applied in schools over the past years. According to the Tunisian Ministry of

Education's White Book, dysfunctions can be summed up into the following seven categories: the fact that the classroom, as a learning space, has become off-putting because of the infrastructure degradation, the incapability of schools to cope with the rapid technological changes, the failure in adopting adequate teaching methodologies, the decline in the acquired cross-curricular competences (such as critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, technology literacy and social skills) in favour of short-term memorization, the chasm between streams and the requirements of the job market, regional disparities in logistic means, and the fragility of schools to degrading social phenomena (such as juvenile delinquency and extremism mainly).

Having said that, the most serious problem remains the shortage of experienced teaching staff. Indeed, the professionalizing training of primary teachers has been abandoned after shutting down all the specialized institutes in the 1990's. Since then, the recruitment of teaching staff at the national level has been based on non-pedagogical criteria with a policy destined to hiring the highest possible number of the unemployed rather than caring about their pedagogical training and professional competences. Added to this, the corrupt transfer of tenured teachers has created situations where a pupil is at risk of being taught by interns for the whole six years. In the light of such alarming situation, the Ministry of Education felt the need to reform the educational system by implementing six measures among which we can find the gist of our presentation: launching an Educational Sciences diploma conjointly with the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. For this endeavour, 6 Tunisian institutes were selected in 2016-2017 to train thousands of future primary teachers.

For the academic year 2017-2018, 2618 students are divided over 9 institutes in the following governorates: Zaghouan, Mahdia, Gabes, Gafsa, Jendouba and Kef, after the addition of Sbeitla, Mednin Tataouine. The new discipline is meant to develop the subject matter and to provide pedagogical knowledge as well as teaching skills of future primary teachers. By the end of the programme, all pre-service teachers should also attain a certain level of mastery in Arabic (L1), French (L2), and English (L3) as they might be teaching one of these languages once they are dispatched to a specific primary school and do not really have the choice of selecting the subjects they prefer to teach, hence the importance of being versatile and knowledgeable.

Despite the noble attempt of both ministries to launch a comprehensive ambitious programme, various flaws have emerged upon its implementation. Indeed, the curriculum includes too many subjects as well as too many hours, which is worsened by shortage of teaching staff and equipment, and inadequate infrastructure, such as absence of labs. It also comes with vague course descriptions, which has led to a problem of coordination between teachers teaching the same subjects within the same institutes and between the various ones. The English language course design for first year pre-service teachers, which is more relevant to this study, suffers from various inconsistencies, namely an overlap between the learning outcomes, and limitations, such as the lack in clarity. Consequently, its design requires an effective adaptation to fit teachers' expectations and learners' needs.

1. What is meant by effective course design?

Despite what some might think, designing a course is not the mere act of piling up material from online resources and paper-based textbooks. Although the quality of the content to be delivered clearly matters, it is not the only prerequisite that guarantees an effective course design. Prior to selecting the teaching material, educators or course designers must have a pre-established course skeleton that acknowledges the three following main steps or components: the learning outcomes to be achieved, the types of learning activities, as well as the assessment method. Simply put, Learning outcomes are what learners should be able to achieve at the end of the course.

These are generally referring to the skills, cross-curricular competences and subject matter knowledge that will be acquired or further consolidated after attending the course in question. Learning outcomes are by nature student-centred and are not meant to depict the teaching methods or strategies adopted in the classroom. It is worth mentioning that Bloom's taxonomy of educational outcomes (1956, 2001) has been widely used to determine the learning goals of various teaching programs worldwide and has been considered as a foundational element within the education community (Shane, 1981).

As illustrated in figure 1, the hierarchical pyramid, which is a revised version of the original taxonomy suggested in the 1950's, distinguishes between the cognitive processes involved in the learning act and arranges them from low order thinking processes, such as to remember and understand, to more complex and cognitively demanding processes, such as to evaluate and create.

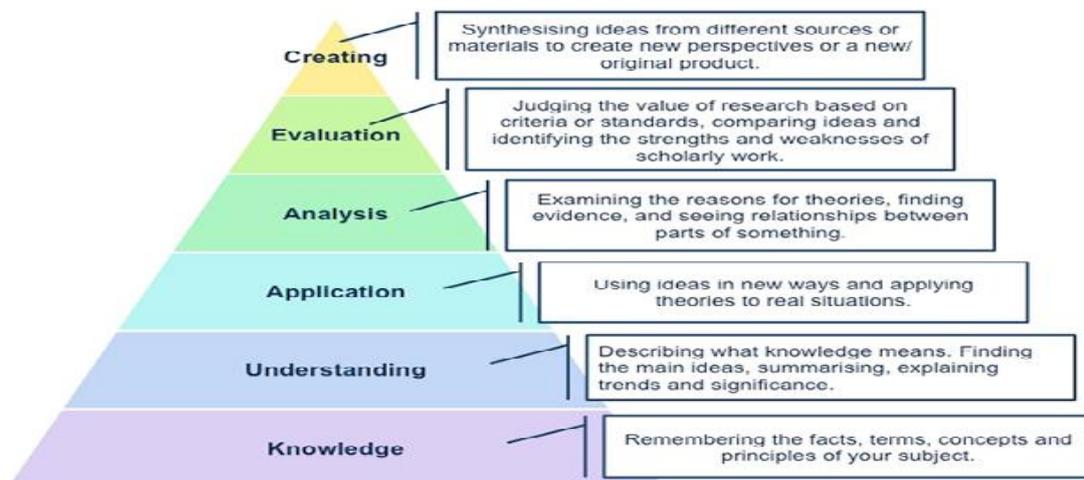


Figure 1. Bloom's revised taxonomy model (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)

The learning activities generally refer to the channel chosen by educators or course designers to transmit and practice factual, conceptual, procedural as well as metacognitive knowledge (for more details on Bloom's knowledge taxonomy, see also Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). In this regard, the choice of activities implicitly reflects the teaching and learning approaches adopted. The third and last component to be introduced in this part is assessment & feedback. Unfortunately, this step has been wrongly associated with summative assessment i.e. graded forms of evaluation such as tests, exams

and assignments, and some educators have disregarded the fact that there is no fixed way to evaluate students.

In this regard, formative assessment, which is an on-going form of evaluation followed by constant constructive feedback, can guide and enhance the learning act. Eventually, each educational context has its own characteristics and it is up to educators to choose when, what and how to assess. According to the constructive alignment theory or coherence principle introduced by Biggs (2003), all three aforementioned components have to be aligned to ensure the global coherence of the course design. As such, the activities and assessment type have to closely match a specific learning outcome or more. Also, a learning outcome should be measurable and observable to be later assessed.

As far as the literature goes, there is no widely accepted course design paradigm to adapt in higher education. As a matter of fact, various simplistic and more intricate conceptual models have been conceived over the years to target different learning environments ranging from technologically free to virtual classrooms (Freire, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the Integrated Model of Course Design developed by Fink (2003), which is highly inspired by the constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 2003; 1999), has been selected for the evaluation and re-design of 1st year pre-service teachers English language course. The model, as illustrated below (see figure 2), reckons the three main components previously defined, yet it adds a pivotal step that should precede any course design: the situational factors behind the learning and teaching context in question.

According to Fink (2003), an in-depth analysis should be initially carried out to gather information about numerous features including the affordance of physical spaces for class delivery, the availability of equipment, the nature of the subject, and the expectations of others namely the society, the university and the profession itself. A realistic summary of the current state of play will then serve to judiciously choose all three key components of the model (see figure 2). Despite its absence from the model above, both researchers deem that a constant evaluation of any course design is crucial to ensure that congruity is attained and sustainability guaranteed. In this regard, Dimitriadis and Gooday (2013) maintain that a good educational design is by definition an evolving re-design process.

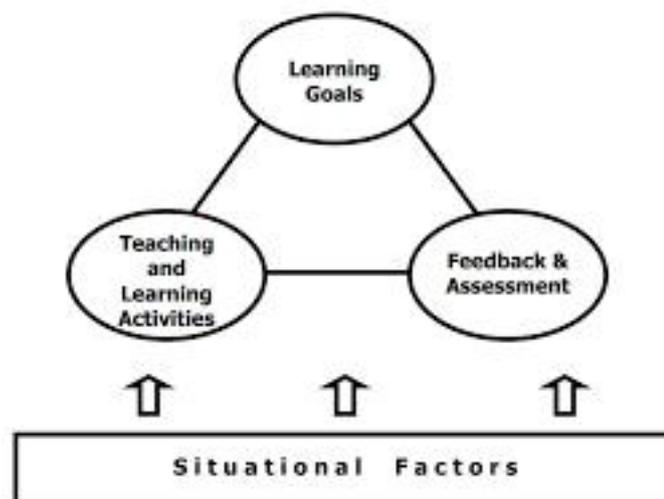


Figure 2. The key components of Fink's Integrated Course Design Model (2003)

A syllabus is usually embedded in each course design. Although various definitions of the term have come to light during the last decades (Brown, 1994; Thornbury, 1999; White, 1988), a syllabus can be simply defined as a detailed "description of the contents of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught" (Richards et al. 1992:368). Consequently, it serves as a set of guidelines for both teachers and students. Over the years, the focus of syllabi has gradually evolved and course designers' interest has shifted from the product to the process. Indeed, early product-oriented or synthetic syllabi (Wilkins, 1976) listed the final learning outcomes and content (generally in the form of discrete linguistic features) but disregarded to a great extent the importance of the methodology to be adopted. This implies that syllabus and methodology were viewed as completely separate notions.

This type of syllabus has been heavily criticised as it exposes learners to a very limited sample of inauthentic language use and remains ill-suited for communication skills development. Process-based syllabi have attempted to bridge the gap by putting emphasis on methodology i.e. the learning activities to be used in the classroom. These have been favoured as they provide a purpose for the use and learning of a target language rather than simply learning language items for their own sake. Nevertheless, the clear-cut distinction between product-based and process-based syllabus is gradually fading away and these two are rarely used independently nowadays. Indeed, course designers have come to acknowledge the importance of using a combined syllabus framework for better clarity.

2. Aims and Justification of the study:

Because a successful educational reform has been recognised as a national mission, both researchers think that it is pivotal to reflect upon their first experience as mentors of the next generation of Tunisian school teachers. Being English language teachers at ISEAHZ, Zaghouan, they deem that the 1st year English language course can put the potential success of the reform at stake; therefore, requires extensive modifications. The brief review presented in the previous section will be used to point out the main pitfalls of the current course and guide both researchers to suggest an enhanced version that includes a comprehensive yet teacher/learner-friendly syllabus. Indeed, a well-thought and meticulously developed English language course is more likely to guarantee successful long-term learning outcomes and maximise students' potential for great achievements. Considering the substantial number of higher education institutes, English language teachers and students, it is crucial to suggest a thorough description of the course design to facilitate coordination, guarantee that all graduates attain the target proficiency level in English (B2 or independent user level according to the Cambridge English Scale, see appendix A) and develop the same cross-curricular skills.

3. Methodology:

Based on a brief analysis of the course description and syllabus passed on in September 2016 (see appendix A), both researchers come to realise that there were too many glaring inconsistencies

and major limitations that rendered the implementation of the course nearly impossible. Due to time constraints, a prompt decision was taken to modify the design progressively and not prior to the course start date. For such purpose, a weekly diary was created to share thoughts, teaching material and self-designed activities.

The diary also served to keep record of longitudinal information including both teachers' observations during class time and provided some valuable comments described in the next section. The Integrated Course Design Model (Fink, 2003) has been adopted yet slightly adapted to create a streamlined exhaustive critical analysis of the initial course structure and suggest an effective alternative. Indeed, a common agreement has been reached to include an extra facet, which is the content to be taught. As a result, the course evaluation and redesign presented below tackles the following three major dimensions: 1) situational factors, 2) learning goals, and 3) content, teaching activities, as well as feedback and assessment.

4. Course evaluation and redesign:

4.1. Situational factors:

With all the accumulated hindrances that have been impeding the progress of primary schools, it is pivotal to decide on today's priorities and design a pre-service teacher training programme that matches the nature of the occupation, meets the expectations of policy makers (and society's), and reaches international standards. With all these competing tensions on design work in mind, it is clear that versatility and a grasp of subject matter knowledge do not really suffice to fully prepare Tunisian pre-service teachers for the teaching profession. Some skills are nowadays indispensable to teach 21st century learners. Among these are: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, and ICT literacy (Bloom, 1956, 2001). Future Tunisian primary school teachers should also act as role models and restore the prestige of the teaching profession. Therefore, all subjects of the curriculum including the English language programme, which is more relevant to the scope of the study, should transmit the aforementioned cross-curricular skills as well as the key principles of professional job ethics and good conduct to pre-service teachers.

Regarding the researchers' observations concerning the Zaghoun teaching Institute's infrastructure, it is important to mention, for instance, that it hosted about 300 1st year pre-service teachers during the academic year 2016-2017. These were divided into twelve groups of reasonable sizes (approximately 25 students per group). Each group was assigned to a specific classroom, which implies that the physical space itself did not really pose problem and allowed enough flexibility in terms of teaching activities design. Although there was enough room to carry out tasks that enhance communication and foster collaboration between students (such as role-plays, group projects and plays), the absence of internet network presented an enormous obstacle so was the lack of laptops, loudspeakers and data-show projectors.

Unfortunately, in the light of the impossibility of using online resources (dictionaries, photos, and videos) to adopt a technology-based teaching approach, the researchers were in the obligation of

using their personal tools, to download all the needed online material prior to the lessons and use hardcopy dictionaries or rely on students' smartphones whenever there was a reachable phone network.

4.2. Learning goals:

The learning objectives as formulated in the initial course design (see appendix A) can be classified in two major categories: language-related skills and cross-curricular skills. Upon graduation, students are expected to reach the B2 level (according to the Cambridge Test Scale) and develop the necessary receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills. The course description also mentions the following nine cross-curricular skills.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Communication | 6. Creative thinking |
| 2. Working and living with others | 7. Project work |
| 3. Appropriate self-expression | 8. Efficient working procedure |
| 4. Efficient use of data | 9. Education technologies use |
| 5. Critical thinking | |

In addition to the ill-informed choice of words and the vague formulation of ideas, the list reveals a serious overlap between various competencies. This clearly demonstrates that the course designers did not adopt a scholarly approach when developing the set of learning objectives above. First, communication (1) and appropriate self-expression (3) are seemingly referring to the same learning objective, which is the ability to communicate effectively in different environments. Both Efficient use of data (4) and efficient working procedure (8) are very much alike, therefore both have been replaced by some explanatory classroom management skills that are listed in Appendix C.

There is also a complete confusion between skills that students should acquire at the end of the course and means or learning activities that are likely to equip students with these skills. As a matter of fact, a project work (7) should not be defined as a learning objective, but as a project-based learning activity or a team-based tasks task that can develop in students the ability to collaborate effectively and respectfully with diverse teams (2), collect data (4), use it effectively (8) to make valid interpretations, and critical remarks (5). Point (9) is obviously irrelevant to infrastructural reality (as aforementioned) and is also unclear. The initial version of the course description clearly reckons primordial learning objectives namely critical thinking and creativity, both of which have long been acknowledged as pivotal high-order thinking processes (Bloom, 1956; Anderson et al., 2001). Nevertheless, it fails to include transmitting professional ethics, and to mention its goals clearly and coherently.

4.3. Content, teaching activities, feedback and assessment:

The English language course has a theme-based syllabus that aims to expose students to a new topic every two weeks or so. The themes in question are the following:

➤ **Year I – Semester I:**

-) Family life and relationships
-) Daily routines and time
-) Education and school life
-) Descriptions
-) Entertainment and hobbies

➤ **Year I – Semester II:**

-) Money
-) Shopping, food and drinks
-) Professional life, jobs and occupations

These themes are vague, out-dated and worn-out to say the least. Most of them can be found in any English language course description. Some are so similar that it is hard to distinguish between them (ex: family life and relationships and relating to others – to be taught in second year), whereas others refer to text types rather than topics (ex: descriptions and narrating events). Embedding themes across an entire language course can be interesting as long as the themes themselves are contemporary, thought provoking, and culturally challenging. Having said that, content selection remains a highly subjective issue as teachers' perceptions of engaging learning experiences diverge for personal reasons and agendas (see lesson 2, week II, Appendix B).

Surprisingly, the course outline does not make reference to any type of teaching activities despite the fact that it has a long list of learning objectives. For a national reform, such a description is limited and unhelpful, and hinders the success of the experience, as teachers have different understandings and interpretations of the course description, therefore they might choose activities that do not match the aspired changes. A designer is supposed to be thorough in describing the activities to be adopted by all teachers in the light of such overgeneralized themes and goals. For instance, it seems that the course description insists on enhancing learners' collaboration and communication with others, but does not suggest pair-work or team work as teaching activities or encourage the development of critical and creative thinking via collaborative and interactive assignments (See the example of creative writing projects, , which is a highly subjective area where teachers' notions of creativity and sense of critique highly diverge for personal reasons and agendas (see "Writing a short story" in "Extra Activities", Appendix B).

This implies that the initial course description and syllabus display a lack of congruity between the targeted learning objectives and the teaching activities to be adopted. As such, the constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 2003, 1999) promoted in Fink's Integrated Model of Course Design (2003) has been disregarded during the design process. Other examples that are pertinent to English language learning are: first, teachers' attitudes towards grammar teaching that could vary from a preference of the grammar-translation method to the integrated approach to teaching grammar. Second, setting the priorities of what or not to teach in terms of relevance to primary education lessons is a topic of controversy between teachers, which is summed up in the question: "Will they need it later?"

Naturally, such limitedness of the course design is extended to the assessment part. There is no reference to the way of assessing learners' acquired linguistic and cross-curricular competences which will certainly lead to future teachers who do not have the same capabilities and skills. Another controversy is about including oral exams as a prerequisite of passing and whether to consider team-based projects as a valid method to measure the progress of students.

In attempt to overcome all problems discussed above, the course syllabus, here suggested (see appendix B), is based on a combination of product-based and process-based design approaches. Being based on an adapted version of Fink's framework (2003), it explicitly acknowledges all the aforementioned dimensions (learning goals, content, teaching activities, and feedback types) except for the situational factors analysis, which remains an internal business matter.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the present paper does not call for a standardized version, i.e. a textbook, of an English language course for pre-service teachers, to be followed to the letter by the teaching staff in all nine institutes, but it is rather directed at clarifying the vagueness of last year's course design and syllabus that is not becoming of a national reform. Both researchers are in fact for a streamlined and clear description to ensure a similar outcome in terms of prospective primary teachers English language training. However, it is worth mentioning that this is naught but an attempt at sharing a personal effort that was made during a period of experimentation, hence it is open for criticism and improvement.

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Appendix A

وزارة التربية
الإدارة العامة للبرامج والتكوين المستمر
إدارة التكوين المستمر

البرنامج الخاص بالإجازة التطبيقية في علوم التربية

المادة: الإنجليزية وتعلميتها

عدد ساعات التدريس: 88 ساعة موزعة على 4 سداسيات (السداسي الأول والثاني والثالث والرابع) بمعدل ثلاث ساعات أسبوعيا خلال السداسي الأول وساعة ونصف أسبوعيا خلال بقية السداسيات
أهداف التكوين:

Upon graduation, the primary English teacher is expected to reach the approximate CEFR level of Independent User. B2: can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his /her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Develop abilities in the language skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) and their micro-skills in addition to the following cross-curricular skills (communicating, working and living with others, appropriate self- expression, Efficient use of data, problem solving: critical thinking+ creative thinking, project work, efficient working procedure and education technologies use.

المضامين:

Theme- based modules integrating topics, language items, lexis and communicative functions

عدد الساعات	1 مضامين السداسي
7	Family life and relationships -1
7	Daily routines / time -2
7	Education and school life -3
7	Descriptions -4
7	Entertainment and hobbies -5
5	Consolidation activities and remedial work)
.....	
.....	
عدد الساعات	2مضامين السداسي:
5	Money / shopping: Food and drinks -1
5	Professional life / jobs / occupations -2
5	Teaching methodology with a focus on young learners)
3	Consolidation activities and remedial work)
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عدد الساعات	3:مضامين السداسي

5	Health and illness -3
5	
5	Relating to others -4
3	Teaching methodology with a focus on young learners)
.....	Consolidation activities and remedial work)
.....	
.....	
.....	
عدد الساعات	4: مضامين الاساسي
4	Narrating events -5
5	Teaching methodology with a focus on young learners)
3	Consolidation activities and remedial work)
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Appendix B

Week I

Theme	Skills	Medium/ Media	Learning outcomes/ Objectives	Activities	Type of feedback
Family and Relationships (1)	Main skill: Reading/ speaking Sub-skills: vocabulary/ grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text: “Lost & Found” (the true story of Saroo Brierley) PS: The movie title is <i>Lion</i> a.k.a. <i>A Long Way Home</i>. One possibility is to schedule a movie screening to further intrigue students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop creative thinking 	Group work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice brainstorming the topic from the title in small groups 	Group Teacher (mediator)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise cultural awareness 	Group work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite students to think about the idea of adoption and culture shock (Indian Australian) • Reviewing their knowledge of geography (locate India and Calcutta on a map/ calculating traveling distance) and their use of Google Earth 	Group Teacher (mediator)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become familiar with biography as a genre 	Individual work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the different features of a biography 	Peer and teacher
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop reading strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice skimming and scanning 	Teacher (timer)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a wider lexical repertoire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words using roots and context • Create compound nouns with the roots <i>home</i> and <i>house</i>, and check the difference in meaning • Use new vocabulary in context, such as: <i>vivid memories, slams, hordes of people, to fend for himself, foul play, barefoot, etc.</i> 	Dictionary/ app and teacher
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to produce well-structured sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer WH-questions properly 	Peer and teacher
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to express personal opinion on a hypothetical situation in a sound way • Be familiar with 	Classroom debate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orally answer the hypothetical question of: “If you were Saroo, would you go back to live in India?” and conduct a debate • Focus on stopping interruptions, encourage the students with speech handicaps in terms of thoughts or pronunciation, signal rude words and slang when said for everybody to understand the 	Group Teacher (mediator)

			debate rules	inappropriateness	
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Week II					
Theme	Skills	Medium	Learning outcomes/ Objectives	Activities	Type of feedback
Family and relationships (2)	Skills: Reading/ speaking/ writing Sub-skill: vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Text: “Hejira” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop creative thinking 	Group work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice brainstorming the topic from the title in small groups 	Group Teacher (mediator)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop critical thinking Be familiar with autobiography as a genre 	Individual work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the different features of an autobiography 	Teacher
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop reading skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice skimming and scanning 	Teacher (timer)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise cultural awareness and enrich vocabulary knowledge: <i>Be familiar with idiomatic expressions</i> <i>Be able to detect sarcasm and dark-humour</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infer the meaning of words and idiomatic expressions in context, such as <i>chewed this over</i>, <i>pinned him down</i>, <i>a sponge</i>, <i>insurmountable</i>, etc. 	Dictionary/ app and teacher
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to improvise, respect conversation dynamics, pick up cues 	Role-play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvise a dialogue between the father, mother and son, and take liberties in view point/ attitude 	Group Teacher (mediator)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to challenge a social taboo 	Classroom debate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about the topic of homosexuality Discuss topics about the topic of dysfunctional families Talk about the gravity of failure in communication 	Group Teacher (mediator)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop writing skills 	Homework: individual free-writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write two paragraphs: in the first, students imagine a better alternative way of 	Individual			

				communication within the narrator’s family and in the second they describe a personal defining moment in their lives	
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Week III

Theme	Skills	Medium/ Media	Learning outcomes/ Objectives	Activities	Type of feedback
Family and relationships (3)	Skills: Writing/ reading/ listening/ speaking Sub-skill: vocabulary	• “Sari of the gods” • “The Long life of my grandfather’s car”	• Be able to distinguish the three parts of paragraph writing	Individual work: • Study the organization of a paragraph based on two sample paragraphs	Teacher
			• Be familiar with the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph	Peer work: • Study the features of a descriptive paragraph through two sample paragraphs	Peer Teacher
		• Have a richer vocabulary knowledge	• Brainstorm and classify nouns and adjectives into categories: <i>jewellery/ photographs/ mechanical or electronic devices/ art or music/ clothing</i> • Distinguish and categorize adjectives according to <i>the five senses</i> • Write a first draft describing a favourite clothing item in class and correct it	Dictionary/ app and teacher	
		• Audio extract: "My favourite object"	• Be familiar with different English accents Be able to listen and take notes	• Fill in the blanks task	Peer and Teacher
			• Be able to describe personal belongings	• Orally describe a favourite object	Peer and teacher

Extra activities

Activity	Description	Outcome
<p>Writing a short story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the students' ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Write an interesting narrative paragraph ➤ Work in groups ➤ Get creative and use other media to consolidate writing skills 	<p>Group/ project work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a narrative story (mystery – action – comedy – romance – horror – melodrama) and read it while presenting a minimum of 8 pictures that could be drawings, printed pictures or PowerPoint slides, a video of the students silently acting the events or 8 silent tableaux 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most students succeeded in coming up with their own stories or adaptations of movie plots. • All groups used PowerPoint presentations, some added drawings and printed photos. • One group combined: taking turns in reading, PowerPoint slides, personal paintings symbolizing instances of the story and a student acted the role of the protagonist at a certain point of the story.
<p>Watch a movie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students a break from the classical and formal context of lessons 	<p>Group activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch the movie <i>When Nietzsche Wept</i> • Take a break halfway to allow students to digest the ideas presented • Help explain the difficult psychoanalytic and philosophical terms for students during the break and after the movie • Encourage them to take note of the difficult words from the subtitles • Conduct a debate after the movie with the teacher as mediator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrigued their critical thinking • Allowed them to discover philosophy and psychoanalysis through a new medium • Practiced their listening skills • Reviewed spelling of words and discovered new ones (peer/ teacher/ dictionary) • Conducted a debate on psychoanalytical problems and existential crises

Appendix C

Classroom management strategies

1. Presenting oneself in the first session
2. Greeting upon entering the classroom
3. Keeping the right posture while standing in front of class
4. Standing at "stage centre" to talk to all pupils
5. Dividing the whiteboard into sections with vertical lines
6. Advising students to divide their sheets/notebooks into sections
7. Writing while trying to avoid blocking the pupils' view
8. Moving between rows and scanning the work being done
9. Announcing the time allocated for each exercise
10. Teaching that leaving the classroom without erasing what is written on the whiteboard is disrespectful
11. Stopping them from interrupting each other while making sure to come back to the student who made the interruption to listen to their opinion as well
12. Stopping them from correcting each other while reading
13. Supervising group work and making sure to ensure respect and mutual efforts
14. Privileging the students who raise their hands to answer to make it clear that speaking in a disorderly way is unacceptable

Assessing an EFL Master's Programme: Tertiary Learners' Perspectives: The Case of Biskra University, Algeria

By Meddour Mustapha and Laala Youssef

Abstract

Evaluating study programmes targets the areas of accomplishment and failure alike. The ultimate purpose is to obtain feedback on the effectiveness and the efficacy of the instruction to make suitable changes or adjustments. Evaluation, then, requires an insightful investigation on the implementation of the various programme components. As learners are in the heart of any programme design and evaluation, the present study is a student-based evaluation on the effectiveness of the current Master's programme of English at Biskra University, Algeria. It aims at spotting out the strengths, the deficiencies, and the gaps of the programme and finding out the degree of students' satisfaction with the needs analysis, objectives, materials, assessment and tutoring. To do so, an evaluation checklist was devised as a data gathering tool to gauge students' approval on the various elements of the programme.

The 56 participants revealed their considerable appreciation of the courses' syllabi content, though their load and density. They also acknowledged the qualification and the experience of the tutors and their competence, yet they are reported to lack fairness of evaluation and motivation. Moreover, students were not satisfied with their involvement in the designing of the programme and they expressed their disappointment of being out of the heart as their learning needs were not seriously considered. More importantly, the theoretically-oriented syllabi of the courses made students craning for more practical learning sequences. The current Master's programme of English at Biskra University is critically targeted as being teacher-centered, excessively theoretical and overloaded which made the accomplishment of objectives far from students' expectations. Therefore, a revision of the teaching approach is to be made in accordance with students' objectives and a consideration of students' needs is to be prioritized.

Keywords: program design, assessment, Master's studies.

Introduction

Questioning programme design has always been in the heart of academic debate. The debate has risen to find answers to certain questions related to the learning process based on the feedback about the effectiveness of the programme components and their impact on the achievement of learners. This evaluation of the programme effectiveness has become a paramount source of data for teachers to make judgments on the syllabi of the courses and determine the success or failure of their instruction. It generally aims to empower instructors to advance learners' performance and make appropriate adjustments regarding the objectives, materials and teaching methods and assessment besides obtaining an ongoing feedback from students to better the teaching standards and guarantee the optimal atmosphere of quality learning.

The present paper is an evaluation of a tertiary EFL Master's program at Biskra University of the academic year 2016-2017. The study is a descriptive-based survey that uses a checklist as a data-gathering tool that addresses 56 Master's students of Sciences of Languages. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of the program from students' perspectives as they are the target agents of this program. This assessment is the first step towards a more refined and adjusted version of the current Master's program.

1. Syllabus/programme design: general overview

Considered as a process, a programme design is a set of items which have to be taken into consideration by an expert or a teacher as well to make the teaching process more effective. The teaching process involves many items and so does the programme design, content, methods, task management and testing are some of these items. To understand what is syllabus or curriculum design, Nation and Macalister (2011: 02) have introduced and illustrated its components in following model.

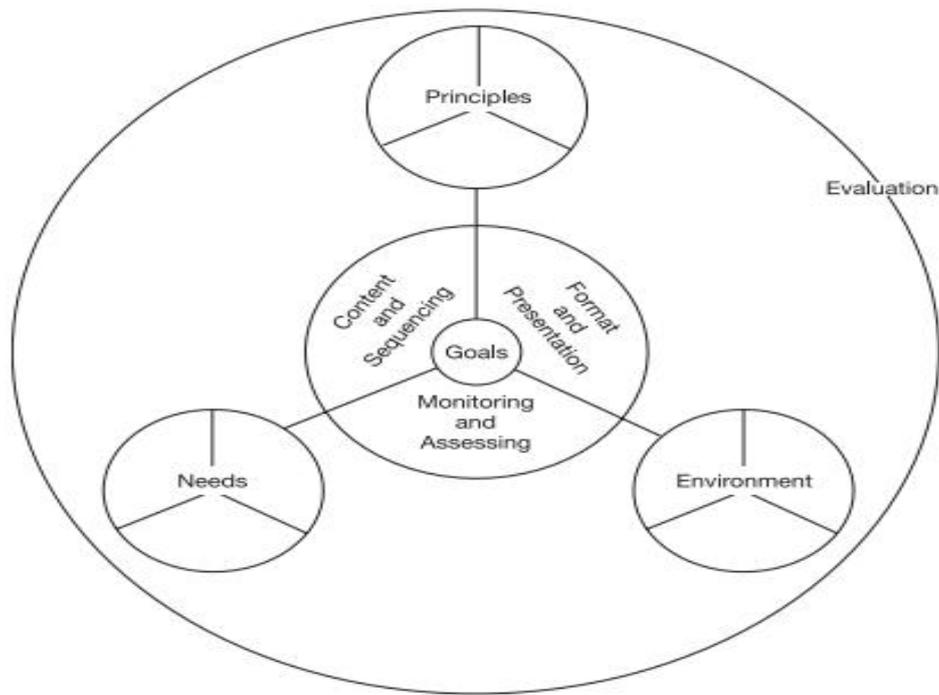


Figure 1: A model of the parts of the curriculum design process

The model shown includes three outside circles and a subdivided inner circle. The inner circle has goals as its centre to show the importance of the goals set by the programme. Meanwhile, the content and sequencing parts are items to be learnt in a determined order. The format and presentation part are the format of the lessons or units of the programme including the techniques and type of activities used to help in learning. The monitoring and assessment part are learning observation, testing and feedback. However, the outer circles are principles, environment, and needs. These circles include theoretical and practical considerations that are fundamental to produce a curriculum like learners' present knowledge and deficiencies. The resources available include time, the skill of the teachers, the curriculum designer's strengths and limitations, and principles of teaching and learning (Nation and Macalister 2010).

Another perspective does not give a model of syllabus or programme design but raises a set of questions about its development and management. Soifer et al. (1990: 156) explained this as follows.

How is an adult literacy programme developed? Is it truly a programme planned as a whole or is it characterized as a series of classes offered because they seem to be needed and instructors are available? If a coherent planned programme exists, should it continue in its present form or might revisions be desirable?

Questioning how the programme is made, its design and organization are fundamental items in considering any programme or syllabus but what it seems to be most important is the revision or deciding whether this programme could be used perpetually or changed when necessary. The idea or intention to change is not made arbitrarily but intentionally through assessing learners' achievement. It is proven that a good programme well implemented, improves learners' development and optimal achievement.

2. Learner-centered approach to programme design

The major reason we need to consider in designing and planning a syllabus or programme is to give learners an advantageous life-long learning experience and tools needed to conquer the job market, O'Brien et al. (2008:03) said:

Preparing your students for the purposeful and effective lifelong learning that these conditions require has strong implications for course content, structure, and the materials and strategies that you use to promote learning. Students will require more carefully thought - out information and well - honed tools.

In the classroom, the so called learner-centered approach, learners are instructed to better achieve their course objective(s) as a short-term target and in parallel with what is needed for success in the whole academic career as long-term target. This approach considers the learner as the central agent in the process and he/she is an active partner in decision making about every aspect of the programme. The aim is to assist him/her to make a sense of what they learn as it prepares them for the academic and professional future. In this regard, O'Brien et al. (2008: 05) stated, "when reading a learning - centered syllabus, students learn what is required to achieve the course objectives, and they learn what processes will support their academic success". A programme design based on learner-centered approach has as a primary focus the different learning stages and their objectives, if the programme is working well, the results would be so.

3. Programme assessment/evaluation

Teachers are the most valuable source of information needed to evaluate and assess the programme, being in the forefront of the class, teachers can observe and report the evolution and the quality of learning, if any deficiency the teachers can judge if the programme needs to be renewed or changed according to the collected information in the classroom. The information or data about the teaching/learning process and the programme are collected through different tools. Hall and Hewing (2001: 254) said:

It is the teacher, rather than the 'tester' or the evaluation 'expert', who has most information about specific classroom contexts. This information may be reported at

various times and in various forms, for example as responses to questionnaires, interviews, records, or diary keeping. It may be largely descriptive and qualitative, and not entail tests, measurements, and inferences about curriculum quality from statistical data. In contrast to summative evaluation for purposes of accountability, evaluations intended to improve the curriculum will gather information from different people over a period of time. This is known *as formative evaluation*.

As mentioned earlier, this kind of assessment is used to detect the weaknesses of the programme rather than evaluate the results engendered from using it. When using the formative assessment, some items need to be taken into consideration including:

- Evaluation is not restricted to the testing the learners' abilities.
- More than just the end product is important when evaluating a learning programme.
- There are different conditions that may explain, or contribute towards an explanation of why a programme is successful or not.
- Other information related to a range of different aspects of the teaching and learning process should be included in an evaluation of the curriculum to complement data typically derived from a test analysis of learner performance.

Ibid. (2001: 255)

In addition to the previous considerations, the components of curriculum or syllabus design should include the following items as cited in Brown (1995: 35-179).

3.1. Needs analysis

As the name shows, needs analysis refers to information gathered about learners' needs that serve to establish the curriculum design, if the programme is language based so the needs would be so. When identified, learners' needs are considered as objectives and help in developing tests, materials, teaching activities, and evaluating strategies.

It is noticeable that needs analysis is the starting point of the other items in the syllabus design; this reflects the importance of learners' needs as the main consideration into the process of design.

3.2. Goals and objectives

Goals are the programme purposes set to be achieved or attained. Before deciding about goals, four main points should be considered:

- Goals are general statements of the programme's purposes

- Goals should usually focus on what the programme hopes to accomplish in the future, and particularly on what the students should be able to do when they leave the programme
- Goals can serve as one basis for developing more precise and observable objectives
- Goals should never be viewed as permanent, that is, they should never be set in cement

3.3. Testing

Testing is a tool to measure learning performances as a general aim, and can serve as a reference to better the way it is designed and administered. There are two types of test, norm-referenced test to compare students' performances, and criterion-referenced test to test the student's performance.

3.4. Materials

Materials include different types of techniques and activities in teaching the students. While dealing with materials, three strategies should be followed: adopting, developing, and adapting materials. Teaching materials can be authentic and non-authentic depending on the proficiency level of learners and their needs of learning. When selecting the materials, teachers have to consider the interest, the complexity, and the functionality of the materials.

3.4. Teaching

The last item in the curriculum design process is teaching where all previous items are implemented; instruction and teaching methodology are the basis of the design.

4. Students' program assessment/evaluation

It is often recognised that every aspect in the syllabus is to be evaluated as to content, objectives, teaching methods, testing and assessment criteria, learning materials and administrative arrangements. This is due to the fact that "evaluation showcases your [the teacher] achievements and helps to make your programme better" (Pope and Jolly 2008).

As far as students' assessment of programmes is concerned, Little, Goe and Bell (2009) consider it as a form of measurement and judgement of the effectiveness of teaching including course content, classroom practices and teacher behaviour to get their feedback. Moreover, Boggino (2009) sees that it has become beneficial and inevitable in the sense that it helps teachers make suitable instructional decisions that fit learners' potentials for better improvement of their output. Hence, the purpose of assessing programmes is to "improve

educational efforts” (Taylor-Powell, Steele and Douglah 1996: 3) and empower instructors to improve learners’ performance and make appropriate adjustments regarding the objectives, materials and programme sequence besides obtaining an ongoing feedback from students to better the teaching standards (McNamara 2002). In this context, Keane and Labhrainn (2005) believe that the effectiveness of the assessment/ evaluation leads to relevant changes in the programme.

Although it is not the only and the best tool, the use of students’ evaluation as an instrument to appraise the success or failure of any language instructional programme has been increasingly applied in many educational institutions over the world as primary determinants of the teaching effectiveness (Emery, Kramer and Tian 2003; Keane and Labhrainn 2005).

5. The study: methodology and participants

The present study is a descriptive exploratory-based investigation which relied on evaluation checklist that measures students’ satisfaction with the current FL Master’s programme. The study mainly targets the four constituents of the programme: needs analysis, objectives, tests, and teaching. In this checklist, students were asked to measure their satisfaction level by ticking one of the suggested options (very satisfied, satisfied, undecided, fairly satisfied and not satisfied). The checklist was handed to students in a class session and they were asked to tick the most appropriate option. The answered checklists were handed over at the end of the session.

The study participants are 56 students of first year EFL Master’s in Sciences of Language at Biskra University. They have been studying English for three years in License studies and they are now following their Master’s after being admitted to enroll in Master’s programme. The admission was done selectively according to their overall credits and averages in License studies.

6. Description of the programme

The current Master’s programme of Sciences of Language is a revised version of 2013 canvas of Master studies offered by the department of English at Biskra University, which was approved by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. This canvas is a four semester programme of 30 credits each; the student has to obtain 120 credits by the end of the programme to get his Master’s degree. The first year Master’s programme is

divided into two semesters of 382 hours each. It is composed of four main teaching units; Fundamental unit, Methodology unit, Discovery unit and Transversal unit. The Fundamental unit as its name suggests is the basic unit of the programme in which the most important courses are included namely Language Mastery, Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics/theories of learning, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis. The Methodology unit consists of Research Methods in Language Learning and Academic Writing courses. Meanwhile, Psycholinguistics and Statistical Mathematics are the two courses which constitute the Discovery unit. The Transversal unit consists of two courses: Deontology/communication and Foreign Language (French). These course varies in the way they are taught; some are purely lectures and others are lectures followed by tutorials (practical sessions). They also vary in their assessment methods; formative and summative.

7. Analysis of results

7.1. Needs analysis

Statements	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Undecided		Fairly satisfied		Not satisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. The present curriculum meets my learning needs and takes them as the core of instruction.	3	5.35	15	26.78	3	5.35	19	33.92	16	28.57
2. I have been consulted in every stage of the current curriculum design and development.	2	3.57	9	16.07	8	14.28	7	12.50	30	53.57
3. The courses of the curriculum are diverse, and relevant to my target needs.	4	7.14	19	33.92	6	10.71	11	19.64	16	28.57
The sum	9	16.07	43	76.78	17	30.35	37	66.07	62	110.71

The mean	3	3.35%	14.33	25.58%	5.66	10.11%	12.33	22.02%	20.66	36.90%
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Table 1. Students' assessment of needs analysis

Learner-centred approach to teaching often necessitates designing a syllabus/programme based on students' needs and the learner should be the center of the instruction. However, the table shows that Master's students of English at Biskra University are not pleased with their programme as they are not involved in the design of the syllabus and therefore their needs were not met. Statistically, 36.90% of the participants said that they are not satisfied with the current programme as they are not considered in the syllabus design and this is reflected on the relevance of courses to students' interests. As far as the diversity of the courses and their relevance to learners' target needs are considered, participants varied in their responses. 33.92% said that they are satisfied with the different courses offered by the programme, while 28.57% said the contrary; they reported their dissatisfaction. In fact, students have different target needs which range from purely linguistic needs to communicative needs; therefore, their appreciation of the courses' relevance to their needs seems to be made with different parameters and considerations, which are determined by students' needs.

7.2. Goals and objectives

Statements	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Undecided		Fairly satisfied		Not satisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. The curriculum states clearly my learning goals and objectives.	2	3.57	11	19.64	13	23.21	19	33.92	11	19.64

2. The goals are well explained and well detailed which makes sense of my learning.	2	3.57	13	23.21	11	19.64	16	28.57	14	25
3. I have so far accomplished most of my learning goals.	1	1.78	9	16.07	16	28.57	18	32.14	12	21.42
The sum	5	8.92	33	58.92	40	71.42	53	94.64	37	66.07
The mean	1.66	2.96%	11	19.64%	13.33	23.80%	17.66	31.53%	12.33	22.01%

Table 2. Students' assessment of objectives

The optimum learning is the one of clearly identified objectives; therefore, any programme must state its objectives and learners make their best to achieve them. In the present case, the participants claimed that the objectives of their programme are neither identified nor detailed, which impacted on students' overall attainment of their learning objectives. In numbers, 53.54% are fairly satisfied or not satisfied at all with the way the statement of objectives is stated and explained. 23.80% are undecided as there has been no satisfactory explanation of the objectives at the beginning of the programme which led students to have no clear image of what it intends to achieve. This situation made some students uncertain to claim any affirmative statement on the attainment of their objectives. 22% represents students who reported their certainty of their awareness of the programme objectives. These statistics express the correlation between objectives clarity and students' achievement of their goals.

7.3. Tests and exams

Statements	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Undecided	Fairly satisfied	Not satisfied
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	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. The tests are designed according to the syllabus content.	19	33.92	27	48.21	00	00	06	10.71	04	7.14
2. The tests are clearly announced and scheduled.	24	42.85	18	32.14	01	1.78	09	16.07	04	7.14
3. The tests are cohesive, purposeful and measure my learning progress.	07	12.5	20	35.71	05	8.92	17	30.35	07	12.5
4. The tests are fairly evaluated and graded.	06	10.71	16	28.57	14	25	07	12.5	13	23.21
The sum	56	100	81	144.64	20	35.71	39	69.64	28	50
The mean	14	25	20.25	36.16	5	8.92	9.75	17.41	7	12.5

Table 3. Students' assessment of tests and examinations

Testing has always been in the heart of teaching and learning (Evers and Walberg 1998) as it is meant to measure students' progress and assess their achievement. Thus, tests have to be well designed and properly scheduled so that learners do their best to obtain optimal results. The table above shows that over half of students (61.16%) are pleased with the way exams and tests are designed, announced and graded. In details, 33.92% are very satisfied with the relevance of the exams and tests to the syllabus content, while 48.21% are satisfied. However, 40% of the respondents claimed that tests are not relevant, purposeful and unfairly graded. In the present case study, measuring students' achievement follows both formative and summative assessment so that the teacher tracks students' progress all over the year. This achievement tracking is not sometimes appreciated by some students especially if

they are not well prepared or the criteria of the tests are competence and knowledge demanding. In some cases, the subjective evaluation of the teacher disappoints students and affects their overall achievement.

7.4. Material development

Statements	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Undecided		Fairly satisfied		Not satisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teaching materials are well developed to suit my language needs.	1	1.78	7	12.5	3	5.35	10	17.85	35	62.5
The teaching materials are rationally delivered in a sequence that matches my learning pace.	2	3.57	8	14.28	13	23.21	9	16.07	24	42.85
The teaching materials are authentic and updated.	3	5.35	13	23.21	1	1.78	15	26.78	24	42.85
The sum	6	10.71	28	50	17	30.35	34	60.71	83	148.21
The mean	2	3.57	9.33	16.66	5.66	10.10	11.33	20.23	27.66	49.39

Table 4. Students' assessment of materials development

Material development essentially refers to the set of lessons and activities which provide the instructional exposure to a wide range of theory and practice (Graves 2000).

These instructional materials are basically developed to suit the objectives of the programme and the needs of learners. As with the previous items, the dissatisfaction is reported by participants to rate materials development for the present programme; 49.39% are not satisfied at all with the appropriateness of the teaching materials to their language needs and their authenticity, 20.23% are fairly satisfied, and 10.10% are undecided. Yet, almost 20% are satisfied with materials development. It is now clear that the absence of needs analysis for the present programme has impacted negatively on students' overall evaluation of the lessons' sequence and the pace of activities in addition to the authenticity of the presented materials.

7.5. Language teaching

Statements	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Undecided		Fairly satisfied		Not satisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Teachers are experienced, qualified and knowledgeable enough to achieve my objectives.	12	12.42	25	44.64	3	5.35	10	17.85	6	10.71
2. Teachers engage learners in a more oriented learner-centered approach.	2	3.57	17	30.35	12	21.42	13	23.21	12	21.42

3. Teachers are fair, honest, and ethically disciplined.	6	10.71	13	23.21	7	12.5	14	25	16	28.57
4. Teachers are supportive, motivating and enthusiastic towards teaching.	5	8.92	21	37.5	4	7.14	14	25	12	12.42
The sum	25	44.64	76	135.7 1	26	46.42	51	91.07	46	82.14
The mean	6.25	11.16	19	33.92	6.5	11.60	12.75	22.44	11.5	20.53

Table5. Students' assessment of teaching

Evaluating teaching effectiveness is hard as there are many constituents in this complex interaction, namely teachers, students and content (Archer, Kerr, and Pianta 2014). Thus, measuring students' satisfaction with teaching is not often accurate because of the existence of many external variables that determine the satisfaction as the mutual relationship between students and teachers, teachers' reputation, and students' prejudgments. For that reason, the results in the table show disparity in participants' answers. About 45% of students are satisfied with the experience of their teachers and their assurance of learner-centered approach, while 43% are not pleased with their teachers' conduction of teaching and their overall motivation and support to students in class. 11.60 % are undecided. These differences in evaluating teaching effectiveness reflect the complexity of the process and the diversity in perspectives and expectations i.e. what one student expects from a teacher is different from one to another as their objectives of learning differ and their target needs are not the same.

8. Discussion of results

Measuring programme effectiveness is a necessary procedure for the optimization of learning and a step to look forward adjustment and improvement in the quality of instruction.

The present programme evaluation is based on students' perspectives and satisfaction level in terms of needs analysis, objectives, testing and teaching. Its objective is to have an effective feedback to be considered in the coming revisions and improvements of the programme.

The overall results suggested that students are fairly displeased with the current programme and its constituents. Over half of participants claimed that the absence of needs analysis conduction at the beginning of the instruction and the non involvement of students in decision making during the different parts of the programme have impacted negatively on their appreciation of the entire programme. The only appreciated constituent is testing and examination design and scheduling because of its high importance in determining students' success and failure though some participants are not satisfied with the way tests are graded and they doubted the fairness of some teachers in evaluating their tests and exams. What should be stressed here is the fact that the EFL Master's programme for tertiary students at Biskra University was decided by teachers who are in charge of the instruction and it was elaborated by field experts in sciences of language and applied linguistics.

Unfortunately, there were no students' representatives when designing the programme which eventually lessened its effectiveness. Although the new reforms in the tertiary education brought into practice the LMD system, which basically supports learner-centered approach, the designers of the current EFL Master's programme has not considered the learner in any decision making; therefore, the discontent is the dominant tendency in evaluating the programme. To begin with, a needs analysis was not taken as a preliminary procedure in the course design; hence learners' situation analysis was not stated as well the target situation analysis. All the other constituents of the programme, namely course objectives, materials development, tests and teaching have not met the expectations and needs of learners.

Unlike the norms in course and programme design, learners need to be well informed and acquainted with the short and long-term objectives so that they can make a sense of their learning and a self-evaluation of the learning progress can be made according to the degree of objective' attainment. In the present case, students joined the programme with no prior information about its objectives and goals, which led students to have a blurred picture of their learning goals as there was a disconnection between their needs and the offered instruction. This disconnection appears for instance in the inappropriateness of the learning materials as participants reported in this study.

Most of the courses are seen by students' participants to be outdated and not purposeful, and some teachers are deemed to lack experience and motivation to involve

students in the different tasks held in class. Moreover, the method of lesson delivery is still traditional and teacher-centered in which no active role is given to students. The participants claimed that many of their teachers still rely on lecturing and theory-based instruction with little practice inside and outside class, which discouraged students from being active agents in the ground. This lack of motivation and engagement resulted in a monotonous atmosphere of learning in which little space is left for creativity, autonomy and innovation.

Conclusion

The present study revealed the major deficiencies in the programme of first year Master's of English at Biskra University. Learners, therefore, are hereby looking forward to have their needs seriously considered and taken as the cornerstone for their programme design. To illustrate, many students targeted teaching as their future profession, which means that their programme should be tailored to meet the requirements of this profession, while in the present programme the major focus was given to language proficiency and linguistic competences with a minor focus on pedagogy and teacher education. To end up, the present EFL Master's programme at Biskra University was not appreciated by students though the course designers have put much effort in the elaboration and construction of the programme. The overall dissatisfaction with most of the programme constituents calls for a serious revision and refinement of the programme, especially on the level of needs analysis as it is the foundation for any successful programme.

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