



An Evaluation of the EFL Curriculum in Vocational Schools to Address the Gaps and Job Market Mismatches in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Abstract

This study evaluates the current English language curriculum taught in public vocational schools across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The research identifies deficiencies and gaps in the English curriculum and examines how well it meets students' needs and modern labor market demands. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through three tools: a questionnaire for students and stakeholders (400 participants), a questionnaire for vocational English teachers (43 participants from 43 public vocational schools), and semi-structured interviews with seven English supervisors and policymakers from the Ministry of Education. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS, whereas qualitative data were analyzed with thematic analysis to elucidate the perceptions of key stakeholders. The findings indicate several weaknesses in the curriculum's content, structure, and practical application. Teachers, students, and policymakers all indicated that the current curriculum lacks sufficient alignment with students' professional needs (particularly regarding speaking, listening, and writing skills, as well as the incorporation of technology) and job market demands. The study advocates for the urgent revision of the curriculum through a needs-based, negotiated syllabus that focuses on job-orientated language skills and practical communication. The findings support educational reform efforts and help vocational education in the KRI respond more effectively to evolving Kurdish market needs.

Keywords: Curriculum Evaluation, Vocational English, Needs Analysis, Job-Oriented Syllabus.

هه ئسه نگاندىكى پرۆگرامى خويندىنى زمانى ئىنگلىزى وه ك زمانىكى بيانى له قوتابخانه پيشه ييه كاندا بو چاره سه ر كردنى كه لىنه كان و نه گونجانى له گه ل بازا رى كار له هه رىمى كوردستانى عىراق

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پوخته:

ئهم توژينه وه يه هه ئسه نگاندىن بو پرۆگرامى خويندىنى ئىستاي زمانى ئىنگلىزى ده كات كه له قوتابخانه پيشه ييه حكوميه كانى سه رانه رى هه رىمى كوردستان- عىراقدا ده خوئىندىت. توژينه وه كه كه مو كورى و بو شاييه كانى نيو پرۆگرامى خويندىنى زمانى ئىنگلىزى ده ستىنشان ده كات و ده كۆلئىته وه له وهى كه تا چه ند پىدا وىستىيه كانى فىرخوازان و داواكارىيه كانى بازا رى كارى نوى دا بىن ده كات. به په ريه وكردنى رىبازى تىكه له، وه له رىگه ي سى ئامرازى كۆكردنه وهى زانىارىيه وه، ده يتاكان كۆكراونه ته وه: راپرسىيه ك بو قوتابىان و لايه نه په يوه ندىداره كان بو (400 به شداربو)، راپرسىيه ك بو مامۆستايانى زمانى ئىنگلىزى پيشه يى (43 به شداربو له 43 قوتابخانه ي پيشه يى حكوميه وه)، و چاوپىكه وتنى نىمچه - كراوه له گه ل 7 سه ره رشتىارى زمانى ئىنگلىزى و دارپژه رانى سياست و بىرارىبه ده ستان له وه زا ره تى پهره رده. زانىارىيه چه ندايه تيه كان له رىگه ي به رنامه ي ئامارى (SPSS) لىكدانه وه و شىكارى وردىان بو كراوه و زانىارىيه چۆنيه تيه كانىش له رىگه ي (شىكردنه وهى ناوه رۆكى بابه تىانه)، شىكارو لىكدانه وه بو تىروانىن و رونكردنه وهى سه رنجى ئه و لايه نه به شداربو، (كاربه ده ستانه ي وه زا ره ت) كراوه.

ده رهنجامه كان ئاماژه به چه ندىن خالى لاواز ده كه ن له ناوه رۆك، پىكه اته، و جىبه جىكردنى ئه و پرۆگرامى خويندىنه دا. مامۆستايان، قوتابىان، و دارپژه رانى سياست هه موىان ئاماژه يان به وه كردوه كه پرۆگرامى ئىستا هاوته رىبى ئه و پىوستىانه نىيه له گه ل پىدا وىستىيه پيشه ييه كانى قوتابىان (به تايبه تى سه باره ت به كارامه ييه كانى قسه كردن، گوئىگرتن و نوسىن، هه روه ها تىكه لكردنى ته كنه لۆژيا) و داواكارىيه كانى بازا رى كاردا گرنگن. توژينه وه كه داواى پىدا چونه وهى به په له ي پرۆگرامى خويندىن ده كات له رىگه ي پشت به ستن به پرۆگرامىكى دانوستانكراوه له سه ر بنه ماى پىدا وىستىيه كانى فىربونى قوتابىانى پيشه يى و په يوه ندىه كى پته و له گه ل بازا رى كارى كورستان. ده رهنجامه كان پشتگىرپيه كى ته وا و له هه و له كانى چاكسازى پهره رده يى له هه رىمى كوردستان ده كات كه يارمه تى قوتابىانى پيشه يى بدات تا بتوانن به شىويه كى باشترو گونجاوتر به شدارى له بازا رى كارى كوردستان دا بكهن.

كليله وشه كان

هه ئسه نگاندىنى پرۆگرامى خويندىن، ئىنگلىزى پيشه يى، شىكارى پىدا وىستىيه كانى فىربونى فىرخوازان، پرۆگرامى خويندىن به ئاراسته ي كار

1. Introduction

English is a highly valued foreign language that impacts many areas, including communication, education, business, and career advancement worldwide and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (henceforth KRI) in particular. EFL teachers, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders in the region firmly support the idea that mastering the language is crucial for getting a job and moving up the corporate ladder (Borg & Capstick, 2024). As such, the importance of a curriculum that can meet the learners' needs is highlighted in this study, with a focus on evaluating and enhancing vocational English curricula. It is crucial to develop and assess English language learning resources in Vocational Schools (henceforth V.S.) that prioritize training for real-world jobs and effective communication. The government in KRI prioritizes education changes that meet the needs of both the global community and the local job market. The emphasis on updating education suggests that providing students with applicable skills, including language competency, is vital for their success (Vernez et al., 2024). This study highlights the need for a more flexible and student-centered approach to teaching English at vocational institutions across the KRI. The study aims to help students become more prepared for their future careers by analyzing current language programs and suggesting a negotiated curriculum that better aligns with the workforce's needs. The English language curriculum (ELC) in Kurdish vocational schools appears to be inadequate and does not meet the learners' needs. Since 2003, Kurdish vocational schools have implemented English teaching curricula and textbooks tailored to specific departments. However, none of these textbooks have used scientific methods to analyze the needs of their students and the local job market; they also have a lack of authenticity while selecting their contents. Based on the current curriculum design theory and practice (Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2011, 2013; Nation & Macalister, 2010; among others), the current curricula of those schools have serious issues in their principles, environment, and needs, which have had a significant effect on classroom practice and learning outcomes. Therefore, based on the problem outlined above, the current study attempts to answer the following questions. 1. What are the students' and the stakeholders' perceptions of the gaps and weaknesses in the current vocational EFL curriculum? 2. To what extent does the current vocational English curriculum meet English teaching and learning goals in vocational schools? 3. What are the views of English supervisors and policymakers regarding curriculum deficiencies and their suggestions for improvement?

2. Literature Review

Curriculum evaluation to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement is crucial to ensure study programs achieve educational goals. As a systematic process, it can undoubtedly yield significant results that can be dynamic for constant change and development. Curriculum evaluation has been conducted through diverse theoretical models, each providing distinct methods for analyzing the quality and efficacy of educational programs. Tyler's (1949) objectives model demonstrated the alignment between wanted learning outcomes and students' real-life performance, whereas Stufflebeam's CIPP model (1971) evaluates the curriculum within four dimensions: Context, Input, Process, and Product. Scriven's (1967) goal-free evaluation model emphasizes verifying the actual impacts of the curriculum regardless of its designed objectives. Stake's (1975) responsive evaluation model has a qualitative aspect by focusing on stakeholders' experiences and perspectives. Nation and Macalister (2010) proposed an innovative model tailored to language curriculum development that involves evaluation as an ongoing process alongside environmental analysis, needs analysis, goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation, and monitoring. Nation and Macalister (2010) claim that effective curriculum design is cyclical or periodic and necessitates extensive needs analysis, environment analysis, and an explicit statement of goals, followed by a selection of content, format, and monitoring systems. These models are expanded by evaluation frameworks, including pre-use, in-use, and post-use evaluation (Ellis, 1997), which facilitates continuous development of syllabus and training. This study adopts Nation and Macalister's model due to its pertinence to English language instruction and its comprehensive, cyclical framework that enables continual modifications based on students and contextual feedback, making it highly suitable for vocational EFL settings in the KRI context. The literature on evaluation and designing language teaching materials is extensive, but no single empirical study has tackled the effectiveness of all EFL curricula in the KRI's vocational schools. In the Kurdish context, there are studies carried out by some scholars which deal with the syllabus in the KRI schools. The most relevant ones are the series of studies by Al-Zeebaree (2024) in which he conducted extensive evaluations of the "Sunrise" series of ELT coursebooks used in the KRI educational system, including "Sunrise 11" (2024), "Sunrise 12" (2023), "Sunrise 10" (2023), "Sunrise 9" (2022), and "Sunrise 7" (2022). Utilizing frameworks such as Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist and McDonough and Shaw's (1993) evaluative tools, the studies focus on evaluating the strengths and

weaknesses of these materials. The results highlight the series' conformity with Communicative Language Teaching principles, effective integration of skills, and suitability for Kurdish learners. However, they also recognize gaps, such as inadequate cultural representation, limited multimedia resources, and outdated content. Al-Zeebarees' studies provide significant recommendations for enhancing the series to better meet the linguistic and cultural needs of Kurdish students by addressing current pedagogical trends. Similarly, two studies have employed the model of CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) to inspect English-language curricula in the KRI. One important link between Ali and Celik's (2020) study and Kawthar et al.'s (2016) research is that both use the CIPP model to judge how well the curriculum works. The pros and cons of English language programs were evaluated in both studies using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, like questionnaires, interviews, and evaluations. Moreover, they both highlighted the value of connecting educational goals with learner requirements and practical, real-world applications. Despite these methodological similarities, the emphasis and the results of the two studies significantly differ. Ali and Celik (2020) evaluated the speaking curriculum in English departments at private universities in Erbil. Their research, including 169 students and 11 teachers, analyzed course goals, learning environments, teaching methodologies, and materials. The findings indicated that the speaking courses met fundamental expectations but required slight improvements in course objectives and materials to enhance accuracy and fluency. The research also emphasized the need for engaging pedagogical approaches that prioritize practical language use over memorization. On the other hand, Kawthar et al. (2016) evaluated the "Sunrise" curriculum for teaching English as a foreign language in academic secondary schools. The study included a larger sample of 2,000 students and 25 English language teachers. The evaluation attempted to determine the curriculum's impact on linguistic proficiency, the authenticity of teaching materials, and how they align with learner needs and real-world applications. Although the curriculum achieved theoretical quality standards, the study identified significant deficiencies in improving students' English proficiency due to insufficient resources and outdated teaching methodologies. In summary, Ali and Celik's research provides recommendations for improving speaking skills at the university level, whereas Muhammad et al.'s findings point to the need for resource augmentation and methodological updates for academic secondary school curricula.

In a related vein, the paper entitled “Assessing the suitability of ‘Sunrise’ Program to the Kurdish Learners of the Seventh Basic Grade in the Schools of Erbil City” by Ghafor and Hassan (2014) studied the suitability of the English program in the MoE “SUNRISE” Program to enhance Kurdish seventh-grade learners' English language skills. The qualitative data were collected through the questionnaires for both participants' groups. The study results show that the "Sunrise" program effectively engages students in language learning, particularly in vocabulary development and speaking. However, the study identified challenges such as inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, and difficulties in teaching grammar and pronunciation. These issues stem from limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and unsuitable teaching conditions. Besides the aforementioned studies that primarily examine preparatory schools' curriculum under the MoE in the KRI, there exists additional academic work concentrating on higher education institutions and university-level contexts. Although these studies are not directly associated with vocational or preparatory curricula, they provide significant insights into curriculum development, educational methodologies, and the perspectives of university participants. In contrast to the studies carried out by the MoE, these studies focus on subjects such as higher education curriculum reform and the experiences of university stakeholders in influencing educational policies. The analysis of these findings reveals correlations between the obstacles encountered in higher education and those in MoE, thus offering a broader understanding of the educational landscape of curriculum development in the Kurdistan context. This distinction suggests the importance of analyzing studies focused on higher education.

One of these studies is by Ahmad (2024) entitled "Evaluating EFL Speaking Materials at Universities in Kurdistan: A Competency-Based Approach" which aimed to evaluate the efficacy of six EFL speaking materials utilized in the English departments of universities in Kurdistan, emphasizing their conformity to the Competency-Based Approach (CBA). Data were collected using a mixed-method approach that included 300 students. The tools employed were a structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a checklist for material analysis, while qualitative data underwent a thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the speaking materials utilized a hybrid methodology combining communicative and competency-based strategies. However, there was limited proof of significant alignment with the basic principles of CBA. Based on the results, the study

proposed improving teacher training programs, modifying speaking materials to align more closely with competency-based ideas.

A significant contribution to the field of curriculum development in higher education about ESP is provided by Ramadhan & Abdulrahman (2023) in the study titled “Investigating ESP Courses at Salahaddin University-Erbil from the Instructors’ Perceptions: A Qualitative Study”. This research is particularly noticeable as it portrays one of the few evaluations of the ESP curriculum in the Kurdistan region, identifying it as a pioneering attempt in this context. This research provided a tailored approach to ESP, highlighting the needs of Kurdish universities and addressing a significant gap in understanding and development of ESP education, in contrast to prior studies that mainly concentrated on general English courses. The study evaluated the implementation and challenges of ESP classes at Salahaddin University; qualitative data were received via semi-structured interviews with seven ESP instructors from non-English departments. The findings revealed that the ESP courses were not aligned with the theoretical frameworks, nor did they match the practical needs of the students.

Following the evaluation of the context and syllabi in Kurdistan, it is valuable to examine similar aspects within the Iraqi context to provide a broader perspective on the same theme. Along the same lines, Alzurfi and Ameen (2023) conducted a study entitled “An Assessment of English Textbook for Vocational Schools, Book One: From the Viewpoints of Teachers to evaluate the appropriateness of the Iraqi vocational syllabus from its instructors’ thoughts”. Quantitative data were collected from 100 Iraqi EFL teachers by administering an adapted quantitative survey which is modified by the Alharby (2017) model. The results suggest that this ESP textbook is inappropriate for the students in the vocational schools in Iraq. The teachers thought that significant issues were found relevant to the textbooks’ objectives, layout, and design. Furthermore, based on the results, the study identified a lack of practical applications, insufficient use of modern technology, and inadequate assessment instruments for evaluating students' proficiency. It is concluded that improvements are necessary, including revising the layout, design, and content, aligning the objectives with learner needs. Previous studies have investigated the Iraqi vocational English textbook and identified several issues, including inadequate objectives, outdated content, and inadequate assessment mechanisms; however, the majority mainly depended on teachers' perspectives. There is still a significant gap in research targeting students' current needs and the relationship between the syllabus and real-world skills.

This study seeks to address that deficiency with a needs analysis that considers both student needs and the vocational context, which improves syllabus design and its relevance.

3. Methodology

The design of this study employs a Sequential Transformative Strategy. This mixed-methods approach aims to address both analytical and intervention aspects of curriculum evaluation. The Sequential Transformative Strategy's dual focus allows for in-depth analysis and empirical testing of the new curriculum, ensuring a theoretically grounded and data-informed approach (Creswell, 2009). This approach aims at measurable improvements in teaching outcomes and student learning experiences. This paper aims to evaluate the existing English language curriculum used in vocational schools within the Kurdistan Region. The objective is to identify the Key short coming of the current curriculum and to assess whether it meets the needs of the learners and aligns with job market demands. In this study, the following key assumptions are proposed and evaluated:1-The current vocational English curriculum inadequately meets students' practical and professional needs.2-There are significant deficiencies in the content and structure of the current curriculum that limit students' development of essential language skills.3-Teachers, students, stakeholders, and policymakers believe that a revised curriculum needs to emphasize more practical, job-oriented English language applications to more effectively prepare learners for their future careers.

3.1. Sample and Procedure

Questionnaires modified for the Kurdish context were sent electronically via professionally designed forms. The first round was sent to approximately 60 participants, who were English teachers and supervisors in vocational schools across the KRI. Of the total, 55.8% were females and 44.2% were males. 75% of participants possessed more than a decade of teaching experience and were aged approximately 30 to 55 years. Snowball sampling was employed to determine this group's sample size. The second survey, also distributed electronically, was sent to about 450 participants who were alumni and students of vocational schools and stakeholders of the KRI labor market. The sample was made up of 59.9% male and 40.1% female participants. Students represented 63.8%, alumni formed 22.2%, and 14% were from the labor market. The participants showed diverse experience levels, with 58.6% carrying 1 to 5 years of experience, and their ages approximated

between 17 and 50 years. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) mention that an ideal research sample size ranges from 30 to 500 participants or should be ten times larger than the number of variables being researched. To ascertain the usability and quality of questionnaires before large-scale application, a pilot study with 15 participants was conducted. Outcomes ensured the face validity of the questionnaires, establishing them as suitable for the objectives of the research. Response in the initial three weeks was 254. Follow-up telephone calls were then used to distribute an additional 200 questionnaires, which summed up to 454 completed responses. All the data collected were input into SPSS for analysis. Higher-order testing was subsequently conducted to test the research hypotheses and explore the underlying relations in the conceptual model. The demographic features of the research participants, including teachers and stakeholders who willingly participated in the two different survey questionnaires, are demonstrated in the following figures.

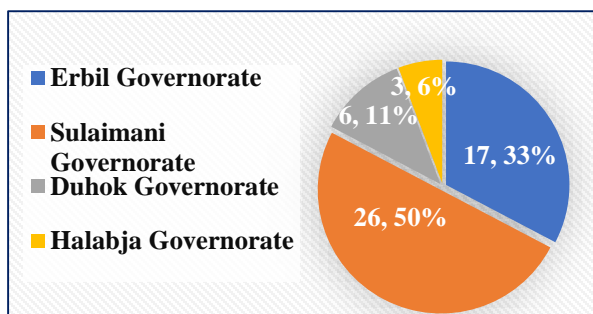


Figure 1: The distribution of participant teachers by governorates of Kurdistan Region

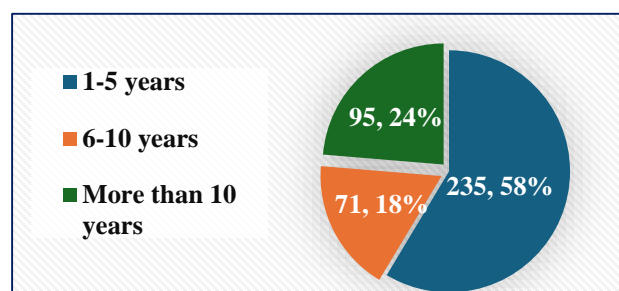


Figure 2: The distribution of participant stakeholders by Experience

As Figure 1 explains, among the contributors of the participant teachers from the four governorates of KRI, 50% (n=26) were from Sulaimani governorate, followed by 32.7% (n=17) from Erbil, 11.5% (n=6) from Duhok, and 5.8% (n=3) from Halabja governorate. The results related to stakeholders' working experience, as shown in Fig.2, reveal that the largest proportion, 58% (n=235), had between one and five years of working experience. Additionally, 24% (n=95) of stakeholders reported having more than ten years of experience, and 18% (n=71) designated they had between six and ten years of experience.

3.2 The Research Instruments

A seven-point Likert scale ranging from one, referred to as strongly disagree, to seven, referred to as strongly agree, was employed in the research. Items for measurement were

adopted from true and validated instruments and were rendered reliable and context-specific for application in the study. The English curriculum was evaluated on some key aspects like situational (environmental) analysis, needs analysis (including learners' needs, gaps, and desires), underlying principles, learning objectives, content organization and sequence, instructional format and presentation, teaching approaches and classroom activities, assessment and evaluation process, and the use of textbooks to foster the development of the four language skills. All these were measured through 30 items.

Interviews are another method for gathering and are one of the techniques for collecting qualitative data. Punch and Oancea (2014) explain their adaptability and importance in acquiring in-depth information and rich data in educational research. Cohen et al. (2007) define a research interview as an interaction between two people, typically initiated by the interviewer, to acquire information relevant to the research and answer research questions. Interviews, unlike everyday conversations, should have explicit goals that the interviewer has planned for (Neuman, 2014). As described by Neuman (2014), interviews are typically classified into some categories: Structured-systematically formalized, fixed questions (quantitative use), semi-structured-directed by themes/questions but providing flexibility. Unstructured (In-depth)-informal, lacking the set questions, is used to investigate in-depth a general area of interest. Unstructured interviews are particularly advantageous for obtaining profound insights into qualitative research. These are also called non-directive interviews, and the discussion is guided by the interviewees' responses rather than a set script. They encourage the participants to talk freely about beliefs, events, and behaviors, often revealing rich and comprehensive data that the researcher may not have anticipated (Neuman, 2014; Saunders et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect significant insights. Several open-ended questions were prearranged, with additional follow-up requests provided as necessary to investigate themes in alignment with Wengraf's(2001) guidelines. Seven participants were interviewed, including 4 policymakers from the MoE and 3 senior supervisors from vocational schools situated in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. Pseudonyms are utilized for the experts following ethical standards, rather than their true identities. All participants had more than two decades of experience, including proficiency in curriculum design, ESP training, and vocational monitoring (Table 6). Attempts were taken to prevent leading questions and to offer clarification when responses expressed ambiguity. Online interviews provide

flexibility and inclusion in asynchronous settings (James & Busher, 2016). The integration of in-person and online interview styles revealed advantages, facilitating more profound and adaptable dialogue. This approach was important to achieving the study's objective: to receive an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the vocational English curriculum's advantages and disadvantages from the perspective of experienced professionals directly involved in the field (James & Busher, 2016). Thematic analysis of their views provides a comprehensive perspective on the gaps and drawbacks of the current vocational English program and guides recommendations for improvement.

Table 6: Summary of Participants' Background and Experience

No. of Interviewee	Affiliation	Duty-specialization	Years of experience	Interview date	Format
1	MoE	Policy maker	More than 30 years	Oct-2024	In person
2	MoE	Policy maker	More than 20 years	Nov-2024	In person
3	MoE	Policy maker	More than 35 years	Nov-2024	In person
4	MoE	Policy maker	More than 35 years	Dec-2024	In person
5	Suleimani	Supervisor	More than 25 years	Dec-2024	Online synchronous
6	Erbil	Supervisor	More than 25 years	Jan-2025	Online Asynchronous
7	Duhok	Supervisor	More than 25 years	Feb-2025	Online-Asynchronous

Triangulation was applied by comparing findings from three sources to cross-check results and strengthen the credibility and validity of the study (Denzin, 1978). As illustrated in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the reliability of the survey instruments. As the results showed, there was very good internal consistency, with a value of (0.981) for the teachers' survey and (0.960) for the stakeholders' survey. Both are far greater than the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, which indicates a high level of reliability. These results show a strong level of intercorrelation between the items and confirm the internal consistency of the indicators for the EFL curriculum.

Table 1: Results of the reliability test

Constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Result
EFL Curriculum (Teachers Survey)	30	0.981	Excellent
EFL Curriculum (Stakeholder Survey)	30	0.960	Excellent

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was also used to conduct discriminant validity, which is based on the relationship between the research variables or the components of the EFL curriculum. This criterion relies greatly on comparing a construct's square root of AVE with other variables' or constructs' squares to all other constructs. According to Chin et al.

(2003), a construct is revealed to achieve discriminant validity if its square root of AVE is greater than any relationship between it and any other construct. Similarly, Hair et al. (2014) emphasize that the relationship matrix would establish that the square root of each construct's AVE is greater than its inter-construct correlations.

Table 2: Results of the discriminant validity test (stakeholders survey)

Fornell-Larcker Criterion								
	<i>EA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>PRI</i>	<i>GOL</i>	<i>CS</i>	<i>FPTM</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>ETS</i>
<i>EA</i>	0.871							
<i>NA</i>	0.811	0.823						
<i>PRI</i>	0.793	0.806	0.893					
<i>GOL</i>	0.722	0.805	0.819	0.899				
<i>CS</i>	0.703	0.772	0.790	0.766	0.811			
<i>FPTM</i>	0.646	0.705	0.678	0.737	0.787	0.892		
<i>MA</i>	0.598	0.672	0.586	0.659	0.637	0.789	0.872	
<i>ETS</i>	0.591	0.584	0.585	0.593	0.629	0.683	0.814	0.898

The discriminant validity test results presented in Tables 2 and 3 below show that the square roots of all variables' AVEs in both stakeholders' and teachers' surveys are larger than their respective correlations with other constructs in the model, thus establishing acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 3: Results of the discriminant validity test (teachers survey)

Fornell-Larcker Criterion								
	<i>EA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>PRI</i>	<i>GOL</i>	<i>CS</i>	<i>FPTM</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>ETS</i>
<i>EA</i>	0.879							
<i>NA</i>	0.824	0.889						
<i>PRI</i>	0.797	0.856	0.887					
<i>GOL</i>	0.749	0.812	0.808	0.895				
<i>CS</i>	0.714	0.799	0.781	0.776	0.906			
<i>FPTM</i>	0.699	0.755	0.675	0.738	0.795	0.873		
<i>MA</i>	0.678	0.694	0.607	0.670	0.698	0.707	0.899	
<i>ETS</i>	0.671	0.593	0.597	0.593	0.616	0.684	0.844	0.908

4 The Results

To verify the first research hypothesis that there are serious content and structure deficits in the current curriculum thereby inhibiting the students from gaining critical language skills, descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, and agreement weights were used along with Chi-square tests of correlation analysis. The findings, as shown in Figure 3 and Table 4, indicate overall agreement among the stakeholders that there are gaps in the curriculum. That is, environmental (situational) analysis, goal setting, and monitoring and evaluation disappeared. These results are authenticated by p-values below 0.05, which confirm the statistical relevance of stakeholders' agreement on these aspects.

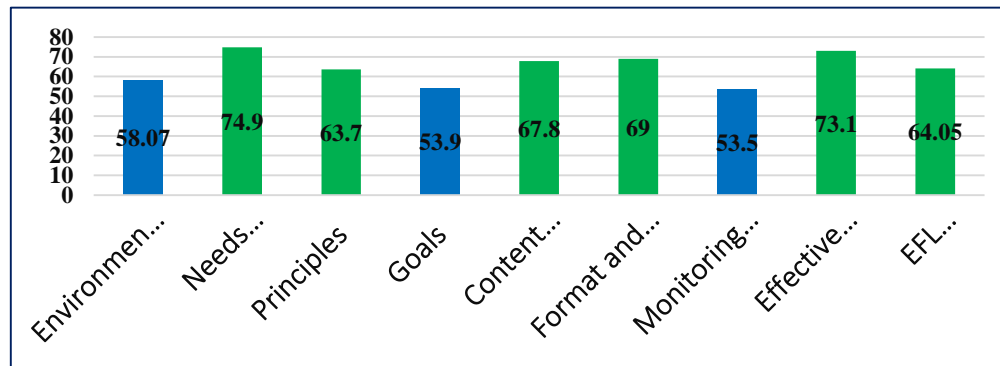


Figure 3: Agreement Percentages on Curriculum Components (Stakeholders Perspective)

These findings suggest that the school environment and facilities available are lacking in supporting students' English learning. Vocational schools as a whole may have fewer resources and capacity for students to apply English in genuine, real-world settings. Besides, the structure and contents of current English language education do not appear to be compatible with the specific demands of various vocational courses. Moreover, the general learning environment does not adequately prepare students with the language skills necessary for success in the employment market. The results in Figure 4 showed that the curriculum is not well prepared to enable students to achieve success in local or international labor markets. The subject matter in the curriculum does not reflect new trends and practices as linked to prospective careers. Also, graduates and stakeholders alike complained that the English curriculum did not adequately prepare them for their employers' activities or higher learning. Therefore, the stakeholders express dissatisfaction with the contributions of English towards the preparation of students for their professional careers. The results also revealed that the current evaluation practices in the curriculum do not sufficiently reflect students' actual professional English use capabilities in the real world. In addition to this, the curriculum does not place any focus on developing essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, interpersonal communication, and workplace communication. These competencies are crucial to thriving in today's dynamic and globalized workforces. Moreover, the curriculum appears not to incorporate or encourage the utilization of modern technology, e.g. educational applications and digital tools that can complement vocational skills through English language learning. This gap denies students exposure to relevant, technology-assisted learning experiences aligned with the evolving demands of the Kurdish community and the overall employment sector.

Table 4: Results of One-Sample Test (Stakeholders Survey)

Constructs	Test Value = 4						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
<i>Environmental Analysis (situational analysis)</i>	.786	400	0.432	.06546	-.0982	.2291	
<i>Needs Analysis (Needs, lacks, and wants)</i>	21.903	400	0.000	1.24688	1.1350	1.3588	
<i>Principles</i>	6.013	400	0.000	.46259	.3113	.6138	
<i>Goals</i>	-2.305	400	0.220	-.22643	-.4196	-.0333	
<i>Content and Sequencing</i>	10.780	400	0.000	.74938	.6127	.8860	
<i>Format and Presentation & Teaching Methods and Activities</i>	11.016	400	0.000	.83042	.6822	.9786	
<i>Monitoring and Assessment</i>	-2.435	400	0.150	-.25312	-.4575	-.0487	
<i>Effective Textbook for the 4 Skills</i>	15.264	400	0.000	1.11721	.9733	1.2611	

In contrast, the findings determine that the stakeholders agreed with the needs analysis, i.e. the students' needs, lacks, and wants, are indeed included in the curriculum of the vocational school. However, while the content and curriculum sequencing were determined to be fairly good, they were neither strong nor highly effective. When asked about the curriculum presentation, organization, teaching, and classroom activities, most of the participants responded neutrally, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This shows that there is no strong impression or likely inconsistency in instruction delivery. More hopefully, though, no real concerns had been advanced about the effectiveness of the textbook in the education of the four principal language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and therefore it is probable that the core learning materials would prove adequate, if not for their application (see Fig. 4 below).

As presented in Table 5, a Chi-square test of independence was used to examine if there is a correlation between the vocational field of study, the current curriculum, and the job market demands by including necessary skills. The test results produced no statistically significant correlation with an asymptotic significance (2-sided) value of (0.135), which is greater than the conventional alpha value of (0.05). This result shows that any lack of satisfaction or inequity in perceived effectiveness identified is likely to be systemic rather than discipline-based, and thus a more universally relevant updating of the curriculum or cross-sectoral restructuring of skill-based content may be necessary.

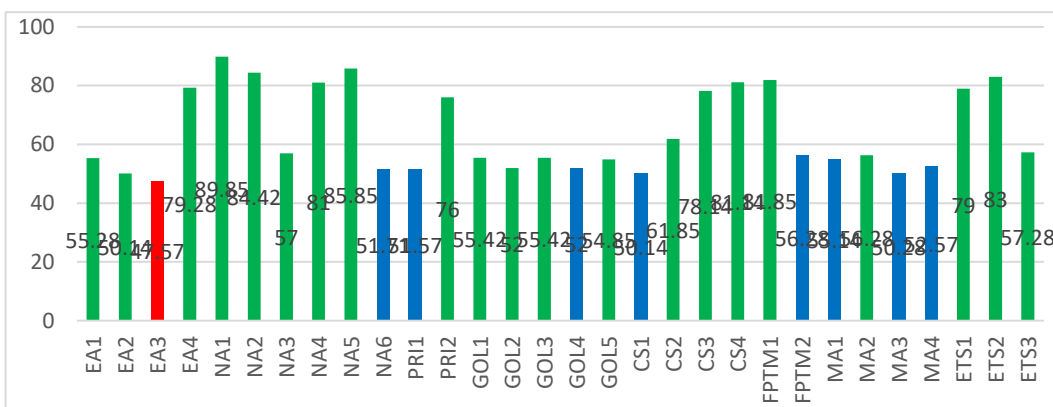


Figure 4: Agreement percentages on survey items related to the curriculum components (stakeholders' perspective)

Based on the above findings, the first research hypothesis (*H1*) is supported: There are significant deficiencies in the content and structure of the current curriculum that limit students' development of essential language skills. Although the Chi-square test did not identify a significant relationship between vocational fields and attitudes towards the curriculum, general responses reflect widespread recognition of shortcomings in coverage of major language competencies. This result highlights the necessity of a thorough curriculum revision focusing on practical language competencies by the academic and professional interests of the students.

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests (Correlation Analysis)

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	302.013 ^a	276	.135
Likelihood Ratio	325.901	276	.021
Linear-by-Linear Association	.958	1	.328
N of Valid Cases	401		

a. 412 cells (98.8%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .14.

As mentioned above, empirical data were also gathered from vocational English teachers and supervisors to test the second research hypothesis, which postulated that the current vocational English curriculum does not satisfactorily cover the professional and practical needs of students.

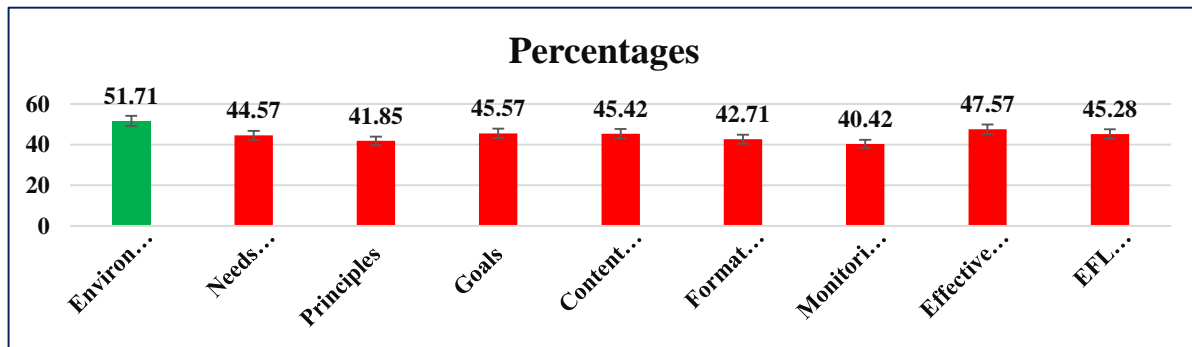


Figure 5: Agreement Percentages on Curriculum Components (English teachers' and supervisors' perspective)

The findings, as illustrated by Figure 5, indicate a strong agreement by the respondents regarding serious gaps in all the key aspects of the current English curriculum. Specifically, voids were observed in environmental (situational) analysis, needs analysis (students' needs, deficiencies, and desires), principles of curriculum design, goal establishment, content determination and ordering, and in the format of presentation, instructional methods and activities, monitoring and evaluation process, and provision of effective textbooks that aid in the development of all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These results highlight the urgent need for a general and systemic rephrasing of the curriculum in a bid to make it more attuned to the real demands and needs of vocational education in actuality.

As indicated in Figure 6, the views of supervisors and English teachers indicate a general trend of lower levels of agreement, with several items being responded to in neutral or undecided terms. This trend would imply that although there is a consensus between stakeholders and English teachers on many elements of the English curriculum, there are some areas that are unclear or controversial. Specifically, responses to questions regarding the adequacy of class periods assigned for conducting activities, how closely the content of textbooks matches the number of weekly lessons stipulated, and whether classroom physical environments (e.g., noise level) are supportive of learning clustered around the undecided/neutral point. Moreover, less than half (45.28%) of the participants agreed that classrooms are well-facilitated with equipment to enable students' active participation in learning activities. It means that despite accepted conceptual formulae, infrastructural and logistical elements can be obstacles to the proper implementation of the curriculum.

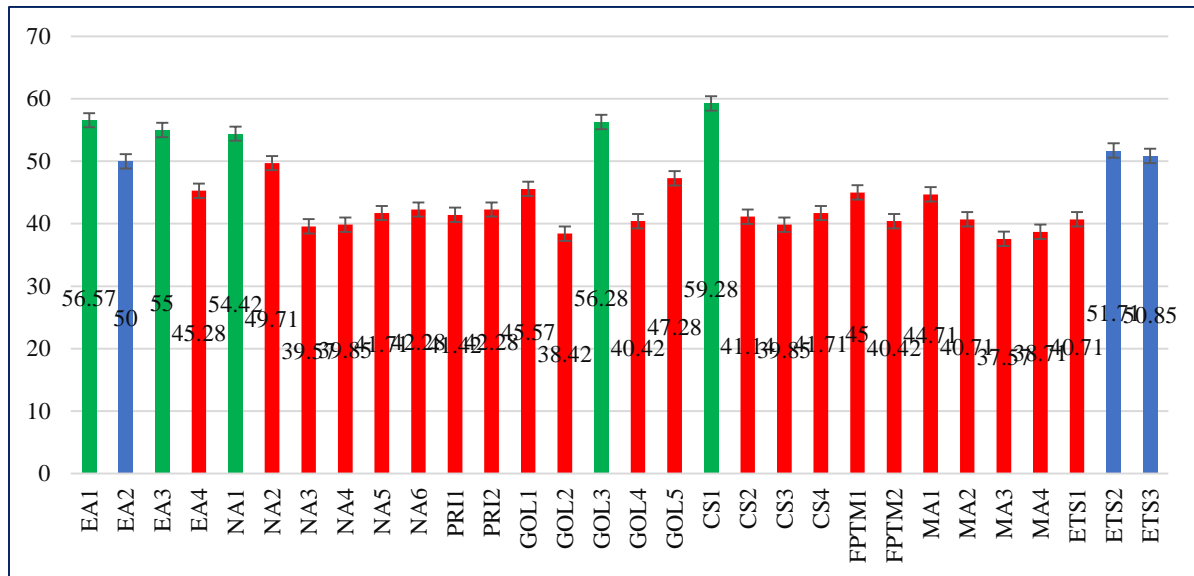


Figure 6: Agreement percentages on survey items related to the curriculum components (English teachers' and supervisors' perspectives)

The review of need, lack, and want items indicates low teacher and supervisor agreement throughout. More specifically, there is a lack of clarity in curriculum objectives, a mismatch between content and objectives, and a perceived inability to meet job market needs or prepare students in Grade 10 for vocational careers and industry certifications. These findings reveal that the current curriculum is insufficient to address the professional and practical requirements of the students in the Kurdish vocational context.

The item comparison related to curriculum principles and goals shows low agreement levels among teachers and supervisors. Issues about the lack of opportunity for practical language use, the mismatch between curriculum content and workplace skills development, and the inability to create a stimulating learning environment were highlighted by the respondents. Additionally, the curriculum is perceived as being outdated, not increasing in level of difficulty, and not preparing students for the workforce. Assessment practices were also seen as not being adequate to measure learning outcomes. These findings point to significant defects in both the structure and intent of the current vocational English curriculum.

In general, the results indicate persistently low interrater agreement between supervisors and teachers on several dimensions of the vocational English curriculum. In terms of content and sequencing, the curriculum is revealed to be lacking in logical arrangement of content, including out-of-date and irrelevant materials that fail to support language

acquisition adequately. Concomitant with was poor agreement in format, presentation, and instructional strategy that signals the curriculum is not aligned with constructivist learning principles and does not support the integration of current technologies into the classroom. Monitoring and evaluation-wise, the textbook has been deemed insufficient in providing diagnostic tests and in building necessary 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Lastly, the provision of the curriculum for developing the four main language competencies listening, speaking, reading, and grammar is seen to be insufficient, with limited opportunities for using the language in authentic contexts. All these findings in total point to severe shortfalls in the planning and implementation of the current curriculum and highlight the imperative for far-reaching reform in relevance, skill development, and modern pedagogy. Based on the above findings, the second research hypothesis (*H2*) is supported that the current vocational English curriculum inadequately meets students' practical and professional needs.

Thematic Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews on the Vocational English Curriculum in the Kurdistan Region

This section presents a qualitative thematic analysis of seven semi-structured interviews. The analysis followed an inductive coding method and aligned to the six-phase framework designed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interview transcripts were first reviewed for familiarization, followed by the producing of initial codes derived from reoccurring patterns in the data. The codes were further categorized into significant themes, which were reviewed and adjusted to ensure internal consistency and distinction within categories. Each concluded theme was clearly defined and exemplified via participant quotations. This thorough and clear process resulted in the identification of seven core themes, guaranteeing methodological clarity and alignment with establishing qualitative research standards and led to the identification of specific theme areas which are classified as follows:

Theme 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current English Language Curriculum

According to the data, the majority of participants expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the current English Language Curriculum (henceforth ELC) implemented in V.S. across the KRI. They strongly emphasized that the curriculum remains antiquated and mostly irrelevant to the evolving recent needs of the job market. While some participants reported

that the curriculum provides basic English language instruction, they claimed that it is not tailored to the specific linguistic needs of each vocational field.

One of the policymakers explained, *"We're still teaching the same materials that were arrived at decades ago, which are mostly conventional and fail to facilitate students communicating effectively in their chosen professions."*

The same viewpoint was shared by other stakeholders, who described the curriculum as extremely general and detached from practical, job-relevant English. The policymakers and supervisors noted that while some vocational vocabulary is included, it lacks meaningful integration into tasks that reflect real-world workplace interactions. In contrast, only a minority of interviewees highlighted limited strengths of the existing curriculum, noting that it provides a foundation on which to learn basic English. Moreover, there was a consensus that students and teachers have been largely marginalized in the curriculum development process.

Theme 2: Insufficient Focus on Language Skills

Based on the information, the common anxiety among the participants consistently was the noticeable, evident lack of emphasis on productive language skills in the current ELC. at V.S. The curriculum incorporates some vocabulary pertinent to students' professional fields. Nonetheless, its primary focus remains on just receptive skills, namely reading, and grammar in language parts, rather than on speaking, listening, and writing, which are essential for job market communication and student employability. A number of policymakers and supervisors underlined that the recent curriculum's design does not promote the acquisition of practical speaking and writing abilities. One interviewee stated: *"The curriculum gives vocabulary teaching, yet the students fail to acquire it and use it in real-world conversations. Speaking, listening and writing skills are either insufficient or too limited to effect any significant change."*

Another participant shared a similar perspective, highlighting that even when productive skills are available in that syllabus, they are frequently treated as extra or optional rather than essential aspects of language learning. This result leads to identify technical terms in writing but struggle to communicate effectively in workplace interactions, job interviews, or professional correspondence. Furthermore, some respondents claimed that large classes and inflexible textbook structure hinder the practical implementation of speaking and writing tasks. Consequently, teachers often resort to grammar-based and

comprehension-oriented lessons to guarantee students pass written exams, inadvertently neglecting oral and written communication skills.

Theme 3: Lack of Stakeholder and Student Involvement in Curriculum Design

The data indicates that most of the participants emphasized the insufficient involvement of teachers and students in the curriculum development process for V.S. in the KRI. Interviewee 1 said, *“Historically, direct and systematic student input has been negligible, if existent, and there is no formal mechanism to integrate student perspectives during curriculum design.”*

Participant 2 confirmed, “No, students have never been offered the opportunity to contribute their opinions or recommend improvements for the curriculum.”

Similarly, Interviewee 4 remarked, *“The development process has become centralized, and students’ feedback or even frontline teachers has been considered rarely.”*

These responses reflect the perception that curriculum development is mainly a top-down process, disconnected from the practical needs and experiences of students and teachers. This exclusion has resulted in outmoded materials and misalignment with the communicative needs of today’s vocational sector. Participants acknowledged the necessity for an inclusive curriculum design that authentically reflects the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders in the KRI context.

Theme 4: Textbook Exercises

A common theme in the interviews was that textbook exercises in the current ELC do not adequately support the development of critical vocational English skills. *“The exercises are lacking any real-life application to what students will face in their jobs and are excessively theoretical”*. Said the 1st interviewee

Similarly, Interviewee 3 stated that exercises do not give enough practice for important communication skills, explaining, *“Exercises mainly revolve around grammar and vocabulary memorization with no practical language use”*. Interviewee 4 pointed out that exercises in the ELC strongly focus on reading and grammar tasks, with minimal opportunities for speaking, listening, and writing practice. *“Students have no opportunity to practise listening, speaking, and writing. Exercises are either too simple or not tailored to the reality of vocational duties,”* they claimed. Despite these drawbacks, a few participants (e.g., Interviewee 5) acknowledged that the activities do provide some basic assistance to the students to become familiar with vocational terminology. However, to

close the gap between classroom learning and using language communicatively in daily life, all the interviewees had a consensus that the exercises needed to be reimagined.

Generally, the participants repeatedly requested exercises that are more authentic and task-based exercises that mimic real-world duties, such as managing customer interactions, writing technical reports, or negotiating work-related conversations in English.

Theme 5: Alignment with the Current Trends

There is a significant gap between the current ELC in V.S. right now and the rapid changes that are shaping today's job market. All interviewees confirmed that this curriculum has not kept pace with modifications in areas such as online collaboration platforms, digital learning, and the recent one, which is artificial intelligence (AI).

Interviewee 1 declared, *"We're still teaching the same extinct books and outdated exercises, whereas modern industries nowadays are digital and rely on technology."*

Similarly, Interviewee 3 confirmed, *"Students have no opportunity to practice practical English, as there's nothing in the curriculum about new trends in education, such as digital tools or online communication"*. All the participants indicated that even the V.S.in KRI failed to include modern workplace practices such as participating in online exams, using digital books, or engaging with AI-based learning applications in their field.

Theme 6: Assessment Methods' Effectiveness

All the interviewees (100%) concurred that the current assessment methods in the V.S. are misaligned with the English language skills demanded in the modern job market. The 1st participant admitted, *"The exams' methods are mainly written, prioritizing grammar and memorization. There's no possibility to assess and test how students apply their English knowledge in a real professional context"*. In a similar remark, Interviewee 3 puts forth:

"Students are taught to pass the exams, but the tests don't measure the four essential skills of language or digital communication skills required for their jobs."

Interviewee 6 emphasized: *"Assessments are old-fashioned. There's no effort to test daily use of the language or job environment scenarios. They do not align with the current usage of English in nowadays"*. These findings underscore that present assessment tools are largely theoretical, neglecting the chance to measure abilities like professional dialogue, digital literacy in English, team communication, listening skills, etc.

Theme 7: One-Size-Fits-All Curriculum vs. Need for Specialization

One of the major issues that has been voiced by most participants relates to the fact that V.S. across the KRI do not currently have specialized English for specific purposes (ESP). The participants believe the current one-size-fits-all approach does not meet the specific language needs within different vocational fields. According to them, students do not receive specialized training which hinders the language proficiency that they need from this general curriculum; Interviewee 1, for instance, stated, *“Instead of a single syllabus that covers general English for all departments, we need modular content that fits the needs of each department.”*

Respondent number 3 made a similar point. *“There’s too much focus on general English proficiency for example, the materials provided to an electrician are not appropriate for a tourism student since they need customer-facing language.”* Almost everyone who took part in this discussion agreed that this uniform approach restricts the students' opportunities to engage with authentic and field-relevant language skills. Many proposed that including authentic language genres, field-specific modules, and real-world scenarios would better prepare students for the challenges they would encounter in a job context. In addition to strengthening their vocabulary, the syllabus would allow them to gain self-confidence in communication skills and mastery of relevant context-specific information for professional success.

Finally, it was revealed through the interviews that the ELC in V.S. across the KRI is outdated and misaligned with the real-world needs of the modern job market. A more Kurdish context-adaptive, specialized, and stakeholder-informed approach is required. According to the participants, such reforms would better prepare students with the real language abilities that employers in today’s diverse job market are looking for, as summarized in Fig.14.

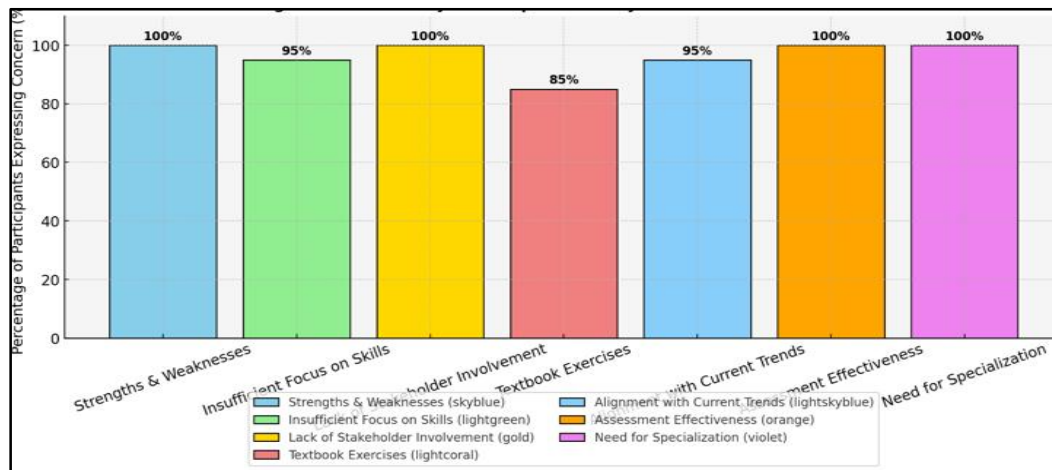


Figure 14 : Summary of perceptions on key themes of the current ELC

3.4 Discussion

This study's evaluation of the English language Curriculum (ELC) in Vocational Schools (V.S.) within KRI identified significant and chronic gaps that impede the harmonization of the curriculum with learners' professional and real-world language needs. The results confirm the previous works' findings, particularly Ali and Celik (2020) and Kawthar et al. (2016), which similarly highlighted deficiencies in KRI secondary-level English programs and a lack of alignment with practical language needs.

The qualitative findings from policymakers' and supervisors' perceptions reinforce these gaps, particularly the curriculum's generic approach and broad nature. This aligns with the conclusions of Al-Zeebaree (2022, 2023, 2024) and Alzurfi & Ameen (2023), who determined that English teaching materials in KRI academic schools are not sufficiently authentic or updated to meet the learners' needs. These parallels highlight the pervasive and systemic nature of the issue. In particular, this study revealed that the curriculum's emphasis is excessively narrow, prioritizing grammar and reading. While neglecting productive and communicative competencies (speaking and writing) with listening, a deficiency was also noted by Ghafor & Hassan (2014) in their evaluation of the Sunrise series program. Moreover, the identified gap of alignment with technological advancements and 21st-century skills, such as problem-solving and communication, reflects the concerns of Vernez et al. (2024), who focused on the urgency of integrating modern job market skills into educational settings.

Additionally, this study's observation of limited stakeholder and student participation in curriculum design aligns with the results from Ramadhan and Abdulrahman (2023), who also focused on the need for bottom-up, context-sensitive approaches in English for

Specific Purposes programs at Kurdistan universities. The consistent focus across studies on the mismatch between curricula and the labor market situation further validates the need for negotiated, field-specific syllabi, as discussed in the broader ESP literature (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Finally, the present study's identification of a deficient assessment system, prioritizing rote memorization over actual performance-based evaluation, reinforces Alzurfi & Ameen's (2023) review of Iraqi vocational English textbooks, which they deemed inadequate for evaluating students' communicative competencies. The combination of insights from past and present research underscores a shared acknowledgment of the curriculum's shortcomings and indicates an urgent need for comprehensive, locally tailored reforms.

Conclusions

From the analysis of empirical data obtained from English teachers with stakeholders and qualitative data from the policy makers' and supervisors' interviews, it is evident that the structure and content of the existing English curriculum are beset by serious weaknesses. The weaknesses can be seen in basic areas such as analysis of the environment, goal setting, needs analysis, and monitoring and evaluation processes. The findings also showed that these areas are either not met or met very superficially, and they take away from the overall coherence and effectiveness of the curriculum. Curriculum content alignment with the real vocational students' needs is highly insufficient. The students are not sufficiently equipped with English language proficiency to be competitive in local or global labor markets. Both the graduates and stakeholders agreed that the curriculum does not apply to actual professional practice, citing its inability to facilitate learning in readiness for the work environment. Moreover, the curriculum remains unconnected with vocational students' careers and everyday life needs. Application in everyday life and activity-based learning limit students' skill development and area of interest. The teachers and supervisors kept reiterating that the curriculum does not facilitate the acquisition of required 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy competencies needed to be effective in the current changing workplace. In addition, learning environments in vocational schools are usually poorly equipped. Physical classroom elements, for example, noise levels and lack of technological equipment are seen to hinder effective language instruction and student involvement. Instructional provision is also hampered by the weakness of the format and design of the curriculum content. The textbooks are not suitable to underpin constructivist pedagogies, where

experiential learning and active knowledge construction are given prominence. English teachers and supervisors who participated in this research also remarked on the poor marketing of new educational technologies, such as digital resources and internet-based materials, which would enhance vocational relevance and student engagement. Furthermore, curriculum evaluation and assessment practices are also weakly developed. Thus, existing tools do not capture students' actual English usage outside the classroom or measure their progress in ways that inform teaching and support learning achievement. Significantly, the research revealed that the problems are systemic rather than being specific to a field. All vocational fields had similar perceptions of the weaknesses in the curriculum, and this means that reforms need to be comprehensive and cross-sectoral.

Recommendations

In light of the conclusions, it is recommended that the new curriculum must be holistically conceived, based on thorough situational and needs analysis, and have well-defined goals running parallel with academic and vocational aims. The priority areas should be to align the curriculum to the requirements of the job market by including English for Specific Purposes (ESP) segments that are sensitive to the occupational pathways of students in the future. This would facilitate ensuring language teaching promotes job readiness and ultimate employability. In addition to the content update, the new curriculum should incorporate 21st-century learning competencies and skills as they relate to critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. Utilization of technology in the classroom should be promoted, and instructional materials and activities designed to allow students to engage in authentic communicative language use. Teacher education programs need to be strengthened to provide for the incorporation of learner-focused pedagogies and effective utilization of instructional technology. Besides, evaluation processes need to be transformed to include diagnostic, formative, and performance-based evaluation that considers vocational settings and natural language use. Empowerment of the material resources and infrastructure of vocational schools is also required. In this regard, computerized classrooms with access to teaching aids can also affect the learning experience and performance of students to a great extent. Finally, putting into place continuous review and assessment mechanisms of the curriculum involving industry players, students, and teachers will be essential to ensuring sustained relevance, responsiveness, and quality. These steps together will correct the shortcomings in the

current curriculum and facilitate a more effective and future-proof vocational English learning system in the area.

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