The Impact of an Introductory Course on the English Language Proficiency Levels of Students upon Joining the Saudi University

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the impact of an introductory English course provided by the English Language Centre as a part of the Unified Scientific Track Program (USTP) at Taibah University, Saudi Arabia on developing the English language proficiency levels of students upon joining scientific colleges at three consecutive academic years, namely, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 at all the university campuses. The study compared the preplacement test scores to the post test scores showing the development occurred during a two-semester English course through the proficiency language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The study revealed the positive impact of the introductory English language course to advance students' language proficiency level from A1 to B2. The study recommended the necessity of administering a standardised proficiency placement test (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, Oxford, etc.) at the end of each school stage e.g. Intermediate & Secondary in order to make sure that students have achieved the target English language proficiency level.

Keywords: Language Proficiency Levels, Placement Test, Oxford Q-Skills for Success, Introductory Course; Saudi students, Taibah University, Unified Scientific Track Program (USTP)

أثر مقرر تمهيدي في مستويات الكفاءة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلاب الجدد الملتحقين بالجامعات السعودية

المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أثر مقرر تمهيدي باللغة الإنجليزية يقدمه مركز اللغة الإنجليزية كأحد متطلبات برنامج المسار العلمي الموحد بجامعة طيبة بالمملكة العربية السعودية في تنمية مستويات الكفاءة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلاب الجدد الملتحقين بالكليات العملية بالجامعات السعودية خلال ثلاث سنوات متتالية (٢٠١٥-٢٠١٦، ٢٠١٦-٢٠١٧، ٢٠١٧-٢٠١٨) في جميع مراكز الاختبارات بالجامعة، وقد استخدمت الدراسة أسلوب المقارنة بين درجات اختبارات تحديد المستوى والاختبارات النهائية للمقرر للدلالة على مستوى النمو في الكفاءة اللغوية خلال مدة دراسة المقرر (فصلين دراسيين) وفقا لمستويات الكفاءة اللغوية للاطار الأوروبي المرجعي، وقد أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى الأثر الإيجابي للمقرر التمهيدي في اللغة الإنجليزية في تنمية مستويات الكفاءة اللغوية من المستوى A1 إلى المستوى B2، وقد أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تطبيق أحد الاختبارات المعيارية في اللغة الإنجليزية (مثل TOEFL, IELTS, Oxford,) كاختبار لتحديد مستوى الكفاءة اللغوية للطلاب السعوديين في نهاية كل مرحلة تعليمية للتحقق من مدى انجاز الطلاب لمستوى الكفاءة المطلوب في كل مرحلة ومعالجة أوجه القصور أولاً بأول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مستويات الكفاءة اللغوية، اختبار تحديد المستوى، مقرر مهارات أكسفورد للنجاح، مقرر تمهيدي، الطلاب السعوديين، برنامج المسار العلمي الموحد، جامعة طيبة

Introduction

In public education, Saudi students officially study English for nine years, starting from the 4th grade in primary school until the 12th grade, the last year in high school. After finishing high school, a good level of English proficiency is required for joining the scientific colleges in most majors such as medicine, engineering, medical sciences or to join any technical or vocational colleges. Furthermore, those who are interested in banks, companies, business or industry should exhibit a good level of English proficiency.

English has become a vital part of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent years in the wake of globalisation and the growing use of technology in all fields (Elyas, 2008). The Saudi government has tried to improve the quality of education by focusing on English language teaching in the school curriculum and through the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz scholarship, a large-scale scheme to send students for higher education in colleges and universities overseas (Shemary, 2008). Therefore, a thorough knowledge of the English language has become a prerequisite for the younger generation of Saudis, for their higher education as well as for their careers, which could lead to a reformulation of educational language policy in the Saudi context.

After several years of English language learning in Saudi Arabia, generally nine years in elementary, intermediate and secondary schools, Saudi learners are still incompetent of communicating effectively in English and may only gain basic writing and reading (Alrabi, 2011). Saudi students consider the English language to be a means of continuing to further studies, which is the reason for their wish to learn it (Shemary, 2008). However, numerous academics in higher education are of the opinion that the level of English among Saudi students is still low despite the government's efforts to improve Saudi learners' English language skills (Alosaimi, 2007). The reason for this could be that most English teachers in Saudi Arabia are from other Arab countries and often do not have any teaching qualifications (Elyas, 2008). Hence, English language teaching in Saudi Arabia has been heavily influenced by the Arabic language, which may have an effect on English language learning and may lead to several issues that hinder learners from achieving good results in their learning (Javid, Farooq & Gulzar, 2012).

One of the solutions offered by Taibah University is to enrol students who want to join the scientific colleges in an extensive program to develop their main skills, including English language proficiency level. Upon successful completion of the secondary stage, students are expected to join the university based on their accumulative score in the final high

school tests, namely, a Test of Abilities and an Achievement Test. The accepted admission scores are determined by the university, and it varies from one university to another. Newly admitted students who wish to join the scientific university colleges (e.g. Medicine, pharmacy, engineering, etc.) at Taibah University are enrolled in a one-year study program before they join the scientific colleges. This program is called the Unified Scientific Track Program (USTP).

The USTP includes various science subjects such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology. In addition, this program includes two English language courses which students have to study over two semesters. These two English courses are ENG101 and ENG102. ENG101 is offered in the first semester and is a pre-requisite for ENG102. In other words, students have to successfully pass ENG101 before they study ENG102. Only ENG102 is offered in the summer vacation period for students who did not pass ENG102 in the second semester. For both ENG101 and ENG102, the Middle East version of the Oxford Q-Skills for Success series is used as a syllabus.

Context of the Study

Before going through the procedures undertaken by the English Language Center (ELC) at Taibah University, it is worth mentioning to review the pre-university Saudi English language education system to explore to what extent those students who join the USTP are exposed to English language and what are their supposed English language proficiency levels.

Pre-University English Language Education: Textbooks and English Language Proficiency Levels

Saudi students join the university after nine academic years or 18 school semesters of English language instruction. These are distributed as follows:

- Three academic years in the Elementary Stage (Grades 4, 5 & 6),
- Three academic years in the Intermediate Stage (Grades 1, 2 & 3), and
- Three academic years in the Secondary Stage (Grades 1, 2 & 3).

English Language Teaching at the Saudi Elementary School Stage

At the Elementary stage, students start studying English at Grade 4 and up to the end of the Elementary stage i.e. Grade 6. In these three years, two teaching periods are allocated to the study of English a week and every teaching period is forty-five minutes. Therefore, a total of ninety minutes a week. During the Elementary stage, the students have to study

six English textbooks over six school semesters i.e. two English textbooks each academic year (See Table 1).

Table 1

English Language Instruction at the Saudi Elementary Stage

School Stage	Grade	Semester	Number of Weeks	Textbook	Language Level	periods per week	Time duration of a period	Total Amount Per Semester	
Elementary	4	1	16	Smart Class 1	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	48 hours a year
	4	2	16	Smart Class 2	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	
	5	1	16	Smart Class 3	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	48 hours a year
	5	2	16	Smart Class 4	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	
	6	1	16	Smart Class 5	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	48 hours a year
	6	2	16	Smart Class 6	Not explicitly	2	45 minutes	24 hours	
Total Amount of time allocated to English Language Teaching at the Elementary School Stage (3 years) = 144 hours of English Language Instruction								**Total = 144 hours**	

As shown above, students at the Elementary stage receive 144 hours of teaching English as a Foreign Language through the syllabi of Smart Class 1 to 6. Although the English language textbooks of the Elementary school stage do not explicitly state the English language level (s) to which they are benchmarked to, their content and syllabi illustrate that they start from the literacy level (with Smart Class 1) and they take students to the low beginners' level.

English Language Instruction at the Saudi Intermediate Stage
Table 2 below shows that the amount of time allocated to the English language instruction during the Saudi Intermediate stage is double the amount of time of the Saudi Elementary stage. During this stage, Saudi students study English throughout the whole Intermediate stage i.e. as of grade one and up-to-the end of the third grade. In these three years, four teaching periods are allocated to the study of English a week. Similarly, a teaching period at school level is forty-five minutes (i.e. a total of one hundred eighty minutes a week). During the Intermediate school stage, the students also have to study six English textbooks over six school/academic semesters i.e. two English textbooks each year.

Table 2

English Language Instruction at the Saudi Intermediate Stage

School Stage	Grade	Semester	Number of Weeks	Textbook	Language Level	periods per week	Time duration of a period	Total Amount Per Semester	
Intermediate	1	1	16	Full Blast 1	A1 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	96 h/year
	1	2	16	Full Blast 2	A1 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	
	2	1	16	Full Blast 3	A1- low A2 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	96 h/year
	2	2	16	Full Blast 4	A1 -low A2 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	
	3	1	16	Full Blast 5	A2-low B1 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	96 h/year
	3	2	16	Full Blast 6	A2-low B1 (CEFR)	4	45 m	48 h	

Total Amount of time allocated to English Language Teaching at the Intermediate Saudi School Stage = 288 hours of English Language Instruction at the Intermediate Stage	Total = 288 hours

As Table 2 illustrates, by the end of the intermediate stage, students would be studied 288 hours of English following the course of the Full Blast 1-6. The English language textbooks of the Intermediate stage are benchmarked to the proficiency language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and they begin at the A1 level (i.e. Beginner) and take students up-to the low B1 level (i.e. lower Intermediate level) at the end of the second semester of the third secondary grade.

English Language Instruction at the Saudi Secondary Stage

As indicated in Table 2 above, students are expected to exit the Intermediate stage at the low B1 (-B1) level (i.e. low intermediate level). However, as Table 3 below shows that the English instruction at the Secondary stage comes back to start at the A2 (i.e. the Elementary level). As it is the case in the Intermediate stage, students study English throughout the whole Secondary stage i.e. as of grade one and up-to-the end of the third secondary grade. However, the number of teaching periods is increased to five teaching periods per week. Similarly, a teaching period at school level is forty-five minutes (i.e. a total of two hundred twenty-five minutes a week).

Table 3
English Language Instruction at the Saudi Secondary Stage

| School Stage	Grade	Semester	Number of Weeks	Textbook	Language Level	periods per week	Time duration of a period	Total Amount Per Semester	
	1	1	16	Traveller 1	A2 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	120 h/year
	1	2	16	Traveller 2	A2 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	
	2	1	16	Traveller 3	B1 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	120 h/year
Secondary	2	2	16	Traveller 4	B1 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	
	3	1	16	Traveller 5	B2 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	120 h/year
	3	2	16	Traveller 6	B2 (CEFR)	5	45 m	60 h	

Total Amount of time allocated to English Language Teaching in the Secondary Saudi School Stage = 360 hours of English Language Instruction at the Secondary stage	Total = 360 hours

As shown in Table 3, the students, during the Secondary stage, have to study six English textbooks over six school semesters i.e. two English textbooks each semester. The English language textbooks of the Secondary stage are also benchmarked to the proficiency language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and they begin at the A2 level (i.e. Elementary level) and take students up-to the B2 level (i.e. Upper Intermediate) at the end of the second semester of the third secondary grade.

As such, the Saudi students at the pre-university education receives a total of 792 hours through the three stages. They receive 144 hours of English instruction at the elementary stage utilizing the course of Smart Class 1-6. In the intermediate stage, they receive 288 hours through the three academic years using the course of Full Blast 1-6 whereas in the secondary stage, they receive 360 hours via the course of Traveller 1-6 (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Total Number of Hours Allocated to Teaching in the Pre-University Education
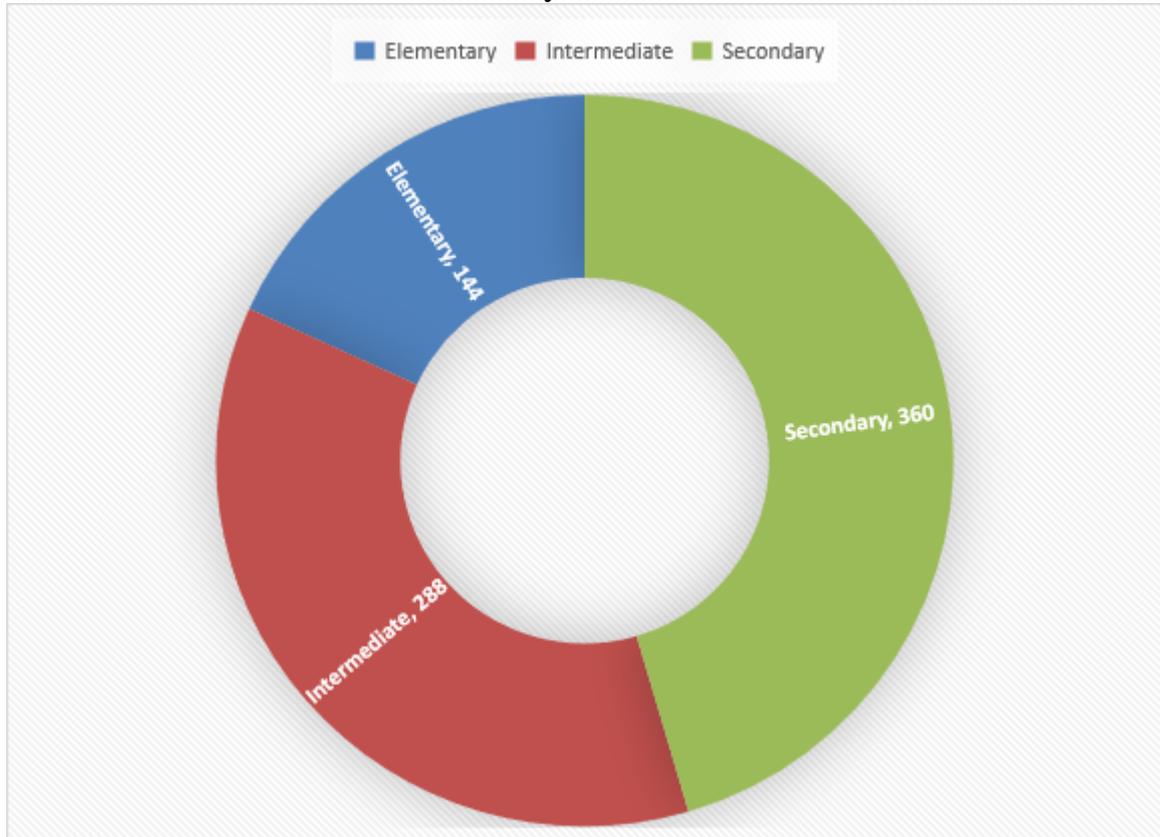
As Figure 1 indicates, the total number of hours allocated to the teaching of English at the Elementary, Intermediate, and Secondary stage is 792 hours. According to Desveaux (2020), the following approximate numbers of hours are needed to reach a CEFR level:

Table 4

Approximate Number of Hours for Each CEFR Language Proficiency Levels (Desveaux, 2020)

CEFR Language Level	Approximate Number of Teaching Hours
A1	90 - 100 hours
A2	180 - 200 hours
B1	350 - 400 hours
B2	500 - 600 hours
C1	700 - 800 hours
C2	1,000 - 1,200 hours

Based on the total number of hours (792) allocated to the teaching of English at the Elementary, Intermediate, and Secondary stages, and according to Table 4, Saudi school students should have completed the B2 level (Upper-Intermediate Level). This means that university English language courses should start at the C1 (i.e. Advanced Level). As such,

the researcher reviewed the results of the students in the placement test held by the ELC at Taibah University for the last three years to find out if the students can start the university English courses at the C1 level.

Table 5

Students' Scores in the Pre-course Placement Test- Semester 1, 2015-2016

Campus	CEFR Score Range						
	0 to 10	11 to 30	31 to 50	51 to 70	71 to 90	91 to 100	
	Intro	*A1*	*A2*	*B1*	*B2*	*C1*	*Total*
AA-M	19	96	851	192	68	1	1227
MC-F	3	41	662	172	58	0	933
MH-F	3	12	32	0	0	0	44
MH-M	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
OL-F	0	40	99	1	0	0	140
OL-M	0	30	56	1	0	0	87
YN-F	1	79	312	19	0	0	410
YN-M	1	114	205	9	0	0	328
BD-F	0	15	68	5	0	0	88
BD-M	0	12	47	0	0	0	59
Total #	27	442	2332	399	126	1	3319
Total %	1%	13%	70%	12%	4%	0%	100%

As shown above, the placement test score at the different campuses at Taibah University in the academic year 2015-2016 showed that 70% of the students are at A2 English language proficiency level, 12% at the B1 level, and only 4% at the B2 level which they should have completed in the secondary stage.

Table 6

Students' Scores in the Pre-course Placement Test- Semester 1 2016-2017

	CEFR Score Ranges						
Score Range	0 to 10	11 to 30	31 to 50	51 to 70	71 to 90	91 to 100	
CEFR Level	- A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	Total
AA-M	45	136	778	208	95	0	1262
MC-F	0	43	652	208	63	1	967
MH-F	1	3	17	0	0	0	20
MH-M	0	15	18	0	0	0	33
OL-F	1	34	140	4	0	0	178
OL-M	0	12	61	2	1	0	76
YN-F	0	26	185	11	0	0	222
YN-M	0	42	166	9	5	0	222
BD-F	1	14	97	3	0	0	114
BD-M	0	7	63	0	0	0	70
Totals #	48	332	2177	445	164	1	3164
Totals %	2%	10%	69%	14%	5%	0%	100%

As shown above, the placement test score at the different campuses at Taibah University in the academic year 2016-2017 showed that 69% of the students are at A2 English language proficiency level, 14% at the B1 level, and only 5% at the B2 level. This result supports the results showed in Table 5 as most students are at A2 level upon joining the university stage. The following table also shows the students' language levels in the pre-course placement test, semester 1, 2017-2018.

Table 7
Students' Language Levels in the Pre-Course Placement test, Semester 1, 2017-2018

Score Range	CEFR Score Ranges						
	0 to 10	11 to 30	31 to 50	51 to 70	71 to 90	91 to 100	
CEFR Level	**- A1**	**A1**	**A2**	**B1**	**B2**	**C1**	**Total**
AA-M	10	108	851	223	113	1	1306
MC-F	0	34	524	171	66	3	798
MH-F	0	3	18	0	0	0	21
MH-M	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
OL-F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OL-M	0	13	57	1	0	0	71
YN-F	0	11	104	7	2	0	124
YN-M	1	37	163	7	0	0	207
BD-F	1	5	35	2	2	0	44
BD-M	0	3	31	1	1	0	36
Totals #	12	215	1783	412	184	4	2608
Totals %	0%	8%	68%	16%	7%	0%	100%

This table also supported the results of the previous two tables as the scores of 68% of the students are at A2 level, 16% at B1 Level, and only 7% achieved the B2 level. These results reveal that Saudi students lack the required English language proficiency level upon joining the university stage which forces the university to propose remedial programs that might enhance students' proficiency levels before joining the university colleges, especially the scientific ones (e.g. Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, etc). As such, the ELC at Taibah University introduces the Unified Scientific Track Program (USTP) which includes two English language courses students have to study over two semesters. These two English courses are ENG101 and ENG102. ENG101 is offered in the first semester and is a pre-requisite for ENG102.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the current research might be stated that most Saudi students lack the required English language proficiency level (B2 of

CEFR Levels) upon joining the university stage. More specifically, although Saudi students study English as a Foreign Language at the Elementary, Intermediate, and Secondary stages for about 792 hours (See Tables 1, 2 & 3 above) and the English textbooks of the secondary stage are benchmarked to the B2 level (i.e. Upper Intermediate), the results of their English language placement tests, which the English Language Centre of Taibah University provided to newly admitted students in the past three academic years, namely, 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic university years (See Tables 5, 6 & 7 above), demonstrated that the majority of those students (68% - 70%) fall at the A2 level of the CEFR Levels. Hence, this research paper explores the impact of the experience of the English Language Centre in assessing and developing the English language proficiency levels of freshmen students upon joining the USTP at the Deanship of Academic Services at Taibah University. More specifically, the paper investigated how the USTP assess the students' proficiency levels of English before and after joining the program and finding out the impact of the English courses provided through the program in developing such proficiency levels according to the CEFR Levels. Hence, the study sought to answer the following question:

- What is the impact of the introductory English course provided by the Unified Scientific Track Program on the English language proficiency levels of students upon Joining the Saudi university?

Literature Review

As shown above that Saudi students failed to achieve the required level of English language proficiency upon joining the university stage despite the large number of instruction hours they received through nine years of study. Such failure was the main concern of many studies in literature to find out the reasons why students do not usually achieve the targeted proficiency levels despite all the reforms and plans that have been conducted.

Ashraf (2018), for example, investigated the issues affecting the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia. Findings revealed that teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia was affected by the impact of the native language, not practicing English on daily bases, attitude towards teaching and learning English, not using up to date teaching methods, enrolling larger number of students in EFL classes and not creating effective teaching environment. The study suggested some recommendations; (1) teaching English from grade 1 of the elementary level, (2) using teaching strategies that motivate students to learn English, (3) selecting appropriate textbooks, (4) strengthening the teacher-student

relationships in a way to stimulating students to learn English and (5) implementing diverse assessment methods.

Another study conducted by Mitchell and Alfuraih (2017) aimed to provide an inclusive timeline of the development of English language education from the time King AbdulAziz Ibn Saud united the Arabian Peninsula and created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study found that there were two main factors which result in students' abilities that do not match their grade leve: 1) not all students complete their homework tasks and 2) students need more English classes per week. The study suggests more English classes and online activities. Furthermore, they study suggested structured professional development programs for teachers.

Al Shumaimeri (2003) highlighted that students leave the secondary school stage without the ability to participate in a conversation. Javid and Asmari (2011) supported Al Shumaimeri (2003) as they carried out a study to investigate the reasons of low proficiency in English language among Saudi students. They recommend, a strict admission policy, an increase in language courses, developing tailor-made activities, providing increased practice in academic writing, exploiting modern teaching techniques, and equipping the classrooms with modern teaching aids to improve Saudi EFL learners' academic writing.

Aljouei and Alsuhaibani (2018) also wanted to find out why school leavers cannot speak or write complete proper sentences after studying English for 9 years. The study finds that the reasons are the following; introducing English language at a late stage of studying makes students not ready to learn a new language, the teachers were not well trained, neither as language teachers nor as behavioural science teachers, and information and communication technology (ICT) is not used for teaching English. The study makes the following recommendations: 1) Introduce English from the early stages; 2) Concentrate on quality not quantity; 3) Attention should be paid to evaluation not examination; 4) No class should encompass more than 20 students; and 5) Audio visual aids should be used in instruction.

Fareh (2010) also mentioned some challenges that affect teaching English as a foreign language in Arab countries including Saudi Arabia. First. English teachers are not well trained to use updated methods. Second, Student-cantered method is not effective regarding the activities and tasks. Third, students are not motivated enough to appreciate the importance of English language in their life. Forth, limited effort is directed towards developing skills. Fifth, modern teaching materials are not widely available. Seventh, assessment process is not updated. Finally,

initiatives are lacking to bring about total exposure to English language with literature ethos.

Reviewing these studies and others revealed that Saudi students suffer from low proficiency levels due to several factors that pointed to the need for improving students' English proficiency levels before joining the university life. As such, the ELC proposed the USTP that includes two English courses with the aim of helping students achieve the required English proficiency level.

Method

To meet the purpose of the research paper, the researcher compared the Saudi students' scores on the English language test held by the ELC of Taibah University before and after the USTP. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the USTP includes two English language courses which students have to study over two semesters. These two English courses are ENG101 and ENG102. ENG101 is offered in the first semester and is a pre-requisite for ENG102. In other words, students have to successfully pass ENG101 before they study ENG102. However, before students start studying the ENG101 course, the English language Centre of Taibah University gives a pre-course placement test in order to achieve the following purposes:

1. To identify the English language levels of the students upon joining the program.
2. To place students in the fast track sections if they are able to prove a higher level of English proficiency by obtaining the target score on the placement test (i.e. 71 and above).
3. To make the English language classes more homogeneous in terms of the students' language abilities and thus more motivating for students.
4. To enable the teachers to deal with homogeneous classes in terms of the language level; and hence make their teaching customized to their students' level.
5. Every teacher is given the scores of his / her students so that they know their levels on joining the course and can monitor their students' language progress throughout the teaching semester.
6. To compare the results of students in this pre-course test with the post-course test in order to measure the difference in the students' language progress.

The pre-course and post-course English tests are two standard quality assurance procedures which are regularly applied by the English Language Center of the Deanship of Academic Services, Taibah

University. As indicated above, the pre-course English placement test is regularly administered prior to the actual study at the beginning of the first semester in order to identify the English language proficiency levels of the students on joining the English language program whereas the second English placement test (i.e. Post-course test) aims to measure the progress achieved in students' English language proficiency levels after successful completion of the English language courses taught in the Unified Scientific Track (i.e. ENG101 & ENG102).

Overview of the Q Skills Placement Test, Oxford University Press

The Placement Test (PT) is designed by Oxford University Press (OUP), and it is based on the Q-Skills series which is used in the English language program in the USTP. The Q-Placement Test is designed to place students into the appropriate strand and level of Q: Skills for Success (i.e. from Intro- Book 5). It consists of two parts: Reading and Writing and Listening and Speaking. These two main parts also include language use items (i.e. vocabulary & Grammar).

The Reading and Writing Placement Test

The reading and writing placement component of the placement test measures reading comprehension, other reading skills, such as vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary skills, grammar, and knowledge of writing skills. The Reading and Writing Placement Test consists of 50 items.

The Listening and Speaking Placement Test

The Listening and Speaking Placement Test measures listening comprehension, some listening skills, vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary skills, grammar, pronunciation, and knowledge of speaking skills. The Listening and Speaking Placement Test consists of 50 items.

The reading, writing and the listening and speaking placement tests were combined in one test. Some test items have been transformed into the MCQ test format in order to produce the students' scores in a timely manner. The Oxford University Press Placement Test recommends placement of students as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Score Correlation of Q-Skills Placement Test (Oxford University Press)

Q: Skills Placement Level and students' grades (%) sum of L&S and R&W	Level	TOEFL (Paper)	TOEFL (iBT)	TOEIC	IELTS	CEFR
Q - Introductory Level (0-10)	Intro	0-343	0-18	10-250	1-1.5	A1 (Breakthrough)
Q –A1 Level 1 (11-30)	1	347-393	19-29	250-350	2-2.5	A1 (Breakthrough)
Q A1	2	397-435	30-40	350-450	3-3.5	A2 (Waystage)

Level 2 (31-50)						
Q A2 **Level 3 (51-70)**	3	437-487	41-57	450-550	4-4.5	B1 (Threshold)
Q B1 **Level 4 (71-90)**	4	493-537	58-74	550-650	5-5.5	B2 (Advantage)
Q B2 **Level 5 (91-100)**	5	540-577	75-90	650-750	6-7	C1(Effective Operational proficiency)

Table 9 below shows the time allocated for the course in terms of periods per week, periods in minutes, time allocated per semester and year for the course.

Table 9

English Language in the Unified Scientific Track, English Language Center, Taibah University

Semester	Textbook	Language Level	Periods Per Week	Time Of Period in Minutes	Time Allocated Per Week	Time Allocated Per Semester	Time Allocated Per Year
Semester 1	Q-Skills for Success 1 & Half of Q-Skills for Success 2	A1 & Low A2	16	50 minutes	13 hours and 30 minutes	213 hours	426 hours
Semester 2	Q-Skills for Success 2 & Q-Skills for Success 3	A1 & B1	16	50 minutes	13 hours and 30 minutes	213 hours	

 The table above shows that the course lasts for 426 hours in both semesters, 213 hours for each. The course is taught in 16 periods per week for 50 minutes for each. The following section highlights the findings of the study in terms of descriptive statistics of the post-course tests in the three consecutive academic years and comparing the pre-tests and post-tests to find out how much effect had the English course taught by the USTP on the evaluation of students' language proficiency levels.

Results

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the post-course placement test is another quality assurance procedure that is regularly conducted at the end of each academic year. The results of the post-course placement test in three consecutive years were analysed in terms of means and percentages to measure the progress achieved by the students after studying the English courses in the USTP. The following figure graphically shows the results of the post-course placement test in Semester 2 2015-2016.

Figure 2: Students' levels in the Post-Course Test in Semester 2 2015-2016
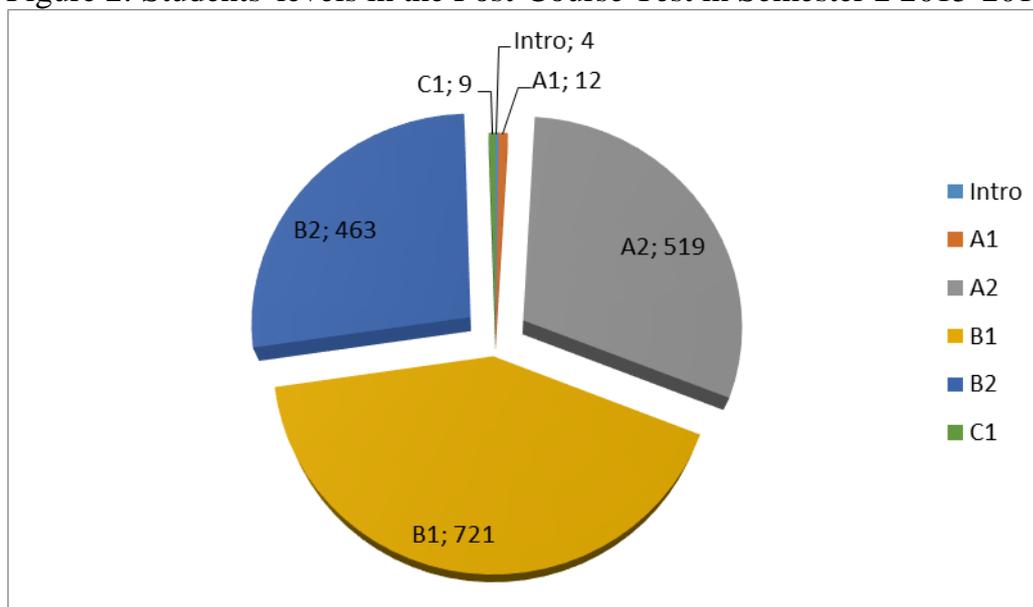
As shown above, most students achieved B1, A2, and B2 proficiency levels after studying the intensive English course at the USTP. Tables 10 illustrates that the English language program in the UST has managed to upgrade most students' English language proficiency levels to B1 and B2 levels. Table 10 below shows the distribution of students over the language proficiency levels according to their campus and the percentage of students in each level in semester 2 2015-2016.

Table 10
Students' Scores in the Post-Course Test, Semester 2 2015-2016

Sr. No.	Campus	Q : Skills CEFR Score Range						Total
		0 to 10	11 to 30	31 to 50	51 to 70	71 to 90	91 to 100	
		Intro (Below A1)	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	
1	AA-M	0	4	178	298	200	4	684
2	MC-F	0	0	81	307	237	5	630
3	MH-M	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
4	MH-F	0	0	11	2	9	0	22
5	OL-M	0	1	29	9	0	0	39
6	OL-F	0	3	50	27	1	0	81
7	YN-M	4	2	105	19	7	0	137
8	YN-F	0	1	48	44	5	0	98
9	BD-M	0	1	6	2	0	0	9
10	BD-F	0	0	11	13	2	0	26
	Total	4	12	519	721	463	9	1728
	Total %	0.23%	0.69%	30.03%	41.72%	26.79%	0.52%	100.00%

The table above shows that 41.72% of the students were able to achieve B1 language proficiency level after receiving the English courses in the USTP, whereas 26.79 achieved B2, and only 30.03% were at A2 level. This means that the intensive course was able to advance students' proficiency level to the required level to join the scientific colleges, such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering, or science.

Table 11

Students' Language Levels in the Post-Course Placement test, end of Semester 2, 2017- 2018

Score Range	0 to 10	11 to 30	31 to 50	51 to 70	71 to 90	91 to 100	
CEFR Level	- A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	Total
AA-M	0	1	105	241	289	55	691
MC-F	0	0	83	215	324	102	724
MH-F	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
MH-M	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
OL-F	0	0	56	17	4	0	77
OL-M	0	0	3	2	0	0	5
YN-F	0	0	59	61	40	4	164
YN-M	0	2	17	28	15	0	62
BD-F	0	0	6	7	4	2	19
BD-M	0	0	1	4	3	0	8
Totals #	0	3	331	575	680	163	1752
Totals %	0%	0%	19%	33%	39%	9%	100%

The table above shows that 39% of the students were able to achieve B2 language proficiency level after receiving the English courses in the USTP, whereas 33 achieved B1, and only 19% were at A2 level. This means that the intensive course was able to advance students' proficiency level to the required level to join the scientific colleges, such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering, or science.

Conclusions

The above statistics revealed that although the last English textbook which students studied at Secondary stage is benchmarked to the B2 level (i.e. Upper Intermediate), and students are supposed to exit the Secondary stage at the B2 level, the results of the English language placement test (from Oxford University Press) show that the majority of students (60%-68%) fall at the A2 language level (i.e. Beginner's Level). Moreover, with a total of 792 hours of English language instruction at the Elementary, Intermediate, and Secondary/high schools, students have only reached the A2 level (Elementary) by end of the Secondary stage. Furthermore, with a total of 426 hours of English language instruction in the USTP, students have successfully managed to move from the A1 level to the B1 level. In addition, the students' have significantly moved from

the lower CEFR language levels (i.e. -A1, A1) to the higher language levels on the CEFR language scales (i.e. B1, B2, and C1). As such, the results revealed the positive impact of the introductory English course, in the development of students' English language proficiency level.

Interpretations to such positive impact of the English language program of Taibah University in improving the students' language levels from the A1 level to the B1 and B2 levels with a total number of 426 hours of English language instruction might be the well-structured English language program which starts with a placement test and ends with a post-course placement test in order to measure the progress achieved by the students. It also allows to evaluate the effectiveness of the different aspects of the English language program. Furthermore, between the two placement tests, there is a well-established and varied assessment system that measures students' progress throughout the course of study. The results which are obtained from the various assessments are analyzed to address the aspects which need improvement e.g. teaching techniques, student support, various language skills. In addition to that, well selected textbooks that are benchmarked to international standards such the CEFR, TOEFL, and IELTS; well-trained teaching staff who are closely monitored, and who are supported by a professional development program; a language support program which offers help to weak/low level students; and finally well-defined learning outcomes of each English language course. All these factors are considered vital to the success of English language courses as revealed by the previous literature.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings as well as the unique and long experience of the English Language Center, the following recommendations can help in improving the English language instructions and outcomes in the Saudi general school.

- Establish an overall English language curriculum for the Saudi general schools where the English language levels build on each other; for instance, if the English language curriculum at the Intermediate school stage aims at taking students from the A1 level to the B1 level, the English language curriculum at the Secondary stage should start teaching from the B1 level and take them to the B2/low C1 levels. This way English language courses at the university level can focus more on English For Specific Purposes (ESP) courses which are related to the students' majors in the colleges that students join. This will save a lot of time and

resources and allows for maximising the benefits of the English language instruction at school and university levels.

- A standardised proficiency placement test (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, Oxford, etc.) should be given to students at the end of each school stage e.g. Intermediate & Secondary in order to make sure that students have achieved the target English language proficiency level. Students who fail to meet the required level can then take a summer course in English.

- Similarly, a language benchmark/ standard should be set for admitting students at the university. For instance, students should join the university at the B1 level (Intermediate). This will allow the university to offer the ESP courses which students need for their college majors.

- An English language training/professional development program should be established to develop the English language teaching skills, techniques, and strategies of the Saudi school-teachers.

- A comprehensive assessment system should be developed at school level to make sure that the target learning outcomes of the English course are being achieved. The results which are obtained from the various assessments should be analyzed to address the aspects which need improvement e.g. teaching, learning, textbooks, student support, etc.

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