

Academic English Program Evaluation of the Foundation Year at Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic College: Trainees and EFL Instructors' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

The main reason of conducting this study is grounded on my rational to provide further guidance to curriculum staff in my professional context, College of Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic (SPSP), to develop the current English program taught to vocational trainees to prepare them to their future jobs at petroleum services industry in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, the graduates' spoken language is inadequate at their worksites and therefore their employers are relatively dissatisfied with the language quality of their manpower. Accordingly, I have decided to explore the speaking skill aspects in the existing English curriculum to value its effectiveness in improving and helping the academic staff to produce fluent speakers of English at oil industry workplaces. Based on my study findings, I have found that it is relatively difficult to assign a language course book which meets all the needs of trainees at vocational training institutions because their working environment needs specific learning objectives for learning job-related language. In my research and professional experience, as a researcher in language curriculum development as well as being a language instructor at a vocational training college, I can conclude that the solution to solve language learning and its implication at workplace is to develop EAP/ESP language program based on specific instructional objectives driven from the actual needs assessment at the target workplaces and their intended learning outcomes could be aligned with both learning and teaching activities and assessment tasks using the constructive alignment principles as the constructive alignment framework could be effective in structuring and designing aligned curriculum to meet the intended goals of these contexts, especially vocational training centers and higher education institutions.

Key words: Curriculum Development, Program Evaluation, Constructive Alignment, Systems Approach

INTRODUCTION

This investigation is aimed at conducting a formative curriculum evaluation of the current English course book (Cutting Edge) at a vocational training center (SPSP). It focuses in particular on trainees and EFL instructors' perceptions of the elements of the course in relation to speaking skill. The focus of my investigation is to answer the following research question:

How do EFL instructors and trainees at a vocational training center in Saudi Arabia perceive the aspects of the English program in relation to speaking skill?

Based on Nation and Macalister's (2010) conception that course book evaluation process can be based on activities of curriculum design process, the following sub-research questions cover the main elements of course design in a principled way including proficiency level of learners, goal and objectives, testing, materials, teaching and evaluation activities:

- Does the content of the course book meet the proficiency level of trainees?

- Does the goal of the course book meet the needs of trainees?
- Are trainees pleased with the course?
- Has enough time been spent on speaking objectives?
- Is the pacing of materials adequate to the available timeframe?
- Is the methodology that EFL instructors are using appropriate to the needs of trainees?
- Are trainees/instructors satisfied with assessment aspects?
- What aspects of the course do instructors/trainees think are more/less effective in developing the speaking proficiency?

Following this introduction, background chapter two includes some factual information about the context of this study such as the trainees' educational background, proficiency level required to start the course, the assessment system and the main purpose of studying the course for trainees. Then review of the existing literature in relation to curriculum

evaluation and designing in chapter three involves two main parts, theoretical analysis (section 3.1) includes evaluation interpretations by some researchers, purposes of language program evaluation and the main aspects of evaluation process such as types and dimensions of evaluation. In this study, I followed decision-facilitation approaches in evaluating the target program as they match the purpose of my study which is conducting a formative evaluation, so I delivered more details about this approach including the actual steps of program evaluation process. Furthermore, section 3.2 of this chapter elaborates specifications of the two main empirical approaches that have been used for designing and evaluating language programs, the first approach is systems approach which involves six main activities: needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching and evaluation. The second approach entails the main aspects of constructive alignment framework which is based on three main components: intended learning outcomes (ILO), teaching and learning activities (TLA) and assessment tasks (AT). This part gives further explanation on how constructive alignment approach is applied to enhance teaching process through assessment. It ends with the likely constraints for not using this approach in some contexts. After that, chapter four is where you can find explicit details for my study design including mixed methods approach specifications which is based on using questionnaires in quantitative data collection, then following-up interviews to elaborate the findings of quantitative data analysis. This chapter ends with a summary of the ethical considerations and validity and reliability checks strategies that I followed while conducting this investigation. After explaining methodology descriptions, it is time to discuss and present results in chapter 5 for the two phases of data collection, starting with quantitative data analysis results using SPSS software, then conducting thematic qualitative text analysis to the transcripts. Finally, I will report the final conclusions based on both quantitative and qualitative data results including my implications and suggestions for doing further research for the findings of this study in different contexts.

BACKGROUND

My study targets male Saudi trainees who study vocational training programs conducted in English at a postsecondary vocational training center in Saudi Arabia. They are aged between 19 and 30. They have to complete the training subjects in two years: year 1 assigned for foundation year programs including academic English program and year 2 assigned for technical training programs (Job Skills). For the trainees, their main purpose of studying this training program is to get a diploma certificate to be eligible for working at petroleum services industry around Saudi Arabia. To this end, the academic English program is designed to help the trainees improve their English to better understand their technical training programs delivered in English throughout year 2. In addition, this course should enable them to communicate fluently in job-related interactions after graduation at their workplaces. Unfortunately, the speaking proficiency of most graduate trainees is inadequate at their workplaces according

to dissatisfaction messages received from their employers. Consequently, it is relatively good to determine the value of aspects of the academic English program in view of ESL instructors and vocational trainees' perspectives as a guidance to develop the curriculum.

Course Book Overview

English course book is centered around series of interactive books of levels 2 to 7 published by Pearson and titled Cutting Edge. The successful candidates of the program are placed at the right level based on their results of the entry proficiency test which is administered by the curriculum staff to select the best candidates to start studying the English course and level 2 is the minimum accepted level according to the recruitment policy of this training center and their sponsoring companies. In my experience as a language teacher, placing trainees at the appropriate level at the beginning of course is relatively essential to achieve the goal of the course because this secures that trainee's language proficiency level meets the content of the course which in turn may empower trainee tendency and motivation to learn the course smoothly. That is why I started my questionnaires by asking participants about their perceptions of the entry placement test to check whether it has helped them to be placed at the right level or not.

The course book is delivered in iBook format using iPads in paperless classes through either virtual (online) classes or on campus-based classes; recently it has been delivered online due to study suspension associated with COVID 19 pandemic. Trainees study each level in a 10-week segment and the academic year is divided into four segments, so each cohort completes four levels throughout the academic year. For example, if a trainee starts with level 2, he will graduate at level 5 and so forth. Levels 2-5 consists of 14 units and levels 6-7 contains 12 units. The pacing of these materials is 2 units per week in 5 English classes per day for 50 minutes each.

Program Testing Outline

This English program has systematic achievement tests which are administered periodically throughout the academic year. For each segment, trainees are tested three times: progress test 1 (PT1) in week 4, progress test 2 (PT2) in week 8 and end of segment assessment (ESA) in week 10. The weighting for each assessment element is: 20% for PT1, 20% for PT2, 35% for ESA, 10% for coursework assignments (weekly quizzes), 10% teacher-based evaluation and participation, and 5% for attendance. The course focuses on four main skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, so there is a special test for each skill and 70% is the passing rate for each one. The listening test is based on pre-assigned listening objectives for each level and similarly the other tests are based on assigned objectives for each skill. Listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar assessments are computer-based including on-line assessment questions: multiple choice, matching and true false. Writing test is paper-based and the trainee has to write one/two paragraphs covering the given writing objectives.

Concerning speaking assessment, it is audio-recorded and conducted in face-to-face interviews in IELTS format questions by two examiners; an interlocutor reads the given questions for the trainee and an assessor scores his answers to give him a band score according to the assigned speaking assessment marking rubrics including task achievement, language and fluency and pronunciation. The percentage of speaking skill assessment is only 20% including 5% in PT1, 5% in PT2 and 10% in ESA.

To sum up, the main goal of foundation year including the academic English program is to enable vocational trainees to communicate effectively in English at their workplaces in petroleum services industry, not to prepare trainees for higher level of academic or technical degrees, so this study is aimed at evaluating the course book components in view of trainees and EFL instructors' perceptions to achieve this program goal.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My study is to conduct a language program evaluation, so my review of literature involves two main parts: theoretical analysis (section 3.1) to program evaluation process in terms of purposes, approaches and dimensions (considerations or issues in evaluation process) and then empirical analysis (section 3.2) to program evaluation frameworks: systems approach theory and constructive alignment principles.

Theoretical Analysis

Purposes of program evaluation

Since the 1960s, the scope of evaluation has changed from only concern of test results to the importance of measuring all factors that may impact the curriculum including components of the program as noted by Hewings and Dudley-Evans (cited in Richards, 2001:287), they start "*collecting information and make judgments about all aspects of the curriculum, from planning to implementation*". Further, I am in full agreement with Brown's (1995:34) conviction that evaluation should be continuous in a systematic way saying that evaluation is "*the ongoing process of information gathering, analysis ...the entire purpose of which is to constantly improve each element of a curriculum*". Also, he indicates that curriculum evaluation can be the heart of the systematic approach to language curriculum design; it includes, connects and gives meaning to all the other elements of the program. Dealing with the program as a system helps to develop the whole learning process in order to meet the needs of learners.

The purpose of evaluation process is to understand how the program works enabling different kinds of decisions to be made about the program as noted by Richards (2001:286) to find out "*whether the program responds to learners' needs, whether further teacher training is required for teachers working in the program, or whether students are learning sufficiently from it*". Further, Nation and Macalister (2010) state that the purpose of curriculum evaluation is to check if the course is successful in achieving the perceived goals and

also where it needs to be improved. Furthermore, evaluation process is crucial in developing an ongoing program as it measures all the main aspects including materials, students and teachers' perception of the course as noted by Stenhouse (cited in Mckernan, 2007:202) that "*evaluation should lead development and be integrated with it*". Further, evaluation is necessary to make education-based decisions as noted by MacDonald (cited in Mckernan, 2007:204) that "*evaluation is the process of conceiving, obtaining and communicating information for the guidance of educational decision making with regard to a specified program*".

All in all, in my perspective based on the earlier interpretations of researchers and my experience as an EFL teacher, evaluation process is not only effective in designing and developing a program, but also it could be important for both teachers and language learners; for teachers to improve/adapt their teaching styles to meet the learning needs of learners because, of course, we periodically receive new learners who have different needs and from different backgrounds, so it is relatively good for language teachers to be always well-prepared to receive new learners' needs. In this way, program evaluation could enhance the learning process through improving the delivery of the program which is good for the target learners.

Types of program evaluation

Weir and Roberts (cited in Richards, 2001) propose that there are two main purposes of language program evaluation: program accountability and program development. The accountability-oriented evaluation focuses on the effects of a program at the end of an educational stage and it is usually conducted for the benefit of an external audience. In contrast, development-oriented evaluation is aimed at improving the quality of an ongoing program and it is conducted by teachers, students who are involved in the program. Based on these different purposes for evaluation, Richards (2001) recognizes three types of evaluation: formative, illuminative and summative:

- Formative evaluation is conducted as apart of program development process to identify and address problems in any aspect of the program. The main emphasis of this type is to improve the delivery of the program by resolving the problems defined in data collection process.
- Illuminative evaluation is used to find out how different aspects of the program work or are being conducted in order to provide deeper understanding of teaching and learning processes without seeking to change the course in anyway as a result of this evaluation process. Block (1998) suggests that teachers may use this type of evaluation through interviewing students regularly to find out their learners' interpretations of the given language course.
- Summative evaluation is aimed at judging the value of different aspects of the curriculum. Its main purpose is to find out the degree of success of a program through determining its effectiveness, efficiency and acceptability. It occurs at the end of the program by external evaluators.

To end this part, I can assure that the first type (formative evaluation) meets the purpose of this study as it aims at evaluating an existing course book (Cutting Edge) in the service of development purposes through addressing likely issues identified in any aspect of the course in view of both instructors and trainees' perceptions.

Decision-facilitation Approach

Brown (1995) defines four approaches for conducting program evaluation: product-oriented, static-characteristic, process-oriented and decision-facilitation approaches. The first three approaches focus only on limited aspects of the program, namely the goals and objectives, so researchers see that they were not effective enough to revise the program and make decision. I totally agree with this norm as these first approaches of program evaluation do not deal with curriculum as a system and they consider one element only- goals and objectives. Accordingly, decision-facilitation approaches were introduced to help in making decisions. On this approach, evaluators are facilitators only and they favor gathering information that will help program developers make their own judgments and decisions.

Brown (1995) adds that decision-facilitation approach has three models- CIPP, CSE and Discrepancy as follows:

The CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model, as described by Stufflebeam (cited in Brown, 1995), context focuses on objectives, input defines the resources to achieve objectives, process as a continuous feedback to decision-makers and product defines results at the end of the program. Stufflebeam also recommends four aspects that should be remembered while conducting a language program evaluation using this model:

- Useful information should be provided to decision makers.
- Evaluation must be conducted through a systematic way.
- Evaluation entails three steps: delineating, obtaining and providing.
- Collaboration is required in delineating and providing steps.

The CSE model- the Center for the Study of Evaluation. It is designed for decision making purposes. Using this model, Alkin (cited in Brown, 1995:223) points out that evaluation process should produce information for five different types of decisions:

- Systems assessment
- Program planning
- Program implementation
- Program improvement
- Program certification

The discrepancy model was designed also to help in decision making. To show the aspects of this model, Provus (cited in Brown,1995:223) postulates a comprehensive definition to evaluation:

Program evaluation is the process of (1) defining program standards; (2) determining whether a discrepancy

exists between some aspects of program performance and the standards governing that aspect of the program; and (3) using discrepancy information either to change performance or to change program standards.

To conclude, decision-facilitation approaches are the most appropriate to my study as they clearly define the goal of evaluation process which is to help the program staff make decisions (CIPP model) by providing reliable and valid information. Also, my rationale is not to judge the course, but to explore the course aspects to identify any difficulty with any aspect of the course in the service of developing the delivery of the program (CSE model). Furthermore, program description step will be followed while performing evaluation to the target course book (discrepancy model). Accordingly, decision-facilitation approaches meet rational and resonates the planned procedures to conduct the evaluation process to the target program.

Considerations in program evaluation implementation (the audience for evaluation)

As advised by Elley (cited in Richards, 2001), it is essential before starting program evaluation to identify who the different audiences are and what kind of information they are interested in, therefore evaluation should satisfy the needs or purposes of all involved parties. For example, the main concern of vocational training center might be to find out whether the language program prepares the target trainees for vocational training programs, Job Skills, conducted in English. Further, Nation and Macalister (2010:123) recommend that "*in the initial stages of an evaluation, the evaluator needs to talk at length with the person commissioning the evaluation to make clear the goals and type of data to be gathered in the evaluation.*" Also, this preparatory step has two purposes: determining the degree of the evaluation confidentiality and defining what kind of information should/ not be gathered. Accordingly, I interviewed the academic principal in my study context to elicit his perceptions of the types of information they need before starting evaluation process.

Empirical Analysis

The following parts of this section demonstrate specifications of two main theories that have been used in empirical studies for evaluation purposes: systematic approach framework and constructive alignment principles. As noted by Nation and Macalister (2010:165), "*it is thus worth spending some time considering in a systematic way ... whether it is good enough to recommend making it the text for a course*" through evaluating the consistency between the aspects of the target course book and therefore they conclude that "*a systematic approach to course book evaluation can be based on the parts of the curriculum design process.*"(Nation and Macalister, 2010:165). Thus, each aspect of the two course design models, systematic approach and constructive alignment, will be demonstrated in the following parts.

Systematic approach theory

I totally agree with Dick and Carey’s conclusion (cited in Brown, 1996:269) of the systematic approach theory to language curriculum in terms of a system specification:

A system is technically a set of interrelated parts, all of which are working together toward a defined goal. The parts of the system depend on each other for input and output, and the entire system uses feedback to determine if its desired goal has been reached. If it has not, then the system is modified until it does reach the goal.

using systems approach framework helps to develop or design a language program through well-organized and systemized activities as Brown (1996:270) defines program development as “a series of activities that provide a support framework that helps teachers to design effective activities and learning situations to promote language learning.” Further, Brown (1995:29) believes that curriculum development process entails “a series of activities that contribute to the growth of consensus among the staff, faculty, administration, and students.” In agreement with Brown’s notion, it is relatively good to evaluate a program based on the consensus among all the interested parties- especially students and teachers- in relation to the consistency of the main components of the program. Therefore, I will use the systematic approach to find out this interrelationship, as noted by Brown (1995:276) that “systematic approach focuses on the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation phases of language teaching”. Furthermore, Nation and Macalister (2010:142) favored using the systematic approach in designing or developing a language program saying “the output of one stage becomes the input of the next”. In full agreement with this norm, when program designers or developers have plenty of time and resources to apply the systematic approach in curriculum designing or developing, they may develop a well-organized and successful language course.

Figure 3.1 (adapted from Brown, 1995:20) indicates six main elements of curriculum: needs analysis, goals and objectives, testing, materials development, teaching and evaluation. They should be interrelated; for instance, the program designers or developers may use the output of needs assessment stage to be the input of objective writing stage. In this way, any change in one activity may affect the other parts or activities.

In agreement with Brown’s (1996:260) notion that “systematic approach helps language teachers monitor and improve the components of an already existing language program”. I assume that systematic approach is an effective tool to find out the degree of consistency of the program aspects through the curriculum evaluation process. Based on systems approach theory, I can conclude that the curriculum could be seen as an overarching system which has interconnected aspects based on certain objectives to achieve the perceived program goal.

Constructive alignment approach

As described by Shuell (1986), teaching will be more productive when there is consistency between what instructors

want students to learn, how they teach and how they assess students’ academic performance. Educational psychologist John Biggs formulated a course design model called constructive alignment (henceforth CA) in 1994 to describe this consistency. Biggs (cited in White, 2012:18) defines CA:

the fundamental principle of constructive alignment is that a good teaching system aligns teaching method and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives so that all aspects of this system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning.

As demonstrated in Figure 3.2 by Biggs (1999), the concept of this system is that alignment between teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks will result in better student learning which means achieving the intended learning objectives.

I totally agree with Kabouha’s (2015) conclusion that constructive alignment approach provides an effective framework for constructing program elements in a systematic approach to obtain high-level learning outcomes because the learners’ performance and practice are based on authentic tasks that are relevant to the main goal of the program. In my perspective, CA could be an authentic solution to my professional context program as the real goal of the course is driven from actual needs of trainees and accordingly, teaching and learning activities could be aligned with assessment

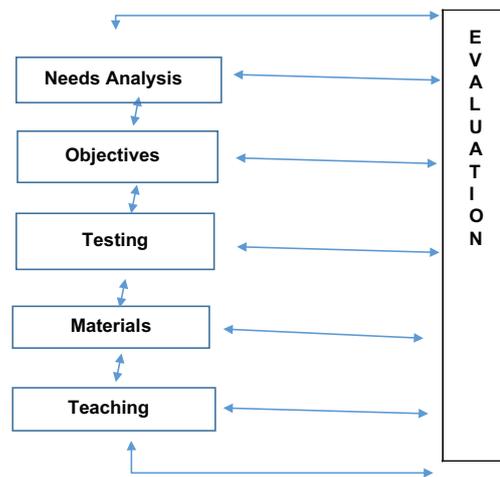


Figure 3.1. Systematic design of language curriculum (adapted from Brown 1996)

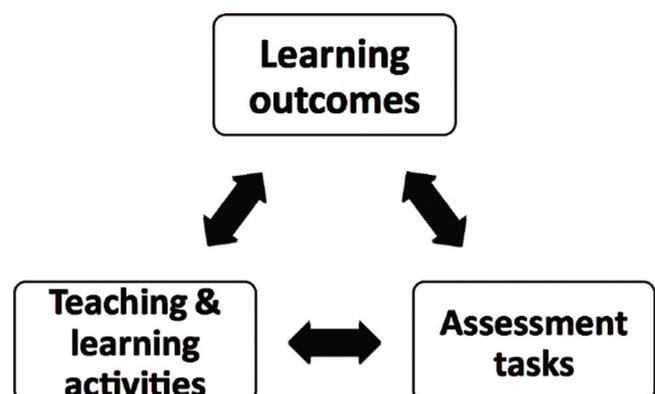


Figure 3.2. Constructive alignment model of course design (adapted from Biggs, 1999)

tasks to enhance learning process and achieve the intended objectives.

Constructive alignment aspects

Biggs & Tang (2007:52) point out that CA entails two aspects because “it was based on the twin principles of constructivism in learning and alignment in the design of teaching and assessment.” The first aspect, it is constructive because it implies the constructivist theory in which students are the constructors of their knowledge and skills through applying the given learning activities. The second aspect, alignment principle is explained by Biggs (cited in Dames, 2012:38):

Alignment in constructive alignment reflects the fact that the learning activity in the intended outcomes, expressed as a verb, to be activated in the teaching of the outcome is to be achieved and in the assessment task to verify that the outcome is achieved.

Dames (cited in Kabouha, 2015) adds another significant aspect of CA approach assuming that constructive alignment cannot be achieved or implemented in an educational system which does not allow to change or amend its module descriptors. This reinforces that learning is a lifelong process which empowers students to construct their knowledge through their lifetime. Furthermore, Biggs (2009) believes that CA theory resonates deep learning concept and it helps implement this concept; deep learning process requires a strong teaching technique which results from applying constructive alignment principles. Lawrance and Snyder (cited in Kabouha, 2015:84) conclude that deep learning “leads to understanding and long term retention of concepts so that they can be used for problem solving in unfamiliar concepts.” In my norm, this leads to better learning for the intended outcomes and achieve successful learning process in an interesting way as the learners construct their knowledge themselves which may enhance their learning motivation.

Constructive alignment application

Biggs and Tang (2007:59) presents a general frame work for teaching according to constructive alignment system. After defining the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs) should be developed or designed in such a way which enables students to involve in these activities to construct their knowledge or skills identified in the ILOs. Next, we create assessment tasks (ATs) by using the same verbs expressed in the ILOs to tell us how well students meet the descriptors expressed in the ILOs. In this way, ILO, teaching and assessment are aligned. Also, Biggs (cited in Kabouha, 2015) visualizes this system, as shown in figure 3.3, demonstrating how learning and teaching activities are created based on the intended learning comes, then assessment tasks are designed to test the intended learning outcomes using the same verbs and tasks used for teaching, in this way both teaching activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the intended learning outcomes.



Figure 3.3. Aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment (adapted from Kabouha, 2015)

Constructive alignment application constraints

As concluded by Biggs and Tang (2007:61), there are some reasons for not using constructive alignment principles in teaching so far:

- Traditional transmission theories of teaching ignore alignment because “The aim is to get a spread between students, not to see how well individuals have learned what they were supposed to have learned” and therefore, there is no connection between what is taught and what is tested.
- Some instructors believe that “there is nothing wrong with current practice” and they even do not seek to elicit their students’ feedback to improve it.
- Some administrative factors make alignment difficult, but not impossible, such as resource limitations, large classes with mass lecturing and multiple-choice testing. To apply constructive alignment, such policies and practices need to be amended.
- Teachers had no idea about constructive alignment theory, or they might know the principle, but they do not know how to apply it.

To conclude, involved teachers should be well-trained on how to create assessment tasks based on the intended learning outcomes to be used for learning and teaching activities before applying constructive alignment approach. In short, increasing teachers’ assessment literacy may facilitate applying CA approach.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Study Design Specifications

Quantitative data collection helped me get an overall picture of the current English program aspects based on the perceptions of both academic and technical trainees as well as EFL instructors. Then, the quantitative findings were elaborated through qualitative interviews obtaining further insights into the significant aspects of the program. Rationale for using mixed methods is that the qualitative findings are anticipated to help me explain the results of the quantitative investigation.

The explanatory design of this mixed-methods approach is based on the purpose of my study which is to understand perceptions of the participants towards aspects of the current English program, and then I used the qualitative results to get deeper understanding and explanation to the obtained quantitative findings. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in two sequential phases; the qualitative phase was built on the quantitative through purposeful sampling from the same population. Figure 4.1 presents the features and procedures of my explanatory mixed methods study:

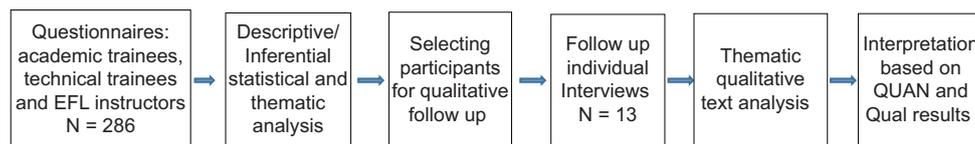


Figure 4.1. Explanatory mixed methods design procedures - adapted from Saito and Ebsworth's study (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009)

As figure 4.1 shows, I started data gathering process using quantitative method (QUAN) followed by qualitative (Qual.) as the QUAN represents the major feature of my data collection process grounded in the purpose of the study. The mixing of the two methods (Connect) occurred at two stages: first, while designing the interview protocols and choosing the participants for conducting follow-up interviews to do further exploration to the quantitative results, and second while integrating the final conclusions from both quantitative and qualitative phases at the interpretation and discussion stage of the study. To achieve the purpose of evaluation process, final findings might guide the program staff to make decisions in order to improve the program in light of the suggested changes.

Participants' Descriptions and Sampling Strategies

My study participants are categorized in three groups: academic trainees, technical trainees and EFL instructors involved at a postsecondary vocational training center in Saudi Arabia. The first group represents academic trainees who are aged between 19 and 30. I used academic trainees as 'current students' of the English program to explore their attitude towards the pacing of materials and to what extent they are pleased with the course and also to explore their thoughts of how could the program be improved to raise their learning motivation. As for the second group (technical trainees), they have completed the English program successfully, so I wanted to explore their thoughts of the program goal; if the English course helped them improve their spoken language and enabled them to better understand their technical training programs. The third group represents EFL instructors involved in delivering the course to explore their insights of the given learning and teaching activities and to what extent the content of the course meets trainees' proficiency level. Also, I wanted to understand their perceptions of preparing extra materials for speaking objectives and how the program could be improved to meet trainees' needs at the technical year. EFL instructors are native and non-native English speakers and they are qualified to teach adult learners.

I used the same population for the two phases and sampling strategy was according to these standards: non-probability sample, availability at certain time, easy accessibility and willingness to volunteer. In the first phase, I administered three questionnaires to 286 participants in three samples: 30 EFL instructors (sample3), 56 technical (sample2) and 200 academic trainees (sample1). As for academic trainees sampling, all the 200 academic trainees answered the same survey questions as they study the same English course book, but in three different levels (levels 2, 3 and 4 starters) based on their entry placement test results. Most of them are level 2 starters, so I surveyed 120 level 2 starters, 50 level

3 starters and 30 level 4 starters: $120 + 50 + 30 = 200$ academic trainees. Likewise, 56 technical trainees administered another questionnaire as they studied the same course book in year 1; 30 level 2 starters, 16 level 3 starters and 10 level 4 starters: $30 + 16 + 10 = 56$ technical trainees. The number of technical trainees (56) is quite small compared to the number of academic (200) because it was quite difficult to approach technical groups as they train in various specifications in different timetables and sometimes they visit worksites for in-service training. Meanwhile, academic trainees follow the same timetable, so they were more approachable.

In the second phase (interviews), I purposefully selected 13 knowledgeable participants from the same population, trainees were selected based on their starting levels in the course and instructors based on the name of the intake they are teaching as follows: 6 academic trainees (3 level 2 starters, 2 level 3 starters and one level 4 starter), 4 technical trainees (2 level 2 starters, one level 3 starter and one level 4 starter) and 3 EFL instructors from three different intakes.

Ethical Considerations

As shown in my ethical approval certificate, consent form and information sheet (see appendix A), I considered the ethical principles applied by Exeter University and there is no ethical consideration required in my study context. I followed these principles as noted by Heigham and Croker (2009) regarding participants' arrangements:

- I informed participants about study's purpose and explained the procedures to be followed explicitly.
- They completely understood all aspects entailed in the informed consent forms before signing them.
- They participated in this study per their willingness and they can withdraw at any time without penalty.
- They agreed to be recorded while interviewing.

In terms of ethical research threats, I considered the following considerations as noted by Brown (1996):

- **Anonymity of participants:** participants remained anonymous in both questionnaires and interviews to avoid bias which may affect the validity of my study results.
- **Data collection methods:** I scheduled the interviews and surveys at the participants' convenience to avoid their distraction and they had reasonable time to respond.
- **Handling the collected data:** I backed-up all the collected audio recordings and saved all collected data files in my personal well-secured computer as well as uploaded on OneDrive of Exeter University.
- **The ownership of data:** I was always in a complete control to release or edit the collected data with the purpose of achieving the main goal of the study.

Validity and Reliability Checks Strategies

Concerning quantitative data collection, I piloted three different questionnaires for reliability checks as I had three groups of participants in the service of checking clarity and difficulty level of the questions. Also, I constructed the questionnaires assigned for the trainees' survey in Arabic and English to avoid misunderstanding and misreading any questions. In addition, I conducted all the trainees' surveys myself through Teams classes to provide extra explanation if needed during the survey in the service of obtaining valid results. Finally, I employed SPSS software to Cronbach's alpha reliability test (internal consistency reliability) to reduce the number of measured parallel variables through questionnaires before data analysis process. Qualitative procedure reliability checks, firstly, I prepared a special interview protocol for each sample based on the quantitative data results after defining the most significant aspects of the course and then I used it in coding the text passages of transcripts in creating a thematic matrix of all respondents.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires

As noted by Dornyei and Taguchi (2010), rating scales are considered the most popular items in research questionnaires as they can be used for evaluating almost anything, especially course books which meet the purpose of this study. Accordingly, I designed a six-point Likert scale representing agreement/disagreement degrees ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Further, I surveyed each sample using a different questionnaire to explore certain perspectives of the course according to their experience while studying the course as academic trainees sample1, and after studying the course as technical trainees sample2, as explained earlier in section 4.3 showing reasons why I sampled three groups. In short, the sections of the surveys covered these elements of course design: entry proficiency test, goal and objectives, testing aspects, materials, teaching and learning activities and evaluation. The last section in each survey was assigned to 'evaluation' asking open-ended questions in order to let participants provide further insights into all parts of the course. Also, their responses to these questions were especially analyzed using thematic analysis approach as I will explain in chapter 5.

After piloting the questionnaires to three participants of my colleagues and trainees to ensure the aspects of the questionnaires covered perfectly and all the questions are clear, I myself administered the original surveys online to the three groups through Microsoft Teams virtual classrooms based on my pre-planned schedule based on their convenience. Due to the suspension of regular study associated with COVID 19 pandemic, I surveyed 286 participants in three samples as follows:

Firstly, I sent the link of EFL instructor feedback survey to all instructors (60) involved to their outlook emails including the information sheet and the consent forms to be accepted before initiating the survey. 30 EFL instructors (out of 60) submitted their responses gradually over one week.

Concerning a limitation during conducting survey this sample, I had to send a gentle reminder by the weekend as I collected only 20 responses through weekdays and my target was to get 30, so I got 10 more responses through the weekend.

Secondly, I prepared a special plan for data collection from academic trainees based on their convenience and I sent this plan to the academic senior instructors in order to inform the involved group owner instructors to let me join their virtual classes accordingly. I visited 13 groups of academic trainees throughout 5 working days via Teams. 200 trainees (out of 260) submitted their responses in 15-20 minutes. I administered the questionnaire myself in order to maintain the validity of this study results and to elaborate any questions from the trainees while doing the survey to urge them provide valid and reliable information about the program.

Thirdly, I repeated the same procedures explained above to survey the technical trainees. I visited 5 groups throughout 2 working days and 56 trainees (out of 75) submitted their responses in 10-15 minutes. Finally, after collecting the data from the three groups, I manipulated the obtained responses to be clean from any irrelevant data before creating a special codebook for each survey to be analyzed using SPSS software. to define the initial findings of the quantitative data. Also, all obtained data files were uploaded on OneDrive of Exeter University to be safe and available when needed.

Interviews

The goal of this qualitative phase is to explain in depth the initial findings of the quantitative data in order to get further understanding of the perceptions of the most significant aspects of the course book. To this end, I prepared three different interview protocols for the three groups to get further insights into the identified aspects of the program through the quantified data analysis. Accordingly, the most significant aspects might be teaching activities, course goal and intended learning objectives, and therefore the focus of the interview questions was to get further insights into these aspects.

After piloting two interviews with my colleagues to give me feedback in the service of reliability checks and practice interviewing. I administered 13 semi-structured internet interviews one by one via private audio-recorded Teams calls as per the participants' convenience. Each interview took 15-20 minutes and I completed interviewing in three working days. Finally, all the audio recordings were uploaded to OneDrive of Exeter University and then I transcribed the interviews typically in numbered-line word files to be coded and analyzed through thematic qualitative text analysis approach.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data analysis

I used SPSS software to conduct descriptive statistics through displaying frequency tables and graphs which show variables and their frequency of occurrence. The tables contain measures of central tendency of the sample such as Mean (the average of scores) and Mode (the most frequent score in a

group), and measures of variability to indicate the average difference between the Mean and individual scores such as Standard Deviation of the results. The goal of this descriptive analysis is to be able to understand the data and better communicate the result. To draw final conclusions from the three samples, I did correlations analysis as inferential statistics to define the relationships between variables, and the obtained probability of occurrence by chance (p) enabled me to qualify their statistical significance. If the results are statistically significant, then I could conclude that the results did not occur by chance alone as noted by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009).

Qualitative Data Analysis

I followed the steps proposed by Kuckartz (2014) while applying thematic qualitative text analysis. Firstly, I created a thematic matrix involving short case summaries after reading the transcripts carefully and highlighting the most significant text messages that suit the investigated hypotheses/categories in the quantitative stage. Secondly, my interview protocols included questions to get further insights into four elements: goal and objectives, learning and teaching activities, materials and testing in order to better understand the initial findings of quantitative data analysis. Thirdly, first coding process through assigning text messages to the correct categories. Therefore, I organized my interview protocol based on these categories to improve the reliability of the obtained data and meet directly the intended category. Further, I went through the text again line by line to select all the significant insights that were relevant to the program elements to be categorized and coded in the thematic matrix. However, the other responses which are irrelevant to the pre-assigned categories remain uncoded as noted by Kuckartz (2014:72) that “*Passages that do not contain information pertaining to the pre-determined topics and sub-topics are irrelevant for the research question and should remain uncoded.*”

Having essentially structured and systematized the data in a thematic matrix helps to create a clear and comprehensible interpretation of the obtained information in a systematic manner as noted by Kuckartz (2014:80) “*the thematic matrix serves as a starting point and is virtually transformed by the systematic process into a thematic matrix whose cells no longer contain passages from the original materials, but analytical summaries written by researchers*”. After that, I created case-related thematic summaries for the topics/categories through paraphrasing respondent’s actual statements to their core and summarize them in light of the goal of doing this analysis which is getting further thoughts into the most significant elements identified through the quantitative data analysis. In addition, these case-related summaries enabled me to compare the perceptions of three groups while presenting the report of results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data Analysis Results

In agreement with Dornyei and Taguchi’s (2010:95) conviction that “*reliability analysis can also be used to reduce the*

number of items in the scale.” I used Cronbach Alpha coefficients in SPSS software to sum up the parallel variables under broader variables that carry as much information as the original ones. All alphas (.838, .790 and .840) for the three scales exceed .70 and this signifies reliable internal consistency between the variables as shown in SPSS output 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

The obtained perceptions of the six activities of course design process: **proficiency level of trainees, objectives and goals, testing, materials, teaching activities and evaluation** will be elaborated successively in the following parts of this section.

Proficiency level of trainees

In the context of this study, the program administrators conduct a language proficiency test in order to select the right candidates to study the English course the results of this test are used to place the successful candidates in the right levels within the program.

SPSS output 5.4 shows that standard deviations of the three samples (1.049, 0.928, 1.033) are quite small compared to the values of means. As such, the means accurately represent the ratings of the participants’ perceptions of proficiency level of trainees on a six-point scale, so the means are good fit for the data. The average mean for the three samples is 4.9 (around 5) and this value means ‘agree’ on the scale. This indicates that they agreed that trainees’ proficiency level is good enough and therefore their proficiency level suits the content of the course book. This conclusion meets Brown’s (1995:110) assumption that proficiency tests “*may be necessary in determining exit and entrance standards for curriculum, in adjusting the level of goals and objectives to the true abilities of the students.*”

Course goal and speaking objectives

As shown in SPSS Output 5.5, values of mean are quite close and relatively high. The mean value (4.9) of academic trainees

SPSS output 5.1. Reliability statistics for academic trainees’ variables

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.838	.852	5

SPSS output 5.2. Reliability statistics for technical trainees’ variables

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.790	.800	5

SPSS output 5.3. Reliability Statistics for EFL instructors’ variables

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.840	.845	5

indicates that most of them agreed that they were aware of the course goal and it helped them improve their speaking skill. Also, it signifies their thought that the course goal meets their current employment requirements. Similarly, mean (4.7) of technical trainees indicates that they agreed that this course enabled them to better understand their Job Skills training programs. Likewise, the mean (4.7) of EFL instructors indicates that most of them agreed that the speaking objectives meet the needs of trainees and the course is relatively effective in improving their speaking skill. This conclusion match Brown's (1995) norm that the purpose of any language program should be clear and learners should be aware of this goal.

SPSS 5.6 provides a matrix of correlation coefficients for three variables, speaking skill improvement is positively related to studying the course, with a Pearson coefficient of

SPSS output 5.4. Descriptive Statistics for Satisfaction with trainees' proficiency level

	Sample 1 (academic trainees)	Sample 2 (technical trainees)	Sample 3 (EFL instructors)
Mean	5.27	5.11	4.37
N	200	56	30
Std. Deviation	1.049	.928	1.033
Std. Error of Mean	.074	.124	.189
Minimum	1.00	2.00	1.00
Maximum	6.00	6.00	6.00
% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

SPSS output 5.5. Descriptive statistics of perceptions of course goal and speaking objectives

	Sample 1 (academic trainees)	Sample 2 (technical trainees)	Sample 3 (EFL instructors)
Mean	4.9117	4.7768	4.7333
N	200	56	30
Std. Deviation	.88190	1.08259	.96252
Std. Error of Mean	.06236	.14467	.17573
Minimum	1.00	1.50	3.00
Maximum	6.00	6.00	6.00
Variance	.778	1.172	.926
% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5.6. Pearson correlations between measures of perceptions of course goal and objectives for academic trainees

Scale	1	2	3
1- speaking skill improvement due to studying the course	1	.665**	.423**
2- Course effectiveness in improving speaking skill	.665**	1	.447**
3- The course goals meet your current employment requirements.	.423**	.447**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

$r=0.665$, which is also significant at $p < .001$. Hence, we can gain confidence that there is a genuine relationship between studying the course and speaking skill improvement. The output also shows that speaking skill improvement is closely related to the current employment requirements, with a coefficient of $r=.423$, which is also significant at $p < .001$. This significance tells us that the course goal is closely related to trainees' current employment requirements.

Testing

Brown (1995:121) also points out that *"the development of systematic achievement tests is crucial to the evolution of a systematic curriculum."*

SPSS output 5.7 shows that standard deviations (1.12,1.16.,814) are relatively small compared to the value of means. The average mean is 4.7 (about 5) which means that most of participants were familiar with speaking assessment procedures and they agreed that testing aspects correspond to the intended learning objectives of speaking and therefore most of them are satisfied with speaking aspects of the course. This perception meets Boud's (cited in White, 2012:18) conclusion that *"assessment has a direct backwash effect on learning. If assessment tasks reward recall, they will prompt students to rote learning and memorization of facts."*

SPSS output 5.8 shows Spearman's correlations between two variables on correspondence of speaking testing to speaking learning objectives and satisfaction with speaking aspects of the course, the two variables are positively related with a coefficient of $r=.579$, which is also significant at $p < .001$. Thus, this could indicate that there is a genuine relationship between trainees' satisfaction with speaking aspects of the course and testing aspects. It can be concluded that correspondence of testing aspects to the intended speaking learning objectives increases trainees' satisfaction with the speaking aspects of the course. This conclusion match Cowan's (cited in White, 2012:10) perspective that *"assessment is the engine that drives learning"*, so the main purpose of assessment is to serve student learning.

Materials

SPSS output 5.9: descriptive statistics for satisfaction with pacing of materials and course content relevance to technical programs.

SPSS output 5.9 shows that standard deviations are relatively small compared to the values of means. Values of means are quite close and the average mean 4.8 (round 5) is relatively high and 5 means 'agree'. Most of participants of the three samples agreed that the pacing of materials suits planned timeframe of each segment. Also, the high value of mean (5.25) of technical trainees' perceptions indicates that most of this sample agreed that the content of the course was useful and relevant to their Job Skills programs.

SPSS output 5.10 shows a Spearman's rho correlations between two variables of content of the course and the pacing of materials They are positively related with a coefficient of $r=.280$ and the significance value $p (.037)$ is less than 0.05.

SPSS output 5.7. Descriptive statistics for correspondence of testing aspects to speaking objectives and satisfaction with speaking aspects of the course

	Satisfied with speaking test aspects.	Speaking assessment aspects match speaking objectives	satisfied with speaking aspects of the course.
Mean	4.72	4.77	4.60
N	200	30	30
Std. Deviation	1.122	1.165	.814
Minimum	1	2	3
Maximum	6	6	6
% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Std. Error of Mean	.079	.213	.149

SPSS output 5.8. Spearman's rho Correlations between measures of correspondence of speaking testing to speaking learning objectives and satisfaction with speaking aspects of the course

Scale	1	2
Spearman's rho		
1-speaking skill assessment aspects match the speaking learning objectives of the course.	1.000	.579**
	.	.001
2- The trainees are satisfied with speaking aspects of the course.	.579**	1.000
	.001	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SPSS output 5.9. Descriptive statistics for satisfaction with pacing of materials and course content relevance to technical programs

	pacing of materials is adequate to the time length of each segment- academic trainees	pacing of materials is adequate to time available- EFL instructors.	pacing of materials was adequate- technical trainees	course content was useful and relevant to Job Skills- technical trainees
Mean	4.91	4.30	4.86	5.25
N	200	30	56	56
Std. Deviation	1.144	1.489	1.119	.879
Minimum	1	1	2	2
Maximum	6	6	6	6
% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Std. Error of Mean	.081	.272	.150	.117

Hence, we can conclude that there is a genuine relationship between the distribution of materials over the planned time-frame with the content of the course. This could have enabled participants to benefit from the course, especially technical trainees as indicated in figure 5.11 above. This conclusion meets Brown's (1996:276) perspective that "*having clear-cut objectives and tests will aid considerably in the planning, organization, and creation of materials*" so materials are adapted using the best available information and planning.

Teaching and Learning Activities

SPSS output 5.11 shows that means of ratings in the three groups are relatively high and close while standard deviations

are relatively small compared to means. The average mean is 4.9 (around 5) indicates 'agree' on the scale. This shows that most participants agreed that they have spent enough time on speaking objectives and provided sufficient practice for speaking skill. Further, this value (5) indicates that most of EFL teachers arranged interactive group/pair activities while delivering speaking focus class. Also, it means that most trainees perceived that teachers applied various activities for developing trainees' speaking proficiency, especially learner-centered communicative-based approach. Finally, this mean (5) could be an evidence that teaching and learning activities meet trainees' learning styles and to what extent they were familiar with teaching and learning activities.

Table 5.12 shows a matrix of Pearson correlations between measures of five variables of learning and teaching activities. All observed variables are positively related with correlation coefficients of $r=.652$ which is significant at $p<.01$. This indicates that there is a genuine relationship between developing speaking skill and employing various teaching activities. Likewise, there are strong positive correlations between the other variables along the matrix. This indicates that most of

Table 5.10. Spearman's rho Correlations of measures for satisfaction with pacing of materials and course content

Scale	1	2
Spearman's rho		
1-The pacing of materials was adequate to the time length of each segment.	1.000	.280*
	.	.037
2 course content was useful and relevant to Job Skills	.280*	1.000
	.037	.

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

SPSS output 5.11. Descriptive statistics for perceptions of teaching and learning activities

	Sample 1 (academic trainees)	Sample 2 (technical trainees)	Sample 3 (EFL instructors)
Mean	5.0310	5.1143	4.6933
N	200	56	30
Std. Deviation	.83734	.68951	.85619
Minimum	1.60	3.80	2.40
Maximum	6.00	6.00	6.00
Std. Error of Mean	.05921	.09214	.15632
% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5.12. Pearson correlations between measures of teaching and learning activities

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1- Adequate time spent on teaching speaking objectives.	1	.652**	.260	.461*	.504**
2- Trainees are getting sufficient practice for speaking skills.	.652**	1	.409*	.470**	.457*
3- using instructional methods appropriate to trainees' needs.	.260	.409*	1	.614**	.562**
4- arranging task-based communicative pair/group activities appropriately.	.461*	.470**	.614**	1	.821**
5- employing learner-centered communicative-based approach in delivering a speaking-focus class.	.504**	.457*	.562**	.821**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

teaching activities are associated with the learning needs of trainees as indicated in coefficient of $r=.538$ which is significant at $p<.001$. Hence, we could conclude that English instructors are using appropriate instructional methods which meet trainees' learning needs. Similarly, they are using learner-centered approach in delivering speaking-focus class as indicated by a coefficient of $r=.821$ which is significant at $p<.001$. Also, they are arranging pair/group communicative activities properly as indicated by a positive strong correlation of $r=.821$, which is significant at $p<.001$. These findings match Brown's (1996:276) conclusion that "teachers must be involved in the process of curriculum development, feedback, and revision, and they must be consulted often along the way." Also, he points out that both teachers and students should be aware of the objectives of the course to support teaching process.

Evaluation: Thematic Analysis for open-ended questions responses

Brown (1995:217) concludes that "the heart of the systematic approach to language curriculum design is evaluation ... includes, connects, and gives meaning to all the other elements." Worthen and Sanders (cited in Brown, 1995) add that evaluation includes obtaining all relevant information to be used in measuring the value of the course and attaining specified objectives. Open-ended questions designed to elicit further insights into all elements of the course and explore their perceptions of the value of the program. Accordingly, thematic analysis was done to the obtained responses and the findings will be demonstrated in the following lines.

• **Trainees' responses on evaluation aspect**

Thematic (content) evaluative analysis was conducted to analyze these perceptions in quite detail as follows:

Output 5.13 shows that 94% had no difficulty with any aspect of the course. However, 6% had difficulty with some elements, including materials. To exemplify, one participant (ID# L49) argued the materials saying "the English book ... has too many mistakes throughout the book. It has a lot of unrelated/unimportant exercises that doesn't help improve our language."

SPSS output 5.14 shows that 88.5% of academic trainees are pleased with the course; for example, a trainee (ID# M99) expressed his positive attitude and also suggested an idea to improve the course delivery saying "Yes, I'm and I wish if there is a student leader of each group so he can talk behalf them in any notes related to learning difficulties or unclear targets or points." Meanwhile, 11.5% were displeased with some aspects of the course and provided reasonable reasons for their displeasure. To exemplify, a trainee (ID# M43) thought that the course book doesn't meet his career saying "the book is very standard and it doesn't help my career at all." Another one (ID# M149) argued teaching saying he wanted "one free speaking class every day with a native English speaker." Similarly, another participant (ID# M184) protested saying "no, we need more activities because, sometimes feel boring."

• **EFL instructors' responses on evaluation aspect**

Also, SPSS output 5.15 indicates that 33.3% of EFL instructors experienced in three main aspects: teaching and

learning activities (n=5), materials (n=4) and testing (n=1), To exemplify, an instructor (ID# P2) noted teaching saying “yes, speaking practice is not enough”. Another one (ID# P23) explained “I have difficulty with speaking because it’s a demanding skill. It’s a productive skill based on the other skills. If there are weaknesses in the other skills, the productive capacity is negatively impacted.” Meanwhile, 66.7% didn’t specify any aspects.

SPSS output 5.16 shows that 56.6% defined three main aspects to be more effective: objectives, materials and teaching. Some of them provided further insights into these aspects; an instructor (ID# Q23) pointed out that “giving ready-made answers is very detrimental to the speaking proficiency. Students totally depend on memorizing the answers.” Another one (ID# Q21) recommended that “more time should be given for the speaking practice inside the classroom.” Finally, ID# Q9 claimed that “listening and reading are more effective as they provide an adequate model of the target language needed for the speaking production.” However, 43.3% didn’t specify any aspect.

SPSS output 5.13. Frequency table for academic trainees who are having difficulties with any aspect of the course

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
yes	12	6.0	6.0	6.0
no	188	94.0	94.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

SPSS output 5.14. Frequency table for academic trainees who are pleased with the course

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
no	23	11.5	11.5	11.5
yes	177	88.5	88.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

SPSS output 5.15. Perceptions of aspects of difficulty in the course for EFL instructors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
no response or no comment	20	66.7	66.7	66.7
testing	1	3.3	3.3	70.0
materials	4	13.3	13.3	83.3
teaching and learning activities	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Findings of quantitative data analysis

Based on the initial results of quantitative data analysis, I can conclude that most of 286 participants of the three samples agreed the following:

- Proficiency level of trainees is good enough and it suits the content of the course book.
- Course goal and speaking objectives are clear enough and helped them improve their speaking skills as they meet learning needs of trainees. However, 11.5% assumed that the course goal does not meet their career at all.
- Testing of speaking skill matches the speaking learning objectives and most of the participants are satisfied and familiar with the testing procedures assuming that it is fair and clear enough.
- Pacing of materials is adequate to the timeframe of each segment. However, 20% of EFL instructors suggested developing new materials for speaking to be related to their workplace and technical year.
- Teaching and learning activities meet the learning needs of trainees and teachers used group and pair interactive communicative activities properly as they were trainee-centered. However, 64% suggested increasing the time for speaking skill practice during the class to have sufficient practice for speaking skill.

All in all, based on these findings, course goal and objectives, materials, teaching and testing could be the significant elements of the course that need further elaboration through conducting follow-up interviews. Furthermore, three of these aspects form the main components of constructive alignment approach. Thus, it would be relatively good idea to conduct follow-up interviews to better understand consistency and interrelationship among these aspects in order to figure out the possibility of aligning the course aspects using constructive alignment approach in the service of program improvement purposes.

Qualitative Data Analysis Results

13 respondents have been interviewed representing three samples: 6 academic trainees (R1-R6), 4 technical trainees (R7-R10) and 3 EFL instructors (R11-R13) to elaborate the

SPSS output 5.16. EFL instructors’ perceptions of more effective aspects in developing trainees’ speaking proficiency

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
nothing	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
teaching and learning activities	2	6.7	6.7	50.0
materials	6	20.0	20.0	70.0
objectives	9	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

initial findings of questionnaires. The goal of thematic qualitative text analysis is to analyze the obtained perceptions of four main elements: course goal and objectives, materials, teaching activities and testing which are the most significant elements of the program according to the initial findings (as mentioned in section 5.1.7). As a starting point for this analysis, I created two tables, coded text passages for all categories and thematic matrix of all cases based on the original data. The obtained insights into each element will be demonstrated in the following parts.

Analyzing perceptions of course goal and speaking objectives

Academic respondents (R1-R6) ascertained that they are aware of the course goal which is to improve their English for technical training programs and job-related purposes. Most of them thought that speaking objectives are relatively effective in improving their spoken skills. However, 4 (out of 6) advised to provide extra practice for speaking skill during the class, therefore they suggested assigning a special class for speaking per day as explained by R5 *"to be more confident and improve ourselves as there are some guys who are shy so working in a team in the class good for them we can do a lot of things together."* Further, technical respondents (R7-R10) had a positive attitude to course goal and speaking objectives, they thought these objectives helped them speak fluently at their workshops as noted by R10:

it helped me the course because I have always known that speaking is lacking because of the lack of practice, but after one year in academic, I have really seen that my English is different, I can speak more fluently.

EFL respondents (R11-R13) thought that their trainees are aware of course goal and familiar with their speaking objectives. However, they considered that the content of the course does not correspond to the academic program goal which is to prepare trainees for Job Skills subjects conducted in English over the technical year as assumed by R13 that *"there is no direct link between the course... and technical, this is one of the problems we have."*

To sum up, the 13 respondents considered that the trainees are aware of the purpose of the course which is to learn job-related language. However, two EFL instructors (R12 & R13) believed that the course goals do not meet the academic program goals as the course focuses on general English, but the academic English program aims at preparing trainees for technical training subjects. Concerning objectives, 11 respondents (out of 13) thought that speaking objectives are effective and helped them improve their speaking proficiency and though they advised to increase speaking practice time.

Analyzing perceptions of materials

Most of academic respondents (4 out of 6) thought that pacing of materials is adequate to the timeframe of each segment, only two considered that it is stressing. Meanwhile, all of them (R1-R6) advised to add extra materials related to their technical year as proposed by R6 *"I think that would be*

helpful with learning technical... for example how to weld, to make electric circuit."

In addition, all technical respondents (R7-R10) thought that pacing of materials was adequate to the planned timeframe, but they advised to add something help them in technical year because they are a bit struggling with difficult technical words right now as expressed by R7 *"it is ok, but the words of technical may be difficult."*

EFL respondents (R11-R13) believed that pacing of materials is adequate, but two of them thought that the content of materials does not meet trainees' needs at technical year as observed in the words of R12 *"our students will join oil companies, I do not think they are related at all as we are teaching them general English. That is why they are not suitable to the students' needs."* Also, R13 added *"there is no direct correlation between what they would study in technical and what they are studying now."* Meanwhile, R11 had a different perspective, he believed that materials are relevant and reliable enough to improve trainees' speaking proficiency right now and then this could enable them to manage communication at their future worksites as he protested that *"if they manage or communicate language in general, I guess, they can manage to communicate at their work sites or companies, though they will not have adequate amount of language related to oil and gas field."*

In addition to this, all EFL respondents agreed that extra materials should be added to the course to meet trainees' needs at the technical year. To this end, R11 suggested assigning the last segment (segment 4) of the academic year to teach a bridge course from general speaking language to technical speaking language saying *"my suggestion here at the end of academic year, why don't we assign one month or one segment teaching a bridge course from general speaking language into technical speaking language."*

To conclude, 11 out of 13 respondents believed that the pacing of materials was appropriate to the planned timeframe of each segment. 12 out of 13 suggested adding technical-related materials to better understand technical training subjects.

Analyzing perceptions of learning and teaching activities

Academic respondents (R1-R6) thought that the given teaching and learning activities were effective and appropriate to their learning style; they are satisfied with classroom activities as observed in the words of R5 *"we did some kind of contest, challenges speaking objectives, games, fun games together have a team with a classmate and teacher; we interact with each other and improve."* Also, they ascertained that teachers gave them opportunities to speak in front of the class to practice and learn from their mistakes as noted by R6 *"I have seen my class have been better with him and they were confident when they talked using their language."* However, most of them (4 out of 6) advised to increase the time of speaking practice and suggested assigning a special class for speaking for further practice purposes as proposed by R2 *"I like this idea because you can train more and you can practice speak English more with your teacher."* Surprisingly, 2 of this group refused the idea of assigning a

special class for speaking saying that if they have an excellent teacher, he will help them improve all skills, not only speaking as noted by R6 *"It depends on the instructor or what the instructor does with the trainee, our instructor has been great with us, ...he does everything, grammar, speaking whatever he helps us, so we do not need a special class for speaking."*

Furthermore, all technical respondents (R7-R10) believed that they got enough practice for speaking skill and they thought that coursework activities played an effective role in improving their speaking and they became more confident to speak in front of other people as their instructor gave them a chance to speak in front of the class as noted in the words of R9 *"he used a role model and we come in front of the class to speak without worrying of making any mistakes"*. Meanwhile, all EFL respondents (R11-R13) assumed that they had no enough time to let trainees practice perfectly for speaking because they have to teach other skills such as listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar at the same time as observed by R13 *"as a group owner has listening, grammar, vocabulary, reading, a lot of skills need to be covered at that time ... actually we don't have enough time to spend on speaking in class."* Thus, they suggested assigning a special class for speaking skill per day for two main reasons: firstly, giving trainees further time for speaking practice as assumed by R12 *"that would be much better actually...at least all the attention will be on speaking, when I say speaking no problem to have grammatical mistakes, something like that, we need to focus on fluency"*, secondly, giving speaking skill the importance it deserves as expressed by R13:

The infrastructure of the program itself dedicated a special class for writing, but we don't have specific class for speaking... change the infrastructure of the course to give speaking the importance it deserves by actually dedicating one class a day to just speak in English.

To conclude, the 13 respondents thought that teaching and learning activities were adequate and relatively effective in improving trainees' speaking proficiency. Also, they advised to increase the speaking practice time, but 11 respondents (out of 13) suggested devoting a special class for speaking skill in the service of delivering perfect English speakers at their worksites.

Analyzing perceptions of testing

All academic and technical respondents (R1-R10) perceived that they are satisfied with the speaking test aspects and test rubrics were fair and clear as two examiners for speaking test is a good idea as observed by R9 *"it was fair and very clear because we had two teachers to take the exam."* Furthermore, they believed that speaking objectives and speaking test aspects were aligned as expressed by R10 that *"when we would study and do speaking test, it was never something we had not studied, so it was very fair and clear."*

Also, EFL respondents (R11-R13) believed that speaking test procedures are relatively good and fair. However, R12 and R13 believed that the marking criteria are quite silly and no challenging at all as if a trainee says one sentence, he still can pass and there is nothing to push trainees to develop their

answers by saying one or two more sentences as observed by R12:

the marking criteria is silly, if the student say incomplete sentence will still pass, if he used the same vocabulary as if he was in a primary school, he will pass. the marking criteria is to be blamed actually.

Similarly, R13 perceived that the speaking weighting score should be increased to be 30-35% (instead of 20 %) to force trainees pay more attention to the speaking skill as noted by R13:

continuous assessment would force trainees to take speaking a little more seriously, and it could influence the overall score ... if we raise the percentage of speaking to be 30 or 35%, it might make them work harder with particular element.

To conclude, the 13 respondents perceived that speaking test procedures are fair enough and trainees are satisfied with it. However, two EFL respondents believed that test rubrics should be amended to raise the percentage of speaking skill in order to push trainees to pay more attention to the speaking skill.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

After completing quantitative and qualitative data analysis in two sequential stages eliciting thoughts to answer the given main research question and sub questions of this investigation, both academic and technical trainees and EFL instructors perceive that the speaking aspects of the academic English program at SPSP college could be improved through the following:

- The proficiency level of trainees suits the content of the course book as confirmed at the initial findings of quantitative data analysis.
- Concerning course goals and speaking objectives, most of participants in the first phase agreed that they were aware of the course goal and the intended learning objectives. Also, they assured that these objectives helped them improve their spoken language, especially as noted by technical trainees that they became more confident to speak English as noted by a technical trainee (R10) *"after one year in academic, I have really seen that my English is different, I can speak more fluently"*. Further, almost all academic trainees perceived that the goal of the course corresponds to their current job requirements and their speaking skill is being improved due to the course as noted by an academic trainee (R6) saying *"I think objectives helped my colleagues to get better their speaking skills"*. Nevertheless, 7 (out of 30) EFL instructors perceived that the course goal does not match the trainees' needs at the technical year and therefore two EFL respondents (R11 & R13) suggested teaching a bridge course at the end of academic year to gap the lack of technical vocabulary with trainees.
- Almost all participants had a positive attitude towards speaking testing aspects and they assumed it is fair and clear and also it is aligned with speaking learning objectives. However, two EFL respondents (R12 & R13) suggested amending the marking rubrics to be more

challenging for the trainees and another EFL instructor (R13) suggested raising the percentage of speaking skill to be 30-35 % of the total passing rate of the program in order to urge/push the trainees to take the speaking tasks more seriously.

- Pacing of materials is considered adequate by most of participants and they also advised to develop special materials for speaking and technical vocabulary to increase trainees' knowledge, especially safety-related phrases. In addition to this, a reasonable number of trainees wanted special materials for writing program to be based on business pieces of writing such as business emails, memos and reports.
- Teaching and learning activities were tackled heavily in this study and more than 80% of participants had a positive attitude towards the delivered or given teaching methods. Most of academic trainees and EFL instructors recommended extending the time of speaking skill practice. Furthermore, they proposed assigning a special class for teaching speaking skill to let trainees use English in their daily talk as well as to place the speaking skill at the importance it deserves in the structure of the course.
- Participants' satisfaction with the course: 88.5% of academic trainees are pleased with the course and 94 % had no difficulties with any aspect of the course 63% of EFL instructors had a positive attitude towards the course compared to 37% who had negative attitude and those instructors proposed adding extra materials to the course to support trainees' technical knowledge to be much better at their workshops in the technical year (year 2) at SPSP college.

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