Original Paper

Kuwaiti EFL Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Remedial English Course 099 at the College of Technological Studies

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Abstract

The study aims to evaluate the English remedial course 099 taught in the College of Technological Studies (PAAET) as part of the English program which disseminates English Language Skills to EFL students studying at this college. This study is expected to provide sufficient information to policymakers and educators involved with this program at all levels, with the intention to help them evaluate this course and make useful decisions to improve English Language Teaching in order to combat the deficiency in the English language suffered by college students in Kuwait. A number of 155 students participated in a questionnaire of 15 statements divided into four areas: reading, grammar, writing, and speaking skills. The findings of the study showed that most EFL students benefited from the English course 099, and their language skills were improved. However, there were some drawbacks and weaknesses of the program in terms of learners' assessments and follow up. The significance of the study arises from the fact that it would enable decision-makers and course evaluators to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the course and hence find ways to improve it.

Keywords

curriculum evaluation, program evaluation, ESL, ELT

1. Introduction

This study aims to evaluate the remedial English course 099, which is taught for all EFL students who couldn't pass the placement test at the College of Technological Studies, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. This evaluation study also intends to discover the strengths and weaknesses of English course 099 and determine whether it has accomplished its goals and objectives depending on the students' responses and their feedback after passing the 099 course and then joining English 1. The targeted participants are those studying diploma courses in various specialties of engineering, such as mechanical engineering, civil engineering, petroleum engineering, chemical engineering, and computer engineering. Before joining the college, freshmen students have to take a placement test and earn a passing grade of 60/100. Students who get a score of 60 or above are exempted from studying the remedial course 099 and allowed to register directly for general English 101. Those who fail to get a score of 60 or above have to go through the 099 English course, which is 5 hours a week. This course is designed to improve learners' reading, grammar, writing, and speaking skills and prepare them for a general English course (101) and an ESP English course (171).

2. Literature Review

It is a fact that evaluations may be conducted for a wide range of reasons in every part of life. In terms of education, it can be stated that the primary purpose of evaluation is to obtain information about students' and teachers' performance along with classroom interactions. In the same way, the goals might also be the identification of strengths and weaknesses of particular activities in a program.

As Worthen and Sanders (1998) argued, there is not a universal agreement on the definition of evaluation. While some educators connect evaluation with measurement, others define it as the assessment of the extent to which specific objectives have been attained. Some researchers view evaluation as primarily scientific inquiry, whereas others see it as an essential act of collecting and providing information to allow decision-makers to function effectively. Despite this lack of consensus about the phenomenon, Murphy (2000) defined evaluation as a way to determine the degree to which a program attains its objectives. In this sense, it gives support to stakeholders in decision making for program improvement through careful analysis of information gathered. Kiely (2009, p. 99) stated that "evaluation has emerged from studies on teaching methods which were stimulated by the studies on language learning with a focus on quality assurance and enhancement". Talmage (1982) defined evaluation as the act of rendering judgments to determine value-worth and merit without questioning or diminishing the evaluation of the important role plays in decision making.

Cronbach (2002) made a distinction among three types of decisions that need evaluation:

1) Course enhancement: deciding what instructional materials and methods are satisfactory and where change is required.

2) Decisions for individuals: recognizing the needs of the learner for planning his education, judging learners' merit for goals of selection and grouping, acquainting the learner with his progress and deficiencies.

3) Administrative regulation: deciding how good the school system is, how good individual teachers are, etc.

For Tyler (1991), evaluation is a process that is very important to advance the syllabus. Lynch (1996) distinguishes between evaluation and assessment based on scope and purpose. He claims that evaluation can rely on assessment tools such as exams and many other instruments, such as interviews and observations. According to him, evaluation is "…the systematic challenge to collect information in order to make judgments or decisions" (p. 2).

The purpose of evaluation is to determine the extent to which the curriculum has achieved its stated goals. Evaluation is the basis for the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum, followed by re-planning, implementation, and evaluation (Gredler, 1996). Similarly, Worthen and Sanders (1998) stated that evaluation is the formal determination of the quality, effectiveness, or value of a specific program, product, project, process, objective, or curriculum. Besides, several judgment methods are used for evaluation during this determination process. These are mainly determining standards for judging quality and deciding whether those standards should be relative or absolute. Secondly, collecting relevant information and finally applying the standards to determine quality. Hence, in the light of these definitions related to evaluation, it can be concluded that program evaluation is a systematic investigation designed to provide information to decision-makers and/or groups interested in a particular program, policy, or other intervention. This inquiry might be exemplified as "How does the program work?" "Does the program produce unintended side effects?" and so on (Cronbach, 1980, p. 87). Program evaluation generally involves assessment of one or more of five program domains. a) the necessity for the program b) the formation of the program c) the program employment and service delivery d) the program results or outcomes and e) program efficiency (cost-effectiveness) (Payne, 1994, p. 15).

Mackay (1994) stated that in the field of foreign language teaching, the term "program evaluation" is used to mean a wide variety of activities, ranging from academic, theory-driven research, to informal inquiries carried out by a single classroom. Thus, the evaluation may focus on many different aspects of a language program, such as curriculum design, classroom processes, teachers, and students.

Evaluation is a central component of the educational process. Thus, it is undoubtedly a critical and challenging mission. Kelly (1999) defined curriculum evaluation as the procedures by which we attempt to gauge the rate and efficiency of any particular piece of educational activity. The two common goals of program evaluation, as stated by Lynch (1996), are evaluating a program's effectiveness in absolute terms and/or assessing its quality against that of comparable programs.

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Program evaluation not only provides useful information to insiders on how the current work can be improved but also offers accountability to outside stakeholders. It aims to discover whether the curriculum designed, developed, and implemented is producing or can produce the desired results. The strengths and the weaknesses of the curriculum before implementation, along with the effectiveness of its implementation, can be highlighted by the help of evaluation (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Thus, the continuous and systematic evaluation of a program is significant for its improvement, which ultimately leads to the need for curriculum evaluation.

Scriven (1991) linked evaluation with the time in which evaluation is done and, accordingly, came up with the concepts of two types of evaluations: formative evaluation and summative evaluation. The first one, formative evaluation, is conducted when the program is being designed. This type of evaluation enables the designers to improve and adjust the program. The main objective of formative evaluation is to validate and ensure that the goals of the instruction are being achieved and to enhance and develop the instruction if necessary (Weston, Mc Alpine, & Bordonaro, 1995). Therefore, it is apparent that formative evaluation provides data to enable on-the-spot changes to be done where necessary. Students' learning strategies can be refocused and redirected, and the range and depth of instructional activities of a syllabus can be revised "mid-stream" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). Hence, it applies to both course improvement and students' growth, although some writers tend to concentrate only on the former (Pryor & Torrance, 1996). In brief, formative evaluation is conducted during the operation of a program to provide program directors with useful information in order to improve the program.

Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is conducted at the end of a program to provide potential consumers with judgments about that program's worth or merit. For example, after the curriculum package is entirely developed, a summative evaluation might be conducted to determine how effective the package is with a national sample of typical schools, teachers, and students at the level for which it was developed (Worthen & Sanders, 1998). The summative evaluator's function is to collect data and write a summary report showing what the program looks like and what has been achieved. Summative evaluation is the final goal of educational activity. Thus, summative evaluation provides the data from which decisions can be made. It provides information on the product's efficacy, for example, in finding out whether the learners have learned what they were supposed to learn after using the instructional module. The summative evaluation uses numeric scores or letter grades to assess learners' achievement. This study is a summative evaluation of the remedial English course 099 in CTS, since the program has been delivered for more than 20 years, and the researchers are concerned with exploring whether EFL learners have benefitted from the course in developing their language skills. That is, the study aims to find out whether the outcomes of the remedial course 099 are relevant to the language proficiency of EFL learners after a long time of employment.

Another study that is relevant to the present research is the one of Zucker and Shields (1995, p. 1), who argued that evaluative initiatives or reforms assume that students' achievements of high standards of

learning involve three important elements: 1) significant development and improvement in classroom teaching, 2) the usage of many challenging curricula and materials, and 3) the regular assessment of learners integrated and aligned with instruction. This supposes that evaluation is a significant part of education as instructional curricula and their implementation. That is, evaluation is very crucial in indicating whether the outcomes are being achieved or not. It can be used, as Webb (1997, p. 4) said, to "formulate policy, monitor policy effects, enforce compliance with policies, demonstrate accountability, make comparisons, monitor progress toward goals, and/or make judgments about the effectiveness of particular programs". Indeed, evaluators, as Fitzpatrick (1998) maintained have a significant advisory role: they assist with identifying goals and developing strategies for accomplishing these goals.

3. Research Method

1. The researchers have selected a random sample of students who have completed Eng. 099 from among the population in the College of Technological Studies in the academic year 2017/2018, which was estimated at 1000 students.

2. The sample is about 155 students who have completed Eng. 099.

3. The students were asked to respond to a 15-item questionnaire about the competency of Eng. 099 and the challenges they encountered during their study.

4. Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, 155 students responded to the questionnaire which was designed in four sections with a total of 15 statements to test the improvement of the students' reading, writing, grammar, and speaking as follows: Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 tested the improvement of their reading skills. Statements 6, 7, and 8 tested the improvement of their grammar. Statements 9, 10, 11, and 12 tested the improvement of their writing skills. Finally, statements 13, 14, and 15 tested the improvement of their speaking skills.

4.1 Reading Skill

An overview of the participants' responses in section one which tested their improvement in reading, shows that the majority of EFL students believed that the English 099 course has helped them improve their English reading skill. As Table 1 shows, in statement number 1, 124 students (80%) agreed that the English course 099 has helped them read and comprehend different types of texts, as opposed to 23 participants (14.8%) who disagreed with statement 1, and only 8 participants who had no idea. For the second statement, 85 participants (54.8%) answered in a positive way that after finishing the English course 099, they were able to read and interpret charts and tables. Thirty-two participants (20.6%) disagreed, and 38 participants (24.5%) had no idea. Regarding the third statement, 121 participants responded positively and believed that the English course 099 has helped them learn strategies to expand their vocabulary. Only 17 participants (11%) disagreed with the statement, and 17 participants (11%) were not sure. Similarly, in statement four, 80 participants (51.6%) agreed that the English course 099 has

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helped them read and comprehend scientific texts relevant to their major. Forty participants (25.8%) disagreed upon statement 4, and only 35 participants (22.6%) were not sure. As for the final statement, number 5, which also measured their reading skill, the majority of participants 106 (68.4%) answered positively that by the end of the English course 099, they were able to elicit ideas in texts by reading between the lines.

Table 1. EFL Students' Responses to the Statements about the Reading Skills

Statement	disagree		don't know		agree	
	frequency	percent	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
1- The English course 099 helped me read and comprehend different types of texts.	23	14.8	8	5.2	124	80
2- After I finished the English course 099, I was able to read and interpret charts and tables.	32	20.6	38	24.5	85	54.8
3- The English course 099 has helped me learn strategies for increasing my vocabulary reservoir.	17	11	17	11	121	78.1
4- The English course 099 has helped me read and comprehend scientific texts relevant to my major.	40	25.8	35	22.6	80	51.6
5- After I finished the English course 099, I was able to elicit ideas in texts by reading between the lines.	30	19.4	19	12.3	106	68.4

4.2 Grammar

In the same way, as shown in Table 2, the students' responses for this section, which tested their grammar improvement showed that most of the participants believed that the English 099 course helped them improve their grammar. In statement six, for example, the majority of participants 124 (80%) believed that the English course 099 offered comprehensive revision of the English grammar they learned in school. Few participants 14 (9%) disagreed with statement 6, and only 17 (11%) were not sure. Regarding statement seven, 77 participants (49%) replied that by finishing the English course 099, they were able to write meaningful and grammatically correct sentences. Surprisingly, 62 participants (40%) were not sure about their improvement in writing meaningful and grammatically correct sentences after finishing the course. This could be justified by a lack of assessment of student's grammar by their EFL teachers. Thus, more emphasis should be put on assessing the students' grammar so that they can identify their level in grammar and then improve it. Only 16 participants (10.3%) disagreed with statement seven.

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As for statement eight, many of the participants 100 (64%) answered positively and believed that the English course 099 introduced them to ways of analyzing the structure of sentences within English texts. Only 34 participants (21.9%) disagreed with the statement, and 21 (13.5%) were not sure.

Table 2. EFL Students' Responses to the Statements about Their Grammar Improvement

Statement	Disagree		Don't know		Agree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
6- The English course 099 offered a comprehensive revision of the English grammar I learned in school.	14	9	17	11	124	80
7- After I have finished the English course 099, I was able to write meaningful and grammatically correct sentences.	16	10.3	62	40	77	49.7
8- The English course 099 introduced me to ways of analyzing the structure of sentences within English texts.	34	21.9	21	13.5	100	64

4.3 Writing Skill

When analyzing the statements of section 3, which tested the students' writing as shown in Table 3, we noticed that more than half of the participants either disagreed or were not sure that the English 099 course helped with improving their writing as opposed to less than half of the them who agreed with the statements. For example, only 72 of the participants (46.5%) believed that the English course 099 introduced them to ways of analyzing the structure of sentences within English texts while 48 of them (31%) disagreed with the statement and 35 of them (22.6%) were not sure. This could be evidence that less concentration was put on developing writing skill. Again, for statement ten, only 76 of the participants (49%) replied positively that by the end of the English course 099, they were able to write well- organized and coherent paragraphs. The number of participants who disagreed with the statement was 37 (23.9%), and many of them 42 (27.1%) were not sure. The high percentage of participants who were not sure of their development of writing well-organized and coherent paragraphs shows that the assessment of students' writing through the course was not enough; therefore, more attention should be given to students' assessment. In the same manner, in statement eleven, only 75 of the participants (48.4%) believed that the English course 099 has given them the opportunity to review the writing mechanics and punctuation marks. The participants who disagreed with the statement were 45 (29%), and the ones who were not sure were 35 (22.6%). Regarding statement twelve, 26 of the participants agreed that the English course 099 has helped them write reports relevant to their major. Many of them 55 (35.5%) disagreed with the statement, and 34 of the participants (21.9%) were not sure.

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It is essential to draw the readers' attention that the (agree) responses for this section, which discussed the improvement of students' writing, were all below 50%. This might suggest that there is a shortcoming in teaching the writing skills to students by the EFL teachers; therefore, more concentration should be put for developing their EFL writing. Furthermore, the high numbers of participants who were not sure in terms of the level of their writing also suggested the students' lack of writing assessment by their EFL teachers. For this reason, EFL teachers need to focus more on this issue to improve their EFL students' writing further.

Table 3. EFL Students' Responses to the Statements about Their Writing Skills

Statement	Disagree		Don't know		Agree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
9- English course 099 helped me acquire skills in writing texts for various purposes.	48	31	35	22.6	72	46.5
10- After I finished English course 099, I was able to write well- organized and coherent paragraphs.	37	23.9	42	27.1	76	49
11- English course 099 allowed me to review the writing mechanics and punctuation marks.	45	29	35	22.6	75	48.4
12- English course 099 helped me write reports relevant to my major.	55	35.5	34	21.9	66	42.6

4.4 Speaking Skill

An overview of the participants' responses to the fourth section, which tested the students' speaking skill as presented in Table 4, shows that the participants believed that English course 099 has improved their speaking skill. As shown in Table 4, Statement 13, the majority of the participants 95 (61.3%) agreed with the statement that English course 099 has improved their oral communication skills in their field of specialization, as opposed to 35 (22.6%) who disagreed with the statement and (25:16.1%) who were not sure.

For Statement 14, the majority of participants 106 (68.4%) also responded positively and believed that English course 099 has developed their skills in oral communication in areas outside of their field of specialization. Few participants 24 (15.5%) disagreed with the statement, and 25 (16.1%) were not sure. In the same manner, 71 (45.8%) of the participants replied in a positive way to the final statement and agreed that the English course 099 did improve their presentation skills in front of an audience as opposed to 49 (31.6%) who disagreed with statement 15 and 35 (22.6%) who were not sure.

Table 4. EFL Students' Responses to the Statements about Their Speaking Skills

Statement	Disagree		Don't know		Agree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
13- The English course 099 improved my skills in oral communication in my field of specialization.	35	22.6	25	16.1	95	61.3
14- The English course 099 developed my skills of oral communication in areas outside of my field of specialization	24	15.5	25	16.1	106	68.4
15- The English course 099 improved my presentation skills in front of an audience.	49	31.6	35	22.6	71	45.8

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As mentioned earlier, this study examined EFL students' perceptions of the usefulness of the remedial English course 099 at the College of Technological Studies in Kuwait. 155 EFL students were involved in the study and were asked to answer a questionnaire of 15 statements that tested their language competency. The 15 statements were designed in a way that covered four areas of language skill: reading, grammar, writing, and speaking. Although most of the participants' responses showed that they benefited from the English remedial course 099 and developed their language skills, there were some weaknesses and drawbacks among the course. For example, while testing the participants' grammar in statement 7, 62 participants (40%) did not know about their improvement in writing meaningful and grammatically correct sentences after finishing the course. This considerable percentage showed that there was a lack of learners' grammar assessment by their EFL teachers. Hence, more concentration should be placed on assessing the students' grammar and their progress follow up. By doing so, EFL teachers can identify their EFL students' level in grammar and then improve it. Another weakness of the English remedial 099 courses appeared in section 3, which examined the participants' writing. Below 50% of the participants agreed that their writing was improved when studying the remedial English course 099. This result shows the importance of redefining and re-evaluating the writing syllabus of the remedial English 099 course and the need to develop it to meet its goals and objectives in improving EFL students' writing.

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