

Case Study Higher Education

College / Academic Coverage

Personalized English Language Teaching: Curriculum Development & Assessment

BACKGROUND

By far, the most challenging aspect of teaching English as a foreign language lies in the ability of educational institutions to design language programs that fulfill target learning objectives within a relatively limited timeframe.

At a time when the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) boast over 30,000 schools and hundreds of national and international English-medium universities, it is much of a surprise that Education First ranks the MENA region's English proficiency as the lowest in the world (EPI, 2016). Due to their low English proficiency, MENA students struggle yearly with preparatory programs before they can actually take courses related to their majors. Evaluation of current trends and discrepancies between language expectations and outcomes indicates that English teaching curricula (i.e. academic and non-academic- EAP/ EFL/ESP) are plagued with teaching and learning approaches that, at best, provide one-size-fits-all language solutions, falling short on various levels.

For over 13 years, LAU has been providing academic support to an English-medium college in a GCC state. The English Department at LAU has played a pioneering role in assisting the college in the development of personalized English language programs and appropriate academic infrastructure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Client Challenges

- From its first visit to its client college, the LAU English Support Team acknowledged that the task at hand was neither a job to be done remotely nor one to be accomplished by a mere exchange of English teaching knowledge
- In a virtual open-door English language environment, the college students' English proficiency levels were below minimum thresholds set by international standardized English proficiency tests
- Despite the one-year Intensive English Program students were exposed to before choosing a major, they were still unable to bridge their English language proficiency to academic expectations and, consequently, struggled to cope with major courses taught in English
- Students' lack of English proficiency hindered their overall learning progress, and also, to a great extent, jeopardized the use of English as a communication medium in the classroom
- Facing this challenge, the LAU English Support Team devised an intervention plan featuring a roadmap involving not only the English Department, but all of the disciplines at the college
- The transformational consulting edge that LAU has established is testimony to the reality that academic institutions in the MENA region are still struggling with.

Our Solution

- Setting in place guidelines for English language teaching
- Ensuring faculty development through workshops
- Designing new syllabi and teaching methodologies
- Defining proficiency levels

Our Intervention's Impact

- Improved English proficiency among students
- Paved the way for accreditation requirements
- Ensured faculty development
- Enhanced teaching and learning impact

This collaboration has encouraged long-term academic support with the outline of an English language teaching philosophy characteristic of the college.

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IN FOCUS

Key Client Challenge

The college needed urgently to improve its students' English proficiency, to sustain its admission figures, and to simultaneously satisfy national accreditation requirements.

Our Solution

Institutionalized needs in terms of:

- Common perception of the English language teaching culture across disciplines
- Common framework and guidelines for English language teaching among faculty in the English Department
- Common perception of English language learning leading to academic success among students

Curriculum

- Redesigned English course syllabi based on needs
- Instilled faculty syllabus ownership
- Encouraged teaching approaches according to the objectives and outcomes of the revisited syllabi

Faculty Development

- Planned for continuous teacher development
- Facilitated faculty development workshops
- Improved teaching methodologies
- Reviewed methodologies for testing and evaluation

Assessment

- Integrated assessment throughout the teaching cycle
- Structured assessment of the English course sequence
- Monitored the assessment cycle

Continuous Monitoring Support

- Set up bi-yearly support visits to assist in a comprehensive assessment process

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