البحوث والدراسات الانجليزية

Evaluation of the postgraduate teaching/learning program : in the Department of English in the Libyan Academy

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Introduction

In 1997, a branch for the English language was established among other branches in the Department of Languages at the Academy of Graduate Studies. In 2006, this branch became an independent department on its own when the School of Languages was formed. The aim was to satisfy the country's need for qualified English language teachers. The department was the first institute to grant MA degree in applied linguistics in Libya in order to provide the society with specialists in the fields of English language teaching and scientific research (Jabir et.al., 2009).

This research is considered as a part of the ongoing process in the School of Languages and particularly in the Department of English to improve the quality of its programs. It is felt that an evaluation process should be conducted frequently in order to identify problems, if any, in order to solve them as quickly as possible. It is thought that the teachers' and students' views in this respect are highly valuable and, thus, they should be involved in any evaluation and assessment of the department and its programs and strategies.

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Literature review

Among the studies that have dealt with the different levels of education in Libya, a very small number has considered the postgraduate level. Therefore, most of the literature review will focus on the educational system in general with special emphasis on the level closer to the postgraduate one. That is, the university level.

Some researchers argue that there has been a failure in learning the English language in Libya such as Abdullah (1972), Kara (1992), Al-Akhdar (2001), Omer (2014) and others. One of the reasons for this failure is that due to political tension between Libya and the West in late 1980s, English use in the country was banned, and teaching of English in public schools was no exception. As a result, there was a considerable deterioration in the status of the language for almost ten years (Omar, 2014, p.2) before the government realized its mistake and allowed English to be taught again in schools and universities. The banning of English in public schools for about a decade had its negative consequences on the ability to learn or to teach English.

Abdullah (1972) argues that Libyan learners face difficulties and problems when learning English because of linguistic, educational, social, political and economic factors. As a result, a few Libyan learners of English can reach the minimum level of fluency.

Al-Akhdar (2001) thinks that the failure in learning English among Libyan students is due to the method used in the first stage of learning English and that students are not given enough time for interaction, which has a negative effect on the process of learning English later.

El-Bousefi (2001) attributes this failure to the fact that learners focus on learning grammar at the expense of learning enough vocabulary. He also

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puts some blame on the Libyan teachers by saying that they do not try to improve the techniques they use nor increase their competence in English.

Ahmed (2001) argues that learning English in Libya is unsatisfactory because it does not reach the relevant level. This failure is attributed by Saleh (2002) to the fact that Libyan Learners of English do not have the opportunity to practice English in and out of the classroom.

Abu-Srewel (2002) Argues that the failure in learning English among Libyan students is due to the fact that Libyan teachers are still applying old methods and using traditional techniques with their students. As Elabbar (2011) believes, university teachers are left to their own understanding and make their own decisions regarding teaching.

Problem

Working in the last couple of years in the English department, first, as a staff member, then as the head of the department and, finally, as the dean of the school of languages, the researcher has had a clear picture of how things work there. The contact with teachers and students in the department allowed the researcher to have some idea of the problems they have and the difficulties they face   .

Some teachers complain from the low level of the English language of some students. They put some responsibility on the administrations of the department, the school of languages and the academy. They think that these should make more effort to improve the situation by, for example, firmly applying the regulations and by accepting only those students who have a high level of proficiency in the English language and, thus, they deserve to be postgraduates in the department.

However, some students argue that some teachers are not doing well in their work. They say that some teachers do not prepare well for their lectures. They also say that the assigned materials and references are not

up-to-date. Some of them even go further by accusing teachers of not being fair with the students in their assessment and evaluation.

For these reasons and others some research was necessary to investigate the situation and scientifically explore these problems. This will eventually help in dealing with the situation in a proper way by specifying these problems encountered by both teachers and students and trying to find solutions to them. The ultimate aim is to make a good and suitable environment for the teaching/learning process in the English department and other departments in the Libyan Academy and other Libyan universities with similar circumstances.

Significance of the study

Studies have been conducted that are related to different levels of learning English and different stages of the learning system in Libya including primary stage, preparatory stage, secondary stage and university stage. However, few studies have been conducted which are related to the postgraduate level. So, this study will shed light on this level of learning and open the door for further research in this area to explore some aspects of the postgraduate program not only in the Libyan Academy but in all other Libyan universities. Another important advantage of this study is that it will try to explore any difficulties and problems encountered by both teachers and students in order to help administrations deal with these difficulties and find solutions to the specified problems.

Participants

Participants are 50 postgraduate students studying to obtain MA in applied linguistics and their teachers (7 teachers) in the Department of English during the spring semester 2014.

Data collection

Data of this study was collected using two types of questionnaire; students' questionnaire and teachers' questionnaire. The questionnaires covered three types of information each. The first and third parts were similar in both questionnaires. The first part investigated aspects related to the study subjects while the third part dealt with aspects related to the services available in the department, school of languages and the academy. The second part was different in both questionnaires. In the teachers' questionnaire, it asked about some aspects related to the students' performance while in the students' questionnaire, it investigated aspects related to the subject teacher.

Data analysis

Data obtained from the two questionnaires was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. It was thought that both types of analysis were needed in order to obtain accurate and reliable information. For example, the quantitative analysis would help in finding the proportion of students and teachers and their opinions regarding the different aspects of the teaching/learning process, which would give an overall picture of the situation in the English Department at the Libyan Academy. On the other hand, qualitative analysis would be helpful in going deeper into the details of the responses of the participants and their interpretations.

Analysis of the students' questionnaire

The number of study subjects investigated in this study was seven subjects. These subjects were the only ones available for students to register in and study in the spring semester 2014. The total number of students who completed the questionnaire was 50 students. However, the number of students studying the subjects varies from subject to another as

can be seen in the table below. (For confidentiality reasons the subjects will be referred to by numbers).

Subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Students' number	2	3	5	6	10	12	12

In what follows, the results of the students' questionnaire will be presents for the three main points in the questionnaire: the study subject, the subject teacher and the services.

1. Study subject

Students were asked about their degree of satisfaction with certain things related to their study subjects. These include subject syllabus items, subject content, subject methodology, method of assessment and grades distribution, and, finally, availability of study materials, references and books. The table below gives the results of this question.

	Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Syllabus items	21	20	8	1	0	50	0
Content	19	21	9	1	0	50	0
Methodology	16	21	7	4	0	48	2
Assessment	24	19	4	1	1	49	1
Study material	14	13	13	5	4	49	1

The results show that the majority of the students were happy with all aspects of the study subjects. For example, the satisfaction of 24 students with the method of assessment and grades distribution was 'excellent' and that of 19 students was 'very good'. However, only 1 student chose the 'average' option and no one chose the 'bad' option in the scale of their satisfaction with the same aspect which is method of assessment and grades distribution. Similar results were found with the other aspects of the study subjects like subject syllabus items, subject content and subject methodology.   However, the smallest satisfaction amongst these

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aspects is found in the study material in which only 14 students chose the 'excellent' option and 13 students chose the 'very good' option in the scale while 5 students chose the 'average' option and 4 students thought that the study material is 'bad'.

Students were also asked to write more about these aspects of the study subject if they wish. However, nothing was written.

2. Subject teacher

In this section of the questionnaire students were asked about some points related to their teacher such as method of assessment and grades distribution, method of explaining and conveying information, subject study plan, dealing and communicating with students, availability of study material and specifying references and books, quickness of correcting assignments, tests and giving final exams results and, finally, availability outside class to communicate with students and to answer their inquiries. The results are shown in the following table.

Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Method of assessment and grades distribution						
22	21	3	1	0	47	3
Method of explaining and conveying information						
32	13	4	0	0	49	1
Subject study plan						
20	21	8	0	0	49	1
Dealing and communicating with students						
32	10	5	1	0	48	2
Availability of study material and specifying references and books						
19	20	4	4	1	48	2
Quickness of correcting assignments, tests and giving final exams results						
32	11	3	1	0	47	3
Availability outside class to communicate with students and to answer their inquiries						
19	14	7	2	2	44	6

The results show that most of the students are satisfied with all aspects related to the subject teacher. For example, 32 students out of 50 students chose the 'excellent' option when asked about their satisfaction

with the way their teacher deals and communicates with them. Similarly, 32 teachers chose the 'excellent' option when asked about their satisfaction with the teacher's quickness of correcting assignments, tests and final exam results. However, no one chose the 'bad' option except for 2 students who chose it for the availability of their teacher outside class to communicate with them and to answer their inquiries, and 1 student who chose the 'bad' option for the availability of study material and specifying references and books.

3. Services

In the final part of the students' questionnaire, students were asked about some services that are related to their study directly or indirectly including registration service, department administration service, weekly study timetable, facilities and cleanness of study rooms, photocopy service, cafe service, library service, and, finally, service provided by information technology centre. The following table presents the results related to these services.

	Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Registration	8	24	12	2	2	48	2
Administration	7	25	12	2	2	48	2
Timetable	12	19	13	4	0	48	2
Study room facilities	14	17	10	7	1	49	1
Photocopy	12	14	17	3	3	49	1
Cafe	10	18	10	4	4	46	4
Library	12	16	10	5	1	45	5
IT centre	8	10	8	12	3	41	9

It is obvious that the majority of the students have chosen the 'very good' option in the scale of rating these services which means that these services are not bad according to students but at the same time they are not excellent. if we add those who chose the 'very good' category to those who chose the 'excellent' category, we will find that registration service and

administration service come at the top of these services because they are qualified as 'excellent' or 'very good' by 32 students. However, information technology service is the least popular service as it was rated as 'excellent' or 'very good' by only 18 out of 50 students. On the other hand, all services have been rated as 'bad' by a few students except for 'weekly study timetable' which was rated by no one as a bad service.

Analysis of the teachers' questionnaires

As said before, the number of study subjects investigated in this study were seven subjects. These subjects were the only ones available for students to register in and study in the spring semester 2014. Thus, the teachers investigated were those who taught these subjects and, thus, seven completed copies of the questionnaire were obtained.

In what follows, the results of the teachers' questionnaire will be presented for the three main points in the questionnaire: the study subject, the students' performance and the services.

1. Study subject

Teachers were asked about their degree of satisfaction with certain things related to the study subjects they were teaching. These include subject syllabus items, subject content, subject methodology, method of assessment and grades distribution, and, finally, availability of study materials, references and books. The table below gives the results of this question.

	Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Syllabus items	2	4	0	0	0	6	1
Content	1	6	0	0	0	7	0
Methodology	1	6	0	0	0	7	0
Assessment	1	5	0	0	0	6	1
Study material	1	1	1	4	0	7	0

The results show that the majority of the teachers were generally happy with all aspects of the subjects they were teaching except for the availability of study materials, references and books which was rated as 'excellent' by only one teacher and as 'very good' by another.

Teachers were also asked to write more about these aspects of the study subjects if they wish. The following are some of their comments:

- "The books and references available in the library are not sufficient and are not up-to-date."
- "Assigned books and references should be available in the library and in the bookshop instead of photocopying them."
- "The choice of the assigned material and the subject content and methodology is done by the tutor not by the department."
- "The amount of content of the subject is big and some topics need to be omitted."
- "Some focus should be put on the practical aspect of the subject."

2. Students' performance

In the second part of the questionnaire, teachers were asked about some aspects related to their students' performance including suitability of the study material to the level of the students, student's carefulness, seriousness and commitment, doing assignments and attending exams; midterm grades and final results and, finally, additional activities to enhance achievement. The results are presented in the following table:

Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Suitability of the study material to the level of the students						
0	3	4	0	0	7	0
Student's carefulness, seriousness and commitment						
4	3	0	0	0	7	0
Doing assignments and attending exams						
3	3	0	0	0	6	1
Midterm grades and final results						
0	4	2	1	0	7	0
Additional activities to enhance achievement						
4	0	3	0	0	7	0

It is obvious from the results presented in the table above that almost all teachers are generally happy with the performance of their students. As can be seen from the table, all teachers have rated all categories as 'excellent, 'very good' or 'good' except for one teacher who chose the 'average' option for the ' midterm grades and final results' category. No one has chosen the 'bad' option for any of the categories being rated.

the following are some of the comments that the teachers were willing to add about their students' performance:

- "Students were asked to conduct research and present their work in front of class to improve their research and presentation abilities"

- "Students showed clear desire and readiness to improve and increase their comprehension of the study subject."

- " I think students must pass IELTS or TOFEL and should have a grade of at least very good in his/her BA before being admitted to the postgraduate studies program in the school of languages."

- " The number of the students this semester is not big enough to enable teachers to assess the students performance more objectively."

3. Services

In the final part of the teachers' questionnaire, they were asked about some services that are related to their work directly or indirectly including registration service, department administration service, weekly study timetable, facilities and cleanness of study rooms, photocopy service, cafe service, library service, service provided by information technology centre, administration of financial affairs service and, finally, administration of staff members affairs service. The following table presents the results related to these services.

	Excellent	V. good	Good	Average	Bad	Total	Missing values
Registration	2	2	2	1	0	7	0
Administration	2	3	2	0	0	7	0
Timetable	3	2	2	0	0	7	0
Study room facilities	2	1	0	3	1	7	0
Photocopy	1	2	1	3	0	7	0
Cafe	0	2	3	1	0	6	1
Library	1	2	0	2	0	5	2
IT centre	0	0	1	2	0	3	4
Financial affairs	0	0	2	1	0	3	4
Staff administration	1	0	3	0	0	4	3

The results show that all teachers are generally happy with 'administration service' and 'weekly study timetable' which were rated as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good'. No one has rated these two categories as 'bad'. Similarly, registration service was rated 'excellent', 'very good' and 'good' by two teachers for each category. Only one teacher has chosen the 'average' option and no one has chosen the 'bad' option for this category.

What attracts attention in these results is that there is a relatively big number of missing values for the services related to, for example, information technology, financial affairs and staff administration which means that a number of teachers were unwilling to give their opinions about these services. However, some teachers said that they did not have experience with these services and, thus, could not rate them.

Teachers were also asked to say more about these services. The following are some of their comments:

- "For secrecy reasons, photocopy service should be available for teachers who should be given a personal code to photocopy exams and tests themselves."

- "Teachers should have at least one staff room available for them where they can rest between classes and where they can do their academic work."

Discussion of results

The aim of this study is to evaluate the postgraduate teaching/learning program in the Department of English in the Libyan Academy. To achieve this aim two questionnaires were conducted; one with teachers and the other with students . Three aspects of the learning/teaching process were investigated: study subjects, teachers and learners and, finally, services provided which are related either directly or indirectly to this process. In what follows a discussion of the results of the study related to each of these aspects will be presented.

1. Study subjects

In the investigation of this aspect of the teaching/learning process, both students and teachers were asked about their satisfaction with the subject syllabus items, subject content, subject methodology, method of assessment and grades distribution, and, finally, availability of study materials, references and books.

The results have shown that the majority of the students and teachers were generally pleased with all aspects of the study subjects except for 'the availability of study material, references and books' which has obtained the least degree of satisfaction by both students and teachers. This reflects the fact that the academy in general and particularly the school of languages suffer from severe shortage in study materials, up-to-date references and modern books. This might be partially due to the current situation and the circumstances the country is undergoing at present which resulted in political and financial instability of the country's institutions including the Ministry of Higher Education which provides the academy with the

financial support necessary to make materials, references and books available.

2. Subject teacher/student

In the investigation of the second part of the questionnaire, Students were asked about points related to their teachers while teachers were asked about points related to their students. Students were asked about their satisfaction with things like method of assessment and grades distribution, method of explaining and conveying information, subject study plan, dealing and communicating with students, availability of study material and specifying references and books, quickness of correcting assignments, tests and giving final exams results and, finally, availability outside class to communicate with students and to answer their inquires.

The findings show that the students investigated were generally happy with their teachers. The least degree of satisfaction was given to availability of their teachers outside class to communicate with them and to answer their enquiries. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the teachers are part-timers. They only come to the department to give their lectures and then leave. Another reason is that the teachers are not provided with offices where they can do their academic work and where they can meet their students to discuss their assignments or respond to their enquiries, for example.

Teachers, on the other hand, were asked about their satisfaction with some points related to the students' performance including suitability of the study material to the level of the students; student's carefulness, seriousness and commitment; doing assignments and attending exams; midterm grades and final results; and, finally, additional activities to enhance achievement.

The results show that almost all the teachers investigated were generally content with the performance of their students. In this respect,

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the department is making some special effort to firmly apply the regulations especially those that are related to the admission of new students in the department by, for example, requiring an average of at least 'good' in the student's university degree to be admitted. Moreover, an entry exam is conducted to ensure that only those students who have a high proficiency level in the English language can join the department.

3. Services

Both teachers and students were asked about some services that may affect their work/study directly or indirectly including registration service, department administration service, weekly study timetable, facilities and cleanness of study rooms, photocopy service, cafe service, library service, and, finally, service provided by information technology centre.

The results show that both teachers and students were generally happy - though not very happy - with the services provided especially with administration service which was at the top of services according to both teachers and students. However, the least popular service among students was information technology service, which is not surprising due to lack of computer clusters, lack of internet service and local mail service in the academy (Ahmed, 2014). Also, the majority of teachers were not able to rate information technology service simply , they say, because they do not use this service which can be for the same reasons mentioned above. That is, no computer clusters nor internet service are available in the academy due to the previously mentioned reasons for the unavailability of materials, references and books. i.e., the political and financial instability of the country's institutions including the Ministry of Higher Education which provides the academy with the financial support necessary for these facilities.

Conclusion

This study aimed at evaluating the postgraduate teaching/learning program in the Department of English in the Libyan Academy. Three aspects of the program were investigated using teacher and student questionnaires. These aspects are study subjects, teachers/learners and services related to the teaching/learning process in the department.

The results have shown that both teachers and students were generally satisfied with what is going on in the department in connection with the study subjects and the services provided. Moreover, in general students expressed high satisfaction with the teachers' work and, similarly, teachers, were generally content with the students' performance.

However, satisfaction was not high with some aspects of the teaching/learning process including availability of materials, references and books; accessibility to information technology facilities; and adequacy of offices for teachers, etc.

Therefore, administrations responsible are recommended to take the results of this study into consideration and act urgently in order to improve the situation and increase the quality of the teaching/learning process not only in the Department of English but in all other departments in the School of Languages and in the Libyan Academy as a whole.

Finally, the study has some limitations one of which is the small number of participants especially teachers. Another limitation is there was no verification of the information obtained from the questionnaire through another tool of data collection like interview or observation. However, the researcher believes that this study is a pioneering study of this kind in the postgraduate level in Libyan educational sector. Therefore, it could be considered as a starting point that can be followed by other studies which go deep in the matter and deal with things in more detail.

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