Towards the Development of Standard Intended Learning Outcomes for English Requirement Courses at Yemeni Universities .

Abdulhameed Ashuja'a[1,*], Ibraheem Tagaddeen[1]

[1.]   Department of Translation, Faculty of Languages - Sana'a University - Sana'a - Yemen

*Corresponding author: ashujaa2@gmail.com

Abstract:

English requirement courses (ERCs) are crucial for developing undergraduate students' skills in English at many Arab and international universities. This study investigated the status of ERCs in Yemen in light of similar Arab and international experiences as well as from the perspectives of teachers and students at Yemeni universities, highlighting the need for the transition towards outcomes-based instruction. The descriptive analytical method was adopted to examine the status of ERCs at Yemeni universities and then compare them to their Arab and international counterparts, using a checklist for the titles, credit hours, and number of ERCs. Furthermore, two questionnaires for teachers and students, covering content, teaching strategies and evaluation, were administered separately to samples of 24 teachers and 439 students, selected from 8 public and private universities. Results revealed that there is a mismatch between what is taught in ERCs and what is required by the labor market and students' specific needs. ERCs seem to be content-based rather than outcomes-based. There is also inconsistency across ERCs in terms of target learning items, which may well be due to the absence of standard intended learning outcomes. To help improve ERCs at Yemeni universities, a proposed framework for ERCs learning outcomes along with a few recommendations were suggested.

نحو تطوير مخرجات تعلم قياسية لمتطلب اللغـة الإنجليـزية في الجامعات اليمنيـة

عبد الحميد الشجاع1,* ، **إبراهيم تاج الدين1**

1. قسم الترجمة – كلية اللغات– جامعة صنعاء – صنعاء– اليمن

* المؤلف: *ashujaa2@gmail.com*

الكلمات المفتاحية

1. متطلب اللغة الإنجليزية
3. التعليم القائم على مخرجات التعلم
5. احتياجات المتعلمين

2. جودة التعليم
4. متطلبات السوق

الملخص:

يُعد متطلب اللغة الإنجليزية مهم وضروري لتنمية وتطوير المهارات اللغوية لدى طلبة الجامعات في العديد من الجامعات على المستويين العربي والدولي. لذا، فقد هدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الوضع الراهن لمتطلب اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات اليمنية في ضوء التجارب العربية والعالمية، وتقصي آراء المدرسين والطلبة والحاجة إلى الانتقال إلى التدريس القائم على مخرجات التعلم. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث اتبع الباحثان المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، حيث تمت مقارنة مقرر متطلب اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات اليمنية مع نظرائه في الجامعات العربية والدولية باستخدام قائمة تدقيق لمقارنة مسمى المقرر ومحتواه وساعاته المعتمدة وغيرها. كما تم استخدام استبانة لتقصي آراء (24) مدرسًا ومدرسة و(439) طالبًا وطالبة تم اختيارهم من (8) جامعات حكومية وخاصة. وقد شملت الاستبانة ثلاثة محاور، هي: محتوى المقرر والتدريس والتقييم. وقد أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود توافق بين ما يتم تدريسه في الجامعات ومتطلبات سوق العمل وأن المقررات الحالية لا تلبي احتياجات الطلبة، كما أن متطلب اللغة الإنجليزية قائم على المحتوى وليس على مخرجات التعلم، بالإضافة إلى أن هناك تفاوت في مفردات متطلبات اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات اليمنية في ظل غياب مخرجات تعلم قياسية. ومن أجل تطوير متطلبات اللغة الإنجليزية قدمت هذه الدراسة تصورًا لإطار مرجعي لمصفوفة من مخرجات التعلم لمتطلب اللغة الإنجليزية، كما قدمت الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات التي سوف تساعد على تطوير تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها متطلبًا جامعيًا.

Introduction

Having academic quality standards enables higher educational institutions (HEIs) to compete, excel, and sustain excellence. This is especially true in view of modern scientific renaissance under the umbrella of globalization, which has also resulted in an international competitive atmosphere where HEIs need to review their academic programs and study plans regularly. HEIs also need to ensure high quality in terms of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of their programs as well as the proficiency of students, as paying due attention to the quality of program ILOs is a basic principle for social and economic development in any country.

One of the challenges that HEIs should take into account is teaching English as a requirement course in their academic programs. In this regard, developments in educational psychology have led to a focus shift to the learner as the cornerstone of the learning/teaching process. This has in turn compelled educational institutions to transition from content-based to outcome-based instruction. According to some research studies (e.g., Rani, 2020; Shaikh et al., 2017; Zhang & Fan, 2020), outcome-based instruction focuses on the skills that students will be able to demonstrate and perform upon the completion of any course or academic program. Shaikh et al. (2017) have stressed the advantage of the transition to outcome-based instruction, arguing that it would render students capable of becoming effective members in the workplace. Given the importance of English as a lingua franca in the era of globalization as well as a language of science and technology, English requirement courses (ERCs) have gained in significance as a pre-requisite for university education. This kind of English education comes under a distinct discipline of English language teaching called English for Specific Purposes (ESP), (Rahman, 2015). ESP allows students to acquire language skills necessary for preparing them professionally and academically to keep abreast of recent developments in their respective disciplines and to meet the labor market requirements. More specifically, ERCs are to enable university students to acquire oral and written communication skills, critical thinking and analysis, and problem-solving skills that they need when reading specialized references published in English.

At Yemeni universities, ERCs seem to be quite difficult for students due to the fact that English is taught as a foreign language, which adds more burdens on both students and teachers. In addition to learning problems caused by the language per se, students would be required to have a working knowledge of the cultural norms dictating the appropriate use of English in various social encounters. This makes ERCs different from other university requirements, such as Arabic and Islamic Culture. Therefore, even expert curriculum planners may be hard-pressed to develop standard content for ERCs, as it is not feasible to have a proto-type course content that can fit all university disciplines. That is so because every field of study has its own 'carrier content' (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 11); ESP helps students to learn their specialized content (Alousque, 2016). For instance, the content of a course for computer science students should be distinct from that of a course set for medical students. In addition, the usage of language tends to be different from one area of study to another, and teaching English requires paying attention to the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The selection of content and activities of language courses, therefore, requires meticulous and comprehensive analysis of students' needs so as to develop an appropriate course syllabus that is outcomes-based.

Problem Statement:

Teaching English to students whose major is not English language at the university level should be based on a thorough analysis of students' needs. Such an analysis should cover the three types of needs analysis: target situation analysis, learning situation analysis, and present situation analysis. A number of needs analysis studies in the Yemeni ESP contexts (e.g., Abdullah 2005; Alduais 2012; Al-Dugaily 1999; Al Maghrabi 2015; Al-Tamimi and Shuib 2010; Al-Thawr 1997; Ashuja'a 2009; Bin-Tayeh 1996; Farea & Singh 2024; Hassan 2000; Homadi 2003; Shuja'a 2004; Othman 2006; Saif 2006) have emphasized the need to match what is taught at the university to what is required in the labor market. Unfortunately, this requirement has not yet been met, a persistent problem that manifests itself in frequent complaints by frustrated employers about university graduates lacking the skills and knowledge required in the workplace, and indeed in complaints by the graduates themselves, who – most of the time – join training courses after graduation in order to further enhance their poor skills and knowledge. Had their needs been met at the university, they would not have resorted to other institutions for more skill development. This obviously indicates that the courses offered at universities are not outcomes-based. Therefore, and as a response to a call by the Yemeni Ministry of Higher Education to address the problem, the present study is an attempt to investigate the current situation of ERCs in Yemen compared to Arabic and international experiences and to propose a framework for standard learning outcomes for ERCs that would help in preparing students for the workplace.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study aims at:

1. Reviewing the current ERCs offered at Yemeni universities compared to those offered at some Arab and international universities.
2. Investigating students' perspective on the quality of current ERCs.
3. Investigating teachers' perspective on the quality of current ERCs.
4. Proposing an ILOs matrix that would enhance outcomes-based instruction in ERCs at Yemeni universities.

Questions of the Study:

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current situation of ERCs at Yemeni universities compared to those at some Arab and international universities?
2. How qualified are the current ERCs at Yemeni universities from students' perspective?
3. How qualified are the current ERCs at Yemeni universities from teachers' perspective?
4. What is the framework of standard learning outcomes that would help improve the teaching and learning of ERCs at Yemeni universities?

Significance of the Study:

This study will, hopefully, be of some help to the concerned authorities to update and develop ERCs offered by the Yemeni universities. It is also hoped that the proposed ILOs model can facilitate the development and acquisition of English language skills in such a way that enables students meet job requirements. The study may well be useful in strengthening the abilities of the teachers of requirement courses at Yemeni universities. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies may find this study pertinent to their work in that they would pay more attention to ERCs under the umbrella of outcomes-based instruction.

Literature review

ERCs fall under the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a significant sub-branch of English Language Teaching (ELT). ESP is concerned with the teaching of English to students of specializations other than English. It is based on the identification of students' needs (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998; Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Robinson 1991;). ESP is not a new term but a new approach to teaching English (Brown, 2009). It is also a multidisciplinary approach (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998) which covers a wide range of specializations and majors at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In order to respond to the learners' needs, ESP specialists emphasize these major concerns: needs analysis, discourse analysis, and learners' training for particular study or work purposes (Alousque, 2016).

Within the Yemeni context, a number of research studies have been done with the aim of providing ESP practitioners and HEIs with the required input that would improve the teaching and learning of English across various academic and professional contexts. Studies started in the mid-1990s and continued till the present. For instance, Bin-Tayeh (1996) investigated the students' language needs in the General Medicine department at Sana'a University in an attempt to propose a framework for teaching English to medical students. Another study was done by Al-Thawr (1997); it carried out another systematic needs analysis on the students of the Faculty of Science, Sana'a University, with its main objective being to provide a systematic and comprehensive profile of the undergraduate English language needs at the Faculty of Science. Al-Dugaily (1999) studied the validity of the ESP courses offered at the Faculty of Engineering, Sana'a University, and found that the courses were poor and less relevant to the students' needs.

In the area of business English, Hassan (2000) investigated the English language needs of the students of the Faculty of Commerce and Economics, Hodeida University. In addition to students and teachers, he also included employers in order to investigate the relevance of the English courses to the market needs. It was found out that such courses did neither meet the students' needs nor the market requirements. Along the same lines, Homadi (2003) conducted a study at the Faculty of Commerce and Economics, Sana'a University, focusing mainly on assessing students' English proficiency, their needs, and the assigned teaching materials. The major finding was that the courses offered at the Faculty of Commerce and Economics were insufficient. All of these studies emphasized the importance of ESP training and its relevance to the local market development.

Major and more extensive studies were done by Shuja'a (2004), Abdullah (2005), Othman (2006), and Saif (2006). These studies covered a variety of specializations and settings, including business, banking, and medicine. In his review of ESP in the context of Yemen, Ashuja'a (2009) indicated that the gap between what is taught at university and what is required by the labor market still exists. Likewise, Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2010), Alduais (2012), Assaggaf, Stapa and Mustafa (2012), Al Maghrabi (2015) and Farea & Singh (2024) emphasized the need for improving the current situation of ERCs to provide ESP learners with the necessary skills to cope with their study and job requirements within the Yemeni context.

The present study, therefore, comes as an extension to previous studies, and aims to evaluate the quality of the current ERCs in some Yemeni universities compared to some Arabic and international experiences and to

propose an ILOs matrix for ERCs at Yemeni universities.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, the descriptive (survey and analytical) method was used. Two questionnaires were developed by a committee of experts affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education and were handed to the researchers mandated to conduct the current study. The questionnaires were originally written in Arabic to ensure that the statements are so clear that participants can easily comprehend them and provide accurate answers. For the purpose of reporting on this research to the specialist community, the questionnaires were translated into English by an expert in translation and were also validated by another expert. The following procedures were followed:

- Surveying and analyzing relevant Arabic and international experiences.
- Assessing current ERCs using an evaluation checklist which focused on certain themes: credit hours, intended learning outcomes, contents, assignments and activities, teaching strategies, and testing and evaluation.
- Collecting data from the selected sample of teachers and students, using two questionnaires.
- Analyzing data by using the SPSS statistical program and writing the study report.

Population and Sample of the Study:

The population of the study is represented by Yemeni public and private universities. The sample consisted of undergraduates who had already completed ERCs successfully (i.e. only junior and senior students) and graduates who took ERCs at the undergraduate level.

The total number of the sample was (439) students and (24) teachers. Table (1) shows the sample distribution.

Table (1): Study Participants

Category	University				Total
	Public	%	Private	%	
Students	304	69.2	135	30.8	439
Teaching Staff	18	75.0	6	25.0	24

The number of teachers is small as teachers of ERCs are usually hired on an hourly basis. There are no fixed lists of teachers from which participants could be selected. As is evident from Table (2), however, the teachers sample was diverse in terms of the colleges they teach at, gender, and years of experience.

Table (2): Teachers' Demographic Information

Type of College		Gender		Experience		Total
Science	Humanities	M	F	1-5 yrs.	6-10 yrs.	
12	12	9	15	18	6	24

Likewise, the students sample consisted of students from different disciplines, gender, and academic levels. This is illustrated in Table (3) below.

Table (3): Students' Demographic Information

Major	N	%	Gender	N	%	Academic Level	N	%
Medicine	93	21.2	Female	240	54.7	Undergraduate	403	91.8
Engineering	85	19.4	Male	199	45.3	postgraduate	36	8.2
Basic Sciences	76	17.3						

Social Sciences	75	17.1						
IT	71	16.2						
Commerce/ Administration	39	8.9						
Total	439	100.0	Total	439	100.0	Total	439	100.0

Data Collection Tools:

Two separate questionnaires were administered to students and teachers, and a checklist was used to evaluate ESP courses.

- Student questionnaire: this consisted of (10) statements covering the content of the course, study plan, teaching techniques, assignments, tests and exams, and skills and knowledge the students should acquire upon the completion of the course.
- Teacher questionnaire: this consisted of (12) statements to investigate the content of the course, study plan, teaching techniques, assignments, tests and exams, as well as skills and knowledge specified by the course and are supposed to match students' needs.
- A checklist for course evaluation, covering these sections: credit hours, intended learning outcomes, contents, assignments and activities, teaching strategies, and testing and evaluation.

Results and Discussion:

The results and discussion will be presented in two sections. The first section is devoted to the assessment of ERCs offered at some Arab and international academic institutions in comparison to some Yemeni universities. The second section presents an analysis of the participants' perspective about the ERCs at their respective universities.

ERCs at International Universities:

Evaluating the current situation of ERCs at Yemeni universities involves a thorough comparison between these courses and their counterparts at international and Arab academic institutions. To achieve this comparison, answers to the questions raised in the Problem Statement section of this study are discussed below.

Question One: *What is the current situation of ERCs at Yemeni universities compared to some Arab and international universities?*

To answer this question, a number of ERCs programs at more than (22) international universities were surveyed. The survey covered countries like the US, the UK, Canada, China, India, and some African countries. However, due to the unavailability of detailed and sufficient online information about the ERCs offered by some universities, ERCs at only (11) international universities in (5) countries were selected for study and comparison based on their course descriptions and contents.

Based on a review of and comparison between these ERCs (see Table 4 below), the following points were concluded:

1. ERCs vary from one country to another. In the US, they are listed among the General Education Requirements of the university, which include a number of courses focusing on the development of graduates' general skills.
2. There are discrepancies between ERCs across the international universities in terms of the number of credit hours and courses distributed over the curriculum.
3. At some universities, ERCs are offered according to their need and in consultation with an academic advisor.

4. At some universities, ERCs are taught to nonnative speakers as a prerequisite course for getting admission to the bachelor's degree, after securing a predetermined level of language proficiency.
5. Unlike ERCs at Yemeni and Arab universities (where English is taught as a foreign language), ERCs at international universities are taught to

native users of English, who already have a strong command of the language.
6. ERCs at these universities tend to focus on developing advanced writing skills by encouraging creative writing skills, communication skills, debate skills, and critical thinking skills

Table (4): Review of ERCs in International Universities

No	Country	University	Course Title	Credit Hours	Study Level
1	Canada	McGill University	Academic English Seminar	6	Year 1 (Remedial Course)
2	The US	Wake Forest College	English 111 (writing seminar)	3	Year 1
		Illinois State University	Composition as Critical Inquiry Communication as Critical Inquiry	3 3	Year 1
		Western Kentucky University	*English Composition (6 hrs.)* 1. Introduction to College Writing 2. Writing in the Disciplines * CLEP Exam: English College Composition Or College Composition Modular (3 hrs.)	9	Year 1
		University of Akron	English Composition I English Composition I	6	Year 1
		University of Buffalo	English 101 Writing 1 English 201: Writing 2 English 100: Intro. to Academic Writing	3	Year 1 Year 2
		Utah Valley University	1- Introduction to Writing 2- Intermediate Writing 　　(Humanities/Social Science) 3- Intermediate Writing 　　(Science and Technology)	3	Year 1 Year 2
3	The UK	Cambridge University	Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English		Year 1 (Remedial Course)
4	China	Hong Kong University for Science & Technology	Reading and Writing Skills	6	Year 1
5	India	Pune University (Faculty of Arts)	Compulsory English	3	Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
		Osmania University	English Proficiency Certificate	18	Year 1 (Remedial Course)

ERCs at universities in the Arab World:
In addition to the review of English courses offered in the international context, it is also very much relevant to review ERCs in some universities in the Arab world so as to complete the answer to question one raised in the Problem Statement section above.

A number of requirement courses in more than (17) Arab universities, selected from Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Jordan, Palestine, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, were surveyed. Due to the unavailability of detailed and sufficient information about ERCs at some of the Arab universities on their respective websites, ERCs at only (13) universities in (9) countries were selected for study and

comparison. As shown in Table 5 below, the main focus of comparison was on the course descriptions and contents of the selected ERCs.

Based on a review of and comparison between the target ERCs, the following observations were made:

1. English courses vary from one country to another. In the UAE and Oman, for instance, ERCs are listed among the foundation requirement courses of language proficiency as a prerequisite course for getting admission to a bachelor's degree program.

Table (5): Review of Requirement Courses in the Arab World

No	Country	University	Course Title	Study Level	Credit Hours T	P	T	PSD	Remarks
1	Egypt	Ain Shams University	English 321	Year 1	3		3	Available	University Requirement
		Al Mansoura University	Academic English	Year 1	3		3	Available	University Requirement
2	Saudi Arabia	King Saud University	English (1); English (2); English (3); English (4)	Year 1 Year 2	3		3	Available	University Requirement
		Imam Mohammed University	English (1); English (2)	Year 1	2	1	3	Available	University Requirement
3	Oman	Sultan Qabous University	English Language Skills	Year 1			6	Available	Foundational Diploma
4	Qatar	Qatar University	English For Communication I English For Communication II	Year 1	3		3	Unavailable	University Requirement
5	UAE	Sharja University (Faculty of Arts)	Academic English 1 Academic English 2	Year 1	3		3	Available	University Requirement
		Al Ain University	Effective Communication in English (1) & (2)	Year 1	1	2	3	Available	University Requirement
6	Jordan	Yarmouk University	English Writing Skills (1) & (2)	Year 2	2	1	3	Available	University Requirement
7	Bahrain	Bahrain University	English	Year 1			3	Unavailable	University Requirement

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Abdulhameed Ashuja'a, Ibraheem Tagaddeen

No	Country	University	Course Title	Study Level	Credit Hours			PSD	Remarks
					T	P	T		
5	Palestine	Arab American University	Remedial English Intermediate Writing Skills Technical Writing	Year 1			3	Unavailable	University Requirement
6	Kuwait	Kuwait University	English Proficiency Certificate	Year 0 Year 1 Year 1			10 3 3	Available	Foundation Diploma + University Requirement
		Gulf University for Science and Technology	Academic English I English Composition II English Composition III	Year 1 Year 2			3 3 3	Available	University Requirement

2. ERCs differ from each other in terms of the number of credit hours and courses distributed over the curriculum.
3. ERCs come under different titles across universities in the Arab world; e.g. English Language, Communication Skills in English, Writing Skills in English, English Language Proficiency, English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes.
4. Most of the courses tend to focus mainly on equipping students with a knowledge of English language and terminology related to students' respective fields of specialization, as well as developing creative and communicative writing and speaking skills.

Current Status of ERCs at Yemeni Universities:

The existing ERCs at public and private universities in Yemen were investigated by the means of three research instruments: teacher questionnaire, student questionnaire, and content evaluation checklist. These tools were used to elicit answers to questions two and three of this study.

Question Two: *How qualified are the current ERCs at Yemeni universities from students' perspective?*

To answer this question, an evaluation checklist was used, and a questionnaire was given to students at some Yemeni universities. The checklist covered the following elements: credit hours, intended learning outcomes, contents, assignments and activities, teaching strategies, and testing and evaluation. It was then administered to three public universities (Sana'a Univ.; Aden Univ.; Ibb Univ.) and six private universities (University of Science and Technology; University of Modern Sciences; Al Yemen Univ.; Twintech Univ.; Dar Assalam Univ.; National Univ.). Based on the analysis of the course specification documents, the following observations were made:

1. ERCs are offered under different titles across the universities, with most of the universities using traditional titles (e.g. E101 and E102) and some others using more recent labels (e.g. Proficiency Skills in English).
2. EDCs differ across universities in terms of the number and distribution (theoretical vs. practical) of credit hours, as well as the study levels at which the courses are offered.
3. At some universities (e.g. the University of Science and Technology), ERCs are offered within the remedial course of language proficiency, which requires students to achieve a certain level of

English proficiency to be eligible for the bachelor's degree.

4. At some universities, particularly public ones, no course specification documents of ERCs are available and prepared in accordance to quality and accreditation standards.

5. In most of the course specification documents available, course objectives and intended learning outcomes are not clearly stated.

6. The contents of ERCs vary from one university to another in terms of selection, gradation, sequence, and distribution in the first and second semesters.

7. At some universities, the contents of ERCs appear to be out of date and do not match market needs and requirements.

8. Some course specification documents do not include a variety of teaching and evaluation strategies.

9. At some universities, the course specification documents of ERCs do not

focus clearly on the four language skills and ignore practical aspects as well.

10. Most of the course documents do not contain recent references or electronic learning resources.

Results and Discussion of Student Questionnaire:

The analysis of data collected by the student questionnaire and the discussion of the results would also be an answer to **question two** mentioned above. In order to answer this question, a three-point Likert scale questionnaire, consisting of 10 items, was distributed to the students sample. Table 6 shows the overall results of students' perspectives regarding the ERCs taught at their respective universities.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percent
1	Course topics helped me acquire new theoretical and practical knowledge relevant to my practical and professional life.	2.18	0.66	73%
2	The course plan (objectives, methods of assessment, assignments, etc.) was clear and announced at the beginning of the semester.	2.14	0.80	71%
3	Course topics were interrelated and integrated with each other and took into account the customs and traditions of society.	2.12	0.76	71%
4	Course assignments and activities helped me acquire research, communication and self-learning skills.	2.01	0.78	67%
5	Course assignments and activities helped in developing my ability to think critically and solve problems.	1.97	0.76	66%
6	The number of the theoretical and practical/applied study hours was sufficient for completing the course content.	2.19	0.83	73%
7	The Course textbook (Main Reference) was recent, useful, available and appropriate to achieve the course objectives.	2.14	0.74	71%
8	Teaching methods of the course were varied, exciting and attractive, and could stimulate me to attend classes.	2.03	0.80	68%
9	Questions of the midterm and final tests were varied and measured most of the knowledge and skills included in the course.	2.29	0.75	76%
10	What I learned in this course was generally useful and I recommend that it should remain as a general requirement in all Yemeni universities.	2.25	0.73	75%
	Total mean 1_10	2.13	0.45	71%

As is evident from the data displayed in Table 6, Item (9) received the highest mean (2.29), which indicates that exam question papers were representative of the course content. When responding to the first question of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire (i.e. *What did you like most in this course?*), informants mentioned that the tests and exams of ERCs were easy for them, which they liked most. The lowest mean (i.e. 1.97) was given to Item (5), which suggests that course assignments and activities were too few to help students develop their language abilities, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. This may be attributable to a weakness in the ERCs taught at Yemeni universities, a problem that teachers need to consider when designing or selecting their teaching and learning materials. The conclusion drawn from students' responses to Item (5) is in fact confirmed by informants' responses to the second question of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, namely *What did you not like most in this course?*; most respondents stated that the ERCs they studied lacked sufficient practice and only had a limited number of activities. For them, this did not help develop their skills in English. Additionally, other responses by the students sample to the open-ended questions emphasize that the time allocated to ERCs is not enough; teaching methods and aids employed by teachers are not helpful; and some content items of the courses are quite difficult for the intended learners and indeed irrelevant to their respective fields of study. Finally, some students indicated that some teachers lack the required skills for teaching English for Specific Purposes.

It may be interesting to report that some respondents, when responding to the open-ended questions, indicated that the use of Arabic during ERC classes is not helpful at all. This is a very pertinent point that should be taken seriously while teaching English to students of medicine, engineering, and science. The use of the mother tongue in a foreign language class may not provide learners with enough exposure to the foreign language. Exposure to the target language is one of the prerequisites for acquiring or learning that language.

A limited number of respondents, on the other hand, indicated that the content of the English course they took was relevant to their respective fields of study, clear, and appropriate. The course had a variety of topics and themes, which were well-organized and presented. The vocabulary and expressions were useful to the students as well.

In response to the third open-ended question, which reads: *What are your suggestions for improving this course?*, both undergraduates and graduates suggested the following: more practical sessions and activities to motivate them to practice English skills; improving the teaching/learning environment by providing the required teaching aids and facilities; making the course content relevant to students' specializations; including some local cultural elements which would facilitate learning English; making the content less difficult; increasing teaching hours; responding to the multilevel classes; making the course content diverse and up-to-date; and integrating some English-Arabic translation into ERCs to help students understand and follow up teachers in class. These results indicate that ERCs are more content-based and lack intended learning outcomes.

Results and Discussion of Teachers Questionnaire:
The analysis of data collected by the questionnaire distributed to teachers and the discussion of the results would be an answer to the third question of the study, namely *How qualified are the current ERCs at Yemeni universities from the teachers' perspective?*

To elicit an answer to this question, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, consisting of 12 items, was distributed to the teachers sample. Table 7 below shows the overall results of teachers' perspectives regarding the ERCs offered by Yemeni universities.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percent
1	The course is taught in accordance with an approved study plan given to the students at the beginning of the semester.	2.67	1.52	53%
2	The course description clearly and concisely reflects its intended objectives.	3.58	1.10	72%
3	Credit hours allotted for teaching the course are sufficient to implement all its theoretical and practical aspects	3.29	1.27	66%
4	Course objectives are clear and correspond with the requirements of this age	3.46	1.06	69%
5	Course content topics correspond with the intended educational objectives.	3.58	0.78	72%
6	Course content topics are modern and keep pace with the scientific developments in the respective field.	3.29	1.00	66%
7	Course content topics are appropriate for the students' level at this stage.	3.50	1.18	70%
8	Teaching and learning strategies defined in the Course Specification/Plan are varied and appropriate for achieving the course objectives and intended learning outcomes.	3.42	1.14	68%
9	The assignments and activities specified in the Course Specifications/Plan are appropriate for developing students' skills of scientific thinking, problem solving, communication and self-learning.	3.04	1.00	61%
10	Methods of evaluating students' learning specified in the course plan are appropriate to the nature of the course and its objectives.	3.71	0.86	74%
11	The course textbook (Main Reference) is available and appropriate for achieving the course objectives.	3.92	0.88	78%
12	I recommend that the practical/applied aspects of the course should be made more intensive and its current allotted contact hours should be increased	3.88	1.33	78%
	Total mean 1_12	3.44	0.57	69%

As shown in Table 7, Item (11) received the highest mean (3.92). This indicates that the course is made available and the contents are appropriate. In their answer to the first open-ended question, namely *Do you recommend keeping the present course content without any change to the study plan?*, the majority of teachers responded positively. Item (1), on the other hand, received the lowest mean (2.67). This suggests that most ERCs do not have any study plan specifying the course contents, objectives, intended learning outcomes, and teaching and assessment strategies.

When responding to the second open-ended question, which reads: *Do you think that the Course Specification Document and Course Plan need to be amended?*, over 50% of informants indicated that there is a need to modify the course specification document, with a special focus on the teaching strategies, content responsive to the labor market needs and appropriate to students' level, deficiencies, and needs. These suggestions are further supported by the teachers' answers to question (4), which reads: *Do you think that the main and sub-topics of the course content are appropriate?* Participants pointed out that some of the

Towards the Development of Standard Intended Learning Outcomes for English Requirement Courses at Yemeni Universities.

Abdulhameed Ashuja'a, Ibraheem Tagaddeen

content should be modified to suit students' level, interests, and specializations. Another thing inferable from the teachers sample's comments was that most of classes tend to be multilevel; in one class, students may belong to three language levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced; and this is really a serious problem that requires immediate action by the concerned authorities.

Teachers' responses to the open-ended questions also agree with students' responses in terms of the need for some modifications to ERCs, special teacher training to improve performance, more credit hours, teaching aids, workshops to train teachers on course descriptions, and a revision of the content of ERCs by specialists in respective colleges.

A proposed framework for teaching ERCs:

This section presents a potential answer to question four of this paper, which reads: *What is the framework of standard learning outcomes that would help in improving the teaching and learning of ERCs?*

In view of the results of the checklist analysis of ERCs at Yemeni, Arab, and international universities under study as well as the results of the analysis of the study participants' responses to the two questionnaires, it is of paramount significance that all ERCs offered at the colleges of Sana'a University be revised after an investigation of the three types of students' needs: present situation needs, learning needs, and target situation needs, all of which are well-established in ESP literature. Such needs will cover both the needs of the labor market and the requirements of students' respective specializations. Based on a needs analysis, a list of intended learning outcomes can be developed. Below is a proposed matrix of ILOs which can, hopefully, be of help for those responsible for developing and teaching ERCs. This matrix is followed by the distribution of language skills weights. Then, a general structure for the ERCs program is provided.

1. Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

It is worth noting that the proposed ILOs matrix can be used as a standard framework for English courses that can be offered as remedial courses in the first year at any college. It can be used as a reference ILOs list. An outcome relevant to a particular specialization may not be so to another one. This is why the identification and assessment of students' needs is a prerequisite for any course development and teaching.

Another point to emphasize here is that when students get promoted to a higher level in their study program, they would need a specialized variety of English that is related to their respective fields of study. This necessitates the development of special ILOs for each specialization based on students' specific needs.

Taking into consideration the standards of quality assurance and accreditation, we suggest the following four categories of ILOs: Knowledge and Understanding; Cognitive Skills; Practical Skills; and Transferable Skills. It is in order here to remind the reader that the selection of these ILOs can vary from one context to another, depending on students' disciplines and future careers.

On the completion of the ERCs program, students will be able to:

A. Knowledge	A1	Demonstrate awareness and a systematic understanding of the key features of writing for academic purposes, including the mechanics of writing and the various forms of paragraphs and essays.

	A2	Demonstrate awareness and a systematic understanding of the key skills of reading for academic purposes, including reading strategies to achieve active comprehension.
	A3	Show awareness of basic elements of English grammar, and recognize parts of speech, grammatical categories, and structures.
	A4	Demonstrate knowledge of basic forms of communication and identify the communicative functions of language in different situations.
	A5	Display a considerable knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary and basic technical terms related to their study and their future work.

On the completion of the ERCs program, students will be able to:

	B1	Critically judge and evaluate evidence, especially on the basis of a detailed analysis of the use of language in a variety of modes, genres, and contexts related to their disciplines and future career.
B. Cognitive Skills	B2	Demonstrate an ability to extract information from various types of written and oral texts, using various reading and listening comprehension strategies.
	B3	Identify, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate employ information resources and/or other forms of supporting evidence appropriate to their disciplines and future career.
	B4	Show critical, analytical, and evaluative thinking of their own writing, through drafting, revising, and/or editing processes appropriate to their disciplines and future career.
	B5	Revise writing for clarity of content and accuracy of language use, including sentence formation, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

On the completion of the ERCs program, students will be able to:

	C1	Apply a range of conceptual tools and skills learned to enhance their ability and efficiency in handling language-based tasks, and in communicating effectively in English both orally and in writing.
C. Practical Skills	C2	Respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, genre, and discipline by listening, reading, writing, and speaking with awareness of self, others, and context, and by adapting their communication skills to their discipline of study and future career.
	C3	Effectively use a variety of reading strategies for analyzing multiple kinds of texts and read, independently and intensively, texts of a considerable length, in a variety of genres.
	C4	Successfully apply strategies to analyze and critically examine texts related to their disciplines and in their future career.
	C5	Use technology and digital media strategically and capably to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English.

On the completion of the ERCs program, students will be able to:

	D1	Take responsibility for personal and professional learning and development
D. Transferable Skills	D2	Manage time and prioritize workloads, think and perform under pressure and work to deadlines
	D3	Work creatively and flexibly in collaboration with others and as part of a team.
	D4	Use a range of Information Technology skills effectively, such as word processing text with footnotes, basic formatting, email, searching databases, and navigating the World Wide Web.
	D5	Communicate effectively and fluently in speech and writing.

2. Distribution of Course Components:

The components of an ERC can be distributed over the four language skills as follows.

Skill	Listening Comprehension	Speaking	Reading Comprehension	Writing
Weight	%20	%30	%20	%30

These components would also cover grammar and vocabulary building.

3. Suggested general structure for ERCs:

No	Course Title	Level & Semester	Credit Hours		
			T	P	T
1	English Proficiency Skills (1)	Level one, Semester One	2	2	4
2	English Proficiency Skills (2)	Level one, Semester Two	2	2	4
3	English for Academic Purposes (1)	Level Two, Semester One	2	2	4
4	English for Academic Purposes (2)	Level Two, Semester Two	2	2	4

In addition to these four courses, advanced courses on English for Specific Purposes should be incorporated into higher education programs, taking into consideration students' respective needs and disciplines as well as future careers.

Conclusions:

Based on the analysis and discussion of the data collected for the purposes of the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- ERCs at Yemeni universities do not seem to be developed or selected according to the target students' needs.
- It is apparent that these ERCs lack regular updates required to meet the market requirements.
- ERCs teachers do not undergo mid-career special training and development.
- There is no ongoing assessment of the courses, which, if done regularly, would lead to good results.
- There is no general framework for ERCs as course titles differ from one university to another, though they might be taught in similar colleges.
- Most of the ERCs at Yemeni universities tend to lack valid course

descriptions, a problem which should be addressed by developing course descriptions according to standards of quality assurance and accreditation.

- ERCs are offered only in year one at humanities colleges but in years one and two at science colleges, which, in both cases, seems insufficient.
- The number of contact hours is not sufficient enough to develop students' skills in English, which they need in their respective specializations.
- The Arabic word *mutatallab* (i.e. requirement), which is often associated with the titles of both Arabic and English requirement courses offered at Yemeni universities, seems to lead students in some fields of study (e.g. humanities) to underestimate the significance of ERCs. This attitude has an impact on the overall process of teaching and learning ERCs.
- In most colleges, ERCs teachers are not provided with the necessary equipment and aids of teaching that would help them achieve the objectives of ERCs successfully.

In sum, as far as ERCs are concerned, it seems that there is a mismatch between what is taught at university and what is required by students' needs as well as the job market. This is in support of Farea & Singh (2024) who emphasized that the English course taught to students of medicine at Ibb University does not equip the intended audience with the required language skills.

Recommendations:

In addition to the adoption of the course structure recommended above, other recommendations for those concerned with the teaching of ERCs can be made as follows.

1. Introducing a remedial English course to students before joining the bachelor's degree, which should be a foundation course given to all

students and a pre-requisite for admission into the program.

2. Disseminating the outcomes-based instruction culture among students and teachers at Yemeni universities.

3. Developing specifications of ERCs according to the ILOs matrix proposed by this study.

4. Conducting training courses for new teachers on the techniques and skills of teaching English for specific purposes under the umbrella of outcomes-based instruction.

5. Establishing an English Requirement Unit in each college to be responsible for overseeing the process of teaching and learning English in the respective college.

6. Increasing credit hours so as to ensure sufficient time for practice and training.

7. Involving specialist teachers in the designing or selection of teaching materials for ERCs, with outcomes-based instruction being a priority.

8. Paying more attention to the practice of English language skills that are relevant to students' needs.

9. Activating assessment and evaluating procedures in academic departments and quality assurance units to ensure successful achievement of ILOs.

10. Encouraging and supporting research scholars to carry out research studies that would improve the teaching and learning of ERCs.

11. Forming homogeneous classes, as far as possible, in terms of language proficiency.

12. Utilizing content and vocabulary relevant to students' respective specializations, as well as outcomes-based instruction.

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Towards the Development of Standard Intended Learning Outcomes for English Requirement Courses at Yemeni Universities.

Abdulhameed Ashuja'a, Ibraheem Tagaddeen

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