

**THE CURRICULUM OF THE FOUR-YEAR ENGLISH COURSE
OFFERED IN THE FACULTIES OF ARTS IN YEMENI
UNIVERSITIES: NEED FOR RE-THINKING**

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ABSTRACT

A curriculum should reflect the needs of the students vis-a-vis their societal and economic needs. The courses offered on a programme based on the curriculum should attempt to fulfill those needs to a large extent. The teaching methods followed in the classes based on the curriculum should focus on the activities that enable the learners to achieve those needs. English is a foreign language in Yemen but the uses of English for Yemenis are on the increase and therefore more and more Yemenis, especially the youngsters, have started learning English; the increase in the number of students entering the English classes in the universities and the mushrooming of the 'English institutes' in the cities are an evidence to this trend. In this scenario, the curriculum of the four-year English course offered in the Faculties of Arts in the Yemeni universities is dismally poor in its fulfilling the needs of the learners; it stuffs them with too much literature and linguistics and fails to equip them for their future life. This article reviews the curriculum of the course to show that it lacks the job potential and suggest ways of strengthening the curriculum to make it need-based and purpose-oriented. This, the article points out, is the need of the hour, especially when this course attracts more girls in the present days and the government is concerned about the development of women of this country.

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ملخص

إن المنهج الذي يدرس في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في كليات الآداب ليس نافعاً للطلبة كونه لا يؤهلهم للمنافسة مع الآخرين في سوق العمل، إنه يحتوي على مواد أدبية ولغوية أكثر من اللازم وعلى القليل من مواد المهارة، إن المواد المستخدمة في الأدب قديمة وغريبة ثقافياً على الطلبة، ناهيك عن كونها لا تطور مهارات القراءة المتقدمة لديهم، وكذلك هو الحال بالنسبة لمواد اللغويات .

لذا فإنه من الضروري إعادة النظر في وضع المنهج بما يتناسب واحتياجات الطلاب اليمنيين - يحتاج الطلاب اليمنيون اللغة الإنجليزية أكاديمياً، مهنيًا واجتماعياً: فاحتياجاتهم الأكاديمية تكمن في استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية لمواصلة دراساتهم العليا وتمكينهم من المنهج الحالي، احتياجاتهم المهنية تكمن في استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في المجال السياحي والفندقي وفي الإعلام كالصحافة والتلفزيون وفي مجال الحاسبات وفي مجال المصرفيات والترجمة... الخ، أما احتياجاتهم الاجتماعية فتتضمن استخدامهم اللغة الإنجليزية في المجتمع مع الأجانب الذين هم في إزدیاد متواصل .

إن مراجعة وتنقيح منهج اللغة الإنجليزية يتطلب زيادة مواد المهارة كالقراءة والكتابة وتقليص كمية المواد الأدبية واللغوية، كما يتطلب إدخال مواد مثل اللغة الإنجليزية في السياحة والفندقة، والصحافة والتلفزيون والحاسبات وإدارة المكاتب والمصرفيات وللمدرسين في التعليم العالي، ومن ثم يتم تقديم هذه المواد كمواد اختيارية في المستويين الثالث والرابع لطلبة البكالوريوس ويقوم كل طالب باختيار مادة أو اثنتين حسب ما يريد أن يصبح مستقبلاً .

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Introduction:

In these days of stiff competition for jobs, the graduates with the B.A. degree in English offered in the Faculties of Arts (FOAs) have a low priority in the job markets, as they cannot compete with the graduates in medicine, engineering, agriculture, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and other professional courses, nor can they fight with graduates in computer science or electronics. When the graduates in science subjects such as physics and chemistry get jobs such as those of medical representatives, the English graduates are not generally preferred for these jobs either. The only avenue for them seems to be to become teachers of English in colleges and universities if they fare well on the courses. In countries like India, the B.A. English courses are generally chosen by those who are rejected admission on all other courses or those who do not need to work after the completion of the course (in other words, those who need a degree for ornamental purposes). This is one of the reasons why most of the colleges, especially the self-financing colleges in India do not offer this course at all, and in the colleges which offer this course, the student strength is generally low. This is the scenario in most of the Third World countries at present.

Why is B.A. English of low preference?

It is clear that the professional courses such as medicine and engineering are of high priority because of their job potential, both in the national and international markets. Where do the B.A. English graduates stand in terms of job potential? Even the best graduates with excellent marks cannot fight with the graduates from schools with an additional certificate in computer course, when

they apply for jobs in the corporate sector. It is true that the corporate sector in Yemen prefers graduates with good language skills in English for the jobs¹, but pitted against those with the skills in using computers, the English graduates lose the race in the job market, in spite of their good language skills. The fact that strikes on our faces is that the B.A. English course offered in the FOAs at present do not prepare the students for the job market, both at the national and international levels.

What is wrong with the B.A. English course?

Let's look at the curriculum of the Course offered at present in the FOAs, taking the FOA, Ibb University, for example. The curriculum followed in most of the universities is either the same as or similar to the one followed in the University of Sana'a.

The following is the list of courses on the curriculum:

| Skills courses | Knowledge courses | Literature courses |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Reading 1 | Grammar 1 | Lang . through litt. |
| Reading 2 | Grammar 2 | Analysis of Lit.texts |
| Writing 1 | Adv. Grammar | Modern Eng prose |
| Writing 2 | Int. to Linguistics | Eng.Lit : Hist. Prosp |
| Sp.Eng. 1 | Morph & Syntax | 19 th C.Am.Litt. |
| Sp.Eng. 2 | Semantics | 19 th C.Poetry. |
| Sp.Eng. 3 | App. Linguistics | 19 th C.Novel. |
| Adv.Comp. | | 19 th C.Novel . |
| Transln 1 | | 20 th C.Am.Litt. |
| Transln 2 | | 20 th C.poetry . |
| Transln 3 | | 20 th C.Novel. |
| Adv.Trasln | | 20 th C.Drama. |
| Writing 3 | | Hist. Of English |
| | | Met.& Aug. poetry |
| | | Elizabethan drama |
| | | Literary criticism |
| | | Rest. &Aug. drama |
| | | Shakespeare |
| | | Comp. Litt. |

In addition, Arabic, Islamic Studies, French and Research Methodology courses are offered and the students are guided to do individual research on topics of their choice. In terms of the credit hours allotted for the three groups of courses mentioned above, out of the 144 hours allotted to all the courses on the four-year programme, literature courses get 57 hours, knowledge courses 21 and skill courses 39. The main purposes of these courses can be summed up as follows: the skill courses develop the language skills in the students; the knowledge courses help develop a knowledge base in them; and the literature courses develop in them a taste for English literature in addition to developing advanced reading skills. Whether these courses achieve their purposes depends on how these courses are taught by the teachers concerned. It is understandable that the skill courses can achieve their purposes because of the activities involved in them, but one may have doubts about the literature courses achieving their purposes, looking at the literary works prescribed on these courses, most of which are outmoded in terms of style and diction. Most of these are taught by specialists in English literature most of whom strongly believe that 'literature is for literature sake and not for language', as opposed to what Thakur (2002) said in his keynote address in the International Conference in Hodeidah University², and so one wonders if the linguistic purpose of the literature courses, namely, developing reading skills and literary skills can be achieved on these courses. One also wonders if the knowledge courses such as Morphology & syntax, Semantics and Stylistics will do any good to the students, especially when their English is too poor to understand these courses. The grammar courses and the Introduction to Linguistics course can provide the necessary knowledge base for using English and the other advanced courses are not so useful to them. To conclude, one may observe that most of the courses included in the curriculum are

not useful to the students, as they are not need-based and an immediate revision of the curriculum is necessary with a view to making it purposeful and need-oriented.

What are the needs of the students?

The needs of the students on the B.A. English course for learning English can be grouped under three heads: vocational (for getting jobs), academic (for pursuing higher studies) and social (for better living):

1. Vocational needs:

- i. Using English as tourist guides: Yemen is an ancient country with a number of places of tourist importance and the government is planning to improve the tourism industry in order to attract tourists from all over the world, who bring valuable foreign exchange. There is a growing need for people to work in the tourism industry and the young graduates can get jobs as tourist guides, if they are helped to develop the necessary language skills for the job on this course.
- ii. Using English in the Hotel Industry: Hotel industry is a priority area in Yemen and it is getting the attention of the government and the corporate sector. If the graduates develop language skills necessary for the industry on this course, they can get jobs easily as Receptionists, for example.
- iii. Using English for media: Yemen, as it is interested in international relationship, pays attention to media both in Arabic and English. The English newspapers and journals and the Radio and TV need a lot of people with skills necessary for the job. The graduates, if they develop the

necessary skills on this course, can get jobs in the media industry.

- iv. Using English for teaching at the higher level: The Faculties of Education in Yemen prepare graduates to teach English at the school level, but those enter the colleges and universities teach English without any professional training and they find their jobs extremely challenging and many of them fail to be successful teachers. If these graduates are trained to teach at the higher level, they will be useful as teaching professionals with the necessary professional skills to teach English.
- v. Using English in the computer industry: The computer boom is widespread in Yemen and more and more corporate sectors and government offices are going computers. If the graduates are helped to learn computering and English related to this field along with their other subjects on the course, they will get jobs easily.

2. Academic needs:

- i. Using English for higher education: One of the dreams of any educated Yemeni youth is to pursue higher studies in advanced countries like the UK, USA and India and they need good language and study skills for pursuing higher studies in these countries. The graduates should develop the necessary skills on the course in order to compete for the scholarships for higher studies, and pursue the studies using English when they get a chance to study abroad.
- ii. Using English for successfully pursuing the course on hand: While on the course, they **have to** refer to a number of reference books in English in the library and follow the lectures for better performance on the course. Some of the students attend special courses in the so-called language

institutes paying heavily in order to equip themselves for the task of pursuing the course on hand. If the course enables them to develop the necessary skills for the purposes, they would be benefited from the course.

3. Social needs:

Though English is a foreign language in Yemen, the need for using it is on the increase, mainly because of the large number of foreigners coming to work in the various fields such as telecommunication, shipping, trade and commerce and aviation. Yemeni students have to learn English well in order to get lucrative jobs in these fields as well as communicate with the others successfully and learn the jobs from the experts in the fields, who may be foreigners. The course they study, therefore, should enable them for this purpose, equipping them with communicative skills.

The curriculum of the B.A. English course- a few suggestions:

A curriculum should fulfil the needs of the learners stated in its objectives (Bose 2002). Taking all the needs of the students mentioned above into consideration, the curriculum of the B.A. English course should be reviewed and recast with the following modifications in order to make it more useful and need-based:

- i. The skill courses should be strengthened as they develop the necessary skills in the students. There can be four reading courses, four writing courses, four spoken English courses and four grammar courses spread over the first two years, one course in each semester. The content of these courses should be selected with the needs of the learners in mind.
- ii. The Advanced Grammar and the Advanced Composition courses can be dropped as they become redundant after the introduction of the (i) above.

- iii. The courses in Linguistics can be rationalized. As the Introduction to Linguistics course provides the necessary linguistic knowledge, the other courses can be dropped.
- iv. The literature courses can be reduced to the bare minimum and the literary works selected should include those that enable the students to get exposure to the writings of the modern writers of various nationalities and cultures. The teaching of these works should not only develop in the students a taste for literature but also, more importantly, develop their reading skills at a higher level. The teaching of these courses should meet the purposes for which these courses are included in the programme.
- v. Job oriented courses such as English for Journalism and Media, English for Tourism and Hotel Industry, English for office administration, English for international business, English for Higher Education, Language Teacher Education, Translation (this is already a part of the curriculum) can be included in the curriculum in order to make the course job-oriented. These courses can be offered as optional courses in the III and IV year of the programme and the students may be asked to opt for one or two of them according to their interest and abilities. Other optional courses such as Literary Appreciation and Creative Writing can be offered to those who want to specialize in literature in their higher education.
- vi. A basic computer course can be offered to all the students in the I year of the programme and advanced courses in computer can be offered to those who opt for them in the III and IV year charging reasonable fees for using the computer facilities.

Conclusion:

One would agree that there is an immediate need for revising the curriculum of the B.A. English Course in the wake of the arguments put forward in this short piece of writing. The readers should not mistake this article as an attack on literature courses; on the contrary, it is an attempt to stress the need for making the B.A. English course, offered in the FOAs at present, a useful one to the youth of Yemen. The young students who join this course at present do so without any foresight or planning, but when they face the reality after completing the course, they feel miserable. We will continue to do great injustice to the students of this course, if we do not wake up to the fact staring on our faces that these graduates are practically left on the streets after the programme without any prop for their future.

Notes & Reference materials:

1. A survey conducted by a researcher of the M.Ed. course in the Dept. of English, Hodeidah University in 2000 reveals that the employers in the corporate sector in Yemen prefer their employees to be proficient in reading and writing English.
2. ".....in a country like Yemen,....English literature should be taught not for its own sake and in its own terms, but for the sake of enriching and enhancing students' sensitivity to and their command of the mechanics of the language" (Thakur, D "Teaching Language through literature: Problems and Principles")

Bose, M.N.K. 2002. A textbook of English Language Teaching for Yemeni students. Sana'a. Obadi Publishers.

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