An Evaluation of English Language Proficiency and Curriculum Effectiveness among Foundation Year Students in Puntland Universties.

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Abstract
This study evaluates the English language proficiency and curriculum effectiveness among foundation year students at Puntland Universities, with a specific focus on the University of Bosaso. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 214 students through questionnaires and from four English instructors via key informant interviews. The findings reveal that while most students rated their English skills as good or fair, speaking and listening emerged as the most challenging areas. The current English curriculum was generally well-received, with over 60% of students acknowledging its positive impact on communication skills and learning materials. However, lecturers noted that the curriculum only partially meets students' academic needs, citing issues such as limited English use outside the classroom, environmental distractions, and weak foundational education. Challenges such as lack of motivation, poor peer collaboration, and social media distractions further hinder language acquisition. The study recommends enhancing speaking and listening practices, promoting English use beyond the classroom, revising curriculum content, and improving access to learning resources to better support students' language development and academic success.

Keywords: English Language Proficiency, Curriculum Effectiveness, Foundation Year Students, Higher Education

1. Introduction

English language competency is essential for student achievement in today's interconnected academic environment, particularly in non-native English-speaking nations where English is the main language of teaching (Coleman, 2006). In Somalia, English is widely used for teaching a variety of subjects, especially in Puntland's universities like the University of Bosaso. With a focus on English language development, the foundation year is a crucial time for first-year university students to acquire the necessary academic abilities (Ali, 2017). Proficiency in English is essential for producing research papers, participating in insightful class discussions, and comprehending lectures and academic publications.

However, due in major part to their earlier educational experiences and limited exposure to English in social contexts, many students at Puntland universities arrive at the foundation year with varying degrees of English proficiency. Both academic performance and classroom participation are impacted by these discrepancies, which present serious difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, and academic writing (Abdullahi & Mohamed, 2021; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009).

The efficacy of the English curriculum becomes a crucial issue in this situation. A good curriculum should be learner-centered, well-structured, and in line with both student needs and institutional objectives. Language input, output, and feedback systems should all be balanced (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Few empirical studies have been carried out in Somalia to evaluate whether the foundation English programs

adequately prepare students for the academic demands of higher education, despite the acknowledged significance of curriculum design.

The provision of high-quality English instruction in developing nations is further hampered by issues such a lack of resources, teachers with insufficient training, and socioeconomic limitations (British Council, 2015; Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2012). A data-driven assessment of students' language skills as well as the planning and execution of the English curriculum are necessary to address these issues.

This study intends to appraise the efficacy of the English curriculum provided during the foundation year as well as the English language competency of foundation year students. In order to improve English language education and student performance at Puntland universities, the findings will add to the continuing conversations about curriculum reform, pedagogical approaches, and institutional support systems.

1.1. Problem Statement

English language proficiency is a critical determinant of students' academic success, particularly in higher education institutions where English serves as the medium of instruction. Puntland Universities, foundation year students often face challenges in English communication, reading comprehension, and academic writing, which adversely affect their academic performance and confidence in the classroom. This situation raises concerns about the effectiveness of the current English language curriculum in adequately preparing students for university-level studies. Studies have shown that insufficient English language skills can hinder students' academic progress and limit their participation in both academic and social environments (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Tuyen et al., 2016). Despite these concerns, there is a lack of empirical research evaluating English proficiency levels and the curriculum's effectiveness in the Somali context, particularly at the foundation year level. Addressing this gap is essential for improving language instruction and supporting students' academic success.

1.2. Objectives of the study

I. To assess the current level of English language proficiency among foundation year students in Puntland Universities.

II. To evaluate the effectiveness of the current English language curriculum used in the foundation year.

III. To identify challenges faced by students in achieving English language proficiency in the foundation year

Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Review

English Language Proficiency

The ability of a learner to communicate successfully in English in social and academic settings is known as English language competency. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), it usually includes the four macroskills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Proficiency is a basic requirement for success in higher education for students enrolled in foundation or preparatory programs, especially in situations where English is not the first language. Students' linguistic skills are highly valued because English is the primary language of instruction at the majority of Somalia and Puntland universities, particularly in the fields of science, technology, and professional courses.

Cummins (2000) made a distinction between Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), highlighting that academic proficiency takes years and necessitates specialized instruction, whereas many learners quickly pick up conversational English. Without sufficient assistance, students may find it difficult to comprehend lectures, write research papers, or read scholarly literature, all of which could jeopardize their overall academic performance.

Curriculum Effectiveness

The degree to which an educational program fits the needs of students, attains the desired learning outcomes, and is in line with institutional and national objectives is known as curriculum effectiveness (Tyler, 1949). It covers curricular content, instructional tactics, materials, assessment techniques, and teacher competency. According to Nation and Macalister (2010), a foundation year curriculum should give students the academic literacy and general English language abilities they need to succeed in university-level coursework.

Learner-centered, adaptable, and context-responsive curricula are frequently found to be effective. Conversely, strict curriculum that don't take into account students' sociocultural backgrounds and past knowledge might cause disengagement and poor performance (Littlewood, 2007). Theories like task-based learning and communicative language teaching (CLT) place a strong emphasis on meaningful communication and student interaction, both of which are particularly helpful in helping learners gain confidence and fluency (Richards, 2006).

Furthermore, elements including a lack of instructional resources, teachers with insufficient training, and antiquated teaching methods frequently diminish the efficacy of curricula in weak educational systems like Puntland's. Improving pupils' preparedness for higher education requires addressing these problems.

2.2. Empirical Review

Numerous studies have looked into the connections between academic success, curriculum design, and English proficiency, especially for students making the move to a university setting. Al Hosni (2014) discovered that Oman's foundation students have trouble speaking and listening in the Middle East since they were not exposed to English outside of the classroom. Their participation in and understanding of other university courses were directly impacted by this lack of competency. In a similar vein, a study conducted in South Asia by Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) showed that curricular changes that neglect assessment and teaching quality frequently do not result in the expected gains in student performance.

Olanipekun and Aina (2014) found that students' academic achievement across disciplines in Sub-Saharan Africa was strongly correlated with their proficiency in the English language. They maintained that children who were more proficient in English did noticeably better in content areas like social studies and science, highlighting the fundamental significance that language plays in academic learning.

Although empirical research in Somalia is still in its infancy, the studies that are now available raise significant issues. Poor English language foundations were linked to frequent misunderstandings of lecture material, inadequate writing abilities, and decreased academic confidence, according to Abdi's (2021) investigation of university students in Mogadishu. Many pupils did not have access to English language assistance programs, according to the survey.

More specifically, Jama (2022) assessed the efficacy of Puntland universities' foundation year programs. The results showed that curriculum design varied throughout institutions, with some depending on antiquated resources and conventional grammar-focused teaching strategies. The study found that although some students made progress in their foundational language abilities, the curriculum frequently fell short in terms of preparing them for critical reading, academic writing, and subject-specific communication.

Research from Southeast Asia confirms these findings elsewhere. Students' English language proficiency improved when curriculum designers used contextualized materials, promoted active learning, and trained teachers in formative assessment techniques, claim Hashim and Sahil (2019). Students were able to relate language learning to real-world academic and professional needs thanks to these techniques. The necessity of an integrated approach to evaluating curriculum effectiveness and English language proficiency is emphasized over and again by these empirical studies. A well-structured curriculum taught by trained teachers and supported by relevant materials significantly improves students' academic readiness and English proficiency.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study applied a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' proficiency levels and the effectiveness of the English curriculum. The quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered via open-ended questions and key informant interviews.

3.2. Population of the Study

The target population of this study consisted of Foundation Year students enrolled in Puntland Universities for the 2024–2025 academic year for all faculties. Additionally, the study included four English language lecturers to provide expert opinions on the curriculum and teaching methodologies.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of **214** foundation year students were selected as the sample for this study, using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different faculties of Puntland Universities. Additionally, **four** English language lecturers were purposively selected to provide expert opinions on the curriculum and teaching methodologies.

3.4. Data Collection

Two main instruments were used to collect data:

- **Questionnaire**: A bilingual (English-Somali) questionnaire was designed for students, consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended items measured students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to English proficiency and curriculum content. The open-ended items allowed students to express their opinions in more detail.
- **Key Informant Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English instructors to gain qualitative insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current English curriculum and instructional practices.

4. Results And Analysis

Results

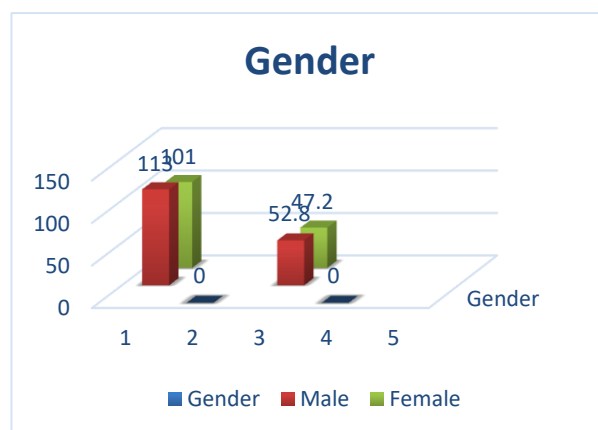How does social media usage affect the academic performance of students?

Table 1

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.870	3

The data's reliability coefficient is measured at 0.870

Demographic Characteristics
Table 1: Gender

| Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	113	52.8
Female	101	47.2
Total	**214**	**100.0**

Interpretation

The table 1 above, shows the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender **113** were male which equivalent **52.8%** of the sample while, **101** were female which represents **47.2%** of the respondents.

Table 2: Faculties

| Faculty	Frequency	Percent
Health of science	77	36.0
Computer science	79	36.9
Social science	19	8.9
Commerce and Modern Mgt.	39	18.2
Total	**214**	**100.0**
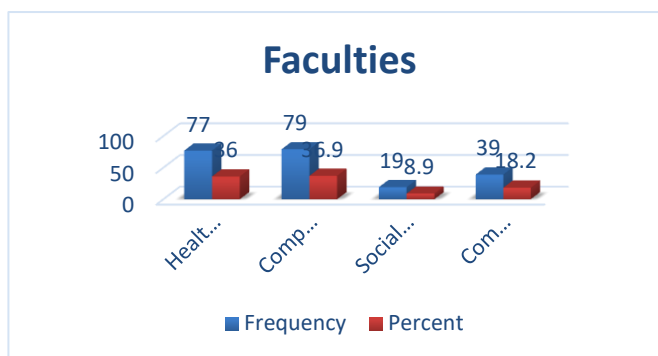
Interpretation

Table 2 above indicates that **79** of the students were from Computer Science, representing **36.9%**, while **77** were from Health Science, making up **36%**. Additionally, **39** were from Commerce and Modern Management, represents **18.2%**, and **19** were from Social Science, which constitutes **8.9%**.

Table 3: Departments

Departments	Frequency	Percent
Nursing	17	8
Public Health	5	2.3
Clinical Officer	5	2.3
Public Administration	8	3.7
Midwifery	19	8.9
Nutrition	7	3.3
M.Lab	17	8
Accounting and finance	39	18.2
IT	79	36.9
Pharmacy	7	3.3
Social work	11	5.1
Total	**214**	**100.0**
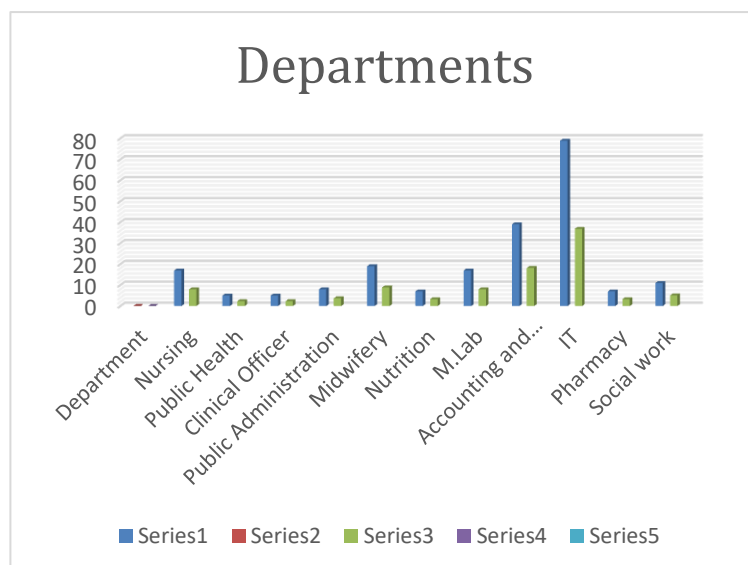
Interpretation

Table 3 above shows that there were **79** of the students from the Department of IT, representing **36.9%**. Accounting and Finance had **39** represents **18.2%**. Midwifery had **19** which is **8.9%**. Both Medical Laboratory and Nursing were **17** students in each, making up **8%**. Social Work had **11** representing **5.1%**, while Public Administration had **8** equating to **3.7%**. Nutrition and Pharmacy each had **7** students respectively, representing **3.3%**, and both Public Health and Clinical Officers had **5** students in each, which is **2.3%**.

Discussions And Findings

The study reveals a fairly balanced gender distribution among respondents, with **52.8%** male and **47.2%** female participants. The majority of students were in Computer Science and Health Science faculties, with **36.9%** and **36.0%** respectively. Within departments, the IT department had the highest participants at **36.9%,** followed by Accounting and Finance at **18.2%**.

Most students rated their English language proficiency as "Good" **42.52%** although, **25.23%** rated as "Very Good", while **3.27%** considered their skills to be "Poor." However, when asked about the most challenged English skill, majority of the students **61.21%** identified speaking as the most difficult, followed by listening **25.23%**.

Lecturers considered the foundation year English proficiency program a timely and essential intervention. They observed significant improvements in students' overall language abilities, particularly in writing. These improvements were assessed through diagnostic entry tests, class participation, continuous assessments, presentations, and final exams.

Despite overall progress, students continue to struggle with speaking and writing, particularly in academic settings. These challenges are primarily linked to limited English exposure at home, weak foundational education, and various socio-economic and environmental barriers that hinder effective language.

Regarding English language use outside the classroom, **59.35%** of students reported using English "sometimes," while only **7.47%** said they "always" use it. This suggests limited practice in real-world contexts. In terms of curriculum evaluation, **62.1%** of students felt the English curriculum improved their communication skills, and **77.6%** believed the learning materials were helpful.

Lecturers acknowledged that the current curriculum has some strengths, but it only moderately addresses students' actual learning needs. They pointed out that:

- Curriculum content is not fully aligned with academic expectations
- Materials and teaching methods require further development and integration

Classroom activities were seen positively, with **70.56%** of students agreed it enhanced students' abilities to comprehend class work and other teaching materials. Additionally, **64.95%** of students believed the time allocated for English classes was adequate. Despite this, **55.14%** of the students agreed having difficulty understanding English. More than **60%** of students expressed satisfaction with current teaching methods and **77.9%** confirmed they had sufficient access to English learning resources.

Several external factors negatively influence English learning among students. A major issue is the lack of commitment and seriousness among students, which hinders consistent effort and progress. Additionally, there is insufficient environmental support for using English outside the classroom, limiting students' opportunities to practice and reinforce their skills. The widespread use of social media platforms like TikTok also serves as a major distraction, drawing students' attention away from their studies. Furthermore, poor collaboration and teamwork among students reduce opportunities for peer learning, which is essential for improving language skills through interaction and shared experiences.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that students in Puntland Universities are moderately confident in their English abilities, though there are clear challenges in oral communication skills. The curriculum, teaching methods, and learning resources are generally well-received by the students. However, practical use of English outside the classroom remains limited, and many students reported difficulties in comprehension. Making focused improvements in these areas can help improve the quality of English education overall.

Finally, the foundation year English program has produced promising results, particularly in improving basic language skills. However, persistent challenges especially in speaking and writing highlight the need for curriculum enhancement and increased support. Addressing environmental factors and promoting a culture of collaboration and seriousness among students are critical for further progress. By implementing the recommended strategies, in Puntland Universities can strengthen its English instruction and help students develop the skills needed for academic and professional success.

Recommendations
1. **Enhance Speaking and Listening Practice**: Since speaking and listening were identified as the most difficult skills, it is recommended that English classes include more interactive speaking activities such as debates and listening comprehension exercises.
2. **Encourage English Use Outside the Classroom**: To reinforce classroom learning, students should be encouraged to use English in social settings, discussion forums, or peer-learning groups.

3. **Tailor Support for Students with Low Proficiency**: Special attention should be given to students who reported difficulty in understanding English through extra tutoring.
4. **Sustain Effective Teaching Methods**: Given the positive feedback on teaching strategies and materials, it is important to continue and further develop learner-centered methods that actively engage students.
5. **Ensure Continued Access to Learning Resources**: Institutions should maintain and possibly expand access to English learning materials such as digital libraries, language labs, and internet-based resources.
6. **Strengthen the Curriculum and Materials**:

- Revise the curriculum to better meet academic and communicative needs.
- Develop learning materials that focus more on practical language use, especially in speaking and writing.

7. **Foster Teamwork and Peer Learning**
   - Introduce collaborative tasks and group projects to encourage student interaction in English.
   - Train students in effective peer support and communication strategies.

8. **Build Student Motivation**
- Use motivational strategies to increase student engagement, such as recognition for improvement and achievements.
- Organize competitions, presentations, and language fairs to make learning more engaging and goal-driven.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE
GENERAL INFORMATION
1. **Gender**
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female
2. **Faculty**: _____
3. **Department:** _____

SECTION A: CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS
OBJECTIVE 1: ASSESS ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

1. How would you rate your overall English language proficiency?

   a. Very Good
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor

2. Which English skill is the most difficult for you?
   a. Listening
   b. Speaking
   c. Reading
   d. Writing

3. How often do you use English outside the classroom?
   A. Always
   B. Often
   C. Sometimes
   D. Never

OBJECTIVE 2: EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGLISH CURRICULUM

4. The current English curriculum helps improve my communication skills.
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

5. The materials (books, exercises, etc.) used in English classes are suitable and helpful.
   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Disagree
   d) Strongly Disagree

6. Class activities are effective in helping me understand English.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

7. The time allocated for English language classes is enough.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY CHALLENGES

8. I face difficulty in understanding English language
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

9. The teaching methods used in English classes are effective.

a. Strongly Agree
b. Agree
c. Disagree
d. Strongly Disagree

10. I have access to enough English learning resources (e.g., books, internet, and audio).
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

SECTION B: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS FOR THE TUTORS AND MANAGEMENT
1. How would you rate the current English language proficiency level of foundation year students at University of Bosaso? Do students show improvement in their English language skills over the course of the year? How is this measured?
2. Do you think the current English curriculum meets the learning needs of the students? Are the teaching materials and methods aligned with students' learning styles and levels?
3. What skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) do students tend to struggle with the most? Are there specific external factors (e.g., home environment, prior schooling, socio-economic background) affecting students' language acquisition?
4. What are the major challenges you face when teaching English to foundation year students?
5. What suggestions do you have to improve English language at University of Bosaso?