

An Investigation of the English Department Curriculum in Two Universities in Iraqi Kurdistan

Submitted by

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Abstract

Curriculum reform was one aspect of the reform process in the higher education system that was launched by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in 2009. The old curriculum was believed to be insufficient to provide the graduates with the necessary skills to compete in the job market. This study is an attempt to undertake a detailed investigation of the decision makers', teachers and students' perceptions of the purposes and content of curriculum in the English Language Departments in two universities.

This research has adopted a case study methodology. The data was collected from multiple participants in order to represent a diverse range of voices. Data include face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Heads of the Curriculum Development Directorate, Heads of English Language Departments, members of academic committees, teachers and recent graduates from the English Language Departments in each university, as well as focus group discussions with third year students in each institution. The study also used documentary data such as activity reports, meeting minutes, directives and module descriptors analyse the written curriculum as well as how it is experienced by staff and students.

The findings showed that the plans and policies of the Ministry have not been implemented properly due to a number of problems that have thwarted the attempt to revise the curriculum in these universities – particularly those arising from the lack of clarity around and a shared understanding of the aims and objectives, the tensions between traditional and progressive conceptions of knowledge, the inability to adopt a learner-centred pedagogy, and the deformative impact of assessment procedures which are out of step with attempts to modernise course content. As a result, even the changes applied to the content have not been implemented effectively or coherently because the curriculum has not been considered holistically.

Another finding of the study is that that many teachers and students have been disconnected from all steps of curriculum change as the criteria for teachers' has emphasized length of service. The study also revealed many pragmatic problems, including issues relating to time, resources, and the alignment of priorities and values between different members of staff, and between staff and students.

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Table of Contents

1	Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis	13
1.1	Introduction	13
1.2	Drive for Reform in Higher Education	13
1.3	Statement of the Problem.....	13
1.4	Statement of Purpose	15
1.5	Significance of the Research	15
1.6	Rationale for this Research	17
1.7	Clarification of some Key Terms.....	18
1.7.1	Perception	18
1.7.2	English Language Curriculum	19
1.7.3	English Language Programme	19
1.7.4	Aims.....	19
1.7.5	Goals.....	19
1.7.6	Objectives.....	20
1.8	Organization of the Thesis.....	20
2	Chapter Two: Context of the Study	22
2.1	A Brief Introduction about the KR.....	22
2.2	Education System of KR.....	23
2.3	Higher Education in the KR.....	23
2.3.1	Brief History.....	23
2.3.2	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Reform Process	24
2.3.3	Students' Admission to the Universities	25
2.4	English Language Departments in the Region at a Glance.....	26
2.5	Features of the Two English Language Departments under Research	27
2.5.1	English Language Department at University K	27
2.5.2	English Language Department at University T	28
2.6	Main Similarities and Differences Between the two Departments	30
3	Chapter Three: Literature Review.....	31
3.1	Introduction	31
3.1.1	Conceptualisation of Curriculum.....	31
3.1.2	Definitions of Curriculum	31

3.1.3	The Historical Development of the Meaning of Curriculum	32
3.2	Classifications of Curriculum	35
3.2.1	The Recommended Curriculum.....	35
3.2.2	The Written Curriculum	36
3.2.3	The Supported Curriculum	36
3.2.4	The Taught Curriculum.....	36
3.2.5	Tested Curriculum	36
3.2.6	The Hidden Curriculum	37
3.2.7	The Learned Curriculum	38
3.3	Sources of Curriculum	38
3.4	Components of Curriculum	39
3.4.1	Aims and Objectives of Curriculum	40
3.4.2	Content of Curriculum.....	40
3.4.3	Teaching Methods.....	41
3.4.4	Evaluation of Curriculum.....	41
3.5	Curriculum Approaches (Models)	42
3.5.1	The Product or Behavioural-Objectives Approach.....	42
3.5.2	The Process Model of Curriculum	43
3.5.3	The Cultural-Analysis Model	44
3.5.4	Curriculum as Praxis	45
3.6	The Process of Curriculum Design.....	46
3.7	Beliefs, Values and Ideologies in Course Design	48
3.7.1	Traditional or Discipline-based Approach	49
3.7.2	Performance or System-based Approach	50
3.7.3	Cognitive Approach	52
3.7.4	The Experiential or Personal Relevance Approach	54
3.7.5	The Socially Critical Approach	55
3.7.6	Which Approach should be Employed?	56
3.8	Teachers and Students in Curriculum Decision Making.....	57
3.9	The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives	58
3.9.1	Bloom's Taxonomy	59
3.10	Aims and Objectives	61
3.10.1	Behavioural Objectives.....	62

3.10.2	Non-behavioural Objectives.....	63
3.11	Curriculum Content.....	66
3.12	The Gaps Found in the Literature and Tackled by this Study.....	69
3.13	Research Questions.....	75
4	Chapter Four: Research Methodology.....	76
4.1	Introduction	76
4.2	The Main Paradigms in Educational Research	76
4.3	The Interpretive Paradigm in this Study.....	77
4.4	Research Methodology	79
4.4.1	Case Study in a Nutshell	79
4.4.2	Rationale behind Adopting Case Study	81
4.4.3	Strengths and Weaknesses of Case Study.....	83
4.5	The Issue of Generalisability	85
4.6	The Trustworthiness of the Study	86
4.6.1	Credibility	86
4.6.2	Transferability	88
4.6.3	Dependability	89
4.6.4	Confirmability	89
4.7	Steps Followed from Data Collection to Data Analysis	89
4.7.1	University Selection.....	91
4.7.2	Participant Selection	94
4.7.3	Methods of Data Collection	101
4.7.4	Focus Group and Interview Arrangements	109
4.7.5	Piloting.....	111
4.7.6	Language	112
4.7.7	Data Analyses	113
4.8	Ethical Considerations.....	118
4.8.1	Access and Acceptance	118
4.8.2	Informed Consent.....	119
4.8.3	Anonymity of Participants.....	119
4.8.4	Confidentiality	120
4.8.5	Avoidance of Harm.....	120
4.9	Bracketing.....	121

4.9.1	Research Interests	121
4.9.2	Personal Value System	122
4.9.3	Potential Role Conflict.....	122
4.9.4	Gatekeepers' Interests	122
4.9.5	Feelings.....	123
4.10	Additional Considerations about the Research.....	123
4.11	The Researcher Position.....	123
5	Chapter Five: Findings	125
5.1	Introduction	125
5.2	Theme one: The Process of Curriculum Development	127
5.2.1	Key Issues Relating to Curriculum Development	127
5.2.2	Challenges and Obstacles of Implementing the Process	131
5.2.3	Teachers' and Students' Involvement in Curriculum Development	135
5.2.4	Students' Needs and Expectations.....	140
5.2.5	Splitting the Programme in University T	143
5.3	Theme Two: Perceptions of the Aims and Objectives	144
5.3.1	Setting Aims.....	145
5.3.2	Intended Aims of the Course.....	148
5.3.3	Achievement of the Aims and Objectives	152
5.3.4	Intended Learning Outcomes.....	159
5.4	Theme Three: Perceptions of the Content of the Programmes	163
5.4.1	Setting and Approving the Syllabi	163
5.4.2	Perceptions of the Content and the Changes	170
5.4.3	Perceptions of Optional Modules	182
5.5	Conclusion	185
6	Chapter Six: Discussion.....	187
6.1	Introduction	187
6.2	Research Question 1: What are the Values and Beliefs that Underpin the Curriculum in the two English Language Departments?.....	187
6.2.1	Liberal-Vocational Dichotomy.....	188
6.2.2	Depth and Breadth	189
6.2.3	Broad-Based (Multi-Disciplinary) or Specialized Courses	190
6.2.4	Approaches Followed in Curriculum Design	191

6.2.5	The Model Followed in Curriculum Development	197
6.2.6	Teachers' and Students' Involvement in Curriculum Change	198
6.2.7	Comparison Between the Two Departments.....	201
6.3	Research Question 2: How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the aims and objectives of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?.....	201
6.3.1	Setting Goals and Objectives.....	202
6.3.2	The Decision Makers' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Implicit Current Goals and Objectives of the Course	203
6.3.3	Students' Reasons for Choosing to Study in ELDs.....	206
6.3.4	Students' Perceptions of the Aims and Objectives of the Programme.....	208
6.3.5	Achievement of the Goals and Objectives	210
6.3.6	Challenges to Achievement.....	213
6.3.7	Intended Learning Outcomes (Module Objectives)	214
6.3.8	The Comparison Between the Two Departments.....	217
6.4	Third Research Question: How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the content of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?	217
6.4.1	Modules of the Programme	217
6.4.2	Perceptions about Module Selection.....	219
6.4.3	Approaches to Literature Content	220
6.4.4	Grammar	222
6.4.5	Pronunciation	223
6.4.6	Graduation Research Paper	224
6.4.7	Academic Skills	225
6.4.8	Creative Writing	225
6.4.9	Core and Selective Modules.....	227
6.4.10	The Differences Between the Two Departments.....	228
6.5	Conclusion	229
6.5.1	The Approaches Followed in Curriculum Re/design	229
6.5.2	The Extent of the Achievement of the Intended Plans	230
6.5.3	The Reasons behind not Fully Implementing the Changes	230
6.5.4	The Mismatches and Tensions among Different Sides	231
6.5.5	Students' Perceptions of the Content.....	231
7	Chapter Seven: Conclusion	232
7.1	Overview of the Chapter	232

7.2	Summary of the Findings and Their Implications.....	232
7.3	Contributions of the Study	234
7.3.1	Contextual Contributions	234
7.3.2	Theoretical Contributions	235
7.3.3	Methodological Contributions	239
7.3.4	Contributions to Policy and Practice	240
7.4	Suggestions for Further Research	242
7.5	Personal Reflections.....	244
	Appendices.....	247
	Appendix 1	247
	Appendix 2	248
	Appendix 3	250
	Appendix 4	251
	Appendix 5	256
	Appendix 6	261
	Appendix 7:	268
	Appendix 8:	269
	Appendix 9	276
	Appendix 10	277
	Appendix 11: Timetable of English Department, University T	278
	Appendix 12	279
	Appendix 13	280
	Bibliography	282

List of Tables

Table 2.1: List of State Universities in the KR that offer a BA in English Language..	26
Table 4.1: Action timeline from data collection to presenting the findings.....	90
Table 4.2: Demographic information about the decision makers.	98
Table 4.3: Demographic information about the teachers.	99
Table 4.4: Demographic information about the students.	100
Table 4.5: Methods of Data Collection Corresponding to Research Questions.....	102
Table 5.1: Illustration of the datasets and data sources.	125
Table 5.2: Terminologies used to express the intended learning outcomes.....	160
Table 5.3: Classification of intended learning outcomes.....	161
Table 5.4: Module Classification of the courses.....	165

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Interrelationships among components of curriculum.....39

Diagram 5.1: Themes and categories derived from data analysis.....126

Figure 7.1: A proposed model of curriculum re/design..... 237

List of Abbreviations

CDD: Curriculum Development Directorate

ELD: English Language Department

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

HE: Higher Education

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

KR: Kurdistan Region

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

MoHESR: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

TFK: Translated from Kurdish

1 Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

This short chapter starts with a very brief explanation of the drive for reform in higher education and a brief discussion of the statement of the problem addressed by this study, including a discussion of the context in which it took place. Then, it goes on to explain the underlying purposes of this research and it expresses the reasons for undertaking this study. After that, the significance of the study is discussed and key terms used in the study are clarified. The chapter ends with a brief account of the organization of the thesis. It is followed in chapter 2 by an in-depth discussion of the context of the research.

1.2 Drive for Reform in Higher Education

Higher Education (hereafter HE) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (hereafter KR) has been found to be outdated and only suiting “a country with a closed market” (MoHESR, 2011, p. 10). Therefore, with the advent of neoliberal policies in the region, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (hereafter MoHESR) launched a reform process to bring about radical changes to raise standards in the higher education system (MoHESR, 2011). The context and factors that have driven change are discussed in chapter 2.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

After the demise of the ruling Socialist Ba’th Party in Iraq and the lifting of the economic blockade from 2003, the KR has been opened to the rest of the world more than other parts of Iraq due to its stable security. The English language has become an integral part of any business, and knowing the language has become more than ever a priority for many people. Therefore, a large number of private courses have been and are still offered in the region in addition to more than twenty degree courses in the KR universities.

In the KR, English language is studied from the first year of elementary school to the last year in high school (ages: 6–17) a total of twelve years. Therefore, students study English for twelve years. In terms of quantity they therefore spend a considerable

amount of time studying English. Admission to the public universities follows a centralised plan in which the high school graduates list their preferred college courses (up to 50 choices) on an application form, and enter a competition for places to be allocated (for further detail see section 2.3.3).

One of the drawbacks of this system is that most of the time students cannot study in their favourite field. For example, English language and literature might not be the top choice of all who become students at an English Language Department (ELD hereafter) across the universities. One of the other drawbacks of this system is that students in high school pay more attention to getting high marks than learning. Although effective learning usually results in getting high marks, high marks in such a system can also be the result of attendance at private courses that provide tips and information about the type of questions raised in examinations and the way they should be answered - here the focus is often more on being able to play the system rather than on developing deep learning. Therefore, students generally have a low level of English proficiency when they join an ELD (Sofi-Karim, 2015).

So far, no study has been conducted on the reasons why college students choose to study English in the KR. Likewise, no study has been carried out on the students' perception of English instruction and the English syllabus. In a very small number of studies, the teachers' voices have been heard in studies related to teaching methodology. In a system in which everything is supposed to be for the best of the students, students have had no voice. The rate of change to the curriculum, teaching methodologies and assessment practices seems to be very slow compared to changes in the wider society and the changing needs of the students. For example, from 1991 to 2003, students might have studied English courses primarily in order to become English teachers, while after 2003, due to the economic growth experienced within the KR and consequent availability of many other job opportunities, communicative competence might have been the most appropriate goal for those seeking jobs that require knowledge of the English language.

Therefore, it would be helpful to understand undergraduate students' perceptions of the curriculum with regard to aims and objectives, and the syllabus - both in order to support the practical development of English courses, and to better understand the theoretical alignment of students' perceptions of the curriculum and the intentions of policy-makers.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to examine students' perceptions of the curriculum in two HE institutions, and to compare these to an analysis of the objectives of the departments. This allows me to explore the matches and mismatches between what students face and experience, and what the policy has intended, in addition to identifying the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the curriculum and providing the decision makers with students' assumptions and expectations so that they will be better informed in making future changes and improvements.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

The major purpose of this research is to explore the aims, goals and objectives of the ELD curriculum in two universities in the KR as perceived by the decision makers, teachers and students. Moreover, this study is an attempt to understand the process of curriculum design, change and reform and to explore its complexities in the light of wider changes in the KR. The study attempts to find out the degree of match and mismatch among the decision makers, teachers and students regarding the goals, aims and objectives and content of the curriculum. Also, the study aims to identify the values and beliefs that inform the ELD curriculum in the two universities. The final purpose of this research is to draw distinctions between the two departments in order to explore the degree of similarity and difference as well as its underlying implications.

1.5 Significance of the Research

As mentioned earlier, it has been confirmed that the higher education system is outdated and level of student competence is low compared to global standards. This indicates that a major reform was crucial. There have been formal concerns over the improvement of the higher education system including curriculum (MoHESR, 2010). However, no study has been carried out about actual changes that might take place according to the perspectives and suggestions of teachers and students.

This contrasts with the international trend towards greater participation of teachers and students in curriculum design and institutional decision-making. In many countries, students' voices are increasingly considered when change is proposed or introduced

(Mitra, 2004). Terms such as 'student empowerment', 'student rights' and 'student participation' show this trend.

Understanding the students' perceptions of their experience of the curriculum is essential in the sense that it could inform the future reforms, especially if student participation in curricular changes becomes part of the process. Although a number of potential dangers could be associated with acting on these suggestions, understanding a range of potentially different viewpoints about the enacted curriculum within one department, and the similarities and differences between the two departments involved in the study could inform the decision making process.

The context of this research is a traditionally hierarchical system in which students and teachers have not had their voices heard about curriculum change. Therefore, this study could be an important step in representing the students' perceptions and suggestions so that how the curriculum is experienced by teachers and students is considered in any innovation plan. Since curricular reforms cannot be successful without students' views being taken into consideration (Davie and Galloway, 1996; Ballantyne et al., 2000), the present study can provide the best chance for students to communicate their voices about the English curriculum with no reservations.

The study is therefore significant in providing the first opportunity for students in this particular context to express their views about the curriculum. It is also significant in identifying points of similarity and difference between two departments in different institutions, with the understanding that the act of comparison may help to illuminate each individual context more clearly.

Further significance may be found in the comparison of the students' real experiences with the objectives of the policy makers: exploring the gap between intention and experience may provide insights into how the enacted curriculum plays out in students' lives, developing understanding of how any changes or intended improvements to the curriculum may relate to students' needs.

Although this study will follow a case study methodology, still it can be of use to other universities since "the uniqueness of each individual (case) in certain respects does not entail uniqueness in every respect" (Pring, 2004, p. 37). Therefore, the findings of this research could be helpful to other English Departments in providing insight into how the

curriculum can meet the needs of students and to enable curriculum designers to make better and informed decisions.

1.6 Rationale for this Research

I wanted to undertake this research due to the following reasons:

Firstly, at the policy level, curriculum has been identified as one of the main areas of education that needs to undergo radical changes or improvements (MoHESR, 2010). Some changes have already happened under guidelines and mission statements by the MoHESR, and translated into practice through the Curriculum Development Directorates at the university level and the academic committees at the department level. Up to this point, no study has been conducted which explores the decision makers', teachers' and students' perceptions of curriculum in general, and specifically the aims, goals and content of the English HE curriculum, either in the past or after the reform process. Therefore, on a practical basis, a study in this context would be an innovative one as it attempts to explore the purposes and content of curriculum in two departments so that the findings could inform any future decisions across institutions.

Secondly, in spite of the existence of a number of studies on teaching methods and assessment, there is not even a single study in relation to the content and more specifically to the purposes (aims, goals, and objectives) of the curriculum and the matches or mismatches among the perceptions of different stakeholders (decision makers, teachers and students). Thus, the empirical investigation of these components of curriculum could be an asset in providing a complex, multifaceted understanding of HE English language curricula in the KR.

Thirdly, as a personal motive, due to being a student in one and an assistant lecturer in the other ELD, I had existing concerns regarding the study of some modules at different stages of the program. This issue was the topic of daily discussions among staff and students alike. At that time, the students in general had very limited access to the administration (Head of the ELD or members of academic committee). The responses from some teachers were "these modules are all important", or "you cannot pursue your studies if you do not study these modules", or "These modules are studied in most of the English departments." These responses, at that time, did not address our concerns and felt unsatisfactory. There was a view that the institution were shirking the responsibility

or passing it to someone or something else. As an assistant lecturer, I was aware of the same concerns among students, especially when they had to invest time in accessing knowledge that was only used to pass those modules. Therefore, having a chance to deal with this issue in an academic way through conducting a research was a driving force. This study therefore represents an issue with which I have a personal connection, as well as academic curiosity.

1.7 Clarification of some Key Terms

The following key terms which will be used in this study are clarified.

1.7.1 Perception

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'perceive' means "to apprehend with the mind; to become aware or conscious of" something, and 'perception' is defined as "the process of becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general". Forgas (1966, p. 2) defines perception as "the process by which an organism receives or extracts certain information about the environment". For French (1963), it involves a higher level of cognition that includes the processing the received information. Rock (1984) further elaborated perception as mental constructs gained through the attended-to or unattended-to process of perceiving the world.

From Rock's (1984) descriptions above, it is clear that perceptions may be changeable, according to different experiences and the mediation of them. With respect to studying perceptions, Rock (1984, p. 5) advises that "perceptions are subjective states; therefore, they are not directly observable." The notion of perceptions as subjective states would confirm the suitability of data collection methods such as interviews rather than direct observation.

In summary, the inclusion of 'Perceptions' in the title of the thesis refers to students' and decision makers' understanding of the curriculum as they report it. It is generally not possible to observe these perceptions directly in the classroom situation.

Perception is understood in this study as participants' impressions through their senses combined with their previous cognitive and emotional experiences. It is subjective since recognizing anything or understanding different circumstances is/are affected by personal motivations and cognitive biases, which in turn have an impact on their

responses to the phenomenon. These perceptions will reflect the political context of the institutions, the professional understanding and intentions of designers and teachers and the learning experiences of the students. They are likely to vary between individuals and contexts; indeed individuals may be making sense of both positive and negative influences in articulating these perceptions. Nevertheless, the understanding of curricula lying at the heart of this study will be constructed in light of these varied perspectives.

1.7.2 English Language Curriculum

English language curriculum in this study refers to the following elements: syllabus, teaching methodology, assessment, evaluation, learning environment and facilities.

1.7.3 English Language Programme

The English language programmes being considered are courses that offer BA in English language and literature. Modules that are studied in this course are: the four language skills, introduction to linguistics in the subfields of phonetics, phonology, syntax and semantics, introduction to literary genres such as short story, novel, drama and poetry, and introduction to the theory and practice of translation.

1.7.4 Aims

Kumari and Srivastava (2005, p. 75) define aims as “general statements that provide direction or intent to educational action”. Aims are vital in any curriculum and are normally expressed in fluid terms that reflect value judgements (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). This term in higher education is also referred to as a mission statement (Allen, 1988).

1.7.5 Goals

Goals are also statements of intent with more specific directions than aims. Goals express the intent or the end without referring to the criteria or achievement. Goals usually encompass all the programs in the institution (Allen, 1988). Evelyn (1996, p. 20) states that goals address the question of “What destination do you have in mind for learners as far as a particular program or subject is concerned.” According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), goals are informed by the aims and as a result they inform and guide particular purposes.

1.7.6 Objectives

“Objectives are usually specific statements of educational intention which delineate either general or specific outcomes” (Kumari & Srivastava, 2005, p. 75). They usually refer to what students will learn, or master, or what performance or behavior they will show on the successful completion of the course. The objectives could be expressed as observable behaviors or non-observable conditions.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This introductory chapter consists of a brief discussion of the statement of the problem, the purposes, its significance, the rationale for this study, definition of some of the terms used in the study, followed by a brief account of the organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the significant contextual evidence and information relevant to the area of study. This chapter comprises two sections. The first section provides a brief explanation of the higher education in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the changes that have taken place during the recent years. The second section deals with the status of English language study in the region as well as the departments of the English language and literature in the universities in the region.

Chapter 3 is devoted to investigating the relevant literature. The chapter is organised into four sections; the first section is about the fundamental concept of curriculum; the second section deals with the beliefs, values and ideologies in curriculum design. The third section is a general review on aims and the content of the curriculum; the last section is a review of recent studies of students' perception of the aims and content of curriculum.

Chapter 4 discusses aspects of methodology and the design of this research. The first section is an illustration of the ontological and epistemological position, that is, the underpinning philosophy that shapes the strategy used to answer the research questions. Then, the research methodology and the rationale behind its use are presented. Next, the methods of data collection and the strategies for ensuring the quality of the data are discussed. This chapter ends with the procedures of data analyses.

Chapter 5 presents the findings that are obtained from the data including semi-structured interviews, focus-groups as well as documents from the MoHESR and both

institutions. In the following table, the various datasets are illustrated with reference to the participants' roles and their differing levels of authority in the relevant institutions.

In chapter 6, a number of selected findings are interpreted and brought under discussion in order to address the research questions.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions as the result of major findings, contributions to policy and practice, together with the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

2 Chapter Two: Context of the Study

Designing and implementing any curriculum is a highly context-dependent issue. Therefore, this short chapter provides a reference to the context in which this research is carried out. The aim of this chapter is to present the significant contextual evidence and information relevant to the area of study. The chapter comprises five sections. The first section provides a brief introduction about the KR. The second section is a short explanation of the education system in the KR. The third section provides some factual information regarding higher education in the KR and the reform process by MoHESR, as well as the changes that have taken place during recent years. The fourth section is an introduction to the ELDs in the public universities in the region. The last section provides some background information related to the curriculum in the two departments under study.

2.1 A Brief Introduction about the KR

The uprising of the Kurdish people in almost all of the majority Kurdish populated areas against the ruling Arab Socialist Ba'th Party in Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, resulted in Peshmerga getting full control of most of those areas. However, the Iraqi Government's brutal retaliation plan resulted in Kurdish mass departure of people to the borders of Turkey and Iran. As a result, a humanitarian crisis arose; due to its exposure through media and its being a concern for the international community, the result was the enforcement of a no-fly zone from the 36th Parallel northwards. Consequently, the Iraqi government withdrew its armed forces and administration. The Kurdish parties and movements created a Kurdish Front to run affairs until the first parliamentary elections in those areas resulted in the establishment of the Kurdistan National Assembly (Parliament) and the first cabinet of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (Ala'Aldeen, 2013; Stansfield, 2005). After the overthrow of the Ba'th Party as a result of the Second Gulf War in 2003, in the New Iraqi Constitution, the KR is a recognized federal entity. It is officially governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The region includes the four provinces of Erbil (the capital of the region also known as Hawler), Slemani, Duhok and Halabja. Apart from the majority Kurds, the KR is home to diverse ethnicities of Turkmens, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians and Arabs, parallel with diverse religions of Islam, Christianity, Yezidi and Kakayee (Kelly, 2009). Kurdish is the official

language of the region. The population was estimated to be six million people in 2015 (House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 2015).

2.2 Education System of KR

The formal K–12 Education in the KR comprises the stages of Kindergarten, basic, and preparatory education. The K–12 education system is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Children can go to Kindergarten (pre-school stage) for one year before they join basic education. The basic education includes grades 1–9 (ages: 6–14). This basic education is free and compulsory. The students then participate in a region-wide exam and can only proceed to the next level by the successful completion of basic education; otherwise, the last year (grade 9) must be studied and examined again. At the end of this stage, the pupils will decide on which branch to follow (scientific, humanities, or vocational) in furthering their preparatory studies based on their interests and abilities. The preparatory stage includes grades 10–12 (ages: 15–17). Education at this stage is free of charge, except the private schools that are allowed to charge tuition fees. At the end of this stage, the graduates of the vocational preparatory schools go through a competitive admission process, based on their average marks in grade 12; they can then further their studies in a polytechnic university and get a diploma in a field of their choice. The graduates of the humanities branch could go to a university to get a BA in any field in humanities based on their grade 12 average. The graduates of the scientific branch, based on their average in grade 12, can decide to study in either the scientific or humanities field and get a BSc or BA. Due to this privilege that the graduates of scientific branches have been granted, there is an assumed hierarchy of the fields with science at the top and vocational courses at the bottom.

2.3 Higher Education in the KR

2.3.1 A Brief History

Higher Education was introduced to the region with the establishment of Slemani University in 1968. In 1981 this university was moved to Erbil and was named as Salahaddin University- Erbil. After that, in 1992, the universities of Slemani and Duhok were established. The MoHESR was later established in 2006. At present, fourteen out of sixteen public universities in the region are directly under the MoHESR. The ministry

is responsible for formulating and developing special strategies and plans for higher education and scientific research in the region.

2.3.2 Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Reform Process

Acknowledging that the higher education in the KR had inherited the non-operational hierarchical administrative system from Iraq, in which the process of decision-making followed a centralised system that has minimised the role of the staff and students, the MoHESR initiated a reform process in 2009. For this purpose, the 2009-2010 academic year served as a 'review period' and 2010-2011 was set to be the year to launch reform as well as some new pilot initiatives (MoHESR, 2011). The reform initiative included the areas of teaching quality assurance, curriculum development, continuous academic development programme, revitalising research, investing in human resources, the organisational structure, the accreditation system, and the student admission system (MoHESR, 2011).

The main purposes of the reform with regard to curriculum development were transforming students from mere rote learners into thinkers, familiarising them with information technology, developing research skills, and getting proficiency in a second language (MoHESR, 2011). More specifically, the reform focused on training students in critical thinking and debates in order to build prominent character rather than afflicting students with the memorisation of extensive information.

In 2010, as another aspect of the reform process, all departments underwent evaluation by an external assessor with the departments selecting modules for evaluation. In this process, the external assessor reports on the module course-guide in terms of the module objectives, content, examination questions, and scoring process. The weak and strong points are identified and the module leader or the instructor is informed of the evaluation. Students have also been given the right to give feedback to the teachers in all modules. This feedback is only related to the way the modules are taught. Therefore, students only express their attitudes about the teaching methodology while the other areas such as the module objectives, content and assessment do not receive any feedback from students. The feedback forms have been managed by the MoHESR.

2.3.3 Students' Admission to the Universities

The students' enrolment in the universities in the region is implemented by the Central Admission Office of the MoHESR. At the end of their final year of high school, students take part in a national exam (equivalent to the UK A level) in all their final year modules according to their high school study branch in science, humanities or vocational studies. They need to pass these exams either at the first or second sitting to get the high school certificate. In addition to that, the National Exam Score determines which departments they could join for their undergraduate studies. The students are provided with a guide book. They are asked to fill in an online admission form and identify their preferred departments (up to 50 choices) mainly based on the admissions of the previous year to give students a better idea of which departments are more likely to be compatible with the students' National Exam Score. Therefore, the students' choice is limited to those departments or faculties that have a compatible requirement to students' scores. According to each department's plan in supplying the places and the demand by students, the Central Admissions Office releases the names of the students and the departments that students can join. Students have the right to apply to change their major only to departments with a lower score requirement. Some departments have additional requirements such as a certain grade in a specific module relevant to the specification of the department. For example, ELDs require the applicants to have more than 65% in the national English exam.

Within the aforementioned reform process, a parallel system of admission was introduced. This was to allocate some places on each course for privately funded students to both give a second chance to some students who had not been able to gain a university place for any reason and to provide some additional income to the universities so that they can enhance the quality of their courses.

The MoHESR (2010) raised concerns with this system and stated that apart from the students' grade, the admissions should rely on students' abilities, capacities, interests and choices. To this end, the ministry has started a system, with the exception of the fields of medicine, pharmacy and engineering, called direct application to university, according to which the students can directly apply to the department of their choice, and

based on some criteria set by each department they try to win one of a certain number of places allocated for the implementation of this system.

2.4 English Language Departments in the Region at a Glance

The establishment of the first ELD in the region dates back to 1985 at the faculty of Arts at Salahaddin University. Ten universities now offer programs in English language and literature and/or EFL under the faculties or colleges of Basic Education, Education for Humanities, Languages and Arts or Social Sciences and Humanities in different towns and cities in the Region as shown in the following table.

ELDs at undergraduate level offer BA degrees in English Language and Literature at the colleges of Arts and Humanities and in Teaching English Language (to qualify students to teach elementary and secondary school level students) at the colleges or faculties of Basic Education and Education, respectively.

Table 2.1 List of State Universities in the KR that offer a BA in English Language

	University	Faculty/ College/ School
1	Salahaddin-Erbil	College of Education
		College of Basic Education
		College of Languages
2	Slemani	Faculty of Basic Education- School of Humanities
		Faculty of Humanities- School of Languages
3	Duhok	Faculty of Education – School of Basic Education
		Faculty of Humanities
		Faculty of Science and Education – School of Basic Education – Akre Campus
4	Koya	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
5	Soran	Faculty of Arts
6	Zakho	Faculty of Humanities – School of Languages
7	Garmian	Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Languages
		Faculty of Education – School of languages
8	Raparin	Faculty of Education, Qaladiza Campus – School of Languages
9	Halabja	Faculty of Education and Humanities, School of Basic Education
10	Charmo	College of Education

Following is a more detailed account of the two departments involved in the study in terms of objectives, content of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. The information given about these departments might also resonate with other departments in the region that offer undergraduate courses in English language and literature.

2.5 Features of the Two English Language Departments under Research

In the following the two departments, one in University K (one of the oldest and biggest universities in the KR) and the other one in University T (one of the recently opened and rather smaller universities), are described in terms of their curriculum.

2.5.1 English Language Department at University K

The ELD at the College of Languages at University K used to belong to the College of Arts from the establishment of the department until 2004. Since then, the language departments have formed a separate college. The re-structuring of the departments and faculties was merely an organisational and administrative change and it did not result in any change or development in the curricula. The first instances of change and reform to the curriculum appeared in 2008, when the university initiated certain changes through a programme sponsored by the Regional Reconstruction Team at the US Embassy in Baghdad (A report Issued by Curriculum Development Directorate of University K, 2015). In this project, ELDs were helped by Appalachian State University to implement certain changes. For this reason, the Directorate of Curriculum Development was established in the university in 2006.

2.5.1.1 The content of the curriculum

The content of the ELD curriculum has been the focal point of the changes in the course of the developments. The changes have been at the level of adding or removing a module in the programme or the shift of some modules to a different stage in the whole programme. A closer look at the list of modules in academic year 1998-1999 (see appendix 7) and 2016-2017 shows that the changes include the introduction of the modules of Academic Debate in year one and the shift of the modules of French Language I and II from year one and year two to year two and year three.

2.5.1.2 Pedagogy

Across the KR, pedagogy and the performance of the teaching staff have been referred to as areas in need of improvement (Ahmad, 2014). All the universities run a six-month mandatory teacher training course for all those who join the teaching staff in all departments. These courses are unified for all the participants regardless of their majors and the specialties of the various departments. In addition to this, participation is only required prior to those beginning their teaching career. Thus, teachers who have been in teaching appointments for more than 10 years are not required to participate in future courses. The universities do run workshops on pedagogical methods to familiarise teachers with modern methods of teaching; however, these workshops are unified for all fields and specialties and only some teachers participate. In conclusion, although there are attempts to adopt student-centered methods through opening training courses and workshops for teachers, the traditional lecturing system is still the dominant method of teaching.

2.5.1.3 Assessment

The assessment system mainly follows written examinations. The whole 100 marks for any module are divided into 40% during-the-year assessment and 60% end-of-the-year final examinations. The former is further divided into two activities worth 20% each. The first 20% would be allocated to pop-up quizzes and monthly examinations, while the second is allocated to activities such as giving seminars, presentations or reports. The final exam is a three-hour written exam. The passing mark is 50 and the students have the right to retake the exam if they do not pass the first time. This system of assessment is applied to all modules except those modules that are more practical. For instance, in the modules of IT and pronunciation in year one, 20% of the mark is for oral exams or practical performance tests.

2.5.2 English Language Department at University T

The ELD at University T was first established in 2008 as a campus of University K but has since become an independent University, established in 2009. In 2010, the College of Languages and the Humanity Departments of the College of Education formed the Faculty of Arts. The ELD shared the same curriculum with the ELD in University K until

2012, when, through the early stages of an accreditation process by a UK university some changes were initiated in the curriculum.

2.5.2.1 The Aims of the Department

The establishment of the ELD was a response to the high demand for this major as well as the government plan to further develop some other towns in the region. In reality, this department was a copy and paste of the one in University K. This similarity, unanimity and uniformity was supported in the ministry under the pretext of control or following set rules. However, the issue of university independence has always been a matter of discussion. The 2012 ministerial reforms made some changes possible. However, this change did not result in a clear formulation of new, independent objectives for the department. These reforms did not result in a consolidated and structured curriculum, but rather made scattered changes (Ahmad, 2014). In the academic year 2015-2016 the branches of linguistics and literature were separated without any formal reason or justification being given.

2.5.2.2 Content

Within the process of curriculum reform, the changes were mostly implemented at the level of the content of the ELD curriculum. The changes include adding or removing a module in the programme or the shift of some modules to a different stage in the whole programme. After the division of the course into two courses of linguistics and literature, based on students' choice after passing the second year, year three and four in the Linguistics pathway is free of literature related modules and vice versa. Instead, in each course a number of new modules have been introduced; for example Language and Identity, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, and Language Acquisition, which were not in the programme originally, were added to the Linguistics course.

2.5.2.3 Pedagogy

Apart from a few modules, the teaching methods mainly follow the traditional lecturing system. There are also attempts to adopt student centered methods. Each year a number of training courses and workshops are held for teachers at the level of the department and colleges. However factors such as a lack of facilities, a lack of well-

trained staff, and a large number of students in the classes hinder modern teaching, as will be discussed in the findings.

2.5.2.4 Assessment

The assessment system mainly depends on written examinations, and is nearly identical to that of institution K. The whole 100 marks for any module are divided into 50% during-the-year assessment and 50% end-of-the-year final examinations. The former is further divided into three activities. Mostly, 30% would be allocated to pop-up quizzes and monthly examinations and the other 20% is allocated to activities such as seminars, presentations or reports and essays. The final exam is a three-hour written exam. The passing mark is 50 and the students have the right to retake the exam if they do not pass the first time. This system of assessment is applied to all modules except those modules that are fully practical or oral. For example, in a module such as Creative Writing, the assessment scheme follows a different pattern. The activities and marking include homework completion, class exam, and coursework comprising a portfolio of written, creative work completed and submitted at the end of the year carrying 10, 20 and 70 marks, respectively.

2.6 Main Similarities and Differences Between the two Departments

With reference to the content of the curriculum, both departments have made some changes in the modules. However, the ELD at University T has divided the program into two branches of linguistics and literature, and consequently has added or removed some modules from year three and four of the program. Regarding the pedagogy, in spite of some efforts, traditional lecturing is the main method of the teaching in both departments. With regard to assessment, except for a very few modules, the written exams and end of the year summative exams comprise the main method of assessment in both departments.

3 Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to investigating the relevant concepts and background information derived from previous studies. The first five sections deal with a number of theoretical issues related to curriculum such as conceptualization of curriculum, classifications, sources, components of, and approaches to curriculum. The next five sections shed light on the processes of curriculum design, the beliefs, values and ideologies in course design, the role of teachers' and students' in curriculum decision making, Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives, and a general review of the aims and objectives of curriculum. The next section addresses the content of curriculum in relatively more detail. The following section is a review of relevant empirical literature and the existing gap addressed by this study. The chapter ends with the research questions.

3.1.1 Conceptualisation of Curriculum

This section deals with some issues related to the definitions of curriculum. It also points out the main historical developments in the understanding of curriculum and thus changes in the meaning of the term. Then, it explains the different ways in which the concept of curriculum has been classified, and the different elements of the curriculum which are identified by education experts, such as the aims, content, teaching methods and aids, and evaluation. The section ends with the presentation of the main models of curriculum.

3.1.2 Definitions of Curriculum

According to Matthews (1989), definitions have limited value since they mainly point to something without describing its important features. Different scholars define curriculum in different ways in different contexts (Lawton, 1983). They cover a variety of areas of importance through either limiting what it implies or attributing new meanings to it. Marsh and Willis (1995) have exposed more than 120 definitions in the literature. This variety

and abundance might be attributed to a number of factors including the varied state, educational and academic contexts in which researchers and educators operate, and changes in society, educational policy and educational institutions.

The definitions have been sometimes classified according to the implications, nature and philosophical approaches to education that they carry. They can be regarded as traditional or modern definitions. They can also be considered as prescriptive or descriptive as they either refer to what ought to happen in “the form of a plan, an intended program, or some kind of expert opinion” (Ellis, 2004, p. 5), or to a description of real occurrences: “not merely in terms of how things ought to be but how things are in real classrooms” (p. 5). Using a classification based on different philosophical approaches, a distinction can be made between five basic types of definition. The first type is derived from Tylor’s rational-linear approach (Wraga, 2017). Here, curriculum involves the selection of objectives and learning experiences, their organization and the evaluation of their effectiveness. In the second approach to the concept, which is based on Dewey’s (1902, as cited in Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead & Boschee, 2016) philosophy of education, curriculum is more broadly defined in terms of experience. According to the third approach, curriculum is characterized as a systems approach which focuses on examining school systems and how they interrelate with each other. The fourth approach describes curriculum from a theoretical perspective “as a field of study with its own foundations, knowledge domains, research principles and specialists” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 27). Within the fifth approach curriculum is described as content including “facts and concepts of particular subject areas” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 27). Therefore, it seems difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of the term curriculum because it is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon.

3.1.3 The Historical Development of the Meaning of Curriculum

At various times, special meanings have been associated with the term 'curriculum'. The Latin term 'curriculum', which means a 'racing course', came to mean a 'course of study'. At first it commonly referred to a teaching syllabus but increasingly developed to include

various educational elements such as class activities, homework, assessments and examinations, and extracurricular activities, and then to include the wider experiences and achievements of students. Moreover, it has also expanded to include the wider concept of how we transfer the acquired part of our nature to the next generation in order to maintain a desired culture (Ross, 2000). In what follows, the main sequential advances in the meaning of curriculum are discussed.

In earlier times the concept of curriculum was used to mean the syllabus. Taba (1962), elaborated on this by referring to the concept as meaning aims, content and methods. In a similar way, McDonald (1965) considered 'curriculum' to be a plan for action, while, through a slightly different interpretation, Kerr (1968, p. 16) defined curriculum as “all of the learning which is planned or guided by the school, whether it is carried out in groups or individually, inside or outside the school.” In comparison, Johnson (1967) believed that a curriculum might comprise organised chains of planned learning outcomes. Musgrove (1968) introduced the notion of experience to this domain: he viewed curriculum as a synthetic action where experience was planned. According to this view, curriculum's fundamental purpose is to make sure that students receive unified, comprehensive learning experiences provided by professional teachers who ensure that the learning contributes to the child's academic and personal development.

The meaning ascribed to curriculum in the eighties saw a shift to including both the formal and informal programs that “promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils” (Department of Education and Science, 1985 cited in Ross, 2000, p. 9). The meaning of curriculum continued to broaden during the 1990s. Blenkin, Edwards and Kelly (1992) identified three quite distinctive concepts which are all rooted in the practice of teachers and in theoretical perspectives: curriculum is considered as a body of knowledge (subject syllabus), an account of the clearly phased shorter-term objectives and a statement of procedural principles. Moreover, Goodson (1994, p. 111) describes curriculum “as a multifaceted concept, constructed, negotiated and renegotiated at a variety of levels and in a variety of arenas” indicates further expansion of the concept.

Curriculum has been an area of considerable discussion towards the end of the twentieth century, as the usage of the term and the aspects of education associated with it have continued to expand. According to Marsh (1997, p. 3), in this century the main concerns related to the concept of the curriculum include “citizenship demand, personal development priorities and vocational training pressures” (Ross, 2000, p. 9), in addition to other pressures, including theoretical management approaches and “practical, school focused approaches to curriculum and curriculum development” (p. 9). In this century, the curriculum is a very broad notion which stresses that “anything that schools do that affects pupils' learning, whether through deliberate planning and organization, unwitting encouragement, or hidden and unrealized assumptions, can all be properly seen as elements of the school curriculum”. Here we see a move away from the concept of the curriculum as a wholly planned entity to something which includes what happens in the reality of student experience, including tacit, unplanned, uncontrolled and unforeseen elements.

According to Ross (2000), the issue of curriculum change in England has been a matter of conflict due to disagreement about the purpose of education, its expected achievements, the kind of society and culture that is needed for the future generations, and these have been the foundations for a series of attempts to define the curriculum that can achieve these purposes. Therefore, education in the 21st century is sometimes conceptualized as a means of replicating culture and communicating the non-genetic part of nature to next generations.

In conclusion, the meaning of curriculum has altered from the Latin word curriculum that meant a course to be run, developing into a course of study, then to include methods of instruction, and further to include all elements of student experience, both explicit and tacit. Most recently, it has been seen as a method of generating a culture for the next generation, but also transferring the cultural values of our own. Thus, the concept of curriculum covers a wide range of issues such as syllabus, formal and informal methods of its delivery, students' obligations, assessments, extra-curricular activities and students' experiences and achievements. Moreover, the concept has also been viewed

in a broad sense as a medium for enculturing the future generation by spreading the non-genetic part of the nature.

3.2 Classifications of Curriculum

Goodlad, Frances and Tye (1979 as cited in Glatthorn et al., 2016) were reportedly the first to distinguish five different forms of curriculum planning, namely: the ideological curriculum which is interpreted by specialists; the formal curriculum which is officially accepted by the authorities; the sanctioned curriculum that embodies the interests of the society; the perceived curriculum—what it is thought to be as perceived by teachers, students, parents; the operational curriculum - what actually happens in the teaching and learning environment; and finally the experiential curriculum—what students experience on the ground. This breakdown highlights the distinctions between what is intended and what is understood (by different stakeholders), what is delivered, and what is experienced. Glatthorn et al (2016) divided the curriculum into two broader types: the intentional and the hidden curriculum. These broad terms in turn are further subdivided into some more specific classes. The first includes the notions of the recommended (intended), the written, the supported, the taught and the tested curricula, and the latter is mainly associated with the learned curriculum along with the hidden curriculum. These notions have been used with rather diverse meanings. In what follows, a brief explanation of each of the above mentioned concepts is given.

3.2.1 The Recommended Curriculum

As the name indicates, this is a curriculum which is suggested by the individual specialists, professional institutions, and reform directives, considering the needs of policymakers. It is similar to Goodlad's (1984 cited in Glatthorn et al., 2016) ideological curriculum which identifies the abilities and conceptions that need to be stressed. It is normally expressed at a relatively general level.

3.2.2 The Written Curriculum

The written, or formal, curriculum is mainly premeditated to ensure the accomplishment of educational aims. Generally, it is more explicit and broader than the recommended curriculum in terms of its rationale, the general goals, the specific objectives and sequence of objectives as well as learning activities. The level of detail to be included has been questioned: Glatthorn et al. (2016) suggest that the written curriculum should only contain a brief account of “a scope-and-sequence chart, a review of relevant research, a list of course objectives and the materials to be used” (p. 9). Its main role is supposed to be mediating between the highest standards of the recommended curriculum and the realities of the classroom. It can also play a vital role in standardizing and centralizing the curriculum.

3.2.3 The Supported Curriculum

This type of curriculum incorporates the resources needed to support the delivery of the curriculum, such as the time specified for any module, personnel, and the textbooks and other learning materials needed (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

3.2.4 The Taught Curriculum

This is the conveyed curriculum, a curriculum that can be observed in action as the teaching and learning environment (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

3.2.5 Tested Curriculum

This consists of that part of the curriculum over which students are tested. Sometimes it is emphasized at the expense of the rest of the curriculum because the tests are used as a measure to rate the educational institutions. The tested curriculum then becomes the measure of the school's success. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the test become a priority instead of those of the general curriculum standards (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

3.2.6 The Hidden Curriculum

As a concept, this expresses the idea that, apart from simply receiving officially-sanctioned knowledge, students face some challenges inside the educational institution which are linked to things that take place outside (Hatch, 2009). Therefore, in addition to the intentional curriculum, students learn from other sources. Consequently, this learning might positively or negatively affect students' development.

The concept of the hidden curriculum refers to as the lessons which are communicated informally and not deliberately in the premises of school. A hidden curriculum is said to be a side effect of education, where lessons are taught with inherent implicit ideological values communicated to students but not openly discussed: These may include values relating to social norms, beliefs, gender, social class, politics or stereotypes that are given as an example to the students about things that are in the environment (Giroux & Penna, 1979). These things which are not taught as part of the intentional curriculum are usually learned from other sources such as friends and other gatherings in the environmental setting, for example in the break times which are provided to students. The concept of the hidden curriculum is a critique of the earlier notions discussed above that a culture can be 'transmitted' simply to students, and the unforeseen elements that are outside the planned curriculum might complicate how students respond (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

One aspect of this hidden curriculum is the social curriculum which is taught indirectly in many schools. According to Hurni (2001), break times in secondary schools develop inherent values in pupils by engaging them in physical activities, exercises, playing in groups etc, thus enculturating social values that some might say are a prerequisite for their personal development. In contrast, the relatively recent concept of 'citizenship education' attempts to construct some formerly 'hidden' aspects of curriculum more openly, and this can sometimes even entail open discussion with students about how break times provide them opportunities to learn additional social and citizenship skills (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

3.2.7 The Learned Curriculum

This denotes all the variations or modifications in students' values, perceptions, and behaviour that happen due to being exposed to the intentional and hidden curriculum (Glatthorn et al., 2016).

3.3 Sources of Curriculum

Identifying the source of a curriculum can be complex – and research has variously considered the learner, the subject and the environment. According to Tyler's scheme (1949), curriculum-makers consider the student, the society, and the subject as sources. Fink (2003) places a stronger emphasis on context, asserting that the environment shapes different perceptions and beliefs which develop into ideas and questions about how to foster the integrated understanding of a discipline. These questions also include consideration of what knowledge and which skills are significant or necessary in the curriculum.

Saylor et al (1981) presented a more detailed account of the sources that curriculum planners need to take into consideration, including the learners' purposes, interests, needs, and abilities. These, they assert, should be examined in order to come up with sensible objectives and desirable values and behaviors in a given social context. As part of this, they encourage curriculum planners to examine current life outside the school and to consider professional recommendations as to the necessary knowledge to include. The professional aspect in this scenario would be the skills that are needed in the professional lives of the students, which are more specific to their choice of workplace or industry. Similarly, Orlosky and Smith (1978) emphasised both the students and the society as the main sources of the curriculum. To better study society, they recommended that aspects of well-being, domestic life, recreation, vocation, religion and civil affairs be studied in relation to society.

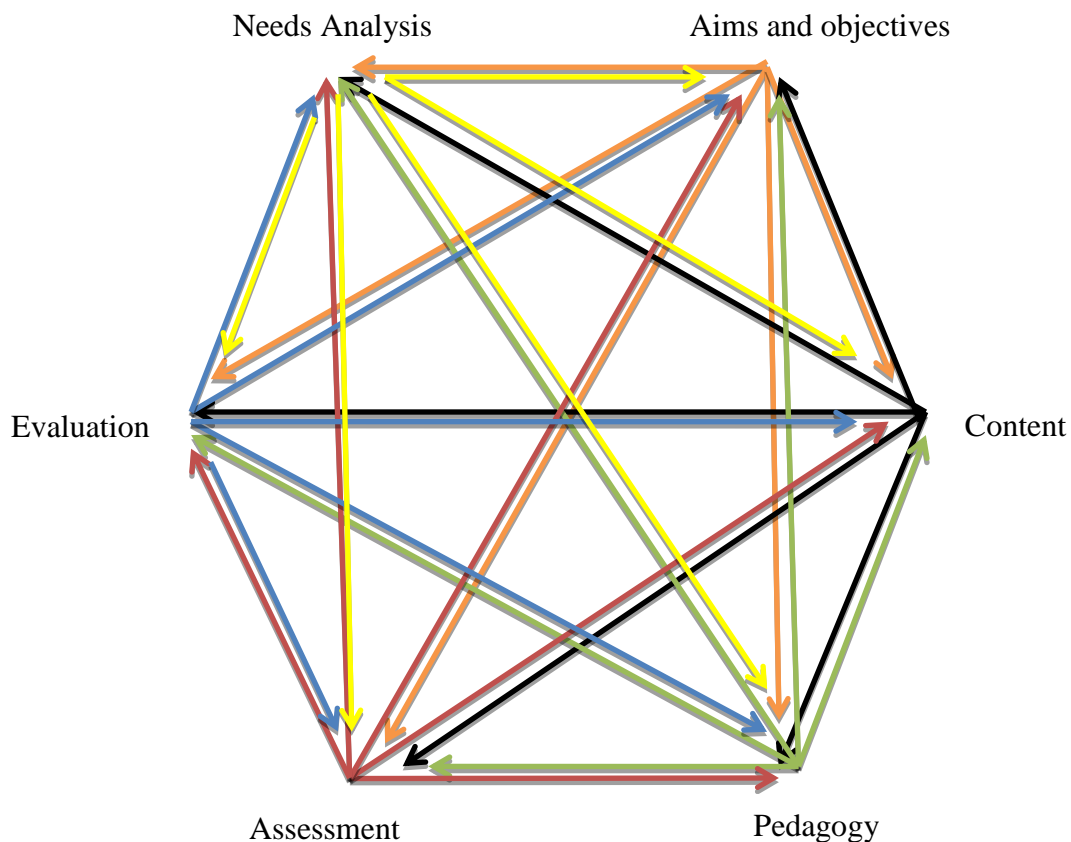
3.4 Components of Curriculum

Different theorists have variously divided curriculum into certain elements. For Taba (1962, p. 10),

the elements of curriculum are a statement of aims and objectives; the selection and organisation of content; the pattern of teaching and learning; and a programme of evaluation of the outcomes. One way of identifying these elements is to consider the major points at which decisions need to be taken in the process of curriculum development.

These elements have been used by many theorists such as Wheeler (1967), and Jarvis and Gibson (1985) with slightly different terms or references. They have referred to 'learning experiences' instead of 'teaching methods' to emphasize learning and have defined 'evaluation' to include assessment. The relationship between these components is not a linear one and as indicated in the following diagram all the components affect one another.

Diagram 1.1: Interrelationships among components of curriculum



3.4.1 Aims and Objectives of Curriculum

Generally, any attempt to develop any curriculum necessitates making decisions that take account of the beliefs and values of the learners, particularly if we consider the viewpoint that one role of a curriculum is to transmit or sustain a culture. It can be argued that curriculum makers must provide theoretical as well as a practical assistance in order to develop intrinsic and extrinsic values. The curriculum is required to enable the students to understand relevant social and cultural phenomena for developing a concrete understanding of the society they belong to. According to Mathews (1989), the aims of the curriculum will be "general", "remote", and reflective of "a particular view of society", culturally biased, and reflect "judgements of value" (p. 5).

Wheeler (1967) has divided curriculum purposes into three phases, labelling the domain of their activities as 'ultimate', 'mediate' and 'proximate', referring to the overall aims of the curriculum in broader terms, specific goals or the intended achievements of the course, and more specific goals (objectives) of a module and the direction of the individual lesson, respectively. Greaves (1984) defines objectives as a complete account of what is involved in the actual learning and what the learners would know or be able to do after completing a certain experience. Thus, aims are characteristically seen as broad goals, often underpinned by ideology and values, and objectives as the more narrow functionally-orientated elements of curriculum. A more detailed account of aims, goals and objectives will be given in 3.10.

3.4.2 Content of Curriculum

This portion of the curriculum contains all the specifications and plans of what is to be taught. In developing the content there are a number of conditions that need to be fulfilled. According to Jarvis and Gibson (1985), it should be relevant to the learners and should progress from the known, simple, concrete and particular to the unknown, complex, abstract and general, respectively. It should also "commence with the whole, sub-divide into the parts and then resynthesize into the whole" (p. 29). However, some specific choices about it would be left to educators. Bernstein (1971) distinguishes between collection and integration as approaches to organisation of content. In the first, subjects are taught as separate, isolated units with clearly determined boundaries that

emphasise depth, while, the latter focuses on common themes that include the study of a variety of subjects that emphasise breadth or coverage. A more detailed account of content will be given in 3.11.

3.4.3 Teaching Methods

Teaching methods involve all the ways through which the teachers transfer knowledge to learners, and in some cases regulate some conditions in order to achieve aims and objectives. The conditions may refer to situations and experiences such as journeys, visits, and displays to complement the teaching. Therefore, a teachers' role goes far beyond instructing students or transferring knowledge, and students are not merely listeners who attempt to absorb information. Therefore, the main role of a teacher in, for example, a multi-dimensional language class is to create an environment and develop activities so that students can practice a certain language in a comprehensible way, supporting students' construction of knowledge and developing ways to encourage students to communicate effectively among themselves (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005).

Teaching methods will differ according to the demands of the content, the age and level of the learners, and the different needs of students who are not all equally interested and will not all learn efficiently by the same method (Marsh 1997, p. 93). The learning needs of adults are different from those of children, for example. Generally, teachers should make various decisions about implementing the right methods of teaching. In some cases, the choice of a suitable method is determined by official syllabus documents, teacher guides or other directives. Nevertheless, the final decision is the teacher's, and his/her own philosophy and experience in teaching adults will influence the methods utilised.

3.4.4 Evaluation of Curriculum

Curriculum evaluation is a process that is carried out with the purpose of examining "the appropriateness of the aims, objectives and content, and of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the methods employed" (Jarvis & Gibson, 1985, p. 30). According to the above statement, curriculum evaluation is a vital phase for the development of curriculum. Through the evaluation process, the faculty explores where there may be

gaps in the curriculum, whether a curriculum is achieving the purposes and whether the learners are actually achieving the intended outcomes.

3.5 Curriculum Approaches (Models)

The choice of any approach taken towards curriculum is reflected in its development. These approaches “are used in curriculum design to provide a structure enabling coherent development” (Bradshaw, 1989, p. 67). In general, some of the main approaches of curriculum are reported by Allen and Murrell (1978) as: the Product Model or Behavioural-Objectives Model, the Process Model, the Cultural-Analysis Model and Curriculum as Praxis.

3.5.1 The Product or Behavioural-Objectives Approach

According to Wells (1987), Bobbit (1918) was the first to introduce this approach in the United States. The model advocates prescribed objectives as an important first step in curriculum development. Tyler (1949) recognized four principle issues to be tackled in curriculum development. These issues became the basis to establish the main framework of concepts of curriculum. They are the educational purposes to be attained, selection and organization of learning experiences to achieve those objectives, effective teaching, and evaluation of the overall experiences. Tyler emphasized the need to set objectives in terms of learner behaviour. A model of behavioural objectives may be used in courses as it is student-oriented, focusing on the behaviour of students in which they are expected to do, rather than on what the teacher will do. Oliver and Endersby (1994, p. 126) find the behavioural-objectives approach advantageous due to the availability of clear guidelines, easier plans for lessons, examinations and experiences, a better chance to compare student achievements and different courses, effectiveness in skills training, possibility of better time management, measurable outcomes and acceptance by learners.

However, the model has witnessed considerable criticism in the literature. According to Wells (1987), criticism against this model started in the late 1960s. In America a campaign was held against it in 1971 where campaigners argued that the behaviour objectives theory is full of incompatibilities, which, from a functional point of view, can do

more to hamper education than to support it. In England, Macdonald-Ross (1973) and Stenhouse (1975), along with others criticised it. According to Davis (1987, p. 20),

The objectives approach may lead to an emphasis on trivial learner behaviours because these are the easiest to express as objectives. Potentially more important educational outcomes will therefore be ignored because by their abstract nature they are difficult to articulate in the form of objectives.

Kelly and Blenkin (1981, p. 75) also criticised this model arguing that

It attempts to reduce education to a scientific activity, analogous to the processes of industry, commits it to a view of man and of human nature that many people find unacceptable and even unpalatable. For to adopt this kind of industrial model for education is to assume that it is legitimate to mould human beings, to modify their behaviour, according to certain clear-cut intentions without making any allowance for their own individual wishes, desires, values and behaviours.

Davis (1987) further criticised this model, arguing that mismatches between the objectives and the students' learning needs, and also between the topics raised by students and the stated objectives may occur, and there may be difficulty in framing significant objectives with regard to the learning experiences. Therefore, he argued that this model is undemocratic because it dictates how the learners should behave after instruction. Furthermore, according to Lawton (1983), this model can only be applied to some skills rather than the whole curriculum, arguing that it suits a closed system rather than a democratic one in which the learners demand an open-ended curriculum. He also points out that this model reduces the whole curriculum to "knowing the right answers," which is out of keeping with the modern concept of "tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty" (p. 15).

Therefore, it is arguable that this model is more aligned with the concept of training rather than education: it does not seem logical to activate a truly educational process by providing a list of objectives.

3.5.2 The Process Model of Curriculum

Dissatisfaction with the product model led to the formulation of another model in the late 1950s. It focuses on procedures, concepts and criteria rather than the statement of objectives and content. Stenhouse (1975) labels it as the "process model" as it is

emphasizing the value of the learning process and experience itself. For Stenhouse (1975, p. 86), behavioural objectives act as a filter that distorts knowledge.

The filtering of knowledge through an analysis of objectives gives the school an authority and power over its students by setting arbitrary limits to speculation and by defining arbitrary solutions to unresolved problems of knowledge. This translates the teacher from the role of the student of a complex field of knowledge to the role of the master of the school's agreed version of that field.

He found it possible to organise the curriculum without an urgent need to formulate beforehand the behavioural changes that would happen in the learners. He was rather in favour of unpredictable outcomes. For this, the content of a curriculum could be designated based on its own value rather than as a means to attain a given behavioural objective.

In spite of the advantages of this model, Oliver and Endersby (1994, p. 127) associate some disadvantages with it. For them, there is the possibility of the following problems: it may be time consuming, teachers may lose “control of the learning experience”, it becomes difficult to maintain “a national standard”; it may be considered “too unstructured for, and unpopular with, some students”; it may be “uneconomic, impossible to compare students and incompatible with a final examination”, and “difficult to plan and difficult to assess objectively” (p. 127).

3.5.3 The Cultural-Analysis Model

In view of the drawbacks of the behavioural objective model, Lawton (1983) developed the cultural-analysis model. Lawton (1983, p. 25) believes that “any society has the problem of transmitting its way of life, or culture, to the next generation” and the task of education is to provide the next generation with the important aspects of culture which must be selected according to a set of principles. That process is regarded as cultural analysis.

Any attempt to derive a curriculum from the culture of any society necessitates dealing with issues about knowledge, skills and values. Moreover, Lawton (1983, p. 28) stated that:

Although some aspects of culture can be measured, it is more than a list of measurable features and observers should be careful about the temptation to

measure the easily quantifiable aspects and consequently become dominated by them.

In addition, he stated that “cultural analysis is more complicated than manpower planning” (p. 28). Since most of cultural analysis is at the level of description, he presented an eclectic method to get the benefit of the measurable and at the same time to look for major categories and parameters that could be tackled both quantitatively and interpretively. This model aims to address the problem of curriculum content implemented through a rational method of analysis. However, it should be noted that the elements and markers of culture are going through a process of constant change and hence it is difficult to analyse the cultural themes. Moreover, implementation of this model is carried out by intellectuals and teachers without participation or involvement of people that practise the culture under analysis. This makes it a top-down model in which all different socio-cultural features cannot gain legitimacy. In addition to that, no commitment or involvement from the real actors of the culture poses the risk that intellectuals and teachers might have special biases in interpreting cultural elements (Magendzo, 1988).

3.5.4 Curriculum as Praxis

This model is based on postmodernist standpoints that “view knowledge as the product of discourse, not something which is independent of human minds” (Yek & Penney, 2006, p. 7). Grundy (1987) states that:

curriculum is not simply a set of plans to be implemented, but rather is constituted through an active process in which planning, acting and evaluating are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process (p. 115).

Thus, knowledge is “subjective and changes with time according to prevailing environment and situation” (Yek & Penney, 2006, p. 7). This model focuses on developing and maximising the potential of all individuals (Grundy, 1987). Furthermore, this view of curriculum aims towards human well-being and emancipation. According to Grundy (1987), this could be achieved through critical pedagogy, a process in which students and teachers deal with real problems together. “They are encouraged to think and reflect critically and develop these skills further” (p. 103) and broaden the understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In general, in this model both teachers

and students should reflect on their own practice and “make sense of the concepts and theories, as well as find meaning and connection to real world applications of knowledge in their learning journey” (Yek & Penney, 2006, p. 7).

3.6 The Process of Curriculum Design

In the previous section, a theoretical account of the main approaches to curriculum was given. In what follows, the practical side of curriculum design which is complementary to the theoretical approaches to curriculum and is also essential for the holistic development of the curriculum will be explained.

The decision to design a course may originate either as the result of suggestions to change an already established course or any intention or plan to start a new course. There are usually reasons behind starting or changing an existing course. According to Toohey (1999), courses might be reshaped or developed to meet certain beliefs and values. The implementation of a new teaching methodology which has been advocated for is sometimes the cause of the change. In either case, any course design process follows a model.

There are a number of various models of curriculum design or development such as Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001), Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001), Connection-Engagement-Empowerment (Yearwood, Cox & Cassidy, 2016) which are mainly pedagogy oriented. The first two steps in Purdue’s Interactive Course Re/Design (Purdue Research Foundation, 2013), i.e. reviewing prerequisite and subsequent courses and identifying student learning characteristics, the first step in Fink’s Integrated Course Design (Fink, 2003), i.e. analysing the situational factors, and phase one of Diamond’s Model (Diamond, 2008) demonstrate some similarities in the sense that they all focus on comprehensive needs analyses.

The results of analysing situational factors and needs analyses underpin the goals and content of a course. Needs analyses have various focuses and can be divided into target and learning needs, subjective and objective needs, or necessities, lacks and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Then, the goals and objectives are set and

consequently the teaching methodology is planned. Finally, assessment methods are decided upon. However, while this suggests a fixed order of events, as stated by Toohey (1999), the real implementation of any course development or new course design may rarely follow such a linear pattern as it is usually a holistic process and sometimes one of the variables has been decided upon even before the process has started.

Once design of a new course is approved and the variables are supposedly fixed, in general, a question is raised concerning what students need to know and how they can better learn. For Toohey (1999), this question is linked to other factors such as characteristics of knowledge to be taught, the teacher's role, goals and objectives, the content of the course and its organization, role and forms of assessment, and a thorough analysis of the context in which the course is to be carried out. Certain techniques can be used for prompting learners' needs. According to Toohey (1999), a major problem is that learners often fail to clearly state their expectations of the course: for instance, new students may not have sufficient familiarity with the subject beforehand, so may not have the necessary questions or concept of what knowledge they need to be developed.

The initial stage of course (re)design involves determining a framework (Toohey, 1999). It starts with gathering information about the content of the course in terms of the main ideas, knowledge and skills that need to be developed. It is also important to note any similar programs and the requirements and standards of the accreditation bodies in addition to the students' prior knowledge and experience (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Another important step is the organization of beliefs and values concerning education that affect the goals of the program as well as the structure of the course in terms of methods of teaching, whether the course focuses on theory or practice, students' choice, entry requirements, and the kind of support students receive when they start the course. Within this framework, types of assessment, grading systems, assessment goals and course evaluation are dealt with.

With regard to the practical steps of implementing curriculum, Tessmer and Wedman (1990) report three models from literature: the 'waterfall' model, the 'focused opportunistic', and the 'layers of necessity' model. In the first type, the components of

the curriculum are either designed or changed following a fixed direction from the context and needs analyses to evaluation in such a way that the completion of one leads to another. The second model starts with the issues related to teaching and teaching material and in the second round of design another component is dealt with. In the third model, the curriculum designer or reformer chooses a specific layer of thoroughness to deal with all components based on the available resources and the time needed.

3.7 Beliefs, Values and Ideologies in Course Design

In deciding what should be taught, what purposes to be achieved and for what reasons, there is a set of beliefs called “curriculum ideologies” (Eisner, 1994). These beliefs are rooted in educational experience, understanding of the discipline, and personal, cultural, and political values (Toohey, 1999). These ideologies might be consciously held, but in many cases they are tacit, historically situated and are not even questioned. The ideologies can be observed in the goals, content and structure of the course. For example, nowadays, the main concern of many universities in the KR is to provide graduates with the skills and knowledge suitable for economic competition. Competition is becoming fierce in every corporate sector and new importance has been placed on what are often referred to as ‘transferrable skills’, such as decision making skills and logical reasoning skills, which might help to maintain one’s performance in a competitive environment. This is even evident in their efforts to redesign degree programs in humanities and fine arts so that graduates meet the requirements of governmental careers or art administrations. Furthermore, the idea that the inclusion of some topics in a course is axiomatic also shows that ideologies surface in what is to be taught. For example, the idea a degree in English literature must include the study of Shakespeare may not be purely based on its relevance to the program as much as it might be related to the beliefs of the faculty about what is appropriate. Ideologies can also affect the structure of the course and the teaching environment. For instance, an ideology is evident in the educational environment where seats are fixed to the floor, indicating that the class must be taught in the format of a lecture and no group discussions will be entertained. Another point which is also indicative of such beliefs is the allocation of time, both in terms of the amount allocated for different subjects and the allowance for different kinds of learning. For example, some subjects should include modules for

acquiring practical skills so that students become competent, whereas in a traditional university enough time may not be allocated to such a module. This shows that theoretical knowledge is valued above practical knowledge. Types of assessments carried out during and at the end of the courses also reflect implicit values and beliefs. For example, a multiple choice exam that can easily assess factual information suggests that critical thinking or argumentation are not part of the assessment process. On the other hand, when students are assessed by a panel of assessors, they can show how to integrate different knowledge they have learned (Apple, 2004).

In general, a number of philosophical approaches to curriculum have been identified. In higher education curriculum, Toohey (1999) distinguishes the following five approaches:

- 1- traditional or discipline-based approach;
- 2- performance or system-based approach;
- 3- cognitive approach;
- 4- personal relevance or experiential approach;
- 5- socially critical approach.

3.7.1 Traditional or Discipline-based Approach

As the name indicates, this pays significant attention to the structure of knowledge in the discipline. In this approach, which is still followed by some universities and colleges, programmes of study are divided into units and topics according to main concepts, and each topic is in turn structured in a rational way (Eryaman, 2010). For example, a linguistics course is most probably divided into modules concerning phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. according to the major branches of the field. Although the courses are structured on a logical basis (chronological, causal, or the major sub-fields of the topic), such a construction that focuses on subject matter itself does not consider students' choice or interest as a major concern (Knowles, 1984).

In this approach knowledge has an existence independent of other variables. It is seen as a corpus of theory that is accumulated, developed, refined and tested continuously. Books and other records comprise the main sources of knowledge (Toohey, 1999). Therefore, abstract and theoretical knowledge are given priority over practical skills.

The teachers' role is to sequence the resources and identify the most important information, then transmit it to the learners through explaining the rules and bringing examples. Teachers mostly focus on text analyses and providing exercises for students (Eryaman, 2010). What students get in such a course is a general understanding of the main concepts and methods of research in each discipline. So, the main goal is to familiarize the learners with the list of important topics in each field of enquiry. As a consequence, students are given a broad and general picture of the field and there is less room for deep inquiry into the subject matter (Toohey, 1999).

The purpose of assessment is to confirm the coverage of the content through different methods of testing. The marks are often represented on a 1-100 scale and students' results are graded against their peers. The students are mainly required to recall the information that is found in the books or mentioned by the teacher (Eryaman, 2010).

This approach has a number of advantages. The process of delivering the modules is less costly and less time consuming as one expert can teach a large number of students at a time. The marking and grading is more objective and comparatively easier (Toohey, 1999). However, these advantages are mainly technical aspects of the program rather than its function in general and there are also a number of disadvantages associated with this approach. Usually, in this form of subject delivery the students are considered as less motivated and less prepared. In most cases, they resort to memorization and they only need to retain the content until the exam is over. Therefore, they have a passive storage role rather than a productive, analytical role. This approach limits students' learning to narrow aspects of knowledge of the discipline, and does not support their real life applications and explorations. Highly important skills like library research and report writing are assigned low importance (Toohey, 1999).

3.7.2 Performance or System-based Approach

In this approach, course design is considered a technical problem rather than an issue of value or philosophy. It is mainly concerned with determining the appropriate means to achieve specific aims and measuring or assessing development (Toohey, 1999). This approach is based on Tyler's view of education. Tyler (1949, p. v-vi) proposes the following four questions for course designers:

1. "What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?"
2. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives?
3. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? And
4. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?"

For Tyler, education is a decisive action that is implemented through setting goals, appropriate teaching to achieve those goals, and assessing the development of the program mainly through assessment of students. This has been labelled an "instructional systems" approach to course design. As Romiszowski (1984, p. 51) states, this approach follows three main "processes of establishing precise and useful objectives, planning study methods and testing them".

In this approach, knowledge is viewed as the performance of the learners in terms of actions, behaviours or skills. Therefore, knowledge informs actions and theory is found useful only when it has the potential of being applied to the area of study. The process of learning starts with analysing learning tasks into their component skills and knowledge which are then arranged and structured so that building on previous learning will enhance the performance of the students. Here, the role of the teacher becomes different comprising both a designer or the deliverer of the course. In the latter role, the teacher facilitates group work, assists students, answers questions and provides feedback on assessment tasks (Toohey, 1999).

Within the general goal of enabling each student to become a "skilled performer", objectives are identified in terms of skills in a linear manner so that the students notice their interrelation and contribution to the final goal of the program. The content of the course is chosen through investigating the nature of profession either through research or observing skilled performers. The most appropriate and most widely used targeted skills in the course are identified through research. Demonstrating effective performance is critical in order to achieve all these objectives.

In this approach, there are frequent assessments in addition to the final assessment to certify the level of performance. The assessments are criterion referenced and the results are expressed in the range of unsatisfactory-satisfactory to show levels of performance.

Advantages of this approach could be student satisfaction and confidence, student involvement, clear objectives, and regular feedback. Therefore, many federal government agencies are focusing on aligning their objectives with performance (Toohey, 1999). Another motivation would be the fact that by having prespecified objectives and planned methods of teaching, assessments could be designed to validate the effectiveness of curriculum (Romiszowski, 1984). Therefore, educational institutions must invest time, money and effort in design and implementation in order to obtain better student performance.

Regarding the disadvantages, one could be that, in determining the content, the interest of the teachers or the learners is not taken into consideration and they have less choice over what is learned. Besides, in terms of implementation, performance based skills need a wide range of equipment, material and work-spaces. It is also argued that such an over emphasis on performance could overshadow the values of curriculum and some ethical issues may be neglected by teachers or curriculum designers (Toohey, 1999), whereas in reality skill development cannot be separated from its social and cultural settings. Moreover, Peach (2010) argues that this approach is problematic in higher education because it focuses on often skill-based outcomes rather than the process of achieving them. Therefore, Higher education turns out to be inefficient when its role is reduced to achieving precise and easily measurable outcomes.

3.7.3 Cognitive Approach

In the cognitive approach, the main function of any educational institution is to develop the mind and to strengthen the learners' intellectual faculties. This approach originates from the 19th century development that advocated the study of Latin and Mathematics due to their ability to develop specific faculties such as logical thinking (Toohey, 1999). In the area of curriculum design, education is regarded as a factor which develops students' intellectual abilities as well as conceptual structures and thinking processes. In

this approach knowledge is personally constructed. Therefore, each individual learner's view cannot be the same as another's. The process of learning follows constant refinement of ideas and thought through a well-organized knowledge base in which a limited content is examined in depth. Teachers mainly focus on real-life problems and learners are encouraged to deal with new knowledge along with previous experiences. Teachers' responsibility is higher and they should be cautious about the areas in which misunderstanding is highly likely to arise. Group work is an integral part of teaching. Questions raised by the teacher or through group discussions are of special importance since they can trigger new insights from students.

Three quite distinct branches of this approach have appeared since 1960s: the conceptual change approach, the cognitive apprenticeship model, and the thinking skills model. The first is mostly applied in science courses in which teachers encourage students to articulate their existing understanding and challenge and question it (Ramsden, 1988). In the cognitive apprenticeship model, students work with an expert practitioner as a model for the process of thinking that occurs while analysing and solving problems. What differentiates it from skilled performance in the systems based approach is that various reasoning processes and thought connections that are usually invisible are demonstrated and made explicit. The thinking skills approach focuses on the development of individual skills and abilities. Developing creativity and critical thinking are peculiar to this model throughout the curriculum.

The goal in each branch of this approach is the development of thinking, reasoning, and intellectual abilities, problem identification and problem solving. In this approach the aim is not coverage or a general picture of the field, but the aim is decided upon based on its role in providing opportunities to master some concepts and practise key intellectual abilities.

The assessment processes attempt to evaluate the learners' understanding and intellectual ability. Assessment tasks often present problems to the students as they need to focus on features of a particular context. This type of assessment is also challenging for markers since they need to justify their judgment while assessment criteria need to be clearly understood by the learners. There are also other types of assessment, such as peer-assessment, which can also be utilised in this approach.

The resources in this approach mainly focus on developing opportunities to engage students in questioning ideas, and their active processing and practising of thinking skills. Interactive small-group activities take place with the guidance of the teacher or group leader. Students can also arrange activities and undertake learning tasks and can challenge their own thinking with the presence and assistance of teachers (Toohey, 1999).

3.7.4 The Experiential or Personal Relevance Approach

According to this approach, personal relevance and learning from experience are two pivots through which course designers, in accordance with the learners, attempt to identify the personal interests and needs of the students. Knowles (1984) finds this approach very useful for young learners since “they do not learn for the sake of learning, they learn in order to be able to perform a task, solve a problem or live in a more satisfying way” (p. 12). He contended that, in order to involve adults in their own learning, andragogic models are preferable. There are several assumptions that are inherent in these models. The first is that adult learners are self-directing and they resist when things are imposed on them. Second, they come to learning with a different experience past education, both in quality and quantity. They are only willing to master relevant information in which they are interested because of a need in some aspect of their lives.

The favoured knowledge is that which is significant and useful for the individual. The learners will become aware of the knowledge and skills that they need to accomplish their professional and social demands. For this to be achieved, Knowles (1984) suggests a model of competencies in which personal, social and professional needs are indicated. This helps the learners identify the areas they need to develop and achieve the level stated in the model.

The teachers' role is crucial in this approach as they need to create a climate suitable for learning through mutual respect, encouragement, collaboration and support among students themselves, and between the students and the teacher. The teachers assist students in achieving these goals by providing information sessions, group work, and offering individual consultations (Knowles, 1984). Students participate in planning the

units of the course so that they address their learning needs; this helps them be committed to the process.

The goals in this approach include a variety of learning which the learners are involved in formulating. Usually the goals are expressed in the form of final achievement objectives, or indications of development or growth. These goals are achieved through appropriate guidance from the programme designers and teachers. The productive learning of an individual through experiences and the acquiring of skills would be the subject of assessment. The learners will be given the opportunity to reflect upon their own learning through their own evidence of learning achievement. Assessment will also include the evaluation of large projects which have been selected in the program to present learning opportunities. In this approach the educational resources in terms of settings and learning conditions are very important. Apart from physical facilities, the existence of mutual trust and respect, a collaborative environment, and supportiveness are so important that such a condition makes learning enjoyable (Toohey, 1999).

3.7.5 The Socially Critical Approach

This approach started with Freire (1985, p. 10) who believed that “illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality”. Society and educational institutions are shaped by the socially superior class that attempt to keep the situation to their advantage. Therefore, examining society and finding out the values at work are the main concerns of this approach. Achieving this, the learners develop a critical consciousness and become aware of misconceptions and also work to eliminate them (Toohey, 1999). In other words, education is considered as a political act that should lead to learners’ emancipation (Pinar, 1978).

This perspective views knowledge as historically, culturally, socially, economically, and politically structured. The understandings of human beings are shaped through the interactions with those who belong to similar culture, background, and class. The goal is therefore to provide the learners with the quality of self-realisation in a social context. This happens through involving the students in problematizing and questioning the deep-rooted values in the society. The goals are in the form of a hierarchy of understanding, criticising, arguing and defending one’s position.

Teachers in this approach are on an equal footing with students as the education is not carried from A to B, or from A about B, but with A and B, and the method of teaching is problem-posing and problem-solving. Students and teachers are open to dialogue. The teachers help students understand where and how the dominant values have taken their present shape, whose interests are served, and what the possible ways to change them are. The teachers encourage different opinions and views. Therefore, students will be critical thinkers and become critically objective about the reality they perceive (Freire, 1992).

In this approach, the content is mainly the problematised reality or the pervasive problem of the day. The projects included in the course are mainly community-based. The contents of the course are related to students' experiences. This makes the curricular knowledge more meaningful and relevant to both students and teachers.

As a learner-driven approach it has a number of advantages such as the attention that is paid to the learners' difficulties and interests. There is no separation between learners' lives and their learning. This approach is a call to action; therefore, it is motivating and encouraging. On the other hand, the application of this approach is time consuming and in term of human resources, the teachers need to have the necessary skills to deal with any possible challenge from the questions of students. It is also difficult to balance the need to plan content and students' interests. One of the other disadvantages is that aspects of society and culture are not analysed so much on the basis of general theory or pure science because they are not discussed in wider terms than is considered necessary for the social lives of the participants.

3.7.6 Which Approach should be Employed?

Although the five mentioned approaches have their distinct features and demonstrate different values and beliefs, there are some common features among them, so the distinction is not clear cut. For example, in all of the approaches, learning is developed within individuals as they are led along a particular path in order to reach an end point. Another consideration is that none of the approaches is totally suitable or applicable to all branches of knowledge. For instance, the cognitive approach is based on the branch

of knowledge that is personally constructed by critical thinking and problem solving in certain situations, the performance based approach relies on the existence of an agreed body of knowledge or skills, the traditional approach assumes that knowledge can be transmitted by teacher to the student, the personal relevance approach asserts that significant knowledge is learned personally within the context of discipline, and the socially critical approach is based on the understanding that knowledge is constructed by and within a historical and cultural framework. However, there could be specific technological subjects which require analytical and technical skills more than cognitive abilities, although cognition is the basic criterion for any kind of learning. Of course, educational institutions are not totally free to choose an approach due to the restrictions of governmental regulations or the requirements of accrediting bodies. Moreover, there are disadvantages and advantages to all the approaches; therefore any attempt to get the best from each approach might be theoretically ideal yet practically very difficult to apply. However, there is general agreement that students should become aware of the rationale of any change or any plan through an open discussion or dialogue in which the course designers clarify what they believe, and that students are more engaged and motivated when they feel involved in the course design.

3.8 Teachers and Students in Curriculum Decision Making

After identifying different approaches to curriculum design, in what follows the role of teachers and students in curricular decision making is briefly addressed.

The importance of teachers' involvement in curriculum development has been repeatedly stated in the literature. (Johnson, 2001; Handler, 2010; Kumar and Scuderi, 2000). For Carl (2009), teachers' resistance to curriculum changes could be minimised through their involvement in curriculum decision making. Fullan (1991) states that involving teachers in any curricular change is linked to any future effective achievement. Kirk and Macdonald (2001) consider teacher involvement a key factor in successful implementation of changes. Similarly, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018, p. 244) firmly state that "teachers will have to continue to be involved in every phase of curriculum development." However, Ramparsed (2000) found out that in South Africa most teachers did not have the necessary skills to participate in such decision making and

consequently faced many challenges. Similarly, Finch (1981) referred to cases where teachers were not eager to engage in such involvement either because of an assumption of a lack of skills or an unwillingness to meet obligations that were imposed on them (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Therefore, for such an approach to succeed, training programs are necessary to promote teachers' knowledge and skills (Alsubaie, 2016; Mawed, 2016).

Students' involvement in the curriculum design and implementation process is quite a recent topic, yet its roots can be traced in Tyler (1975, p. 28), when he stated that:

I have found that observing and interviewing students when they are actively engaged in learning things they think important help me to develop initial outlines for experiences that will help these students learn things the school seeks to teach.

Eisner's (2001, p. 371) challenge in asking "what opportunities do students have to formulate their own purposes and to design ways to achieve them?", is a more direct indication of an inclination towards the role of students in curriculum decision making. Similarly and more recently, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018, p. 371) advocate students' involvement in curriculum development stating that:

It is surprising that until recently, teachers, although they think in terms of what students will learn, have largely ignored them as individuals who could collaborate in creating or modifying curricula.

Rudduck and Flutter (2000) back students' involvement due to the demonstrable link between students' achievements and their being connected to the aims and objectives of a course. Similarly, Konings et al. (2010) believe that instructional change should be guided by students' perceptions. However, similarly to the case of teachers, there are instances in which "students have become comfortable with an educational system that constraints and guides them through a process based on external expectations" (Jagersma, 2010, p. 9).

3.9 The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

In education, taxonomies show a hierarchical order of the different types of learning that refer to different learning outcomes (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). In other words, the goals

of the educational systems are usually classified through the taxonomy of educational objectives. This is a helping factor for those involved in education to deal with the problems more precisely (Bloom et al., 1956). For example, it helps the course designers to accurately design learning activities and assessment materials (Simpson, 1966). Structuring learning outcomes mainly depend on Bloom's taxonomy (Mayes & Freitas, 2004). In spite of the fact that taxonomies have been established to include all domains of learning, educators mostly use the cognitive domain to identify their intended outcomes. Similarly, Gagné and Merrill have also focused on the mental (or cognitive) aspect. Gagné contended that different kinds of learning outcomes require different conditions of learning, which are divided into five main categories of learned capabilities; subsequently Merrill extended the classification of the learned capabilities originally proposed by Gagné by adding the content dimension. Merrill proposed a two-dimensional classification scheme comprising performance and content through the component display theory. With the help of these models, curricula, that are developed, encompass the holistic learning process of various kinds of learners. In this section, the most widely used theory of educational taxonomy, namely, Bloom's taxonomy is briefly discussed.

3.9.1 Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom proposed a three-domain-taxonomy of educational objectives: the cognitive domain (Bloom et al., 1956), the affective domain (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964) and the psychomotor domain. The cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains cover the mental processes, emotional expressions and motor-skill area, respectively. The levels in the first two domains follow a hierarchy from less to more complex where mastery of one level requires the learner to have already mastered the previous level (Ferris & Aziz, 2005).

3.9.1.1 The Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain categorises six levels, namely, 'knowledge', 'comprehension', 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis', and 'evaluation' (Bloom et al., 1956) that are defined as follows:

Level 1: “Knowledge” (p. 62) defines the ability to remember, recognise and recall the relevant knowledge from long-term memory.

Level 2: “Comprehension” (p. 89) defines the ability to understand and construct meaning through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying and explaining.

Level 3: “Application” (p. 120) defines the ability to apply and carry out a procedure (or process) through executing or implementing.

Level 4: “Analysis” (p. 144) defines the ability to break down information into its constituents through distinguishing, organising, and attributing.

Level 5: “Synthesis” (p. 162) defines the ability to put features together to form a purposeful whole through generating, planning, and producing.

Level 6: “Evaluation” (p. 185) defines the ability to value and make judgements based on criteria or a specified purpose.

3.9.1.2 The Affective Domain

The affective domain covers the emotional modes through which things are dealt with (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964). It includes five main categories of receiving, responding, valuing, organisation and characterisation. At the first level, the learners become aware, be willing to act and be attentive towards the phenomenon. In the second stage, the learners show a willingness to actively participate, react and respond to the phenomenon. Then, they attach a worth or value to the phenomenon or behaviour. At a more developed level, the values are prioritised and classified. In the final and highest level, the learners develop a value system or inner control system (Bloom, Madaus & Hastings, 1981).

3.9.1.3 The Psychomotor Domain

In this domain the emphasis is put on physical skills which involve management of the brain and muscular action. In other words, it deals with the planning of material and objects (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, bloom & Masia, 1964).

Unlike the cognitive and affective domains, this domain is acknowledged in the literature, yet this classification has little developed or utilised in institutions of higher education and academia (Bloom et al., 1956; Ferris & Aziz, 2005). Compared to the cognitive domain, the affective domain is also less well-recognised (Bloom et al., 1981; Bolin, Khramtsova & David, 2005), and one can state that the cognitive domain is widely accepted and Bloom's taxonomy is often narrowly used to refer only to the cognitive domain.

3.10 Aims and Objectives

There is no doubt that education or any educational program or course of the study is designed to serve particular purposes. Different terminologies are used to refer to these purposes such as aims, goals, objectives, intentions or outcomes. Some of these terms have been used interchangeably (Popham et al, 1969), "freely and apparently indiscriminately" (Cohen & Manion, 1977, p. 28). This causes confusion since each of these terms implies a certain level of specificity (Rowntree, 1982, p. 31). Apart from this confusion, the term "objective" itself suffers from the lack of a single universally accepted definition (Allan, 1996).

Allen (1988) distinguishes the terms aims, goals, objectives and purposes. Aims precede the others and, due to their generality, suggest a framework for certain actions. Therefore, they direct and guide the curriculum as they reflect a set of values. Goals are statements of purpose with a destination in mind set for learners to achieve as a result of participating in a course (Sowell, 1996). According to Allen (1988), goals are also visible in the learner characteristics of those who obtain them. Goals are derived from aims. They can be of several levels of generality from aim-like statements to particular achievements. Goals usually do not indicate any specific times, but they address the endpoints. According to Tylor (1949, p. 3) at the starting point of any course "it is very necessary to have some conceptions of the goals that are being aimed at". Here, the goals are educational objectives which include "the kinds of changes in behaviour that an educational institution seeks to bring about in its students" (Tylor, 1949, p. 6) and "the area of life in which behaviour is to operate" (Tylor, 1949, p. 47). Creating goals is a continuous activity that is the responsibility of staff, based on the needs of society, the

students and the particular content; they give rise to immediate statements that later on are restructured, finalised and listed in logical order according to the requirements of a particular group of students.

Mager (1962, p. 20) introduced the term instructional objectives instead of educational objectives. He focuses on students' achievement of pre-specified objectives as a consequence of instruction they receive from teachers. Therefore, these criteria limit the objectives to quantitatively measurable ones. These standards mainly refer to what students are capable of doing at the end of the course without any mention of the content or the teacher's role or intention. Mager (1962) believes that students should be informed about the objectives as it helps them to match the standards and meet the requirements.

3.10.1 Behavioural Objectives

The use of the term 'behavioural' marked another shift in the use of terminologies. According to Eisner (1979, p. 105), it "reflects an increased emphasis on the behaviour of the student and on discrete forms of student activity". Behavioural objectives refer to the observable and measurable behavioural changes that are expected to be seen in the students, under specific conditions. Proponents of behavioural objectives (Mager, 1962; Popham, 1975) approve their use as a basis for efficient and effective instruction, asserting that the use of such objectives follows a scientific approach and is compatible with technological advancements in education, its precise measurement and objective assessment techniques. In addition, the observable and precisely stated objectives arguably are not confusing for teachers and other groups and individuals involved.

However, the use of behavioural objectives has been criticised in the following ways. The behavioural changes of the learner are seen as the result of teacher–student interaction, whereas in reality they could be the result of only student activity or student–student interaction. Therefore, it fails to acknowledge the fact that learning can take place independently for the student without the involvement of the teacher. Another point is that such an approach limits and reduces learning to only measureable performances which limit learning and consequently fails to measure or capture the true extent of students' ability or understanding. In general, although behavioural objectives

help the teachers and others who are involved in the course to think precisely and carefully about the objectives of instruction, it neglects the fact that knowledge cannot be so simply and straightforwardly transformed into specific behaviours (Simons, 1973). In respect to higher education, behavioural objectives, in spite of being relatively straightforward to implement and manageable to assess, have been deemed unacceptable. The reason for this is that the outcome for learners becomes standardised and the individuality of the learners is hampered (Allan, 1996).

Eisner's (1979, p. 98) argument that "one should not feel compelled to abandon educational aims that cannot be reduced to measurable forms of predicted behaviour" is a contributory factor to the move towards more personalised objectives that have been labelled as "expressive objectives". An expressive objective is an educational encounter or a learning activity in which teachers identify a working situation, deal with a problem or engage in a task without specifying what the learners achieve. In addition, this approach creates an opportunity for the teacher and the student to investigate and focus on certain issues which may elaborate on and broaden the student's abilities and skills. In such a personalised learning situation, the learners' responses and the products or outcomes of learning are diverse, and consequently the uniqueness of the response leaves no room for applying a common standard in the assessment process.

3.10.2 Non-behavioural Objectives

The prevalence and dominance of behavioural objectives provoked a reactionary response in the form of a tendency towards the return of non-behavioural objectives. According to Tyler (1949), these objectives can fall under one of three categories. Firstly, the way they are stated is sometimes indicative of what the teacher does. Secondly, they mostly consist of topics, concepts and generalisations about the content of the course. Thirdly, they could be in the form of generalised behavioural patterns. However, when objectives are stated in the form of generalised patterns of behaviour, the language is mostly vague and imprecise. They also do not specify the content to which the objective relates. In addition to that, they do not provide the criteria for assessment (Allan, 1996).

The non-behavioural objectives in Cohen and Manion's model do not assign a specific final behaviour to the objective through which the assessment is carried out to determine what the learners have attained. Meanwhile the word "objective" is used to refer to both the teachers' intention and the learners' achievement. Although this has been acknowledged by many curricularists including Tyler (1949) and Popham (1975), they avoided using the term objectives to mean teachers' intentions to remove confusion. Therefore, Mager (1962) used teaching objective to refer to teachers' intentions.

The use of the term outcomes instead of objectives focuses on "what one ends up with, intended or not, after some form of engagement" (Eisner, 1979, p. 3). It is also affirmed by Otter's (1992, p. i) definition that a learning outcome is "what a learner knows or can do as a result of learning". There are various meanings attributed to learning outcomes. The following are some examples. "Learning outcomes are broad statements of what is achieved and assessed at the end of a course of study" (Harden, 2002, p.151). Similarly, Jenkins and Unwin (2001) define learning outcomes as statements of what learners are expected to be able to demonstrate or do as a result of participating in a learning activity.

Using learning outcomes in higher education encourages instructors to care about learners (McDaniel, Felder & Gordon, 2000). In the classroom, an instructor may establish a prior intention about the results of the pedagogical activities and attempt to organise the classroom (or learning environment) to persuade learners to interact and form an understanding until they finally reach the learning outcomes (Hussey & Smith, 2003).

Learning outcomes differ from behavioural objectives in that they are general and comprehensive effects of learning rather than a specific account of expected behaviour. Also, they do not mention any conditions of the occurrence of the behaviour or acceptable standards. Therefore, to better illustrate what the essence of learning outcomes are, Eisner (1979) divides the concept into three types: subject, student and teacher-specific outcomes.

Subject-specific outcomes, also called learning objectives, are associated with the content. They clearly state what the learner will perform due to the planned learning

experiences. Although this superficially looks like the objectives, the substantial difference is that the subject-specific outcomes are not stated in the form of a specific and distinct element of the content and its specific areas. Also the conditions or standards of the performance are not mentioned. The outcomes in the process of assessment are not assessed separately, but they are grouped into one task. This grouping favours the integrity of subject-matter which was under threat in behavioural objectives (Allan, 1996). This makes it more logical and useful to be appointed in higher education.

Personal outcomes include student-specific and teacher-specific outcomes. The former refer to the personalised or individualised learning which mostly involves what a student achieves as a result of independent learning or as a direct outcome of the teacher-student relationship. These outcomes, due to their variety and being individual-specific, do not inform curriculum design, but they are divided into two types: personal transferrable outcomes and generic academic outcomes. The concept of transferability is “based on the assumption that the acquisition of the core skills in some areas of competence and contexts offers the potential of generalisation or transfer to other areas and contexts which employ the same skill” (Jessup, 1990, cited in Allen, 1996, p. 102).

However, the acceptance that such transferrable core skills, which are mainly associated with vocational training, can be identified as a matter of debate in higher education. Some argue that higher education is of intrinsic value since “to be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view” (Peters, 1965, p. 110). However, the learning outcomes in higher education are not the same as those of vocational training. It should be considered that learning should not be started with a defined objective as the process will then stop when the objectives are achieved. Rather, learning should be a journey, where the process of growth is continuous.

The intended outcomes of higher education in different parts of the world are often determined by certain institutions which would generalise them to pertain to all fields of knowledge. For example in the UK, the Higher Education Quality Council identifies three levels of achievement (Glover, Law & Youngman, 2002). By the end of the course, the successful graduates are expected to have gained field-specific knowledge, shared attributes, and generic attributes. In Australia, National Board of Employment Education

and Training (1992) provided a similar set of qualities that graduates must meet. These qualities in essence are similar to the ones stated by Higher Education Quality Council, but they carry different names. The generic academic outcomes, also named 'capability' by Stephenson and Weil (1992), include a set of attributes like "application, understanding, integration, autonomy, development, responsibility and collaboration" (Stephenson, 1994 cited in Allan, 1996, p. 103). However, among academics and employers there is disagreement with regard to the importance or priority of one set of skills over another (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

In practice, designing and implementing a course with all these aims fulfilled seems very difficult. Boyatzis (1995) believes that students tend to develop specific skills, which are those being more emphasised by their teachers. Hence, the teachers need to carefully consider and determine all the aspects they need to pinpoint the most important standards that the students must meet. The next step is to decide what content embodies the desired knowledge. The last challenge is to find out if teaching of the content provides the graduates with the generic skills aimed at (Toohey, 1999).

One approach would be to determine a set of core attributes that would be reflected in all stages of a course. These core attributes could be defined through listing all types of skills and knowledge that characterise experts in that field in terms of the roles they take, problems they solve, methods they choose, evidence they collect, how they present the results and how they communicate with a larger audience. This could be done by consulting a group of experts in the field as well as academics.

3.11 Curriculum Content

Following the aims and objectives, curriculum content is the second element of curriculum. It includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes in various areas/subjects that the learners are expected to acquire. Ozolins (1982) believes that it is through imparting useful knowledge that the students can prevail over cultural conflict and the challenges imposed by social control. Like any other component of the curriculum, this might be affected by philosophical views. Those who believe in objective, measurable and testable reality think of knowledge as coming from structured disciplines. Advocates of constructivism consider knowledge as a personal experience or a product of human

interaction, so they believe that learners should be engaged in the process of meaning-making. An existentialist or phenomenologist views knowledge and reality as the immediate inner experience of the self. Knowledge from a post-modern stance is dynamic which can affect the learner and might be affected by the learner (Parkay and Hass, 2000).

It is obvious that no educational institution can and should teach everything to the learners. In addition, it is also self-evident that no institution has ultimate control over what is learned since learners may also learn from various sources such as media or the Internet, as well as from social interaction with each other, and others outside of the institution. Alongside the impact of philosophical views, curriculum planners find it difficult to decide on curricular content as they should have a proper knowledge of available resources and exclusively decide about what will facilitate the best learning for students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). When dealing with the content, curriculum planners consider the two issues of organisation and selection of content. Curriculum organisation is also relevant to the various interpretations of knowledge. It is argued that whether curriculum is viewed as product or process shapes the content of the curriculum. In the former, the content is defined in terms of subject knowledge with the focus on academic discipline which is intrinsically valuable, while in the later knowledge is a vehicle for skills and values development with the focus on learning to learn (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) do not support this dichotomy and maintain a balance between product and process. In addition, Parker and Rubin (1966, p. 2) consider process as “operations which can be associated with human activities” that can build, communicate and utilise knowledge. According to Eisner (1994), the content is chosen on the basis of excellence, learners’ psychological readiness, and the diversity of the forms of representation. Morris (1995) provides five criteria for content selection: nature of knowledge, a selection from culture, the needs of employers, the needs of students, and the areas of learning and experience. Morris’s criteria look like a guideline that provides balance to the content in terms of considering employers, students and the knowledge itself. Employers emphasise the vocational element, while students’

individual needs may vary from one learner to another. Some academics are more likely to pay attention to the criticality factor to maximize the learners' potential.

With regard to content organisation, curriculum planners employ philosophical, psychological, political and practical organising principles. According to logical organisation, content is organised based on specific rules and concepts. Psychological organisation aims to consider the immediate social factors that influence the wellbeing of the students. Distant environmental factors do not receive significant emphasis. Political organisation is highly evident in the demands of pressure groups as various national and international groups demand specific aspects in the curriculum for serving their personal agendas. Practicality is the last organising principle, and this includes aspects such as the cost of implementing or structuring the content in a specific way, considering the socio-economic conditions, attainability of the objectives, availability of educational materials, gaining public acceptance and the potential resistance towards the content (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) refer to some other criteria for content selection: self-sufficiency, significance and utility, validity, interest, learnability and feasibility. The first point, self-sufficiency, has also been emphasised by Scheffler (1970, as cited in Sindhu, Pant & Dash, 2017, p. 85) who believes that it could be achieved through "economy of teaching effort and educational resources; economy of students' efforts and economy of subject matter's extent of generalisation." For the second point, Taba (1962) focuses on the cognitive and affective significance of the content, and Reid (1992) finds cultural significance equally important. Another criterion is interest which is achieved if the content addresses the students' intellectual interest and broadens it. It should also invite the learners to the highest extent of engagement (Beane, 1990). Learnability focuses on the match between the content and the learners' range of experiences. This is a practical step that directly affects appropriateness and best positioning of the content (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Another criterion is feasibility which is related to availability of time, resources, staff and funding as well as the prevailing political condition. It also necessitates a careful study of the constraints and potential problems (McNeil, 1977).

3.12 The Gaps Found in the Literature and Tackled by this Study

According to a systematic review of the literature, it has become clear that this study is different from previous studies in a variety of ways. Curriculum, in relation to teachers and students, has been a topic of research from a range of perspectives in different contexts. Most existing studies are related to teachers' and students' perceptions, understandings or attitudes towards different components of the curriculum in different stages from primary to higher education and in different fields of higher education.

The following studies have dealt with the aims and content of curriculum. With regard to higher education, Aslam & Rao's (2017) study aimed to assess student teachers' perceptions of the clarity of objectives for the selected course content in a distance teacher education program, and to compare their perceptions of selection and organization of curriculum content. The findings revealed that students in general had positive perceptions towards selection and organization of curriculum content. With implication for curriculum design, the study focused on a need to improve the content by shifting the focus from theory to practice. Similarly, Manzar-Abbas and Lu, (2013) investigated teachers' perceptions of clarity of curricular goals, content selection and organization, and the theory-practice proportion in undergraduate-postgraduate programmes by teacher education institutions in China. With implications for curriculum design, one finding of the study was that the teachers demanded the integration of the practicum experiences throughout the program so that the allocated time could be expanded and that the teachers to be sent to schools as early as possible. Focusing on primary school curriculum, Yanik (2007) investigated how English language curriculum of public primary schools was implemented by teachers and how it was experienced by students. The major areas of investigation were the teachers and students' perceptions of the curriculum goals and content, instructional strategies, evaluation and assessment procedures and the problems encountered during the curriculum implementation. The results revealed that majority of the curriculum goals were attained at a moderate level and there were problems with the selection and ordering of curriculum content. The main problems encountered in the implementation process resulted from the lack of materials and resources, the course-book, the learners, the classroom environment that influenced the attainment of goals, classroom practices and the assessment procedures. Likewise, Yuen (1996) studied secondary

students' perceptions of the aims and content of the school curriculum in Hong Kong as well as their expected aims and content in terms of subject combination. The findings revealed that the students' perception of and their expectation for the school curriculum were significantly different from that stated in the official documents due to the different goals they wanted to achieve as they wanted the curriculum content to be more relevant to everyday life and useful in their future career. What is common between these studies and the current study is that they all concentrate on aims and content of curriculum. However, this study accompanies the investigation of the aims and content as perceived by stakeholders with a focus on the values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum.

In addition, what puts this study at variance with those studies that have dealt with content is that most of the studies have investigated only one module, one genre or one aspect of content. For instance, Al-Badwawi's (2011) study is an investigation of students' writing in a college of applied sciences in Oman. The focus of the study was on probing the views and the discursive practices of first year students and their EFL teachers in relation to academic writing. The study revealed that the students faced difficulties due to discrepancies between the writing instruction and the demands of writing assignments. The study had implications for practice, such as raising students' proficiency in English and providing necessary support that students needed to improve their writing. Another one is Sadeghi and Nikou's (2011) investigation of how Iranian EFL teachers and students perceive the content of reading skill in Iran's high schools in term of textbooks and other necessary equipment. The findings revealed that both teachers and students agree that although the reading skill is emphasised, there are problems such as books' shortcomings, lack of necessary equipment, and inappropriate assessment techniques. The study provided some implications for policy and practice such as revising and updating the books, paying attention to teaching this skill and motivating students. In another study, Aliakbari & Boghayeri (2014) investigated the needs and views of architecture students and graduates about the ESP courses. This study mainly focused on the content in terms of suitability of textbooks and structure of the content. The results demonstrated that the reading skill was perceived to be the most important; yet, the courses did not fully met the participants' needs in terms of textbooks, study topics, and length of the courses. The implication for practice was conducting consultation and collaboration with English departments as well as

assessing students' learning needs. Unlike aforementioned studies, this study is an investigation of the whole content in its totality.

Some other studies have been carried out to examine different stages of curriculum design and implementation, such as development, implementation and/or evaluation. As far as the components of the curriculum are concerned, many studies have been carried out in relation to needs analyses, pedagogy, and assessment. For example, Peng (2014) conducted a case study of EFL education in a Chinese independent college that focused on how the college English curriculum meets the English learning needs expressed by the learners. The empirical findings show that: The learners' expressed needs are generally insufficiently addressed due to over-emphasis on a product-oriented perspective, and particularly on testing, and neglect of a process-oriented perspective in curriculum. The findings have practical implications for EFL education at tertiary level and suggest adopting a process-oriented perspective in curriculum design. Also, Khajavi and Gordani (2011) conducted a study on English language needs of graduate students in Iran as well as identifying which of the four language skills are perceived to be the most important by the learners. The findings was that speaking skill has been rated as the most important skill. Graduate students also indicated a greater need for writing abstracts and giving presentations in seminars. Generally, the study indicated that the present practice of EAP in the curriculum is not consistent with the perceived needs of students. Furthermore, Moinvaziri (2014) investigated students' perceived English language needs of students in university General English course in Iran, and selection of different syllabi, methods and textbooks in accordance with their needs. The results revealed that the students considered vocabulary as the most important component of the language which needed the most practice, whereas they found grammar as the component that they most resented and had the least expertise in. In addition, they perceived reading as the most important skill, while they considered listening and speaking as their most problematic skills. The study had implications for curriculum design by suggesting an implementation of a comprehensive needs analysis. Likewise, Kazar and Mede (2014) attempted to identify the target needs of the students in an ESP program at a private university in Turkey. The focus of this study was also on the intended learning outcomes of the modules, and objectives of the modules and content. The findings of the study revealed that the ESP program did not clearly focus on the

effective use of language strategies in given tasks such as improving presentation skills, learning key terms, writing email messages, and reading academic text. The implication for change and curriculum was that program had to be revised in terms of the students' target needs. However, what makes this study distinctive is that it deals with the aims and content of curriculum from the perspective of not only teachers or students but also decision makers (Heads of Curriculum Development Directorates, Heads of English Language Departments, members of academic committee, teachers) and students. This brings a number of things to the fore, such as the matches or mismatches between views, and agreements or disagreements between the different parties involved in this study, as well as the congruity or discrepancy between the two components of aims and content.

This study overlaps with curriculum evaluation research in a number of ways. For instance, both fields attempt to present alternative ways through which changes to the curriculum could be better applied. Both fields investigate the aims, objectives, and content of the curriculum to find out to what extent the content is informed by the aims and objectives, and to what extent it consistently addresses them. Nevertheless, a number of points make this study separate from evaluation studies. One of the aspects that distinguishes this study from evaluation studies is the different rationale. It is true that evaluation studies address the purposes and content of curriculum, but they identify the achievement of the aims or the quality of content as measured against certain standards mainly by adopting quantitative methods. In contrast, this study follows a different path by attempting to investigate how aims and content are perceived, as well as the participants' perceptions of development and achievement of the aims rather than just indicating whether the aims and objectives are met or not. I do not attempt to provide an authoritative evaluation of the curricula as an outcome of the study, but rather to represent the views of multiple stakeholders in order to foreground the importance of drawing on multiple perspectives when considering curriculum: revealing tensions and complexities revealed by the different experiences of teachers, students and decision makers.

In addition, most of the studies have dealt with curriculum in one institution, but this study has purposefully taken two departments in two universities with the aim of finding out the similarities and differences along with the underlying interpretations.

In the context of the KR, curriculum in general, and specifically in higher education, is a highly under-researched area compared to research in other countries. There have been some attempts to deal with some aspects of the higher education curriculum in terms of teaching material and assessment (e.g. Hassan (2014) studied the extent to which the current available 'printed' materials helped learners to learn English as a foreign language at higher education in Kurdistan by evaluating the samples of the materials that are being taught. The study revealed that the available current materials were of a very limited help for the English learners due to their focus more on the knowledge about English rather than teaching it. Another finding of the study was that both teachers and learners confirmed the necessity of making some changes in the content of the materials. The study concluded that changes should be applied in accordance with learners' future needs along with motivating them to use English in real communication. Ismael's (2016) study is about the current assessment practices and alternative assessments of in-service Kurdish tertiary TESOL teachers and their cognitions of alternative assessment. The study revealed that the assessment practices rarely included various alternative assessments, and even those practices needed development in terms of implement procedures and marking criteria. The study also found that the main challenges were related current assessment system. The implication for policy was adopting alternative assessment in addition to providing necessary training. To the best of my knowledge, there have been no studies which look in detail at the aims and content of the curriculum. Therefore, this study is unique, and it is the first and only study to explore perspectives regarding the underpinning values and beliefs evident in the English language curriculum along with decision makers', teachers' and students' perceptions of the purposes and content of curriculum.

Due to the fact that the higher education system in the KR has undergone reform and that the content of the curriculum has been subject to some changes, this study presents some similarities to those studies that investigated the perceptions of curriculum change. For example, Alwan (2006) investigated secondary school teachers'

perceptions of curriculum change in the United Arab Emirates which is mainly related to the teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. The main finding of the study was that the teachers had a minimal role in this process. Similarly, Al-Houssawi (2016) investigated teachers' roles in an EFL curriculum within a Foundation Year Programme at an English Language Institute in one of the public universities in Saudi Arabia. The study focused on teachers' roles in three different stages of the curriculum: development, implementation and evaluation. The findings indicated that EFL teachers had limited roles in the curriculum development process. Also, Mawed (2016) conducted an in-depth exploration of EFL teachers' attitudes towards and experience of curriculum change and development at the ELT department in the Higher Institute of Languages in Damascus, Syria. One of the main findings of the study is that teachers' opinion, as key stakeholders in the education sector have not been considered; therefore, it emphasizes the significance of teachers' inclusion in curriculum planning. All these studies stressed the importance of teachers' participation and contribution in curricular changes.

On the other hand, Lanning et al, 2012 conducted a longitudinal study to determine students' perceptions of their educational experience in the revised dentistry curriculum with a specific reference to the goals and objectives. The results indicate that the students were satisfied with aspects of their educational experience, suggesting the revised curriculum's preliminary success in meeting its goals of earlier patient care, a condensed preclinical curriculum, and a student-friendly environment. Nevertheless, the study had an implication for curriculum development by suggesting ongoing evaluation complemented according to faculty perceptions and student learning outcomes. Shehnaz, Sridharan and Gomathi (2012) aimed to compare the faculty and students' perceptions of the student experiences with the new curriculum in the Gulf Medical College in the United Arab Emirates. The study showed that the faculty and students had similar perceptions about the student experiences in the integrated curriculum. The implication for curriculum implementation and practice was that some areas needed remedial work such as the need for faculty to learn constructive feedback techniques and an emphasis on long-term learning in the new curriculum. However, the current study is quite different in terms of focus, rationale and methodology.

In conclusion, it could be argued this investigation will add to the existing body of knowledge internationally and also provide an in-depth understanding of such an under-researched area in the context of KR. The study will be critical in the sense that it attempts to draw upon the students' voice in curriculum development and in the light of findings propose directions for change.

3.13 Research Questions

Based on the purposes of this study, and informed by the gap in the literature, this study attempts to address one introductory and complementary research question (Research Question 1), and two overarching research questions (Research Questions 2 and 3) that also address the matches and mismatches between different parties' perceptions, as well as the differences and similarities between the two English Language Departments as in the following.

1. What are the values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum in the two English Language Departments?
2. How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the aims and objectives of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?
3. How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the content of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?

The research design will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

4 Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the aspects of methodology and design of this research. The first section is an illustration of the ontological and epistemological position, the underpinning philosophy that shapes the strategy used to answer the research questions. Then, the research methodology and the rationale behind its use are presented. Next, the methods of data collection and the strategies for ensuring the quality of the data are discussed. This chapter ends with the procedures of data analysis.

4.2 The Main Paradigms in Educational Research

It is widely acknowledged that a researcher's philosophical stance and worldview— often referred to as a paradigm— guides his/her research in terms of understanding of the nature of reality and existence, the nature of the knowledge that research may produce and how research can generate or reveal knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a paradigm is a set of basic beliefs that guide researchers to tackle the issues they aim to address. While these might be viewed as specific to an individual, a number of paradigms have become established in the world of research. Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) refer to five different paradigms. Among these, two very different paradigms sit at each end of the spectrum. At one end, there is the scientific or positivist paradigm, and at the other end, there is the interpretive or constructivist paradigm (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The other three paradigms fall between these two extremes. These paradigms dictate how we view reality, truth and knowledge, and therefore, it is essential that researchers determine their main paradigmatic positions and have an awareness of other possible positions, views and assumptions that could underlie research.

The positivist paradigm believes in a single and identifiable reality that can be conceptualised, tested or measured (Guba & Lincoln, 2004) with reference to certain variables, sometimes allowing the researcher to discover causal relationships amongst them (Hammersley, 2012). With regard to the relationship or interaction between the researcher and what is researched, a positivist researcher believes in complete and pure objectivity (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). As far as methodology is

concerned, it is highly dependent on the conventional scientific methods of the hard sciences. Researchers are trained to acquire the technical procedures to deal with quantitative data (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Studies guided by the positivist paradigm adopt experimental designs or surveys that employ methods such as tests, observational checklists or closed-ended questionnaires to generate numerical data (Cook, Cook & Mark, 1977). The following section explains the reasons behind the adoption of the interpretive paradigm for the present study.

4.3 The Interpretive Paradigm in this Study

Any research has a theoretical perspective that explains the philosophical attitude underlying its methodology (Crotty, 1998). In contrast to the positivist paradigm briefly outlined above, this research sits at the other end of the spectrum, guided by the interpretive paradigm as it intends 'to understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). Interpretive studies are carried out with the aim of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the complex world of social members through the meanings that are assigned to them (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The compatibility of the aims of this study with the aims of an interpretive paradigm makes it a clear choice.

In terms of ontology, which is described as the study of being, concerned with the nature of existence, and/or the structure of reality as such, this study is based on the assumption that realities are observed, and established, by and within the culture and the context in which the participants operate (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, the epistemological position taken is that the study will aim to reveal reality as perceived by participants in the context of their course of study and their experience of the curriculum (Morrison, 2002; Pring, 2004). Moreover, the links between perspectives and actions, and between behaviour and its effects, are seen here as complex and uncertain, rather than reducible to statements about fixed relationships.

The core purpose of the study is to understand the students' and decision-makers' perception of the aims and content of the ELD curriculum in two universities. It is believed that the students and the stakeholders create, modify and interpret the world of

their experience according to their subjective view. Therefore, it is assumed that the participants in this study have different understandings about the curriculum of their study programme.

This study does not aim to find out general laws or to perform an intervention or treatment but to provide description and interpretations of a natural experience as perceived by the participants. That is to say, through the implementation of the interpretive design, the aims and content of the curriculum are interacted with, but not manipulated, tested, measured or verified (Lynch, 2003). Furthermore, the aim of this study is not to test any hypothesis, but it is to understand the participants' beliefs by following an inductive process through probing the participants' experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The aims of this study and interpretative research design are appropriate partly because this is an area that has not been studied in the context of the KR. According to Borg, Gall and Gall (1993), a qualitative interpretative approach is appropriate for the initial investigation of issues to gain detailed information. Thus, the required data is not numerical because the study looks for how the participants understand and explain the aims and content of the ELD curriculum.

Involvement with the participants to gain a deep understanding of the participants' perception of the curriculum, and the influential factors is a major characteristic of an interpretive research. Therefore, as the data-collector, I have the advantage of belonging to the context of study and being an active agent in the process of interpretation albeit with the aim of guaranteeing the criteria that ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Radnor, 2002).

In conclusion, this study is ontologically and epistemologically consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, as the truth or reality emerges as a result of researcher-participants interaction in relation to the specific context of the case/s under study. This is also consistent with my belief that my interaction as a researcher with the participants (students and decision-makers) enables me to explore subjective realities from multifaceted perspectives and obtain a deeper, more insightful understanding of the research problem. Individual perspectives are the result of individual experiences and therefore they could be mixed with personal bias. Therefore, it is important to explore the subjective realities from different perspectives.

Each participant has a unique experience and perception and how “each interprets and makes sense of that experience” (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005, p. 40) is not the same; here, the aim is to understand and gather all the different experiences to interpret and infer a comprehensive and in-depth understanding “without seeking a single, universal, objective truth” (p. 40).

4.4 Research Methodology

In order to properly answer the research questions and to fulfill the objectives of the study, case study was adopted as the most suitable research methodology. In this section, alongside a brief account of case study as a research methodology, the rationale behind adopting this methodology, and the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology are explained.

4.4.1 Case Study in a Nutshell

Case study is adopted mainly as a qualitative research methodology (Denscombe, 2007; Stake, 1995) to make enquiries and delve into “individual, group, organisational, social, political phenomena” (Yin, 2014, p. 4) in a variety of fields including education (Merriam, 1998) as it enables the researchers to concentrate on a case and develop a comprehensive and real-life perspective. Yin (2014) defines case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16).

Conducting a case study is an attempt to address the “how” or “why” questions about the case, an intention which is also appropriate for program evaluation. Yin (2014) also defines case study technically as a way of navigating a large number of variables: in order to handle a unique condition in which there are “more variables of interest than data points,” case study adopts different methods of data collection for the purpose of triangulation and utilises “the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2014, p. 17).

Stake (1995, p. 2) regards it as “an integrated system” which “has a boundary and working parts” and the case is conceptualised as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing,” and this concept of a case study being a 'bounded' phenomenon is echoed across discussion of the methodology. For example, Merriam (1998) builds on Miles and Huberman’s (1994) description of “the case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25) and considers the delimitation of the case as the major point of case study research. This position is congruent with the “bounded system” referred to by Smith (1978) and the “integrated system” described by Stake (1995). Merriam (1998, p. 27) identifies “the case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries.” She defines it as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii).

4.4.1.1 Type of Case Study

The choice of a suitable type of case study, for the most part, depends on the purpose of the study. Experts have used different terms in the nomenclature of its types. Although the classification and accordingly the meaning of some terms overlap slightly, each classification has focused on certain intentions or reasons behind doing case study. For instance, Yin (2012) categorises case studies as descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. The term ‘descriptive’ is indicative of the purpose as it is an attempt “to describe a phenomenon in its real-world context”. Explanatory case study focuses on the how and why a condition or a situation turned in to, emerged or came to be as it is now. Exploratory case study is usually carried out “to identify the research questions” or as an introductory study for later studies (Yin, 2015, p. 238). The adoption of each type of case study does not make the use of another type impossible in the same research because the boundaries between the types are not clear cut. This is due to the fact that, in all types of case studies, description of the case, giving the 'how' and 'why' of the case, is an inevitable requirement. Based on this classification, this study fits the definition of exploratory case study more than other types, although the rich description of the case is also important. Another classification by (Stake, 1995), based on the intention of the research and size of the case, divides case studies into intrinsic, instrumental and multiple or collective ones. In the intrinsic case study, the case itself is the focal point of

the study, while in the instrumental case study, the issue or concern is the focus of the study and the issue is illustrated through a selected bounded case. Multiple case study is similar to instrumental case study except that it illustrates more than one case and takes an approach in which the cases are usually compared. According to this classification, this research is a multiple case study as it illustrates two departments in two universities.

4.4.2 Rationale behind Adopting Case Study

Case study is considered as a convenient methodology to investigate a phenomenon that has been unexplored or not sufficiently understood (Jones & Lyons, 2004; Robson, 2005). No prior study has been carried out, and very little was known about the students and the decision-makers' perceptions of the aims and content of the curriculum within the context of ELD in Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, this study enabled both exploration and investigation of this phenomenon.

Among several methodologies adopted in qualitative studies, case study was adopted as the preferred methodology in this research due to the following factors:

4.4.2.1 Meeting the Criteria for Selecting Case Study

Case study methodology is a popular method in qualitative educational research. The research also meets the prerequisite that it is *an empirical enquiry* that is based on multiple methods of data collection. In order to decide on the adoption of case study methodology, Yin (2014) puts forward three conditions that need to be met. The conditions are related to research questions, researcher's control over the events and the nature of the case under study. All these three conditions are met in this study. First, the main research questions are in the form of "how" and "why" questions that can be dealt with through case study methodology. Second, the researcher had no control or impact over the behaviour or events that affect the study. Third, the study is bounded by time and place as it investigated students and decision-makers' perceptions in two universities at the current time.

4.4.2.2 Ability to Accommodate Different Research Techniques

In order to properly meet the objectives of the study and answer the research questions appropriately, a combination of various methods of data collection and data analysis is adopted. For example, the goal of understanding the policy-makers' perceptions of the aims and content of the ELD favoured a semi-structured interview and document analysis, whereas the goal of understanding the students' perceptions favoured a focus group interview.

4.4.2.3 Compatibility with the Philosophical Viewpoint

In line with the researcher's philosophical vision, the study was situated within the interpretive paradigm. Hence, it was established that case study research was compatible with the philosophical positioning of the research, supporting the basis for adopting case study as the preferred research strategy.

4.4.2.4 Preference of Case Study over other Qualitative Methodologies

a. Ethnography

Case study methodology was preferred over other methodologies as the researcher did not have control over the phenomenon being studied. Ethnography requires the researcher to be immersed in a setting, and become part of the group under study in order to understand the phenomenon being studied (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Ethnography was not an appropriate methodology for this research due to methodological and practical constraints; I was unable to be an insider to the world of participants.

b. Grounded theory

At first, grounded theory appeared to be the optimum methodology. Grounded theory is applicable to studies such as this where the area covered has not been extensively researched, thus it does not aim at verifying or testing a previously constructed theory, but rather intends to construct theory from data. However, this study did not lend itself to the iterative and simultaneous process of data collection and data analysis that would be required, and also it did not exclusively attempt to produce theory out of the data.

Therefore, case study was adopted as it provided a more practical and feasible framework through using a variety of methods. In addition, adopting a case study methodology does not preclude the construction of theory from the data.

c. Action research

Due to its wide scope and extensive use in a variety of settings on a wide range of topics, action research was considered as a research methodology, especially since it was in line with my intrinsic interest in suggesting changes or improvements to the area under study. In addition to that, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the introduction of an intervention is not a prerequisite for carrying out action research. However, this study did not adopt action research as it did not match the two main requirements. Firstly, it is not a collaborative or participatory project. Secondly, due to my geographical restrictions and limited time for data collection, I was not in a position to present or suggest any intervention, or to follow the iterative cycle of action research. Any intervention or change in the area of curriculum aims and content in Iraqi Kurdistan Higher Education is not easily applicable as it is largely a centralised issue, and where decisions are decentralised, there are a large number of stakeholders involved.

4.4.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Case Study

4.4.3.1 Strengths and Advantages

There are a number of strengths associated with case study methodology. They can be classified at three levels: those relevant to the qualitative studies, those pertinent to case study, and those specific to the current research. The last two advantages are referred to in the following.

Case study has the capacity to deal with intricate social units that involve a variety of various variables to understand a phenomenon. In addition to that, focusing on real-life conditions, through using multiple methods and a proper interpretation of the findings, it provides a detailed and complete description. Case study allows more voluminous information to be gathered compared to other research designs.

This approach also helps the reader to get an understanding of their own experience through interpretation and linking of the findings to their own context. These understandings can facilitate further research in the future as well as improving practice in applied fields such as education (Merriam, 1998; Robson, 2005).

In this research, apart from the points that were mentioned in the previous section about the suitability of this methodology, the methodology also provided opportunities to highlight the differences and similarities between the two cases under research.

Therefore, appropriate application of case study creates a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon, which is one of the requirements of the aims of this investigation. Apart from its intrinsic suitability for the current research, it allows some aspects of other methodologies to be embedded in it without affecting its own credibility.

4.4.3.2 Weaknesses and Disadvantages

One criticism against case study is the difficulty of identifying and setting up the boundary of the case(s), data collection and analyses, and communicating these effectively to a reader. Case studies usually rely on more than one method of data collection, on qualitative analysis and contextual information. Consequently, a lengthy and detailed account of the case(s) needs to be presented appropriately to the audiences, and this can be difficult.

Another criticism is the potential risk of over-simplification or exaggeration that results in flawed interpretation of findings. Above, I have explained the importance of case study being rich, nuanced and contextual, and this inevitably means that interpretation risks becoming reductive. To mitigate this and to make the researcher's interpretation transparent, a cautious and careful interpretation must be applied and an audit trail made available (Hammersley, 2012).

The reliability and validity of information collected from case study participants is open to question. Case studies allow a relationship to build between participant and researcher, which can result in making participants more honest and opening up- increasing the validity of results. However, in this project, as in many studies, there are retrospective aspects where the participant is asked to recall past events, and this may result into the

participant leaving parts out or forgetting things, and this may affect the reliability of study. This points to the problem of applying traditional concepts such as validity and reliability to interpretive investigations; below I explore the alternative concept of 'trustworthiness'.

4.5 The Issue of Generalisability

Generalisability of the case study findings has been extensively discussed in the literature (Bassegy 1999; Cohen et al. 2007; Robson 2005). The concept of generalisability, which is a characteristic feature of the positivist view, is questioned in the interpretive paradigm due to the argument that repeated studies of human behaviour, even under similar circumstances, would result in different findings, since human actions are constructed. Furthermore, the results from a large and representative sample group might not be applicable to a specific individual or condition. The other key point is that, within the interpretive paradigm, the existence of multiple realities is fully accepted (Donmeyer, 2000). With regard to case study, Schofield (2000) states that generalisability can be viewed as a strategy to increase the probability that readers could find the significance, relevance and application of the research to other situations or cases. Similarly, Stake (1995) stated that generalisation can be utilised to facilitate transferring the findings from the context of the research to another one. Stake (1995) further explains that a reader should be enabled to draw personal conclusions about his/her own context on the basis of the conclusions drawn by the researcher – they are able to associate the past context, findings and conclusions explored in the research to their own present experiences.

Thus, case study can provide the reader with the ability to understand his/her own phenomenon as they apply the findings of the study to it. To facilitate this, the researcher needs to describe the case and present the findings in an accessible manner. This will also provide the readers with evidences to draw their reference from it. This will also help them to relate to their situations.

The capacity to apply a case study findings to a different context based on the degree of congruency between the two contexts is referred to as transferability (Donmeyer 2000).

Whether the findings of a case study research are transferable or not depends on readers' response, though the researcher can support this through careful description of their case and its context. The reader can judge if the experiences are presented in an accessible way or not, or to what extent the research seems to reflect another's experience. This will also help the reader to widen his/her view by observing the world through the lens of the researcher's insight. The reader might accept or reject the new viewpoints. This is, to a great extent, is related to the congruency between the findings and the evidence. This can also be supported by the researcher's reference to the wider research field: as data is collected on new cases, it is important to refer back to previous cases in order to build on existing knowledge and ensure findings are as relevant and transferable as possible.

I have attempted in this study to engage readers with the perceptions of the decision-makers and the students, as well as their experiences. The detailed description of the context, the perceptions of the undergraduate students, and the assertions made in light of the interpretive process all aim to provide readers with the opportunity to determine the transferability of the findings to similar contexts.

4.6 The Trustworthiness of the Study

Determining the measure of rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research is the alternative to achieving reliability and validity in quantitative studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, the degree of equivalence between this criterion in quantitative and qualitative studies is debated (Tuckett, 2005). As a qualitative study, in this research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the four criteria of trustworthiness, (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) are taken into consideration.

4.6.1 Credibility

Credibility as one of the main factors in achieving trustworthiness is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1998, p. 94) defines it as "how congruent the findings are with" each other. In order to establish credibility, there are a number of techniques that need to be applied, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Silverman (2001) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a number of techniques to bolster credibility which are outlined below:

4.6.1.1 Use of Appropriate Techniques to Achieve Credibility

In this study, I applied the following measures to achieve credibility.

1. Appropriate sampling (which will be elaborated in detail in section 4.8).
2. Using techniques to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing to data. In particular, this was guaranteed by ensuring that participants offered data of their own free will since they were given the full right of refusal to do so. I also tried to persuade them to be frank and honest by telling them that their own perception is required and that there is no right or wrong answer. They were ensured that whatever their answer was would not affect their credibility in the eyes of others, including the administration. Alongside this, I also conveyed my independence to my participants by explaining to them that I am not serving any side's interests.
3. Checking to see if the information elicited from the participants stayed the same by probing questions and returning to previously mentioned issues through rephrasing the questions to detect the probable contradictions and properly deal with them.
4. Examination of the available previous research findings to assess the degree to which the results of this study are congruent with those of past studies.
5. Holding regular meeting sessions with my supervisors to widen my vision through discussing problems and getting feedback in all steps of this study from early steps of data collection to presenting the findings, as well as sharing experiences with colleagues in some of the meetings we had.
6. Evaluating the effectiveness of the techniques through a reflective commentary. I tried to apply this by taking notes of my initial impressions of each data collection session, with patterns appearing to emerge in the data collected and theories generated.
7. Applying necessary member checks during data collection in focus groups, and during and at the end of interviews. The participants in interviews received the

transcripts of their interview and were asked to read them to make sure if the words were accurate expressions of their intentions.

4.6.2 Transferability

Bassey (1981), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Firestone (1993) argue that, if readers find their situations similar to that of the study, they could ascribe the findings to their own cases. They also regard the researcher as responsible for enabling this to happen through the provision of sufficient contextual information. To apply this in my study, I tried to collect sufficient data to provide adequate detailed descriptions of the cases to enable readers to properly understand them and consequently compare different aspects of the phenomenon with those existing in their situations.

Although there is not a clear-cut list of which factors should be addressed when describing a case study, Guba (1981) states that a full description of all the contextual factors related to the research needs to be provided by the researcher. For this reason, the following contextual factors have been discussed throughout this chapter:

- a) The number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based;
- b) any restrictions on the type of people who contributed data;
- c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;
- d) the data collection methods that were employed;
- e) the number and length of the data collection sessions;
- f) the time period over which the data was collected.

As far as this research is concerned, it is more likely that it provides a baseline understanding with which the results of subsequent work should be compared since better understanding is gained through several studies, rather than only one. However, different studies sometimes offer different results from one another. This can be attributed to the issue of multiple realities – and the fact that all individual researchers will construct slightly different understandings of an issue. Therefore, understanding of the *reasons* behind the differences is as useful as the findings of the study to the reader.

4.6.3 Dependability

To fulfill this criterion, the research processes should be stated in detail to allow readers to evaluate the steps that have been followed as well as to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness (Shenton, 2004). In this study, to achieve dependability, the design of the study and its implementation, steps and details of data collection and a reflective appraisal of the project are elaborated in the rest of this chapter.

4.6.4 Confirmability

This refers to the extent to which the findings are the result of the unbiased interpretation of the researcher. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), researchers' statement of their own tendencies is a key criterion for confirmability. Therefore, principles of decisions and adopted methods need to be stated. In this study, the rationale for adopting the approach, the challenges and weaknesses associated with it are presented. With regard to the findings, initial codes were generated solely from the data and the process of generating themes based on research questions and available literature are discussed in their respective sections. In general, in-depth methodological description assists the reader to discern if the data and emerging theories are compatible. Furthermore, detailed elaboration of the decisions made and procedures is presented, e.g. showing how the data were managed during the course of the study.

4.7 Steps Followed from Data Collection to Data Analysis

The study was carried out with a prior plan beginning with the structuring of the initial interview questions, including all practical steps of data collection, to presenting the findings according to the timeline in the following table.

Table 4.1: Action timeline from data collection to presenting the findings

Time / date	Action
October 15 – January 16	Structuring the initial interview schedules
January 16	Search for documents
February 16	Applying for ethical approval
February 16	Approval for data collection from the universities under the study
March 16	Approaching potential participants
April 2016	Conducting Pilot Study
April 2016	Structuring the final draft of interview schedules
April 2016	Conducting the first session of focus group with third year students in University K
April 2016	Conducting the first session of semi-structured interview with Head of CDD and a member of academic committee in University K
April 2016	Conducting the first session of semi-structured interview with the Head of ELD and a member of academic committee in University K
April 2016	Conducting the first session of two focus groups with third year students (literature and linguistics branches separately) in University T
April 2016	Conducting the first session of semi-structured interview with Head of ELD and Head of CDD in University T
April 2016	Conducting semi-structured interviews with a member of academic committee and a teacher in University T
April 2016	Conducting the second session of focus group with third year students, a semi-structured interview with a teacher in University K
April 2016	Conducting the third session of focus group with third year students, a semi-structured interview with a teacher in University K
April 2016	Conducting the second session of two focus groups with third year students (literature and linguistics branches separately) in University T
April 2016	Conducting semi-structured interviews with three teachers in University T
April 2016	Conducting the third session of two focus groups with third year students (literature and linguistics branches separately) in University T
April 2016	Conducting the second session of semi-structured interview with Head of ELD and a teacher in University T
April 2016	Conducting the second session of semi-structured interview with a member of academic committee and the only session with another member in University T
April 2016	Conducting the first session of focus group with third year students in University K
April 2016	Conducting the second session of semi-structured interviews with head of CDD, Head of ELD and a member of academic committee in University K
April 2016	Conducting semi-structured interviews with three teachers in University K
May 16	Document data selection
June- September 16	Transcription
October- November 16	Semi-structured interview data validation
January-March 2017	Coding
April-July 2017	Presenting Findings

4.7.1 University Selection

As mentioned in the index of ELDs in Iraqi Kurdistan universities (see Table 2.1), there are 10 state universities that enroll students on undergraduate courses in English language and literature. The qualitative nature of this study with the aim of detailed and in-depth investigation of undergraduate students' perceptions and understanding of ELD curriculum does not allow the involvement of all universities that offer this degree. Therefore, a decision had to be made regarding the selection of universities. There were two things that needed to be considered. The first was the number of institutions that were selected, and the second was inclusion or exclusion of the individual institutions.

With regard to the number of institutions, I decided to include English language departments from only two universities for a number of personal, practical and research-driven reasons. Personally, I had a desire to conduct a comparison to generate insights that would have remained hidden if I had focused on only one university. However, due to my personal circumstances and limitations, I had a limited time for data collection, and in it, I could only tackle two universities. Practically, accessibility of participants, manageability of data in terms of collection, analyses and presentation are other factors influencing the decision to include only two universities. In terms of research concerns, conducting a qualitative study in more than two universities and collecting data from participants including decision makers, teachers and students in more than two universities would have resulted in a massive amount of data which would have limited the depth of analysis possible for each case: the qualitative, exploratory nature of the study, which entails richness and depth, would have come under question. It would have been possible to add the third university, if I had delimited the scope of this study to focus only on either aims and objectives, or content of curriculum in three universities. In the end, I preferred the former option and decided to study both components of curriculum, i.e., aims and objectives, and content, in two universities.

Which institutions should be included in the study was the second point of consideration. For this, I intended to include ELDs of two universities located at two geographically different places: University K is in one of the biggest cities in the KR and was established in late seventies; the other, University T, is located in a town and was established only eight years ago.

The selection (sampling) of the ELDs in their respective universities was in line with both convenience and purposive sampling procedures. It corresponds with convenience sampling due to the fact that these two universities were practically accessible due to personal reasons outlined below. However, they were also selected purposively to provide contrast, as also explained below.

The personal reasons are the researcher's acquaintance with the Heads of ELDs, study experience in the former institution, and work and teaching experience in the latter. These personal factors helped the researcher to gain access to student participants, administrative facilities and official documents. The practical and scientific reasons derive from the uniqueness of the two institutions in terms of some characteristics, despite many substantial similarities among all institutions in the region. The similarities among the universities are in the methods of teaching, assessment system, enrolment system, and similarity of attendants in terms of culture, education, age, gender profile, and other aspects. The uniqueness of University K lies in its location and in its being one of the oldest institutions in the KR. Moreover, it could be the centre of attention and the focus of policy due to having a large number of students and having many colleges and departments; thus, the findings about this university could be regarded as applicable to other universities. The uniqueness of University T lies in its recent establishment, its major attempts to develop university independence in terms of syllabus change, foreign staff employment, efforts to provide electronic facilities and attempts to be accredited by a European university.

Including the first institution has the benefit of making the study more likely to be taken more seriously by the government, since the study intends to inform policy with directions for change and curriculum development. For University T, such a study could also be particularly useful since the research findings could inform university policy, both in illuminating the impact of changes that have been made and attitudes towards intended changes in the future, and in providing insight into one of its priority areas: student satisfaction.

In addition, each year a larger number of students apply to ELD in University K compared to University T. Due to the limited intake of universities, the students in University K have higher GCSE scores than those enrolled in University T. This difference broadens the scope of the sample.

Furthermore, due to its comparatively long history, the staff in University K hold higher degrees, higher academic ranks, may be supposed to have more teaching experience, and are comparatively older in age. Therefore, it was intended that the collected data from two supposedly different sets of teachers would also bring new insights to the fore. Moreover, there is a conception that the changes could be easily and better applied in newer universities due to comparatively fewer number of students and teaching staff, and the argument that the habits are deeper rooted in older universities and consequently any change is more challenging in those universities. Therefore, studying University T as a new and University K as an old one could again broaden the scope of the sample.

In addition to this, it was considered highly likely that University K host some local students who belong to ethnic and religious minorities like Turkmen, Christians or Arabs as well as from Internally displaced people or migrant Syrians due to the fact that a small fraction of the population in the city are Turkmen and Christians and there are a lot of internally displaced people in this city. In University T, there might be very few, if any

student from other minorities. This difference could also result in different perceptions due to students' different backgrounds that would probably lead to in-depth understanding and richer data as well as the originality of the study.

4.7.2 Participant Selection

This study, like any other interpretive study, did not aim at generalisability. Therefore, probability sampling was not employed. With regard to the decision makers, the sampling followed a special type of purposive sampling named key informant sampling. The key informants were heads of CDD and heads of ELDs. Concerning the teachers, the initial plan of the researcher was in line with a special type of purposive sampling called criterion sampling as the plan was to interview teachers from different age groups, gender, specialty, nationality and university of graduation. However, in reality, in University K, because the teachers were from different range of sub-specialties, within similar age groups, similar nationalities and mostly graduates of Iraqi universities, the sampling followed a random method. This was also true of University T, except the fact that few teachers were graduates of UK universities. Therefore, one of the teachers was a graduate of a UK University. Consequently, the plan to include from both groups introduced an element of purposive sampling to the otherwise random selection.

Concerning student participants, the sampling took place at two levels, namely current students and recent graduates. For the selection of current students, various types of purposive sampling were employed. First, critical case sampling was used to identify the best stage of study for participants to be in at the time of data collection. Such a decision depended on the central focus of the study expressed through research questions, with the aim of obtaining the deepest and richest data needed for it (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Considering the aim of the study and focus of the questions, in addition to some practical barriers, I decided to select participants from the third year students of both

universities. The rationale behind this choice was the suitability of third year students in terms of the richness of their experience, not found in first and second year students, while fourth year (final stage) students were busier with their studies and graduation papers that left them potentially with comparatively limited time and consequently less enthusiasm to participate in the study. In addition, because any finding or any direction towards improvement would not affect the fourth stage, I thought that they might not have had the motive for participation. Furthermore, the second stage of sampling was related to the selection of potential focus group participants among third year students that followed a specific type of purposive sampling called criterion sampling within the broad purposive sampling followed in qualitative studies. This sub type of sampling was suitable because the concern was to deal with individuals who were representative of different positions and backgrounds in relation to the topic under the study in order to conduct a comprehensive study and to enhance the understanding of the case. This type of sampling was also useful in that it resulted in richer data by including the perspectives and understandings of participants from both genders, different achievement levels, different cultures and sects, and other potential varieties that might be found among the students who attended the university. Finally, within those who met the criteria, volunteer sampling was adopted.

The graduates were approached through gatekeepers and the selection of participants followed a special type of purposive sampling called criterion sampling. There were two criteria in their selection. The first was that they needed to have graduated less than three years before than the time of data collection for two reasons. The first reason for this was the desirability of including those whose information was fresh and whose experience would be similar due to the similarity of their social circumstances. The second reason was that the graduates would have taken a variety of jobs, so will be able to reflect on the value of the English course from different perspectives.

The next issue was related to the number of participants as well as the method of approaching or involving them in the research. There is no limit to the number of participants in qualitative studies, but in this study, I intended to draw groups of 8-12 students, and six graduate students, from each department to access a range of different and multiple perspectives yet accumulating a manageable amount of data.

The ELD in University K had 72 third year students in two groups of A and B, and, in University T, there were 61 in two branches of literature and linguistics. Before selecting the student participants, I had meetings with department coordinators. In order to start approaching the students, I discussed my study outline with them, and explained my sampling criteria such as my preference for including all types of abilities, both genders and all social statuses as representatives of different positions and backgrounds. The department coordinator in University T shortlisted 14 students from each branch of linguistics and literature. Similarly, in University K, the coordinator shortlisted 14 students from each group (3A and 3B). Therefore, the initial sample pool of 28 students from both groups A and B (14 students from Group A and 14 students from Group B) in university K, and the initial sample pool of 28 students (14 from literature branch and 14 from linguistics branch) in University T were created. Concerning accessing the participants, in coordination with the department coordinators, they were all invited to an introductory meeting in which the importance and aims of the study as well as their crucial role in making it a success were elaborated. In University T, seven students from the literature branch and six students from the linguistics branch indicated their eagerness to take part in the focus-group interviews, which was in accordance with our estimated take-up. In University K, the same procedure was followed and seven students from 3A and seven students from 3B volunteered to participate in the focus groups. The students in each university were divided into two groups as follows. In University T, the students were in two groups of seven and six students in the branches of literature and linguistics, respectively. In University K, since the programme of their

study was identical for both groups, I used seven participants from group B for the pilot study.

Approaching the graduate students was more challenging. The original plan was to approach them and decide about their inclusion in the study based on their occupation and other criteria. The identification of potential participants was not a challenge since, as is usual in government institutions, the three top graduates in each department are employed by the university. Therefore, few of these graduates had a gatekeeper's role in selecting graduate participants. Two graduates were working in each department at the time of data collection. They each contacted 5 graduates from their previous classmates and provided information about my research and asked them whether they wanted to participate in interviews for my study. Unfortunately, a total of four graduates from the two universities accepted the invitation to participate in this study and for only one session. This was due to their job requirements or other personal reasons, making them unavailable for face-to-face interviews or focus groups. Therefore, I could only interview three graduates by skype and conduct a face-to-face semi-structured interview with a fourth.

Approaching Heads of CDDs, Heads of ELDs, members of academic committee and teachers was easier. I personally knew all of them except the Head of CDD in University T. After I approached them, they suggested interview times that were suitable for them. They were happy to conduct the interviews in their offices. I did not have any criteria for selecting members of academic committees. Therefore, I was randomly contacting members of academic committees, and based on their availability and interest in the study, the interview was taking place. Concerning the teachers, the plan was to interview five teachers from each ELD. The original idea was to approach teachers from different age groups, academic ranks, specializations, gender and nationalities. However, the plan was not applicable due to the limited number of the teaching staff in both ELDs to the extent that even interviewing all the teachers could hardly render such a

representative sample. Therefore, I adopted random sampling and contacted teachers from both linguistics and literature specialties. I considered my first interview with a teacher as a pilot study. Following are the tables of demographic information about the participants.

Table 4.2: Demographic information about decision makers

Name	Role	University	Age	Gender	No of years serving in this position	Academic Rank and specialty	Country of getting their last degree
-	Director of CDD	University K	52	Female	10	Professor	Iraq
-	Director of CDD	University T	50	Male	2	Assistant Professor	Iraq
-	Head of ELD	University K	49	Male	3	Senior Lecturer	Iraq
-	Head of ELD	University T	48	Female	2	Senior Lecturer	UK
Isa	Member of the academic committee	University K	53	Male	15	Assistant Professor	Iraq
Lana	Member of the academic committee	University K	45	Female	4	Senior Lecturer	Iraq
Ahmed	Member of the academic committee	University T	37	Male	2	Senior Lecturer	UK
Hadi	Member of the academic committee	University T	38	Male	2	Senior Lecturer	Iraq

Table 4.3: Demographic information about teachers

Name	University	Age	Gender	No of years serving in this position	Academic rank and specialty	Country of getting their last degree
Alan	University K	45	Male	14	Assistant Professor	Iraq
Amin	University K	42	Male	13	Lecturer	Iraq
Vida	University K	46	Female	15	Assistant Professor	Iraq
Shan	University K	42	Female	14	Lecturer	Iraq
Mani	University K	39	Male	10	Lecturer	Iraq
Dosti	University T	36	Male	5	Lecturer	Iraq
Raha	University T	36	Male	6	Lecturer	Iraq
Yad	University T	35	Male	6	Lecturer	Iraq
Hevi	University T	36	Female	6	Lecturer	Iraq
Sana	University T	34	Female	4	Lecturer	UK

Table 4.4: Demographic information about students

Name	University	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Kani	University K	22	Female	Christian
Kavi	University K	22	Female	Kurdish
Hasan	University K	21	Male	Kurdish
Dastan	University K	22	Male	Kurdish
Fenk	University K	22	Female	Turkman
Kafi	University K	22	Male	Kurdish
Shilan	University K	21	Female	Kurdish
Nada	University T	22	Female	Kurdish
Hawre	University T	21	Male	Kurdish
Jwan	University T	22	Female	Kurdish
Kovan	University T	21	Female	Kurdish
Rawa	University T	21	Male	Kurdish
Sirwan	University T	21	Male	Kurdish
Zara	University T	21	Female	Kurdish
Awara	University T	22	Male	Kurdish
Renas	University T	20	Female	Kurdish
Avan	University T	21	Female	Kurdish
Jinan	University T	22	Female	Christian
Hana	University T	22	Male	Kurdish
Azhin	University T	21	Female	Kurdish
Adam	University K	25	Male	Kurdish
Zin	University K	26	Female	Kurdish
Darin	University T	26	Male	Kurdish
Pari	University T	25	Female	Kurdish

4.7.3 Methods of Data Collection

In qualitative studies which attempt at understanding the experiences of human beings, researchers resort to several methods of data collection. The data in qualitative studies can be generated either after implementation of an intervention or from the study of the phenomenon in its natural setting without any intervention (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In the latter case, generally, (unstructured, semi structured) interviews, (participant, nonparticipant) observation, and document analyses are the main types of data collection methods used. The uses of these methods are mainly determined by the research question and the methodology adopted in the study. This study investigates students' experience of the curriculum in its real world context. In order to study "people's understanding of the meaning in their lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 72), and "to understand other persons' constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them" (Jones, 1985, p. 46). Merriam (1998, p. 72) expresses the rationale behind using this method as helping the researcher "find out those things we cannot directly observe.... feelings, thoughts, and intentions". Concerning the type of data they produce, Rubin and Rubin (2012) state that qualitative interviews generate rich descriptions and in-depth details about the phenomenon under the study. This confirms that interview is the most widely used tool of collecting data, although the rationale behind using this method in this study is its compatibility with the aims, objectives and research questions, not because of the widespread use of this method, particularly as none of the questions required the researcher to observe the participants. Therefore, in this study, interview and document analyses serve as the sources of data from the participants. In order to generate the data required by the first two research questions, students were interviewed through multisession focus group interviews. The interview with the graduate students took a different mode according to their availability: one-session Skype and face to face semi-structured interview. Depending on their free times and preference, the interviews with the decision makers and teachers took the form of face – to– face semi-structured interviews. In what follows, the specific interview methods, i.e. focus group and semi-structured interview, will be discussed in more detail with reference to their implementation in this study.

As mentioned above, interview is the main method of collecting data for this study. The aims and research questions in addition to the “issues of feasibility” determined the type of the interview (Hatch, 2002, p. 97). With particular regard to the type of qualitative interview, the focus group and individual semi-structured interviews were implemented as they generate rich and thick data (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The interviews with the decision makers and the teachers were semi-structured interviews to meet the aim of collecting data about specific questions set in advance, followed-up by probes which asked participants to further elaborate on their answers, so that I could take the lead in the interview but allow for a wide range of responses.

In the following table, according to the research questions in this study, the corresponding methods of data collection are indicated.

Table 4.5: Methods of Data Collection Corresponding to Research Questions

Research questions	Data sources	Method of data collection
1. What are the values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum in the two English Language Departments?	Ministerial orders, Activity reports, Module descriptors, minutes of meetings Heads of ELDs, Heads of CDDs	Document analysis Semi-structured interview
	Heads of ELDs, Heads of CDDs, Members of academic committees	Semi-structured interview
2. How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the aims and objectives of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?	Heads of ELDs, Heads of CDDs, Members of academic committees, teachers	Semi-structured interview
	Current students	Focus group interview,
	Graduate Students	Semi-structured interview
3. How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the content of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?	Heads of ELDs, Heads of CDDs, Members of academic committees, teachers	Semi-structured interview
	Current students	Focus group interview,
	Graduate Students	Semi-structured interview

As shown in the above table, interview is the main method of data collection in this study. Therefore, in what follows a theoretical account of interview and specifically the focus group and individual semi-structured interviews is provided.

4.7.3.1 Documents

In order to collect data about policy, in addition to my previous searches for documents, I recognised that the decision makers, in interviews, might sometimes refer to some official documents such as reports, meeting minutes, or other decrees. Therefore, in addition to interview, another source of data was the documents that were found and referred to by the Heads of the ELDs or CDD upon which some decisions had been made. Thus, document analyses were carried out in parallel with the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In what follows, a theoretical account of document analyses is given, then information that researchers need to know before attempting document analyses.

Document analyses can be the only source of data for certain types of research that involve the analyses of policy (Punch, 2009). Educational researchers that adopt case study or grounded theory approaches might also use documents as sources of data along other methods of data collection (Denzin, 1998). Documents might not be only in the form of words; they might be available in the form of public records, media records and reports, private papers, biographies, and visual records (Punch, 2009). Furthermore, Jupp (1996) considers governmental pronouncement, administrative orders, memorandum, personal note and diary as other types of documents. Educational institutions, such as academic committees of departments in colleges and universities as well as policy and administration units issue significant amounts of such data. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 159), collections, figures and reports that contain quantitative data are regarded as documentary data.

Documentary sources have been classified in various ways. MacDonald (2008) classifies them into four broad types, namely public archives, private records, media, and audio-visual material. Another classification is based on originality, distinguishing between primary and secondary data (Finnegan, 1996). Scott (1990) provides a dual classification in terms of authorship and access. With regard to authorship, he

distinguishes two classes of official and personal data in which the former is further divided into private and public. In terms of accessibility to ordinary people four classes of data are recognised. These include blocked, limited, accessible-archival and accessible published.

These classifications are important for researchers since they provide some guidelines for the evaluation of such documents. Researchers are enabled to get more information about the documents in terms of their originality, accuracy, representation and meaning. In terms of originality, the documents might be authentic and genuine or not. With regard to accuracy, MacDonald (2008) states that the documents should not be taken for granted and their accuracy should be questioned as they affect the credibility of data and the data analyses. The documents should also be tested to see if they represent the other data and also for the meaning that is intended to be conveyed and the meaning which they convey in reality (Jupp, 1996). Therefore, the best way to utilise documentary data is to make use of them in triangulation with other sources of data collection.

In this research, the focus is not the examination of documents alone. The rationale behind document analyses was to explore policy in relation to curriculum which might include documents about curriculum development, curriculum plans and priorities which are mostly in the form of official government documents. Forty-six documents including ministerial order (n=1), activity report (n=1), curriculum development guidelines (n=1), minutes of meetings on the curriculum (n=1), directives (n=2) and module descriptors (n=40) were studied (see appendix 9). Document analysis in this study was not planned to be limited to only eliciting data from government official documents, but from students' personal diaries, notes, student feedback which consisted of their thoughts, actions or creations in relation to their experiences of curriculum. However, these specific types of documents were not available.

These documents used in this study, along with the semi-structured interviews with the decision-makers and teachers, and focus groups with students, served as a rich source of data, especially when for any reason the current administrative bodies were not aware of the historical aspect of the events or for any reason the primary sources of data from people were not sufficient (Potter, 1996). The thematic analysis of these

documents (n=46) was managed side by side with the data generated from focus group and semi-structured interviews.

4.7.3.2 Interview

Interviews have been classified according to function (Moser, 1958) and formality (Fitzgerald & Cox, 1987). Additionally, Madge (1965, p. 165) identifies two opposing types of “formative” and “mass” interviews based on the participants’ choice of “the topics to be discussed and the way in which they are discussed”. Moreover, in terms of the mode, Mason (2012) distinguishes face to face, internet and on-paper interviews. Although there are novel classifications in the literature, Denzin’s (1978) three-type-classification into structured, semi-structured and unstructured fits the quantitative qualitative distinction. The structured interview is used in scientific approaches to generate quantitative data, but the semi-structured interview and unstructured interviews are used in qualitative studies (Berg, 2001).

Semi-structured interview consists of “a series of predetermined but open-ended questions” (Ayres, 2008, p. 810). The term ‘predetermined’ and ‘open-ended’ refer to the structure of the method, but the open-endedness implies that the interviewee uses her/his own words to answer. Semi-structured interviews have some characteristics that make them a flexible method of data collection. Regarding the type of data, the questions may generate “relatively concrete” or “more narrative information” (Ayres, 2008, p. 810). Also, the interview questions are scheduled and formulated beforehand, but the researcher may use various probes and prompts (Kvale, 1996). The “flexibility balanced by the structure and quality of the data” (Ayres, 2008, p. 810) provides a better chance to investigate specific topics by further probes and prompts (Kvale, 1996), along with the likelihood that details not directly might be discovered, can be considered as the reasons why semi-structured interviews are so widespread in qualitative research.

Semi-structured interviews are used by qualitative researchers to reconstruct participants’ experiences in order to investigate multifaceted subjects and to understand “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, researchers use this method to access the participants’ subjective views, perceptions, understandings, and experiences. Semi-

structured interviews provide in-depth understanding in the course of investigating “the contextual boundaries”, reveal unclear views, and express “the multiple views of perspectives and meanings” of “some lived cultural experiences” (Johnson, 2002, p. 106).

There are some significant advantages associated with semi-structured interviews. The first advantage is that they can be utilised in different types of qualitative research as an efficient method of collecting data (Yin, 2014) to generate in-depth, abundant and rich data (Ayres, 2008). Second, being both structured and open-ended provides “the researcher with more control over the topics of interview due to the opportunity for immediate follow up” (Ayres, 2008, p. 810). This also allows the respondents to express their views, perceptions and experiences using their own words. They can also retell past events and actions and future views as well (Foddy, 1993). Third, they can be triangulated with other methods “to check out theories formulated through naturalistic observation” (Johnson, 2002, p. 104).

On the other hand, some disadvantages are associated with the semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the respondents may change their views and attitudes because of the different types and various orderings of the interview questions (Foddy, 1993). Secondly, all of the levels of design, implementation and data analyses take a lot of time (Robson, 2005) and consequently only a comparatively small number of such interviews can be implemented. Therefore, the results are not likely to be as representative or generalisable. Thirdly, the data collected from each participant is unique and therefore it is not possible to directly compare or contrast the results. Fourthly, participants are not always eager to share their views, so there is no guarantee of the participants’ honesty and the participants might become aware of the researcher’s wishes and inclinations (Marshall, 2006) which could then affect the data. Fifthly, subjectivity and bias will become inevitable if the interviewer fails to keep neutrality (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

These challenges and disadvantages were minimised and the quality of the whole process was improved by a careful and well-designed interview as the disadvantages are more related to the interviewer rather than the method (Edenborough, 2002). Knowing these disadvantages, I tried to test the clarity, neutrality and appropriate wording of the interview questions through a well- managed pilot study. In terms of the

time-consuming process of the interview, I set a timetable and selected only a limited number of participants so as to get the richest possible data in the available time. This research did not include generalizability in its aims. Therefore, I have been able to minimise the impact of these disadvantages on both the data and the findings.

4.7.3.3 Focus Groups

To involve students in concentrated discussions about the topics of the study, focus group interviews were conducted. The focus group is a widely used method in social sciences (Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy & Flay, 1991). The rationale for adopting this method in this study was as follows. Firstly, it was too difficult and impractical to conduct face-to-face personal interviews with girls due to some religious and cultural concerns. Therefore, I had to resort either to e-mail interviews or to focus group interviews. The e-mail interview would not be as effective since the interviewer has limited chances of probing and there is always the possibility of misunderstanding. It could also be potentially more difficult to get the trust of the interviewee and build rapport. Feelings and experiences could have been lost in written texts. On the other hand, there are some advantages associated with focus group interviews that other methods may not have. The process of data collection through focus group interview will give the opportunity to the researcher to observe the interaction among the participants which sometimes gives a better picture of the participants' experiences and views (Berg, 2001) when participants express shared and private experiences. Furthermore, the focus group interaction creates an atmosphere of give and take that results in spontaneity of information (Morgan, 1993). Focus group interviews also allow the researcher get at a comparatively larger amount of data than by any other method in a shorter time.

However, there are challenges associated with this method that the researcher needs to consider. Focus groups can be dominated and influenced by dominant members of the group, which can make the outcome unrepresentative of any spread opinion. Here the experience of the moderator is very essential in managing the situation so that every member gets the chance to participate. I was able to manage this problem easily by reminding the participants that I wanted all of them to participate in the discussions. With regard to sensitive topics, focus group interviews are supposed to be less effective since the participants may rarely share their real feelings in public. To minimise this problem in

this study, at the beginning of each session I gave a blank sheet of paper to focus group members to give them the chance of sharing things in private if they did not want other members to know. It has also been a criticism that focus group interviews are often conducted in an artificial environment. This may affect the data because the participants might answer differently in formal situations from what they believe or have in their minds when they are in informal situations. In this study, due to the proper arrangement and well-explained procedures, I believe this issue was minimised. I endeavored to establish a good rapport and create a semi-formal environment, so that the participants felt free and comfortable and knew that they were participating in research related to their own experiences that could finally contribute to its improvement. Also, the pilot focus-group (discussed in 4.7.5) was a useful step towards putting my plans into practice to identify any problems and possible solutions. However, the possibility of participants giving misinformation still remains, as in other self-report methods of data collection such as semi-structured interviews.

In what follows the practicalities of applying the interview will be discussed in terms of designing the interview schedule, piloting, transcription, translation, time and place, and rapport.

4.7.3.4 Interview Schedule

Interview questions were formulated thoughtfully since the type of information that was needed was determined by the type of the question (Mears, 2009; Nourum, 2008). The interview schedule was designed in such a way that each session of the semi-structured interviews with teachers and the focus groups with students would aim at answering one research question. These questions were subject to rewording and modification especially as a result of piloting (see appendix 4 for the original and appendix 5 for revised interview schedules). They were checked to ascertain that they met the criteria in terms of ordering, style, content, focus and clarity as Julien (2008) focuses on double checking the interview questions for accidental errors or inaccuracies. These questions were open to further expansion and followed by potential and instant probes where necessary during the interview and focus group sessions.

The questions were available in Kurdish and English Languages. They were first formulated in English and I translated them into Kurdish. In some cases, translation could be problematic since meaning loss in translation has always been a subject of debate in the literature due to grammatical structures and cultural differences. To avoid all these problems my plan was to consult professional interpreters (translators) to ensure that the translation was acceptable (Creswell, 2007). In this process, three neutral interpreters were given the whole translated texts to test the reliability of the translation and its consistency as well. Therefore, consultation with a third party increased the acceptability of the translation. This also ensured that the objectives of the questions were intact. Translation is not just merely an inter-linguistic process for research study. If the words are not translated for meaning from every aspect, they will not be able to convey the importance of the question to the participant adequately. Therefore, the focus was on translating the spirit of the words as well as the meaning. This is the reason the third party perspective helped double-checking the questions, ensuring that they were translated efficiently and would be able to elicit an adequate outcome as well. The pilot feedback was also very helpful and effective in ensuring that questions that were asked were meaningful and relevant.

4.7.4 Focus Group and Interview Arrangements

After identifying potential participants, I tried to contact them and invite them to participate in focus group sessions. I found it more effective to approach them and be introduced to them through a teacher in each institution to raise the level of positive response and to encourage them to participate in the interview sessions. Therefore, they received telephone invitations, followed by letters describing the purpose, content, structure and location of the first meetings with prospective participants. I made sure that they did not face barriers concerning transportation or baby-sitting needs. The idea of giving the participants incentives was not refused by the institutions; therefore, I prepared food vouchers in advance to give to participants after the focus group sessions.

4.7.4.1 Time of the Sessions

Concerning the timing of the interviews with the participants at the two universities, the period of conducting them was between mid-March to mid-April 2016. I chose to collect

my data at this time for a number of reasons. At this time of the year, the students are under less tension regarding exams, the daytimes are longer, and the weather is pleasant. Therefore, the students are in a better psychological condition. Choosing the exact time of the interviews was decided upon with the departments' and students' agreement. So no exact time was imposed by me. However, my suggestion was to conduct the focus group sessions on the days that students had the least number of lectures since they would feel less tired and they would be ready for the interview.

4.7.4.2 Building Rapport

One of the factors that is very important in ensuring interview success is building rapport, a relationship through which the interviewees feel comfortable to speak about their experiences with the interviewer, since "the quantity and quality of the data shared with the researcher depend in part on the relationship that develops between the researcher and various participants" (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009, p. 282). Goudy and Potter (1975) regard rapport as promoted through an open and welcoming chat which helps to create an atmosphere in which the interviewees feel comfortable, able to be involved in a meaningful dialogue and happy to reveal their experiences.

The intended plan to achieve rapport was to take a number of practical measures before the start of the interviews to ensure that the interviews started in a positive way. An important factor to consider is appropriateness and calmness of the location. I suggested that the place of the interview might be in one of the lecture halls of the department since it could be "an unthreatening location" for both sides (Walford, 2001, p. 89). I also thought about choosing an appropriate site for focus group sessions. I considered comfort, convenience, potential for interruption and noise level to define a good site for those discussions. I also made sure that the allocated university rooms and lecture halls were quiet and convenient for the participants.

The participants did not need to walk or drive long distances to get to the location. They also did not need to pay any extra cost for transportation except any they usually had to pay to get to the university. I also considered the participants' perception of the location as I asked if it was as a place where they felt welcome and comfortable. The location

was a familiar one, easily accessible, and of an appropriate size for the focus group activity.

The locations had the proper facilities in terms of comfortable chairs to accommodate everyone. Participants also had access to a writing surface. There were more chairs than needed but the furniture was not flexible and easily movable, so no decisions could be taken to keep or remove tables and the surplus chairs.

The place for putting the drinks or water bottles was not ideal. Being a lecture hall, the rooms had a whiteboard and projection device. The light was sufficient, the room temperature was ideal. In general, apart from some minor problems, ideal circumstances were attainable.

The opening contact started with a friendly welcome and a social chit-chat about the weather and checking if the participants found the room temperature fine or not. The next step was a concise explanation and opening of the subject matter of the interview and the aims of the research, getting consent to record the interviews, requesting that they sign the informed consent form and making sure if there were any issues or inquiries before the interviews started (Kvale, 2007). Another point was that the participants were assured “that there are no right or wrong answers” and the participants were encouraged “to talk from their own perspectives and experiences” (Hatch, 2002, p. 102).

One of the other points that I found necessary to be addressed before the start of the interview was about information that might be related to a very personal or private aspects of students’ experience. Students were assured about the privacy of data and I also gave them my telephone number and e-mail as well as a blank sheet of paper to write on in case any of them was reluctant to express his/her experience.

4.7.5 Piloting

To check the appropriateness of the methods of data collection and their practicality with regard to interview questions and potential interview problems, I piloted the semi-structured interview and focus-group sessions. This pilot test was to show any flaws, limits or weak points within the interview design. Therefore, necessary modifications and

revisions were made prior to the actual conduct of the interviews (Kvale, 2007). However, there are examples of cases in the literature in which, even after the pilot test, the participants did not grasp the purpose of the questions (Foddy, 1993). To avoid this, I chose to ask them in both Kurdish and English Languages, and during the piloting stage, double-checked if the questions were clear. The pilot study for this research was conducted with students and teachers from “the same kind as the research group” (Gillham, 2005, p. 73).

With regard to sampling and participant selection for piloting interviews, I had two sessions of pilot focus groups with one group of students in University K and one session of semi-structured interview with a teacher in the same university. The sampling process for real data collection and piloting was the same as will be explained in section 4.8.

Therefore, the main issue that was intended to be dealt with in the piloting stage was the refinement of interview schedules and focus group guide. The purpose was to produce questions that would obtain maximum data from the participants’ experiences. The appropriateness of the questions was checked with regard to their being worded in a way that made participants feel free to use their own words, and exhibiting neutrality and non-judgementality so that students were not influenced by them, as well as being monitored for understandability of the questions so that every item and overall question was clear (McNamara, 2009). In this process, the pilot study showed that most of the questions were clear and understandable except for a very few cases in which I changed the wording of the questions to achieve more clarity.

4.7.6 Language

I did not impose my tentative plan of conducting the interviews and focus groups in the Kurdish Language. The reason behind my plan was the assumption that feelings and perceptions could be better expressed and communicated in the mother tongue. Meanwhile, the participants were from the ELD either as teachers or students, so they knew how to communicate in English at different levels of fluency. In the event, both languages were used in the interview and focus group sessions as I asked the participants to decide and choose the language in which they wanted to answer the

questions. However, checking translated transcriptions and listening to the audio data in two different languages posed a great difficulty (Seale, 1999). In the case of interviews conducted in Kurdish Language, the data was first transcribed and coded in Kurdish and was then translated into English in those cases where extracts from the data were used in the writing-up to support the arguments. I had my translation of the data extracts checked and confirmed by professional English-Kurdish (and vice-versa) translators through the previously mentioned procedures to avoid any problems related to the translation process.

4.7.7 Data Analyses

4.7.7.1 Procedures

Data analysis is regarded as a critical issue in qualitative studies due to the abundance of data and of different methods of data analysis, i.e., there is no prescribed way to carry out the process of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, it is more likely that researchers will conduct data analysis in a quite different manner from one another according to the research questions, theoretical foundation of the research and appropriateness of the procedures followed to interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). However, this does not mean that qualitative data analysis is a disorganised process.

According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999), data analysis refers to reducing collected data through summarisation, categorization and presenting patterns and themes. Denscombe (2007) states that such a process does not always follow a linear approach and it could be iterative and recursive. Moreover, Merriam (1998) describes this process as a complex action of moving back and forth between data and concepts, between description and interpretation, using both inductive and deductive approaches.

In this study, due to the limited time available for data collection and short intervals between interview and focus group sessions, I did not have the chance to completely apply “ongoing analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162), which necessitates transcription of any interview or focus group session before the start of another session. However, understanding the role and benefits of this the process (Yin, 2014), I was constantly taking notes during data collection, as well as taking notes after the interview and focus

group sessions through listening to the recordings. Through this, I conducted a preliminary identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 57).

After the completion of data collection, I started transcribing the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In what follows, the practicalities of dealing with the data are discussed. The verbal recorded data had to be transferred to written text. There are two different ways to carry out transcription. Taking the fact that the interview and focus groups included plenty of irrelevant points into consideration, transcribing only the relevant and useful parts of the conversations was an option. However, I decided to apply the second option, i.e., verbatim transcription, to have a more complete data. This gave me the option to go through the written text along with listening to the recorded data to better engage with the verbal data to account for non-verbal clues such as signals, silence or laughter along with the notes taken during the interviews (Wengraf, 2001). Therefore, by bringing the verbatim transcribed conversations, listening to recorded conversations and the notes that were taken during interviews and those that were taken immediately after each session of interview or focus group for instant ideas, I could guarantee a more complete data.

Another issue associated with the transcriptions was whether to send them back to the student participants or not. Sending them back to participants could be a way to guarantee trustworthiness of the data. However, I decided not to send the transcriptions of focus group sessions back to the participants for two reasons. Firstly, it was possible that some students might change their mind and start disagreeing with they have already stated (Kvale, 1996). Secondly, it could be a time consuming process for every student to confirm his/her own part. Thirdly and most importantly, I could not guarantee the confidentiality of the data by sending every student the whole transcription. Therefore, I decided to listen to the recordings for another extra time and run two separate processes of coding.

The raw data included the verbatim transcriptions of interviews and relevant parts of texts from documents. For the intensive data analysis, I followed the thematic analysis approach. This approach is compatible with my research due to its potential to identify, analyse and interpret themes and patterns of meaning across the entire body of data

(Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although thematic analysis is often aligned to an inductive approach to analysis (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010), Boyatzis (1998) states that it is compatible with both inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis. I followed a mainly inductive approach because I wanted to allow the themes emerge from the data rather than from my own preconceived assumptions (Patton, 2002). However, the research questions, undeniably, have guided the data collection and the ongoing analysis.

In this study, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic data analysis: 'familiarising with the data', 'generating initial codes', 'searching for themes', 'defining and naming themes', and 'producing the report' (p. 87). The data analysis was mainly a sequential approach in a sense that completion of one phase lead to the next phase. However, there were instances where I moved back and forth when needed throughout the phases. In the following a more detailed account of each of the above mentioned phases is given.

Familiarising with the data: Braun and Clarke (2006) find it a key step for the researcher to be immersed in data to be familiarised with it. In this research, most of the data is verbal. Therefore, prior to the start of the coding process, as mentioned earlier, I listened to the recorded files of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups at the end of each session and before the start of the new session for two reasons: first, I wanted to take notes and modify my immediate thoughts about the participants' answers; second, I wanted to check if the collected data was linked to the research questions and to identify if there were any other points to be answered or not, in addition to considering any necessary adjustments for the coming interviews. As a result of listening, reading and note-taking, I become more familiarised with the data. In addition to that, I decided to transcribe the data verbatim, and for this, I listened to the data at least two more times. Therefore, in practice, I actively read and reread the data several times. Braun and Clarke (2006) consider this a key factor in fulfilling the first step.

Generating codes: Although I could have had a set of initial codes based on the research questions and the relevant literature, in order to avoid personal preconceptions and only looking for certain codes, I left the choice of codes open to be determined by the data. Coding is an iterative and incremental process that may be performed at

different levels of abstraction. I carried out the process of coding my data twice at two separate times. This had two advantages. First, I could ascertain that all the data was coded and no piece of information worthy of coding was left uncoded. Second, I could make sure that the memos and my interpretations were consistent across both codings.

This process was successful, and through comparing both versions, it became evident that the two codings were substantially similar, with only a few cases of additional codes in the second version, and some better wordings and interpretations and memos in both versions. Therefore, the new codes were accepted and the better worded memos were selected (see appendix 6). This type of coding is in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) statement that coding is not a straightforward process; it is rather a cyclical process in which the data are coded and recoded more than once.

The software that was employed to facilitate the analysis was MAXQDA. This program is compatible with my data analysis method, i.e., thematic analysis, and the language of the data (Mills et al., 2010) as different participants preferred either English or Kurdish languages. These two languages follow different writing systems. Such data could only be tackled through MAXQDA. In general, this program was quite helpful in allowing me to generate and handle a large number of codes systematically.

Search for themes: At this stage the coded data had to be put into categories, a process called axial coding. For this purpose, similar codes (referring to, or related to the same topic or aspect) were grouped together. In the same manner, the relevant categories were put under broader groupings which in turn were classified as broad units of significant information about the research questions, i.e., themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the progression from the codes towards the themes is a move from data towards a pattern that is more abstract. The latter is affected by the literature as well as research questions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) since the purpose behind the generating the themes is to address the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

In this research, the codes were related to the decision makers, teachers, and students' perceptions of curriculum development, teachers and students' involvement in curriculum development, the participants' perceptions of the aim and objectives of

curriculum, their perceptions of the content, and also core and optional modules. These were the five initial themes that were identified at this stage.

Reviewing themes: During this stage, the five tentative themes that were identified in the previous stage were reviewed, modified and refined. This was carried out by reading the data related to each theme and ensuring that the data supported them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a result, due to their overlap and connectedness, the first two initial themes and the last two were merged. Therefore, three themes were identified at this stage. This review proved to be useful as it served as another search for availability of any relevant data to further support a theme (Merriam, 2009).

Defining and naming themes: The purpose of this stage was to “identify the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). In other words it was the continuation of the refinement process. At this stage, I tried to ensure that the themes reflected the data they represented and consequently addressed the research questions. I also checked the relationship between the themes and the categories within themes.

Producing the report: In general, the final stage of data analysis is writing-up. Nevertheless, this stage is open to some potential new ideas. The purpose of this stage is to present “a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell- within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). In the writing-up stage, the ideas, accounts and arguments are justified and supported by bringing sufficient evidence and extracts from the raw data (Patton, 2002). In this study, the writing-up involved analysis as I attempted to delve deep into the data to dig “beneath the surface” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 174).

4.7.7.2 Presentation of the data

As explained in 4.7.3, a number of methods have been adopted to collect data in this research. The analysis and presentation of data could have been carried out distinctly, i.e., presenting the data from interviews, focus groups and documents separately. However, I found drawing the data together to be preferable for two reasons: firstly, due to the fact that each method of data collection was adopted to gain information from a different set of participants, and because the documents were analyzed to gather further

information rather than triangulation, presenting the data according to methods would have resulted in comparatively rather unintegrated and disjointed topics. Secondly, in order to present the data according to the themes and sub-themes that are pertinent to all datasets, drawing together the data from different tools and presenting it according to ideas and topics makes it more understandable and less repetitive, avoiding monotony and lack of coherence which may have arisen from the repetition of the same topic with all datasets.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethics does not just distinguish the right from the wrong; it is a code of professional conduct that is required to be followed effectively. However, ethical standards are designed to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. As for any study conducted in a UK university in the context of Kurdistan, the rules and regulations of both selected universities for research and the University of Exeter were taken into consideration. According to BERA (2018), there are several areas, such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, that need to be considered during the research process. Cohen et al (2007) consider access and acceptance as an ethical concern of the researcher. In what follows, the details of how these ethical concerns will be dealt with in the present study are presented. In addition to that, as per the BERA guidelines, democratic values and academic freedom were emphasised. All participants in this research were treated fairly without any bias. The participants also respected me and this ensured a good relationship between researcher and participants.

4.8.1 Access and Acceptance

To carry out the fieldwork, and more specifically, data collection from any site, the researcher needs to obtain the agreement or official permission of the institution under study for access to it. In the context of Kurdistan, due to the existence of a rather centralised administrative system, as a researcher, I needed to apply for official permission from the MoHESR-KR. My request letter to MoHESR contained brief information about the nature of the study as well as the methods of data collection (see appendix 3). The relevant department in the ministry directed a letter to both universities that expressed their consent and agreement to the research, and similarly a letter from each university was directed to its respective faculties/colleges and through them to the

Heads of ELDs. This process was successful, and both Heads of the ELDs offered their help and support.

Having been a student in one of the departments, and having had working experience in the other department for several years as assistant lecturer, as well as friendly relationships with the heads and teachers at those departments, served as helping factors in gaining access to participants as well.

The study was approved by the ethical review board of the University of Exeter (see appendix 1).

4.8.2 Informed Consent

Informed consent is one of the main principles of ethical research, and means that participants voluntarily participate in the research. According to Cohen et al (2007), the participants must be informed about the research in general, as well as any facts and details that might have impact on their decisions. Patton (2002, p. 407) explains the nature of the information that the informed consent form must contain, namely the aims and objectives, the person or institution that will use the collected data, information about type and quality of questions, and the probable harm or benefits for the participants. After applying these guidelines, before starting the data collection, the participants were asked to give their formal printed agreement to be involved in, and contribute to, the research, and to sign the consent form. In addition to the information mentioned above, the participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they had the full right of withdrawal at any stage of the research (see appendix 2).

4.8.3 Anonymity of Participants

According to BERA (2018), anonymity of the participants is one of the most important ethical guidelines that must be taken into consideration in carrying out any research. In this research, the participants were guaranteed that they would remain anonymous, and that any circumstance where their names might become known, or indication that might result in their names being known would be avoided. For each participant in the phase

of data analysis, a pseudonym was given in place of their real names so that the results could be expressed without any actual names being attached.

4.8.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is another ethical consideration in which the researcher must attempt to cover the participants' identities to save them from any possible harm (Patton, 2002). In this research, the participants were not identified by their real names at any stage of data analysis, presentation of data or presentation of the findings. The participants were also assured that any information given by them will solely be used for this research and nobody outside the framework of this research will have access to it. Therefore, a secured database was utilised for storing the data. The identities of the participants were kept in secured folders out of the reach of any unauthorized person.

4.8.5 Avoidance of Harm

This research involves no risk of serious harm or danger to the lives of participants. However, this does not guarantee the freedom for the researcher not to consider potential harm at every step. Like any other research in social sciences, the researcher should deal cautiously with the personal aspects of peoples' lives exposed during data collection, regardless of the participants' concern (Neuman, 2007). During data collection, ethical concerns were practically considered. It was made certain that the students in no way felt that they were obliged to participate in this study. I gave them the chance to discuss my interpretation of the data. They were informed that they had the right to see the transcribed data to see that it matched the utterances. To get the confidence of the participants, I tried to encourage them to freely focus on their personal experiences.

Being interviewed by a university official had the potential to negatively affect the students. I thought they might not be eager to plainly convey their view about issues they consider sensitive, such as teaching methods. They might think that such a disclosure might be harmful for them. So, I emphasised that their participation and revelations would not bring any harm to them.

Student and teacher interviewees were assured of the privacy of the taped interviews and that they had the right to have a chance to listen and review their interviews. I explained to them that their cultural beliefs and concerns would be respected, and to the best of my ability, this was reflected in the interview questions. Sharing the same language and culture with the participants helped to overcome this challenge.

I was aware that there had been ups and downs in some students' college life and that remembering those unpleasant situations during the interview might affect the participants' psychological state which could be considered harm (Neuman, 2007). In noticing such a case, I tried to think of a way to deal with it to minimise the harm, such as by apologising in advance or at the end of the session, or by telling the students that the findings of the study might help to eliminate the circumstances that have resulted in the formation of such painful memories.

I also tried to be informative and transparent regarding the aims and objectives of the research and the impact of the research on the participants, as well as the possible expectations on the side of the participants, especially the students, about immediate changes in the syllabus, learning environment or teaching methods that in practice might not occur straightforwardly, or be achieved within the time-span of the student participants' university programme.

4.9 Bracketing

The subjective nature of qualitative enquiries might cause the researcher's preconceptions to pass into the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and consequently affect the processes of data collection and data analysis. The process of setting aside the researcher's preconceptions is referred to as bracketing. No practical steps are introduced to mitigate the effects of this transmission. However, Ahern (1999) proposes understanding and acknowledging the researchers' values and beliefs through a number of stages as in the following.

4.9.1 Research Interests

This research is driven by the research questions mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter. Through its contribution to theory and practice, it is also an attempt to fulfil the

requirement of the degree of PhD in Educational research. My personal curiosity to investigate this issue dates back to my connection to both ELDs both as a student and assistant lecturer during 1998-2002 and 2008-2012, respectively. My own, as well as my colleagues, dissatisfaction or concerns about the content of the ELD curriculum, both as a student and a teacher, was a great motivation to carry out research in this field. The stakeholders' perceptions of the aims and content of the curriculum was not researched and the sources or motives of curriculum change were opaque. The students have continuously asked for curriculum development and the decision makers have emphasised the need for a modernised curriculum.

4.9.2 Personal Value System

My values have been formed through my own involvement with the ELDs both as a teacher and as a student. My reading about similar departments and the search of the literature about curriculum has also guided my value system. I believe that both students and decision makers have concerns about the curriculum of the ELDs. Moreover, I believe that the students are not fully aware of the aims and objectives of their departments, and that there are points of match and mismatch between the perceptions of the students and decision makers.

4.9.3 Potential Role Conflict

At all stages of this research, I had only the role of the researcher, which was beneficial in avoiding significant potential role conflict. The only example of what might be considered as conflict was the times when the respondents in the focus group, in cases of discussion and disagreement, were expecting me to state my position. Therefore, several times I repeated that my role was not to agree or disagree, but to understand how they see the issue.

4.9.4 Gatekeepers' Interests

I have had full freedom and independence during all the stages of this research. There has not been any pressure, persuasion, or provocation on the side of my sponsor or the University of Exeter. The only requirements were to engage in research which would result in PhD in education, and to follow the ethical guidelines.

4.9.5 Feelings

During the process of data collection, I did not have any positive or negative feeling that could affect my neutrality. At the start of each interview, I was worried and anxious that something might not go as planned. I did not feel happy when a few teachers didn't agree to participate in the interviews and also when some of the students did not allow me to videotape the focus group discussions. None of these affected my neutrality. Apart from these, most of the time, I was happy and confident as I could manage the interviews, giving everybody the opportunity to express and state their positions. I believe that having a good knowledge of the context gave me a feeling of full engagement with the respondents. During the data analysis, I tried to represent every voice, either through picking up suitable extracts from all the respondents, or through referring to the degree of focus or the manner in which the participants stated their position.

4.10 Additional Considerations about the Research

At various points during the interviews, some responses were in line with my own personal beliefs, opinions, and past experience, either as a student or as an instructor. In such cases, to avoid distorting the results through the influence of my own belief, I tried to identify them in data collection and get into some details through probes and requests for further explanation. In reporting those responses, I depended on the respondents' rationality and justifications. Furthermore, I gave the opportunity to the respondents to comment on my interpretation, either through sending back the interview transcript and my interpretations to them or by having them confirm my initial notes of the recorded data at the end of each interview or focus group and prior to the start of the next session, to avoid interference from my personal preconceptions. In the next chapter the findings of the study will be presented.

4.11 The Researcher Position

As mentioned earlier, a number of techniques were adopted to separate myself from the data to try to maintain objectivity and avoid bias with data analysis. For example, I ran the coding process twice to find out the consistency between the two versions. I asked

participants to comment on whether my interpretations seem to be representative of their beliefs or not (see 4.6.1.1). I also presented some examples of data analysis and conclusions to my supervisors, who were able to challenge my interpretations and help me to consider potential alternatives. This was helpful in identifying gaps in my argument that needed to be addressed and for providing feedback that suggested that my conclusions were sound and reasonable given the data. However, as a final remark, it needs to be acknowledged that, considering the interpretive nature of the study, I was not passive in data collection and data analysis. Due to having experience as both student and teacher in ELDs, the fact that the themes were structured according to research questions and allocating corresponding data to each theme, it cannot be guaranteed that the researcher bias or researcher views and experiences have been fully eliminated or completely detached from the research. It should be recognised that insight, rather than objectivity, is the goal of this type of research, and I have sought to ensure that my insights are trustworthy rather than objective.

5 Chapter Five: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that are obtained from the data including semi-structured interviews with the decision makers (Heads of Curriculum Development Directorate (CDD), Heads of English Language Departments (ELD) in both universities, and members of the academic committees of both departments, teachers and graduate students in both universities, and focus-group interviews with third year students in both universities. This study also draws on data from a number of documents. The documents (n=46) used in this study are activity report (n=1), directives (n=2), meeting minute (n=1) and curriculum development guidelines (n=1) issued by the MoHESR in addition to the module descriptors (n=40) prepared by the module teachers (see appendix 9).

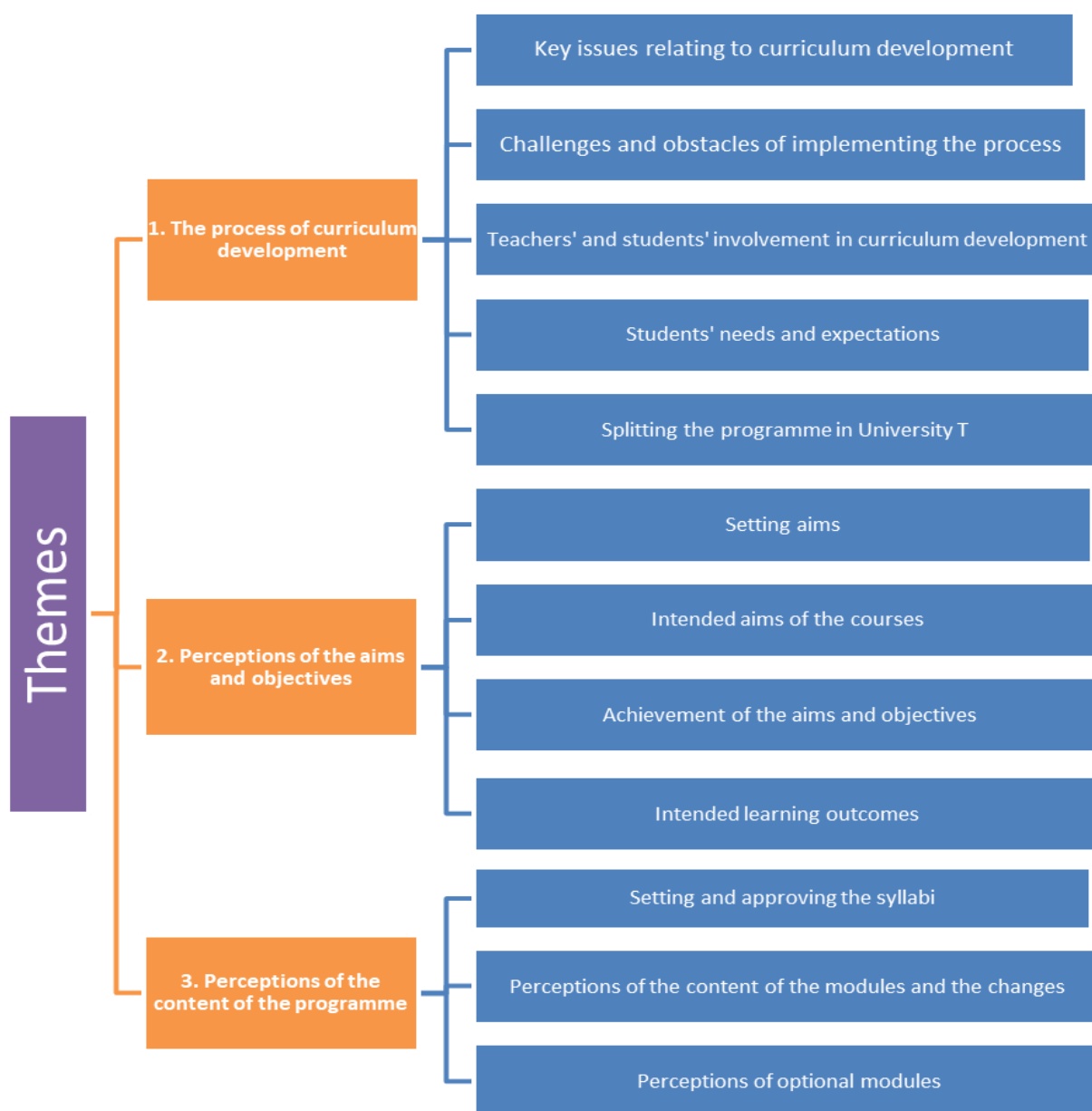
Table 5.1: Illustration of the datasets and data sources

Participants	No.	Participants' Role	University	Dataset
Heads of CDD	2	Decision-maker (They are responsible for planning or framing the regulations as well as approving the submitted draft of the curriculum by the department)	K and T	Semi-Structured Interview
Heads of ELD	2	Decision-maker (They are responsible for organizing, coordinating , and establishing the curriculum draft)	K and T	Semi-Structured Interviews
Members of the academic committee	4	Decision-maker (They are in charge of originating, and producing the preliminary curriculum draft)	K and T	Semi-Structured Interviews
Teachers	10	Practitioners of the approved draft and also in charge of setting the lesson-level content for the module that they are teaching, translating the curriculum into practice.	K and T	Semi-Structured Interviews
Graduates of previous years	4	The graduates of the previous years have only provided feedback to the taught modules.	K and T	Semi-Structured Interviews
Current third year students	20	The current students have the role of giving feedback on some aspects of the implemented Curriculum.	K and T	Focus Group Interviews

As indicated in Table 5.1, the Heads of CDD responsible for supervising the whole process of curriculum development as well as providing feedback for the drafts developed by the departments, and finally approving the curriculum. The Heads of ELD, along with the members of the academic committees, are responsible for developing curriculum draft, following the general framework provided by CDD.

In the following diagram, the findings revealed by data analysis rendered the themes and their corresponding categories.

Diagram 5.1 Themes and categories derived from data analysis



As the above diagram shows, analysis of the documentary data and the participants' responses has generated three themes that are related to the process of curriculum development, the aims of the courses and the content of the curriculum in both universities. In the following sections the themes and their constituent categories, as mentioned in Diagram 5.1, are explained in considerable detail.

5.2 Theme one: The Process of Curriculum Development

The first theme is mainly generated through a documentary analysis of the Ministerial Order No: 22771 dated 30/11/2011, an activity report by CDD in University K and the data from semi-structured interviews with the Heads of CDD and members of the academic committee of ELDs in both universities. It revolves around the process of curriculum design and development. According to the responses of the participants and the documentary data, this theme is divided into five categories: key issues relating to curriculum development, challenges and obstacles of implementing the process, teachers' and students' involvement in curriculum development, students' needs and expectations, and splitting the programme in University T.

5.2.1 Key Issues Relating to Curriculum Development

The documentary data and the interviews with decision makers reveal that there are some particular issues related to the process of curriculum development. According to the Ministerial Order No: 22771/4 in 30/11/2011 and 2014-2015 Activity Report issued by the CDD in University K, the curricula in all departments had to be revised to be compatible with developments and changes both internationally and, more specifically, within the region. A statement in the report indicates that the main reason for development is to address the outdated curriculum in terms of the syllabus and teaching methods. It also focuses on raising the skills and abilities that students need to have to meet the radical changes that have taken place in the world, and on being able to provide workers for different sectors in the region. Therefore, this clearly indicates the view that curriculum developments need to be driven by the job-market.

5.2.1.1 The Rationale for Curriculum Development

The above mentioned documents indicated that the necessity of curriculum development is due to its inability at that time to provide the graduates with the necessary skills to compete in the job market. The Head of CDD in University K put it in the following way:

The graduates have fewer abilities and mainly rely on the government to employ them as civil servants in the public sector. For this to be changed, the students should get multiple skills and abilities through being introduced to the principles of critical thinking. (Translated from Kurdish, hereafter TFK)

This shows that one target of this development is to include enterprise skills and transferrable abilities in the curriculum indicating that an employability-driven ideology underpins curriculum development on the broadest scale.

Another intended target, mentioned in the Ministerial Order, is the “internationalization” of the curriculum through “bringing international dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as implementing new methods of teaching” (2014-2015 CDD Activity Report, para. 4). There have been a number of changes in the content of the curriculum in an attempt to realize the process of the internationalization. A ministerial committee has been formed to develop a module called Academic Debate or Academic Skills. This newly introduced compulsory module in year one of all departments aims to help students “to think, read and write critically, to properly use the references, and to develop an argument” (A Report by Ministerial Committee for Organizing Academic Debate Module, TFK).

Additionally, the revision and rearrangement of modules with regard to their foci is another target of this development. This rearrangement included shifts in the modules across the different stages of the programme in such a way that in year one, “only 30% of the modules have to be an introduction to the specialty of the department”, while the rest of the modules must focus on developing skills and preparing the students for their following years through “raising their communicative competence in English, Arabic and Kurdish languages”. In the second year, the focus shifts towards “in-depth study of some specialties in the form of theory”. In the last two years, the focus is on “useful practical

skills within the frame of the department's specialty" (Ministerial Order No: 22771/4 in 30/11/2011, TFK).

This arrangement is once again driven by an employability-focused ideology as it is persistently mentioned that the modules must be relevant to the needs of the job market, and the inclusion or exclusion of a module should be based on "its role to provide students with practical skills that could help them enhance their chances of successfully getting jobs" (Head of ELD in University K). This also indicates an intended shift from liberal education towards vocational education. At the same time, the CDD 2014-2015 Activity Report emphasises that the addition of any new module or modification of the previous modules should be implemented "through coordination with or getting benefit from some similar advanced departments" (TFK).

As well as content, this development also covers pedagogy, introducing more interactive methods such as seminars and presentations rather than using lecturing as the main method. Therefore, developing a learner-centred methodology and increased student-teacher interaction are the changing objectives that need to be achieved within institutions, which entail staff development through seminars and workshops for the teachers. Another aspect of the development is related to students' involvement in small scale research. It focuses on encouraging and training students to carry out small scale research rather than simply becoming the receivers of information (CDD 2014-2015 Activity Report, TFK). This shows that the changes are meant to result in deep learning. So, alongside the increased focus on the curriculum meeting the needs of employers, there has been a concurrent shift towards a more learner-centered ideology which has higher expectations of lecturers, who are now required to develop more diverse teaching practices, and which places emphasis on students understanding how knowledge is produced, not just receiving it.

The intended change process has not primarily targeted the assessment system. In humanity departments, assessment is based primarily on testing in such a way that for 40% of the whole mark of each module students have two sets of assessments. The first part includes monthly exams and quizzes which count for 25 - 30% and the second type is in the form of students' seminars, essays and presentations which count for 10 - 15%. The other 60% of the marks is allocated to the end of the year summative exam (CDD

2014-2015 Activity Report, TFK). This division shows that, in total, the students' coursework such as seminars, essays, and presentations only account for 10 - 15% of the whole module marks, with the remaining 85-90% being assessed through traditional exams or quizzes. Therefore, in practice, the intended assessment system is roughly similar to that of the previous curriculum, and while there is, in theory, a new onus on lecturers to engage students through more diverse pedagogical practices, there is still a firm emphasis on traditional assessment systems. This indicates a point of mismatch between the intended changes in teaching while sticking to an exam-oriented system of assessment.

5.2.1.2 Curriculum Evaluation and Student Feedback

According to the feedback templates issued by (MoHESR, 2011) (see appendix 10) and interviews with the Heads of CDD in both universities, the evaluation process for this revised curriculum was supposed to be carried out through two types of formative and summative evaluations. At the time of data collection (March 2016), the formative evaluation process was being implemented and students were providing module specific feedback. It is worth mentioning that the curriculum development process started from academic year 2010-2011 and had been continuing up to the point of data collection for this study. According to the curriculum development guidelines issued by CDD in University K, a summative and all-inclusive feedback from teachers and students had to be carried out at the end of the fourth year from the start of this process, i.e., academic year (2014-2015) in order to apply the final changes accordingly (TFK). However, according to the feedback forms and interviews with the Heads of CDD in both universities, in reality, after the passage of almost four years into the implementation of the development process, the only component of the curriculum which has changed has been the content of the curriculum and the only formative evaluation has consisted of feedback given by students at the end of each year, focused mainly on teaching strategies. This does not match with the intended plan that after "four years evidence would be collected to find out the extent and quality of the achievement of the goals" (Head of CDD in University K). Therefore, this evaluation process does not seem to have been implemented according to the original plan. It could also be argued that a comprehensive plan which includes all components of the curriculum has not been worked out.

5.2.2 Challenges and Obstacles of Implementing the Process

According to the data from the interviews with decision makers and teachers and focus groups with students, there are a number of challenges associated with the implementation of all steps of the process across both universities. The problems have been classified as those mentioned by decision makers, teachers, and students.

From the standpoint of the decision makers in both universities, one of the greatest problems faced during the process of curriculum development was the resistance of teachers to change. The Head of CDD in University T confirmed this saying that:

The teachers are insisting on the old curriculum. The teachers still show their support towards the modules that are taught when they were students at similar departments in the past. They bring excuses for their reluctance and say that there is no guarantee that the development would work or would be any better than what we follow now. Some also say that it is not the right time to apply these changes.

In addition to that, lack of coordination and cooperation between the lecturers and members of the academic committee as well as a lack of consensus among the members of the academic committee in the departments among themselves and with the CDD in the university were regarded as the factors that hindered the process. The Head of CDD in University K highlighted this difficulty saying that:

The academic committee of the department is a big challenge to deal with. The members of the committee make some changes to the version of the curriculum that they have already constructed based on personal resistances or preferences when it is returned to them to apply the feedbacks. So, they exploit the opportunity. (TFK)

The other problems were the very limited authority and less available resources to conduct an effective follow up mechanism to determine areas of weakness and strength, lack of clear incentives or sanctions which might help to prompt staff to respond to the changes required. Staff changing was also considered as another challenge. The following remark by the Head of CDD in University T is indicative of this issue.

The follow up mechanisms are ineffective. We can't adopt a reward or punishment system to better implement our plan. Also, there are more than usual shifts and changes in the positions of head of the department and director of curriculum department at the faculty. (TFK)

Another problem, which was raised by both Heads CDD, was “lack of sufficient time compared to the abundant work of reviewing all the changes and approving them” at the university level.

On the other hand, members of the academic committee also had views about the issues and problems associated with curriculum development process. They claimed that they had a very limited self-regulating authority, particularly in relation to student admission. This claim is reported by Isa, assistant professor with 20 years of service in ELD, a member of the academic committee in University K.

Many things are imposed on us. We don't have a word on the quality and quantity of the students who are admitted to this department. We do not decide about the qualifications of the students who join this department. The decisions we take on different issues are subject to refusal on the side of college council or higher authorities. What we do is a normal daily routine about some specific issues.

A comparison of the views of Heads of CDD and members of the academic committees indicates a tension that while the Heads of CDD see the academic committees as having too much power to manipulate and resist the changes, the members of the academic committees feel that they do not have enough authority.

Another major problem which was mentioned by members of the academic committees is the unprecedented fiscal condition that appeared in early 2014: this has had a negative impact on the implementation of curriculum change by changing the context based on which it was initiated. A member of academic committee in University T stated this issue as in the following:

The curriculum development started when Kurdistan was in the peak of its economic boosting and many companies were investing in different sectors in the region. Therefore the idea was to revise ... uh... develop the courses to arm the graduates with the necessary skills to be able to get ... compete in the job market. Now, there are far less jobs in the public and private sectors. In addition to that, this process is quite costly. The government is unable to pay even the salaries in a timely manner. So, nobody has the desire or motive to work harder to deal with challenges that any change would demand. (Hadi, age: 38, 7 years of service)

The negative impacts of this problem was also mentioned by students. For example, Hawre, a student in University T, stated that:

Because of the economic crisis, the college administration and the university do not seem so committed to the development. I know that some teachers are looking

for some other jobs and also some others want to deliver lectures in private universities. (TFK)

This shows the impact of wider national economic issues on impeding the plans of the universities through changing the grounds on which the changes were initiated on the one hand and causing a lack of motivation on the other hand.

There is also the view that there is interference in the affairs that the academic committee is responsible for. This interference was considered to be due to hegemony of the higher authorities who advance their personal preferences. Moreover, a member of the academic committee in each university claimed that they were not part of the decision-making process. Isa, the member of the academic committee in University K makes this clear by saying that:

Sometimes we are trying to reinvent the wheels, and lot of money is going the drain because of that ..., all these things has been solved, sometimes ago internationally. They are busing themselves, with things that are not supposed to be the subject of negotiation, ..., you know, go to any university, the standard that is universally acknowledged and acceptable, is almost the same. Why to think that we need to reinvent the wheel every year, you got the whole program there, with very minor changes, I think.

This shows that when members of the academic committee are not satisfied with what is being imposed on them, they do the things because they need to or feel obliged to, even if they do not believe in it. This also indicates a counter point to the Heads of CDD that the academic committees resist or block changes. It also reveals that at each step between different hierarchical positions – each feels the imposition of those in authority.

Another member of the academic committee in University K, on the other hand, referred to problems related to the teachers' pedagogic competencies in addition to a lack of trained and skilled staff that could carry out the changes. Her response clearly shows this problem.

We do not have the authority to spend money on training the academic staff to teach and follow the modern methods of teaching. In addition to that, the limited budget and the available resources are not compatible with the demands of the changes that are intended to be taken place. Sometimes, the existence of specialty is a reason why we keep a module or on the contrary lack of expertise in a specific field doesn't let us have a relevant module, because we don't have the authority to bring in a member of staff or hire qualified staff. (Lana, senior lecturer, 15 years of service)

In both universities, some of the problems are also attributed to the plans per se. The plans were found to be disorganised, difficult to implement and beset by constantly shifting measures, clearly stated by Ahmed (age: 37, 5 years of service) a member of the academic committee in University T.

There is no detailed account of how the process is carried out. There is no written document of the start date and target of the development at each stage. The issues and problems inherent to the process have not been accounted for. There is no estimation of the cost of the process. There are some guidelines whose degree of applicability is arguable.

Students, in both universities, found the changes or developments to be mostly superficial, as they believed that the changes did not target their major concerns. They wanted the changes to be pedagogy oriented rather than focused on content. Kani, a student from University K, showed her dissatisfaction by saying that:

Our main problem is with teachers, how they teach in class. These changes, I mean this process, did not change how teachers teach. Some of the teachers are teaching us the same thing and the same way they taught us before and may be to students before us. (TFK)

This shows that teachers, between top-down impositions and bottom-up expectations, are considered as key curriculum implementers, while they have not received enough professional development and training courses.

The students also complained about the ineffective monitoring of the changes. A student from University T criticized loss of enthusiasm by the passage of time and exemplified it as in the following:

Only at the start of implementing a plan, the department seemed serious and committed to the process. Later on, everybody forgot about them. Some teachers stick to it and some other teachers are reluctant to carry on. For example, when the teachers were asked to use data show in their lectures, some teachers were quite good in utilizing it and the department had a good follow up. But later, some teachers didn't use it regularly. (Nada, TFK)

In conclusion, attempting to change teaching practice (pedagogy) was pinpointed as a problem by students, and this was confirmed by the members of the academic committees at both universities. The former claimed that, in general, the changes have not covered the pedagogy and the latter attributed that to the lack of trained teachers and training facilities which could support change.

5.2.3 Teachers' and Students' Involvement in Curriculum Development

The decision makers, teachers and students had divergent views about teachers' and students' involvement in curriculum decision making. The analysis of the data shows that their views differ in terms of the degree, manner and method of their potential involvement.

The decision makers acknowledged the importance of teachers' involvement and its positive impacts in curriculum development/change; however, they believed in the direct involvement of only experienced teachers and those who have higher academic ranks in decisions regarding curriculum development and, more specifically, the content of the whole program in terms of which modules should be studied and at which level. Head of CDD in University K stated that:

Teachers are central to any curriculum development effort and it is important to have teachers' support in this process because they are responsible for practicing it in the class. At the level of curriculum development, I think, another professional team, in which there could be experienced teachers, should develop the curriculum. But a newly employed teacher, I believe, is not qualified to participate in curriculum development. Nevertheless, I think we need to incorporate and present teachers opinions and ideas to the specialised team.

This indicates a clear sense that teaching experience is valued by the decision-makers, but also a commensurate lack of valuing of the potential that new teachers have to bring fresh perspectives. This would resonate with the difficulty of promoting change in the institutions as it could be expected that more experienced teachers to be more entrenched in a particular system; they might find it harder to make meaningful changes than less experienced teachers might.

The Heads of ELD at both universities narrowed down this topic to teachers' role in identifying module content, indicating that this is where they see the role of teachers in developing the curriculum. They each had different views regarding the role of the module teachers at the level of module content. The Head of ELD in University K advocated the system they were following. In this system, the academic committee is responsible for determining the topics and the textbook(s) studied, whereas in University T, the Head of ELD stated that they were following a different system in which the teachers select the module content and send it to the academic committee for approval.

This indicates that the teachers, in University T, share the responsibility of the selection of module contents with the academic committee, whereas in University K teachers have no role and responsibility. Due to following these two types of module content selection, the different responsibilities affect the sense of ownership of the module content which is merely that of the academic committee in University K, while in University T, it is mainly that of teachers being the primary initiators or developers of the module contents.

Two of the teachers in University K had different views about their involvement in the curriculum development process. They had no problem with being told about the content, methodology and assessment system as they believed that all this prescriptions is the result of work by an experienced committee. On the contrary, other teachers believed that they should have been given more freedom in choosing what to teach, how to teach and how to examine the students. They were in favour of more freedom and active involvement in curriculum development at all levels especially in relation to the area of their specialty. Ameen expressed his view saying that “I am asked to teach a module based on its congruity with my specialty, but I am surprised when my specialty has no role in what is to be taught”.

With regard to University T, most of the teachers were satisfied with the level of freedom they had been given in choosing the content of the module. Dosti’s statement is a good example of this view.

We are given some instructions about what is to be taught, but when you come to the actual subject, you have some sort of freedom because for example I am to teach postcolonial literature, I can choose the novel that best suits my students, ...

In general most of the teachers demanded an active role in selecting the content of the module they were teaching, but the deep-rooted focus on experience and expertise has made some of teachers consider it a specialized issue for which the academic committee is responsible.

The students’ views about the teachers’ role in curriculum development were aligned to those of the Heads of CDD in emphasizing the need for ‘expertise’ or ‘experience’. Some of the students in both universities believed that “experienced teachers should have a great role in curriculum development” (Kavi, University K). However, a few students in both universities were against the teachers’ independence in choosing the

content arguing that “even if the teachers are knowledgeable about the area or the module they are teaching, it is always better that their choice goes through filters set by expert committees” (Jwan, University T, TFK). In general, the students advocated that teachers’ choice of the content had to be approved by an expert committee, reflecting an underpinning respect for the authority of ‘expertise’.

Regarding students’ involvement, again different participants had different views. There was recognition that students who had not studied the course might not be experienced enough to contribute to curriculum design. Most of the decision makers were against the participation of students in the curricular decision making. The Head of CDD in University T, for example, believed that “it is not students that we need, but a group of experienced and well-educated academic staff that should decide about the curricular changes”(TFK).

Nevertheless, in both universities, a few decision makers supported a conditional and limited role for students in curriculum development. They advocated a limited participation by only a certain group of the students. According to this view, students are classified as those who could have a role and those who are not in a position to have that role. Isa, a member of the academic committee in University K, believed that some of the students are more “open-minded” and they know what they need. Lana, in the same university, gave a clearer description of these potential students as those who “study well, are serious and conscientious”. According to this view, the standard by which it could be determined if the students could participate in the process is students’ achievement which, in turn, is based on their exam grades. The view, that includes only a certain group of students, is problematic as it cannot be indicative of the diversity of students that might bring different things to the curriculum design process.

The Head of ELD in University T had a comparatively moderate view. She acknowledged the idea that the students’ voice should be heard. She believed that it is good to be aware of the students’ desires and interests. She further explained that although this has not been part of the educational system, there might be some opportunity for the students to contribute. However, she expressed her doubt about putting it into practice. She stated that “there might be truth in it that at this moment it might not be so useful to ask students what they want”. She attributed that to “the

students' attempts to pass rather than learn". This, she believed, would result in "asking for less content in quantity and easy material in quality".

Some teachers in principle agreed with the positive aspects of collaboration with students, but they questioned the level and abilities of students, and also questioned the validity of this issue in the context of KR. Rawa's statement clearly indicates this view in University T.

Unfortunately and I am sorry to say that our students have not reached that level to decide on the curriculum in their department. It does not mean there cannot be a start. In addition to that, I don't think it is the role or responsibility of the students to decide on that.

In both universities, there were some teachers that totally rejected any student involvement. For them curriculum development is a matter of specialty in which there is no room for students' involvement. Alan's statement in University K is an example of this widely held view in both universities,

As far as I am concerned, students are students and undergraduate students are not in a position to decide which syllabus to be taught (students should not have any role), there are other experienced people who have been teaching for more than 20 years and they are very good teachers, they know what is to be taught in the department.

Similarly in University T, Sana expressed his pessimistic view in the following way,

Personally, this is not an approach I would advocate. I'm not sure that the students are really in a position academically, to know what is important for them to learn or not! To my mind, university students in general are too green to be involved in such a complex and highly professional task.

This dominant perspective aligns clearly to the way that staff participants from all levels appeared to value experience above anything else: students were viewed as too inexperienced, too lacking in knowledge or understanding to offer meaningful contributions, and it was the longest-serving teachers who were viewed as having the most authority and expertise to offer input.

However, there was an instance in which a teacher from University T claimed that he practiced some forms of collaborative construction of curriculum content in some aspects of curriculum specifically at the module content level. Dosti mentioned that

I first consult the Head of the department; if I have two novels to choose one to teach, I present it to my students to decide to see which one is more interesting to

them; I give some comprehensive explanations about the novels, like an orientation program.

On the other hand, generally in both universities, students believed that they should be consulted in deciding about what is good for them to learn, how to learn and how to be tested. For example, Kovan in University T stated that:

I think that we have no, or may be very little, role in curriculum development either in setting the aims of the course or considering our likes and dislikes. We don't believe that our views are being listened to and acted upon. For example when we came here, we knew that in setting the content our abilities were not considered as some of the modules were very difficult and disappointing for us. For example if I participate in curriculum development or if I am listened to, I suggest that the student would rather get language skills rather than modules that we studied without knowing their importance or benefit. (TFK)

There was also an individual student who thought that the teachers and other senior staff know better. For example, Hasan in University K stated that:

I am not against students' role. Nevertheless, I know what I want [aims], but the teachers know how to guide us to get at it [pedagogy]. Teachers should employ different methods for that. But we don't know which books or what lessons should be taught [content] because they are more knowledgeable than us. (TFK)

This shows that although the students requested to be involved in curriculum decision making, but they were not in agreement about the degree of their involvement and the area of the curriculum.

One of the other aspects of the content of the curriculum that students in University K wanted to actively reflect upon is related to textbooks. Kavi's statement is a good example of the students' dissatisfaction with and concerns about the text books.

We do not know why the department has stuck to some textbooks. Some of the textbooks are very old and are studied for many years. We want our voices and our concerns are heard. We even don't know how the textbook(s) are selected. (TFK)

This view is more apparent in University K. Dastan suggested that it would be better for both teachers and students "if students are convinced about the rationale behind the selection of textbooks". She believed that they will then become "motivated, interested and will be able and be eager to participate in class discussions".

In general, most of the students in both departments, linked participation and having voice at different levels of curriculum development and implementation to high levels of learning, confidence, motivation and autonomy along with improved levels of confidence which would result in better performance.

However, what becomes apparent through the data is that the students have very little input into curriculum development plans, due partly to the established procedures of the educational system and the prevalent belief system of the decision makers and teachers that value experience and expertise, and contrarily do not see a place for the students' involvement in curriculum development. In the educational system, the only instance of the students' participation is limited to module-level feedback which forms part of the quality assurance procedures. The quality assurance unit in each department is responsible for obtaining this feedback through questionnaires designed by the MoHESR. The questionnaires are mainly related to the teachers' performance, which focus on a sample lesson and then the whole module. The surveys are carried out towards the end of each year. The data indicated very little evidence that the results of these were used to inform the teaching methodology and teacher evaluation for the following years.

In general, the students and teachers were in disagreement in relation to students' involvement in curriculum decision making. In addition to that, in practice, there was a consensus on the side of the decision makers and the teachers about the inappropriateness of students' contribution to curriculum development. Moreover, the institutional culture and the belief system that neglects potential inputs and abilities that students could have and tends to position students as not at the suitable level for this, could be regarded as the factors that contribute to the unlikelihood of the active participation of students in curriculum development.

5.2.4 Students' Needs and Expectations

Data from the focus group interviews with students in both universities reveal their feelings before, during and after joining the department and attending the classes. Their lack of familiarity with the department and the university in general makes them feel fearful, excited, nervous and sometimes lost. Jwan in University T expressed her first

day's feelings as that of "excitement and fear" about their modules. However, for some other students who had friends or other members of the family already in this department or university, the feeling was different. Rawa in the same university expressed her clear view of the department in the following way.

My sister graduated from the same department, and I had enough information about the department before I came here. I already know what was expected of me. In most of the cases I had a clear view of things. (TFK)

This shows that students had not been familiarized with the department before actually attending the classes through an induction process or through any methods such as open day events before they chose to study in this department.

Another major problem or challenge for the students in both universities was their level of competency in English. Students had various views about their communicative skills in English language. Mainly, students thought that they should have been more fluent and had a better command of written and spoken language. Sirwan, in University T, expressed his problem in the following way.

I had problems understanding what the teachers were saying. It was really difficult. It was really disappointing. Some of my friends were better than me. It is true that we had studied English in primary and high school, but this was the first time I had to understand and speak the language. In the primary school we were memorizing the rules and we had written exams. The questions were about applying grammatical rules. (TFK)

Some of them also believed that they did not have the same level of competence as their peers when they attended the first year, or at least they were not in the same range of linguistic ability. They also believed that their teachers did not take account of the different levels of English ability within the class and assumed a level of knowledge that meant they struggled to keep up with the lesson content and delivery. As a representation of such a concern, Kani, in University K, stated that their "speaking, reading, writing abilities were different" when they joined the department. She added that "some students didn't have any problems. So, first year was easy for them because we all were in the same class and we studied the same subjects" (TFK). She also believed that there should have been "extra language courses so that [they] all could get to the same level" (TFK). In both universities, students believed that the decision makers and the teachers did not carry out an adequate needs analysis to be able to pitch their

lessons effectively for all students. They also believed that the problems related to their lack of suitable linguistic abilities had not been a major concern of the decision makers and there were no plans to offer student support in this respect.

On the other hand, the decision makers believed that the level of difficulty of the modules was decided based on the expected level of students' linguistic competence by the time they graduated from high school, so any difficulty experienced by students is the fault of the admissions process rather than their curriculum. The expected capability was outlined by the Head of ELD in University T.

Our students who are admitted to this department should meet some criteria, for example, they should pass the English subject test in first sitting and also their mark should be more than 60% [equivalent to B in GCSE]. Therefore, they are expected to be at a certain level of proficiency. However, unfortunately, some students have met these conditions, but their English is not what we expect.

The teachers also agreed that the students faced a number of problems due to the lack of English language skills, but again see this as an issue related to admissions rather than something to address through the curriculum. For example, Amin in University K mentioned that:

Students come to this department because they think that they will be given language lessons. Yes, there are some modules that focus on language skills, but at the same time there are some other modules that students need to have a certain level of competency to cope with. Here, the academic committee, the faculty council and university are responsible for this problem. We have suggested that we interview students for their linguistic abilities and after passing the interview the students would be able to join the department.

Other teachers similarly acknowledged the students' linguistic problems and saw better admissions screening as a solution to this. They believed that it would be better if either the students had joined the department having first met with "some filters" such as entrance exams or interviews, or that there were "courses for those students [in need of additional language support] to raise their communicative skills" (Yad, University T).

The availability of courses for language support was a major demand of the students in both universities as they were interested in raising their language level, being able to speak, write, read and understand English compatible to the level that is required to deal with their modules. The students linked the lack of such a plan and focus to the departments' reluctance to deal with their language problem. For instance, Zara in

University T stated that “having placement tests” and “being assigned to language courses” accordingly would also show that “our interests are taken into consideration”.

On the other hand, the decision makers had a different view of students’ needs. They claimed that they had taken students’ future needs into consideration rather than the ones they had when they started the university. The Head of ELD in University K said that:

What students want at this stage is different from what we know they need in the future. At this stage they care about only being able to speak in English, but for us, university should offer a lot more than a mere language course. We want them to have knowledge about English linguistics and literature. In addition to that the content of the curriculum is quite flexible that students can find their interests in it.

A thorough look at the students’, teachers’ and decision makers’ views suggests three main issues. The first one is the discrepancy between student and staff attitudes to the problem of linguistic competence: the former seeing this as something to be resolved by extra provision within the curriculum, the latter seeing it as an issue which should be removed by a more robust admissions process. The second issue is that there is a fundamental difference of attention between the decision makers’ focus on where the students are going (the knowledge that students should have by the time they graduate) and the students’ and teachers’ focus on where they are coming from (the quality of English teaching at high school level) that causes problems during their university course. The third point is that the decision makers’ focus is more towards knowledge about English language and literature, while the students’ focus is more on the language per se.

5.2.5 Splitting the Programme in University T

One of the major changes that had taken place in University T was to separate the majors of linguistics and literature in the last two years of the programme. This change had been implemented with the aim of reducing the number of modules in each year. Also, this division was based on the assumption that students want to either study linguistics or literature. The other reason was focus on in-depth specialized knowledge stated the Head of ELD as in the following:

Well, I think that it was needed in that students were doing lots of modules and for what purpose?.... They are two very different branches. So, if a student is good at

one thing, it doesn't mean that they are good at another. If they enjoy one thing, would they enjoy the other? Also, this way we can concentrate on depth rather than some general coverage. So, splitting them was actually a good idea. I just think that it is good for students to follow one pathway.

With regard to students, very few of the students from both majors welcomed this change and stated that they liked it when they found that they could select their most preferred branch. On the other hand, most of the students from both branches considered it an unexpected and rapid change, with a rationale which was not clear for them. Most of the students found the split pathway problematic. Avan stated that “we have no idea which major to choose. This created anxiety and had a lot of pressure on us”. Rawa attributed the negative consequences of this to “not receiving any consultation during their decision process over the two options”. In addition to that, some students from both majors expressed their interest in both majors and suggested that language and literature are two sides of the same coin.

This indicates that this change has been implemented based on generalised presuppositions about students' preferences for studying either literature or linguistics, which proved to be the case with only a small number of students. Also, it indicated that changes based on those assumptions are highly likely to cause dissatisfaction for students. Moreover, making such a big change based on only two reasons could mean that this change has not been happened as a result of a sound plan or a clearly stated rationale whether at the heart of the split plan there are any plans towards in-depth study of each major. This could also lead to incompatibility with the guidelines of the MoHESR that advocate interdisciplinary courses.

5.3 Theme Two: Perceptions of the Aims and Objectives

The second theme is centred on the aims and objectives of the course as perceived by decision makers, teachers and students in both universities. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the intended, actual and achieved aims of the courses. The responses were classified into the following categories: participants' perceptions of setting aims, intended aims of the course, achievement of the aims and objectives, and intended learning outcomes.

5.3.1 Setting Aims

The first category is about the participants' perceptions of how aims, goals and objectives are set. It is an attempt to understand how the aims of the course are organized, developed or rearranged. Up to the point of data collection, the universities had not been formally required to state their aims and objectives and none of the departments in both universities had a formally stated set of aims, goals and objectives for their courses. It was in the plan of University K to request its departments to formulate aims and objectives for all the courses. The Head of CDD in University K mentioned their intention to have a set of aims and objectives in following years. She believed that "it is fundamental to state what needs to be achieved". Moreover, she considered the process of "formulating" and "prioritizing" a set of aims to be a responsibility of the "academic committee of the (English Language) Department". She also referred to a prerequisite that "the aims of the course are expected to be formulated in accordance to the curriculum development plan of the MoHESR".

With regard to the tentative practical procedures of this plan, the Head of the ELD in University K stated that "the members of the academic committee would hold several meetings", carry out research to determine "the needs of the society, students and incidents" that happen in the region in order to formulate a set of aims and objectives as well as to update the curriculum. He also confirmed that the action plan will be guided by the "policy and the changes that are required by the MoHESR". In other words, through mainly considering the vision and guidelines of the MoHESR as well as supposedly their own conclusions based on the needs of students and society in general, the academic committee has to formulate a set of aims. The Head of ELD in University T mentioned that "the ministry has identified certain general skills and abilities that all graduates need to acquire. The academic committee applies those principles to the ELD". Therefore, the academic committee is responsible for considering the guidelines of the MoHESR and relating them to what they themselves determine to be important and specific to ELD and finally produce the aims and objectives.

However, the members of the academic committees in both universities have different ideas about formulating the aims and in a few cases there was disagreement among them. They referred to a number of problems associated with the aims of the

programme. There are a number of problems that are inherent to the idea of having aims per se, and other problems which are related to disagreement among the members of the academic committee about the process. Concerning the former set of problems, some members of the academic committees held the belief that some of the aims cannot be articulated in measurable terms, stating that the idea that some aims and objectives whose achievement are difficult or impossible to be measured makes it problematic. Lanja, the member of the academic committee in ELD in University K believed that “documenting or stating a set of aims does not tell anything of significance by itself” since some of them cannot be translated into measurable objectives.

One instance of disagreement was related to the procedures of curriculum development that were followed in both universities in which the content of the curriculum was the primary area of change and development and formulating aims for the programme is preceded by the content. Hadi, a member of the academic committee in University T, believed that the interlinked components of the curriculum should be dealt with “as one package at the same time” and the way each component is tackled separately is not likely to turn out to be effective.

On the other hand, a member of the academic committee in each university believed that, in theory, the aims of the course are supposed to be originated from the plan of the Ministry along with a thorough study of the context. Furthermore, they believed that those aims should inform “the other components of the course curriculum”. However, they believed that in reality, the departments already existed and efforts were focused on the syllabus. Therefore, on the one hand, Ahmed believed that articulating a set aims for the already established departments, with already developed content, would not turn out to be effective because he believed that articulating the aims should have been done prior to all other steps. On the other hand, Isa was doubtful about the urgency of the Ministry and the University with regard to having aims and objectives. This doubtfulness is evident from his statement that “we need to have a set of aims which serve as aims on paper, otherwise, the aims should inform other issues like syllabus and assessment” method followed in the ELD. This indicates that, similar to the case of pedagogical reforms focused by the guidelines of reform process, having aims and objectives would

not guarantee their implementation and achievement if they do not inform the other components of curriculum and result in changes in those components accordingly.

There was another perceived problem with having aims which was related to the unclear rationale behind having so many English departments in the KR. Ahmed, a member of academic committee in University T, believed that formulating aims is problematic because most probably through a “process of blind imitation a number of English Departments were opened in the region with no clear vision” and for no convincing reasons other than just having them”.

Moreover, the disagreement was not just about whether aims are necessary or not, but also how the aims should be formulated and what they should be. One of the members of the academic committee in each department believed that other universities around the world should be imitated in the sense that the university should directly copy their aims and objectives with very only minor changes. For Example, Isa from University K stated that “we should not spend time and effort to do things that other universities have done before us and probably better than us”. On the other hand, Ahmed from University T believed the opposite, and focused on the uniqueness of each context and the detrimental effects of the blind imitation, believing that “the aims should be tailored to the context”. Both Heads of ELDs also expressed their advocacy and intention to benefit from the experiences of other universities in all aspects of curriculum design, including setting aims and objectives. They believed that this could offer them “some solutions which could not be otherwise achieved easily”. However, some teachers expressed their fear of imitation stating that “the peculiarities of each context should determine the aims of any program rather than blind imitation” (Yad from University T).

As mentioned earlier, the process of formulating aims and objectives is supposed to be the sole responsibility of the academic committees of the departments. The students have no role in the formulation or the development of the aims and objectives. The Head of ELD in University T, however, referred to the significance of identifying the students’ needs and interests as they are the ultimate beneficiaries of the aims of the course. She also added that “we mainly take the students’ future needs and interests into consideration”.

Most of the students in both universities expressed their desire to be involved in this process. Some also regarded it a necessity. A student's comment clearly shows this claim.

No doubt we have to have our role in determining the aims and developing the program. We blindly follow what is already decided upon for us. We have not been given a chance to participate in this process. However, we have informed them of our concerns and problems. (Awara from University T, TFK)

Some students mentioned the significance they associated with their role in this process. Fenk from University K referred to the meaning and impact of their involvement.

Having a role means having a responsibility and on the contrary no words or having no say means passivity. We want our needs to be considered; our words listened to, our aims planned for. If everything is dictated on us, we lose our sense of creativity (TFK).

Some of the students in University K also believed that the aims and objectives need to be formulated, prioritized and put into practice based on their needs and the reasons why they had joined this programme. Again, this brings into focus the tension around student 'needs' – the staff participants are focused on what they perceive to be the future needs of students (which they believe they know better than the students do), while the students are aware of their own aims and goals, which they feel are not taken into account

5.3.2 Intended Aims of the Course

As mentioned in the previous section, none of the departments had a set of formally stated aims. However, the Head of CDD in University K referred to the draft of the goals of the ELD which contains six points as in the following:

“To enhance the level of communication in the four skills, be familiar with English culture, history..., building bridges between cultures to better understand our own, enhance the value of democracy and culture of accepting differences, critical thinking/ creative thinking, and enhancing Research abilities”. (The Draft of the Aims and Objectives, TFK)

These goals could be divided into two types: generic skills and discipline-specific knowledge. The first three aims are course specific aims, while the rest of the goals are the general abilities that the MoHESR has planned for all the graduates regardless of their major.

Similarly, in University T, the process of setting an explicit and formally stated set of aims and objectives has not been a prerequisite. The department did not even have an overt draft. During the interview, the Head of the ELD made a note to work on the goals and objectives in their action plan for the following year. Nevertheless, she stated some implicit features based on which the syllabus (the content) has changed. “We work to arm our students with the necessary skills and abilities to become independent thinkers, free workers and creative and critical thinkers”. These aims also fall under the generic skills category.

There was no set pattern of what the participants within different roles think is important; however, they do share similar understandings of the intended and actual aims of the courses. One of the most prevalent shared points among all views was the employment-focused aims. The semi-structured interviews with decision makers and teachers revealed that there were a number of aims that the courses in both universities intended to achieve. Most of the decision makers referred to “providing different workforces” for the private and public sectors (Alan, from University K). Some even referred to particular professions such as translators or teachers. Apart from the widely mentioned job related aims there were mentions of some other aims such as “broadening students’ Knowledge”, “raising students’ awareness”, “familiarizing students with British Culture” (Amin from University K), “developing the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, making them independent workers” (Rawa from University T) and “promoting students’ researching abilities” (Dosti from University T). However, a few teachers considered some of the above mentioned generic aims as the by-products of the whole course rather than the specific intended outcomes of the course. Yad claimed that “most of these aims could be applied to any course irrespective of the specialty”. He also added that “enhancing students’ researching skills could be achieved through adopting and exposing students to new methods of assessment”. This reveals the idea that these changes have to happen holistically, and applying changes in one area, if not accompanied by corresponding changes in other components, creates disagreement and ambiguity.

The students’ perceptions of the intended aims and objectives of the course are varied. Some of the students in University K thought that the main aim of the course appeared

to be familiarizing the students with English linguistics, literature and culture. This indicates that for some of the students the intended aims of the courses have not prioritised the employability aspect. The students mentioned that they have drawn such a conclusion based on what they had heard from their teachers and also according to the focus of the modules that they had studied. However, some students in both universities expressed their lack of explicit knowledge of the aims and objectives of the departments. Hasan, a student in University K, expressed this position in the following way.

We have no formal information about the aims of the department, we just extract them from our understanding of the focus of the modules or what our teachers verbally tell us. We even don't know which job we are better at doing. According to the focus of the department, some modules are repeated. (TFK)

Shilan, a student in University K had a similar account saying that "nobody has told anything about the aims and objectives. I think the department wants to teach us about the English language and literature." (TFK)

There are cases of students in both universities who expressed their doubts about the existence of any aims. For them, the reason why they need to be familiar with or expert in English linguistics and/or literature is not clear. Kafi from University K has a strongly held view about that:

I am sure that even the department is not determined as what its aims are. Apart from the language, we have to know the history, culture and literature to be able to communicate properly. (TFK)

Likewise, in University T, Renas expressed her view as in the following:

I am afraid if there is any aim. It is the first time I hear about the aims of this course. We don't even know why we study what we study. What my classmates say about the aims of this course is all their opinion. (TFK)

With regard to the students' expected aims and objectives, the majority of students in both departments thought that the aims and objectives of the course should be focused on teaching and learning language rather than knowledge about the language and literature. They believed that their command of English language is a decisive factor in their future life. Students' expected aims were related by some to their desire to learn the English language, referred to as 'the world lingua franca'. For this reason the students wanted the department to focus on communicative skills. Among the four

language skills of writing, reading, speaking and listening, they paid greater attention to speaking. For almost all of the students speaking was of paramount importance because they thought that they need it most in their classes to interact with the teacher and be involved in discussions as well as their future jobs. Most of the students in both universities wanted to learn English Language mainly to be able to get a job such as teaching, translation or, to a lesser extent, journalism in public and private sectors after graduation. In general, there is potential alignment, here, between the views of staff and students – they all want to focus on developing the skills that will enable students to have productive and successful careers – but at the moment the students do not perceive these aims, and see much more focus on cultural knowledge which does not appear to be so immediately relevant to them.

The data revealed that in both universities, the perspectives of the males and females were different. The girls' discussion was around finding a job easily while the boys were looking forward to having better paid jobs.

More interestingly, a female student from University T mentioned a different force behind joining this department. Zara stated that:

I was not bad at English. First, I wanted to apply to department of Law. I was in the process of decision making. I was trying to get more information about different departments that I could join. My uncle encouraged me, strongly suggested and imposed this on me. (TFK)

In addition to that, for a few of the students, the motive behind learning the language and joining this programme was also to enjoy the higher social prestige of knowing English. Shilan, in University K, articulated her belief in the following way.

I agree that you have better chance of getting job, but ...uh... from very long ago, in our society, knowing another language has been a privilege for people. Those who know more languages are regarded as clever, understanding, more educated people and they enjoy a high status in the society, especially when that language is English, French, or another important European language. (TFK)

In conclusion, most of the participants agreed that one of the aims of the programme was to raise the students' knowledge of English language, literature and culture. However, most of the students wanted this aim to achieve another aim, i.e., better

communication in English and better use of the language to mostly enhance the chances of having jobs.

5.3.3 Achievement of the Aims and Objectives

With regard to the achievement of the aims and objectives, the responses from the participants are classified as those that refer to the extent of the achievement, the challenges that exist as well as the solutions they provided.

5.3.3.1 Extent of Achievement of the Aims

As far as the degree of realisation of the aims is concerned, according to the decision makers and teachers, there has not been any formal evaluation program to show the degree to which aims and objectives have been achieved. Therefore, they believed that it might be different from one student to another based on their success in pursuing their career as teachers or translators or their command of the English language. Vida, a teacher in University K, provided a good example of such a view:

When I find out that that our graduates get jobs mainly because of the knowledge and the skills they have built up from this department, then, I can say that for this student the achievement of the aims are different from another student who is pursuing an irrelevant career.

Likewise, Isa, a member of academic committee in University K considered students' personal achievements as a criterion.

Some students have been able to get scholarships abroad; some students have become successful teachers and translators. Some students have successfully pursued their studies.

These views and judgments are mostly based on graduates' career or job-attainment chances. However, there is no consensus about the relationship between the achievement of the aims and employability. The following statement by Rawa, from University T, confirms this lack of consensus about the above views:

I know cases of students who have taken intensive courses in English language after graduation from ELD because they have felt that they would be in danger of losing their job if they don't raise their linguistic abilities.

This shows that there are cases of students who have passed the modules and got the certificate and consequently have got a job without achieving one of the implicit aims of the department, i.e., learning the language skills. Therefore, even taking on a job cannot be a real indicator of the achievement of this end.

In addition to this, Alan, from University K, believed that “passing the examinations and getting the certificate” are indicative of a satisfactory achievement of the implicit aims and objectives of the courses. He also believed that all students have not benefited similarly from the course. The Heads of the ELDs and some teachers referred to some other factors such as the relationship among the components of the curriculum and the impact of the external dynamics such as policy, administration and economics.

Regarding the interrelationship between curriculum components, Ahmed, a member of academic committee in University T, believed that the achievement of course goals could be measurable if “the syllabus and content of the curriculum is compatible with the aims and also the assessment and examination systems really measure the aims and objectives”. However, some teachers believed that some of the aims such as critical thinking ability or problem solving ability cannot be measured and, therefore, the degree of achievement is likely to remain less clearly identified.

Among the external factors, the decision makers and teachers believed that there should be a suitable ground for applying the necessary procedures to achieve the aims and objectives. They believed that the achievement of the aims could be dependent on many other issues like:

When the faculty council decides on the pass rate, the absence rate, or when the university cannot provide a fixed academic calendar, or the very budget of the department which cannot answer the requirements of meeting the needs to achieve aims. (Vida, teacher from University K)

In general, the students in both universities mentioned a sense of gaining some knowledge and skills, yet at less than their expected level. They mostly did not feel satisfied with their achievement of what they thought were the aims and objectives of the course. Students made a distinction between the intended aims of the department and

their own expected aims, showing awareness that these will vary from student to student. Hasan's statement manifests this distinction in the following way.

If the achievement of the departments' aims is determined through our passing the modules and getting the certificate, then it is safe to say that the aims have been achieved, but if I talk about the achievement of our expected aims, then the achievement could be different for each one of us. (TFK)

Concerning the future job opportunities, few students in University T were hopeful about the efforts exerted by the university to develop employability "through making contacts with nearby organizations and companies." (Jinan, TFK). A student mentioned their involvement in a variety of activities such as step by step "procedures of researching, group work and extracurricular activities" (Hana, TFK). They were optimistic about the effect these experiences would have after graduation in supporting their efforts to get a job.

With regard to critical thinking, some students in University T believed that their critical thinking abilities were improved. For instance, Azhin stated that:

We are encouraged to read critically, think critically and write critically. There have been some workshops for teachers on how to involve elements of critical thinking to their teaching. There have been also workshops for us to enhance our critical thinking abilities. We have got benefit from it. (TFK)

In general, all participants agreed that the extent of the achievement of the aims is not clear and it could be linked to other issues, and it could also be different from one student to another. There was also a view that all aims and objectives are not measurable, and non-measurable goals are vague in terms of identifying what is expected from involved parties in the programme, and of identifying the necessary resources and infrastructure. This results in their inability to ascertain the extent to which the goals have been successfully achieved.

5.3.3.2 Challenges and Obstacles

The participants referred to a number of issues inherent in the process of implementation of the curriculum as well as some context specific issues. Among the inherent reasons, the Head of CDD in University K mentioned the problem of "the quantification of the outputs and measuring the degree of achievement", and among the

latter ones she mentioned the problems associated with the fact that “the changes to the curriculum are in their infancy, in addition to a lack of facilities and expertise”. Moreover, she mentioned the teachers’ and students’ unwillingness to fully comply with the requirements as well as the abuse of the authority by some members of staff who choose to only selectively apply changes according to their personal preferences. She expressed this claim as in the following.

Any time we want to carry out a change, we come across lots of resistance. To achieve our plans, we need cooperation from teachers and students. There are some cases of some senior members of the academic committee who have got hold of the department and exploit their status and position to only carry out the changes that they like.

The Head of CDD in University T referred to some factors that hinder the achievement of the aims and objectives of the courses. He related some problems to their limited facilities. He also referred to their “limited budget” to carry out the plans that need larger number of “trained staff” to conduct “regular follow ups”, limited “administrative authority” to determine “certain procedures”, the problems associated with “large number of students in classes and the lack of sufficient workshops and training courses for teachers”.

Teachers in both universities also referred to a number of problems that hinder the achievement of the aims. Those problems could be classified as those related to government policy such as the lengthy routine needed in order to apply even a slight change, the central admission (enrolment) of students, the imposition one-size-fits-all top-down guidelines without any consultation with teachers. Amin in University K exemplified the impact of the government policy as in the following.

As an example of the controversial policy, I can refer to the Student Absence Law. Until 2014, if a student was absent in more than 15% of the lectures in a module, he/she would fail that module. Such a law was rarely been enforced by the faculty council as it was believed to be too harsh. Knowing this, the students did not obey the law. Since 2014, %15 absence results in missing only the first sitting of the final exam. This amendment has made the law applicable and students pay more attention to being present in the lectures.

A few of the teachers questioned the expected capacity and pedagogical knowledge of some of their colleagues. In addition to that, they linked students’ lack of motivation,

reluctance and inability to pursue knowledge to the governance system in the country. Alan expressed this through the following example.

In my opinion, the bitter reality of governance has had a negative impact on the students' performance. When employment in the public sector, and to some extent in the private sector, relies on other factors rather than the graduates skills and abilities, the students become disappointed. For instance, the first three top students are employed by the university according to their average. There might be cases who have got better averages through memorization.

This indicates that even teachers acknowledge the inefficient assessment system that relies heavily on memorization. This is in line with students concerns' about the assessment system. For instance, Dastan highlighted the difficulty of transferring theoretical knowledge into practice and the deformative impact of assessment systems which only assess superficial retention of information.

We have problems better understanding as we don't put things that we study theoretically into practice. At the moment what we do is to memorize some information to be able to answer the questions and pass the modules. (TFK)

The students were repeatedly relating the problems to pedagogy and assessment. Kafi, in University K, stated the following in this regard.

we are not happy with the way most of the teachers are teaching. There are no proper methods of teaching, no support, no facility, and no encouragement. When my role is all memorizing, then how can I have a desire to learn? (TFK)

Fenk mentioned some details about the students' concerns about how teaching hinders their ability to achieve the course aims:

Usually, there are no good relationship among students and some of the teachers. Teachers' behaviour, teachers absence, limited knowledge of new methods of teaching, no academic support like mentors or guiders that we can refer to when we have problems. (TFK)

In addition to problems related to teaching methods, some of the students ascribed some of the problems to a lack of appropriate learning facilities. Sirwan from University T referred to the problem of limited academic services in their university as in the following:

The services are very limited. For example, the library has old resources and it does not cope with the changes that happen in the department as well as having

no access to the massive number of books and articles that everyday are issued all over the world. (TFK)

Apart from the impact of content and pedagogy on attainment of the aims, some of the students in both universities considered their insufficient knowledge of the intended aims and objectives to be a problem itself. Some other students believed that there is incompatibility between their desired aims and the departments' aims which has made them focus on something different. Hawre, in University T, clarified this opinion as in the following:

One of our teachers told us that the primary aim of the department is to teach us the language, but we don't even see any strategies to achieve this aim. We are always asked to learn. We don't know the reason and the importance of what we have to learn. (TFK)

The students also discussed their own shortcomings that result in not achieving the course objectives properly. They referred to their limited communication skills in English, feeling less motivated and focusing on passing the modules and getting the certificate. Kovan in University T mentioned the impact of the proper command of English Language on their overall performance.

Another problem that we have is related to our communicative skills in English before we joined the department. The students were at different linguistic abilities, but the content is all the same for everybody. We know that we have to work hard, but in reality we want to go for the easiest way and we are mostly looking for shortcuts. (TFK)

In general, all participants referred to a number of problems and challenges ranging from policy to practice at all levels of administration and the people involved at different stages. The data also revealed a constant tension among different groups. Teachers and academic committees were found to be unwilling to comply with the changes by Heads of CDDs. Teachers thought the Heads of CDDs to be acting unilaterally without consulting them. The members of academic committees questioned teachers' pedagogical competence. The students believed that the pedagogy and assessment were not focused by decision makers.

5.3.3.3 Ideas to Better Achieve the Aims and Objectives

The decision makers, the teachers and the students all believed that formulating a well-planned, carefully considered and relevant set of aims and objectives for the courses should be considered urgently. The decision makers believed that they should be provided with more resources and facilities to create a better environment to achieve the aims. The Head of the ELD in University T mentioned the need to develop all the components of the curriculum as well as demanding the authority to carry out the required changes as in the following:

Achieving the aims is also dependent on many other factors such as the teaching methods, assessment system. We can't expect success if we don't have the authority and the facility to fully follow our plan. If we need to change the system of teaching, we have to familiarize our teachers with the up-to-date methods of teaching. This needs money. I need to have authority to change the assessment system. These changes cannot happen overnight.

Students in both universities believed that the aims and objectives of the curriculum should be student-centred and up-to-date. Most of the students believed that what is considered to be desirable qualities for graduates should be reformulated based on students' needs and interests, particularly with a view of future employment. Kani in University K expressed this issue in the following way:

For me, the aims should be updated to suit the recent changes. Up to 2013, there were many chances that the graduates could apply to become teachers. But now, the chances of employment are very little. So the aims should change to make us more independent. (TFK)

Most of the students in both universities also expressed the desirable potential impact of their involvement in the process of determining aims and objectives. They believed their own involvement in setting goals would encourage them to keep working hard, make them feel self-confident, develop their independence, and help them to learn the English language rather than memorising the historical facts related to language and literature that have no use beyond passing exams and gaining a qualification.

Some of the students also believed that the department should present a "workable plan and effective strategy" for achieving the aims and objectives, as well as carry out proper

evaluation processes to “diagnose problems because it is more important to know how to achieve them”. (Awara, TFK)

With regard to the linguistic barrier, most of the students in both universities asked for placement tests before formally starting the course. Shilan from University K stated that:

They even didn't test our level of English language to see if it is in accordance with the level of difficulty of the modules. The incompatibility of our linguistic abilities with the level of the modules made us focus on something different from what we were required to do. (TFK)

This demand of the students is in alignment to some of the teachers' views who believed that students' language abilities should be tested before they start the course and suggested extra language courses for those in need. However, the students felt that apart from the courses, the teaching approaches and content of the courses offered should change to accommodate their language abilities.

Additionally, they wanted to be familiarized with the position and role of each module in bringing about the overall aims of the course, and its use for their future. Renas in University T mentioned that:

We started with some modules without knowing their roles and objectives. I think they should make all these clear and understandable for us. We think that there are some abilities that the course can focus like teaching, if we learn about the methods of teaching English. We would have better chances of teaching positions in the private sector language courses because after four years of study I have the right to expect a job opportunity through my studies in this department. (TFK)

In general, although there was a shared understanding about the urgency of having aims and objectives, the decision makers referred to some logistic factors towards their achievements, while the students demanded to be involved in setting aims and objectives to have their needs and interests are embedded in the curriculum.

5.3.4 Intended Learning Outcomes

The teachers are required to provide module descriptors for the modules they teach. According to the template provided by MoHESR (see appendix 13), the module descriptor should include a number of points, one of which is the module objectives.

In order to provide a clear image of the module objectives and any possible difference among the objectives at different stages, the words that are used to express the objectives are shown in the following table:

Table 5.2: Terminologies used to express the intended learning outcomes

Module	year	University	Objective
Writing I	1	K	Develop ideas..., identify and describe
Introduction to Literature	1	K	Identify..., recognize..., learn how to use..., understand..., get acquainted with..., and distinguish between...
Grammar I	1	K	Understand the differences..., understand ...,
Phonology	2	K	Have general insight about..., to recognize..., and describe and pronounce ...
Drama	2	K	Provide a comprehensive introduction to..., to relate ..., and raise awareness...
Poetry	3	K	Get the information ... , become familiar with... , understand... , realize..., and start learning how to analyse...
Essay Writing	3	K	Develop the ability to ..., explore the writing process..., be familiarized with..., be aware of ..., develop skills..., and to produce
Syntax	4	K	Distinguish between..., to analyse ..., and identify
Literary Criticism	4	K	get the information ..., understand ..., and judge and evaluate
Introduction to Linguistics	1	T	Understand and explain ..., carry out analyses of ..., appreciate and engage in discussions ...
Introduction to English Literature	1	T	To understand the relationship between language and literature and their origins, to understand the historical outline of English literature
Linguistic Theory	2	T	To gain introductory knowledge of ..., to begin to approach and analyse ...
Communication Skills I	2	T	To formulate different combined ideas and thoughts, to use the language skills, to understand..., to express themselves with increasing confidence
Syntax	3	T	To know ..., to understand... , and to analyse
Novel	3	T	To familiarize..., to relate this text to ...
Language and Ideology	4	T	Gain insights into ..., have an understanding of the ..., and identify ...
Post-Colonial Literature	4	T	Gain a basic understanding of ..., discuss and suggest solutions

The above table indicates that most of objectives of the modules in both departments revolve around gaining knowledge, gaining understanding, becoming familiar with, knowing and describing, and in some cases developing, recognizing, distinguishing, analysing and evaluating the issues and topics within each discipline. It could also be concluded that there is no significant difference among the objectives of the modules at different stages. For instance, 'gaining understanding' and 'being familiarized with' are repeatedly used as indications of objectives across all stages. In order to clarify the intended learning outcomes further, the following table shows the classification of those objectives according to Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives.

Table 5.3: Classification of intended learning outcomes according to Bloom's Taxonomy

Levels of learning objectives	Expressions of intent	Number of times used in University K		Number of times used in University T	
Knowledge	Identify	3	6	1	2
	Recognize	2		0	
	Relate	1		1	
Comprehension	Describe	2	19	0	14
	Appreciate	0		1	
	Explain	0		1	
	Understand and interpret	14		10	
	Express	0		1	
	Discuss	0		1	
	Distinguish	2		0	
	Provide	1		0	
Application	Use	2	5	0	0
	Pronounce	1		0	
	Explore	1		0	
	Produce	1		0	
Analysis	Analyse	2	2	3	4
	Engage in debates	0		1	
Synthesis	Formulate ideas	1	3	0	1
	Develop ideas	0		1	
	Develop skills	1		0	
	Develop the ability	1		0	
Evaluation	Judge	1	2	0	1
	Evaluate	1		0	
	Suggest solution	0		1	

The above table shows that in both departments more than half of the objectives fall within the first three levels of learning. The higher levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation carry very little weight compared to the other levels. Therefore, this reinforces the idea that the objectives that imply high levels of criticality seem absent or less focused in the modules. The above table also indicates that in both departments the repetition or overuse of the term 'understand' and other expressions that suggest the same concept shows that most of the knowledge is learned as theory and there is very little focus on skills or practical knowledge.

Most of the students in both universities found the objectives of the modules general and incomplete; general in a sense that there is no mention of the procedures or activities through which the objectives could be achieved, and incomplete in a sense that they found the objectives to be the objectives of the discipline rather than the objectives that show the importance of these modules in the overall programme and overall aims of the course. For example, with regard to generality of module objectives, Kavi from University K stated that:

We read the objectives of the modules, but in reality, we don't get much benefit from them. They are general statements, for example, it says, 'develop the ability', 'develop the skills' or 'explore the writing processes, but it doesn't specify how. We don't know what are we expected to do. (TFK)

Another student from University T stated the discipline-related objectives as in the following:

Sometimes the objectives say more about the content of the module, for example, in 'to understand the basic principles of', 'get the information about' or 'be familiar with English sound system, I don't see anything except what we study or what is taught rather than how and why it matters. (Jwan, TFK)

In conclusion, analysis of the data about the decision makers', teachers' and students' perceptions of the aims and objectives of the curriculum in both universities shows that employment is the heart of the government plans, and all participants agreed that their programme should incorporate that, but there is disagreement over who knows best what is required for that. In spite of the fact that in theory the academic committees in each department are responsible for formulating aims and objectives, the data shows that in both departments the members of the academic committees do not have the same opinion about the aims and objectives, how they should be formulated, what they

should be and the sequence of their importance. There were clear tensions between Heads of CDD and academic committees who both requested more administrative autonomy and authority, and both found the other as hampering the changes. In addition to that, all sides wanted more roles while disregarding the potential input that other parties could bring into the process. For example, teachers' involvement was restricted under the deep-rooted reliance on the notion of 'experience' or 'expertise'. Similarly, the students' in both universities demand for involvement to convey their needs and interests was rejected by all other parties not believing on in any useful input they could bring to the process. Therefore, very limited cooperation and great tension among all parties is evident with regard to the aims and objectives of the programme.

5.4 Theme Three: Perceptions of the Content of the Programmes

The third theme is centred on the content of the courses as perceived by decision makers, teachers and students in both departments. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the content of the courses. The responses were classified into the following categories: perceptions of setting the syllabus, approval of the content, perceptions of the content and curriculum change, and perceptions of optional modules.

5.4.1 Setting and Approving the Syllabi

According to the interviews with the members of the academic committees in both departments, the syllabus used to be very similar across the country. The Head of CDD at University K stated that "up to 10 years ago, it was the norm that the ELD in the University of Baghdad was the model and other universities were following it". In other words, the curriculum across all similar departments had to be almost the same. In 2010, the universities in KR were given the chance to change their own syllabi independently. Therefore, the academic committee in each department was at liberty to develop the syllabus for the course under certain guidelines. With regard to the practicalities and procedures of setting the syllabus or developing some changes, the Head of CDD in University K stated that it is the "sole responsibility of the academic committees" of the departments "within the guidelines" defined by the ministry to carry out necessary changes. She also referred to some methods to determine the syllabus

such as getting “consultation from the experts”, reviewing and “considering the modules studied in developed universities” in other countries in addition to some of the partnership programs that already existed with other universities. However, in spite of some changes, a comparison of the new syllabus and the one prior to the changes shows that some of the modules are so deep rooted and believed to be necessary that they are still present in the curriculum (see appendix 7).

There are some whole-course standards set by the Ministry that the academic committees are required to follow. These standards are related to the number of modules studied each year and, the classification of the content according to stages. But the module-specific guidelines such as number of lectures for each module and the scheme of the lectures are decided by the academic committee.

Regarding the usual process of curriculum content approval, the Head of CDD in University K stated that after the academic committee organized the final draft for the content, it was sent to CDD for the final checks and necessary feedback towards the final approval. Once the draft was confirmed, “the curriculum (content at that stage) was not subject to change for four years”. During the four year period from the approval, “an evaluation program” was supposed to be carried out and according to the evaluation reports, changes would be applied to the content.

5.4.1.1 Whole-course Guidelines

With regard to the number of modules in each year, there is a ministerial guideline (Document No: 805 issued in 23/10/2011) about the number of modules in the first two years of the courses. According to this guideline, the number of the modules must not be more than 8 for the first two years. Half of these modules in year one are the same for most of the courses since these modules are not related to the specialism of the courses. These modules are “Academic Skills, IT, Kurdish Studies, and a Foreign Language” (Directive No: 20369, para. 1).

Concerning classification of the content in different stages, according to the Ministerial Order no. 22771/2, the content of the year one is an introductory stage with 70% of the modules about capacity building, students’ preparation for college and life after university, and 30% of the modules related to the specialty of the department. The

modules in year two have to be mainly theoretical, and in the last two years, the modules should mainly include the practice and skills needed in the job market.

This order has not been fully implemented by the ELDs in both universities. Year one in both universities is a preparatory stage for the following years. But the theory-practice division is not manifested in the module selection in the following years. In University K, the three literature-related modules of drama, novel, and poetry are repeated in all the three years. A closer look at the module descriptors of these modules in year two, three and four shows that the focus of these modules in the last three years of the course does not differ on the basis of theory-practice division. For example, the content of the poetry module in year two focuses on sixteenth century poetry, while the equivalent in year three focuses on seventeenth century poetry. The same is applied to linguistics-related modules. For example phonology in year 2 is followed by morphology in year 3 and syntax in year 4, in a steady sequence which does not demonstrate a division between theory and practice.

Table 5.4: Module classification of the courses

University K	University T
Year 1	Year 1
English Pronunciation	English Language
Academic Debate	Academic Skills
Introduction to Literature	Introduction to English Literature
English Vocabulary	Introduction to Linguistics
Kurdish Studies	Kurdish Studies
IT	IT
Writing I	
Reading Comprehension I	
Grammar I	

Year 2	Year 2
Novel	Grammar
Drama	Communication Skills I
Poetry	Creative non-fiction
Writing I	Prose Fiction
Reading Comprehension II	Linguistic Theory
Grammar II	Translation I
Phonology	Literary Theory
French Language I	Critical Writing

Year 3	Year 3 Linguistics Branch	Year 3 Literature Branch
Linguistics I	Research Writing	Critical Theory
Novel	Syntax	Creative Writing
Drama	Communication Skills II	Translation II
Poetry	Phonetics	Poetry
Essay Writing	Second Language Learning	Novel
Translation I	Sociolinguistics	Short story
Morphology	Translation II	Drama
French Language II	Psycholinguistics	Research Writing

Year 4	Year 4 Linguistics Branch	Year 4 Literature Branch
Literary Criticism	Semantics	Cyber Literature
Novel	Morphology	Post-Colonial Literature
Drama	Pragmatics	Folklore
Poetry	Language and Ideology	Literature and Ideology
Linguistics II	Discourse Analyses	Literature and Performance
Translation II	English Language Teaching	Modern Drama
Syntax	Translation III	Translation III
Graduation Paper	Graduation Paper	Graduation Paper
TESOL	Applied Linguistics	Modern Poetry

According to the Head of CDD in University K, to address the element of employability, a translation module is studied in year three and Translation and TESOL modules are studied in year four. In University T, translation I, II, III are studied in year two, three, four, respectively. In University T, the structure of the content differs since the modules in year two aim to introduce students to the literature and linguistics topics so that they can decide to choose one of these areas as their major.

The Ministerial Order no. 22771/2 stresses the study of a topic in the last two years of the course (year three and four) in another language apart from the medium language of the course. Therefore, the language of instruction of one of the modules in the last two years of the programme should be in either French, Arabic, German or any other language. For example, a module like phonology has to be studied in French or Arabic language. This has not been implemented by both departments. Instead, in University K,

a modified version of this article of the Order no. 22771/2 has been followed. In year two and year three, instead of studying a topic in French, the French language module is studied whose objective is learning French language per se. In University T, this article of the above mentioned Order has not been followed at all. They have not even followed a similar approach to that of University K. The Head of the ELD in University T believed that this article of the Order is not applicable to ELD stating that “the medium of instruction in the department is not the same as students’ mother tongue, first language, or any of the formal languages of the country”.

This indicates that the department has applied this part of the Ministerial Order according to their interpretations. University T has added more modules related to literature and linguistics to their corresponding branches. University K had preserved most of the modules that existed before the reform process. This makes it clear that module selection and content arrangement are little changed in the light of policy documents.

5.4.1.2 Module-specific Guidelines

The ministry only imposes one proviso with regard to the content of the modules in each course. The condition is that the module descriptor, which is designed by the lecturer, which also includes the content of the module, has to be reviewed by a peer lecturer and approved by the Head of the ELD. However, in University K, the content of the modules is the sole responsibility of the academic committee. The module lecturer will provide the title of the lessons and their sequences in the module descriptor. Concerning the content of each module the two universities differ in regards to the teachers’ role.

In University K, the teachers had a very limited role in suggesting the content of the modules because it is the sole responsibility of the academic committee whose members have higher academic ranks than the rest of the staff. The Head of the ELD believed that in this way the “suitability, practicality and learnability” of the content could be better controlled. He also added that they got benefit from the “experienced staff”, the absence of which would otherwise lead to problems like “repetition among the content of the modules and incongruity with the students’ level”.

In University T, the teachers are responsible for determining the content of the modules they teach. The Head of the ELD stated that the teachers make a “good search” and prepare a draft of the content. In the presence of most of the teachers, “the module teacher presents a seminar” and collects the feedback. In the light of the comments and feedback, a “new draft is presented to the Head of the ELD” and then the content along with the whole module descriptor is “approved by the Head of the ELD and the academic committee”. The head of the department also added that the teachers are reminded to take some points into consideration such as “availability of the resources and students’ interests”.

The different approaches followed in the two departments suggest that the decision makers view the staff and their expertise differently. In University T, teachers’ role, expertise and the procedures that teachers follow to set and organize the content of the modules is positively valued; whereas in University K, the experience and expertise of the members of the academic committee (of higher academic ranks) outrank module teachers’ expertise.

With regard to number of lectures for each module, in University K, some of the modules are taught in two lectures in a week, while some other modules are studied three lectures in a week. Lana, a member of the academic committee believed that it has been a “norm from the past” that some modules are allocated more credit hours. She attributed this to the view that some modules “take more time to be taught” than others; therefore, she considered all modules to be of equal importance. On the other hand, Isa, another member of the academic committee believed that some of the modules are “linked to the specialty of the course” more than other modules. Vida, a literature teacher believed that “literature modules must carry the same weight as the linguistics modules, while the number of the linguistics modules is more than the literature ones”, and suggested that this was the reason for the literature modules having three lectures a week while the linguistic modules have two. So, there is no clear agreement over the rationale for this difference in the number of lectures allocated for teaching different modules.

In University T, all modules in all four years of the course carry equal credit hours and they are studied in two lectures a week. The Head of the ELD believed that all the

modules carry equal degree of importance in the overall structure of the course. However, two literature teachers believed that “two lectures a week has not been sufficient for them to carry out their teaching plans” (Dosti). So, even allocating the same number of lectures for each module has not guaranteed unanimity or satisfaction among all teachers.

Concerning the scheme of the lectures, in University T, each module is studied for two lectures of each 50 minutes. Sometimes these two hours are studied together, and sometimes it is on two separate days for some other modules (see appendix 11 & 12). Teachers referred to the advantages and disadvantages of studying the two lectures together. Rawa believed that it is better when the two lectures are mixed in one double lecture as it gives them “enough time to finish the lesson which would otherwise take a lot of time to reach the point that have already been studied” as well as the time that is saved “for not reading out the names to register the absentees”. On the other hand, Yad believed that students feel “exhausted to sit in a session for 100 minutes”. He was also worried that “an unexpected holiday” outside the university calendar would make it difficult for the department, teachers and students to compensate the missed lecture. In University K, the Head of ELD stated that “the literature modules could be better studied in two hours and if any module is decided to be studied in three lectures a week, it is usually in the form of one 50 minutes and one 100 minute lecture. He also mentioned that sometimes practical constraints such as limitations in the lecturers’ availability or the availability of study halls determine how a module is studied.

With regard to students’ perceptions of the lecture timetable, some students expressed uncertainty about which approach was best, and occasionally this was linked that to the area of study as in the following.

We think it is good that we study both lectures together in some of the modules, but in linguistics modules, we find it better when we are taught things in small chunks rather than many things only once a week. (Dastan, TFK)

Some students in University T had a conditional preference for mixed lectures. They believed that it could be dependent on some other points such as their relationship with the teacher or their personal feeling and preparedness. Hana stated this view as in the following:

Sometimes having enough time helps us practice all the activities associated with the lesson. But, I feel that it is sometimes boring to have a lecture for such a long time, especially when we don't like the lesson. (TFK)

In general, the participants' views about this issue was different ranging from supporting mixed lecturers to supporting separate lectures due to practical constraints and advantages and disadvantages that the teachers associated with each type. However, the students linked this issue to the nature of the topic and the way it was taught.

5.4.2 Perceptions of the Content and the Changes

The changes that have happened to the content in response to the new governmental demands are more obviously manifested in the first two years of the course in University K, while it is more substantial and spread at all stages in University T. In what follows the participants' perceptions of the content and specifically the modules which have been added as a result of the reforms are explained. In general, students in both universities expressed their preferences about the content of the curriculum which related to their belief that the aim of the course should be influenced by employability concerns. Students wanted the modules to focus on language and communication skills, translation and teaching methods. They believed that due to the available jobs it would be better for them to take mainly practical courses in spoken language, translation, interpretation, and methods of teaching.

Their explanation of the current modules of their programme is elaborated separately in the following sub-sections.

5.4.2.1 Responses to the Introduction of First Year Generic Academic Modules

One of the changes that have happened in the first year of both departments is the addition of a module called Academic Debate (labelled as Academic Skills in University T). This module is studied in two practical sessions and one theory lecture. The objectives of this module are to familiarize students with the skills of (oral) presentation, debate and discussion, seminar, constructing arguments, note taking, essay, report and proposal writing, and reference management (Ministerial Order no 22771/4 in 30/11/2011). The Heads of the ELDs expressed the importance of all these skills and their role in students' success; however, they were doubtful whether all these skills have been practiced, and whether all these objectives have been achieved.

The academic skills teacher in University T acknowledged some problems with this module. She believed that students would better learn and use these skills if they were required to transfer the skills explicitly to other modules. Her statement further elaborates this issue.

Unfortunately, most of the other modules follow mainly lecturing method and what we study and most of the skills we practice in this module are thought to be needed only in this module because students are not obliged to apply it to other modules. The students would benefit more if these skills that are utilized in other modules.

The Academic Debate teacher in University K, Shan, also believed that all those skills could not be practiced due to large number of students in the classes as well as the limited time they had compared to the abundance of the skills that were needed to be developed in their students. Therefore, she prioritised the skills and focused on some of them more than others. The students also believed that all those skills that are supposed to be practiced in this module are important. They believed that having all those skills helps them benefit more from their studies. They also stated that some of the skills are neglected and less practiced.

The data indicate that all participants agreed that this module is important, but as a new module it is not yet fully embedded in the programme. As students mentioned, embedding this as a topic requires integration of the module into other modules. This indicates that only adding a module into the programme without considering how it will work alongside others, without requiring other module leaders to adapt and alter the content of their modules and adopt those strategies in their teaching practices, cannot achieve all of the objectives. It also indicates that programme development is a difficult and complex process that if it is not developed holistically, switching or adding individual modules will not necessarily function efficiently.

5.4.2.2 French Language

Another area of change (Ministerial Order No: 22771, para. 10) included the study of a topic in a language different from English that is the medium of instruction in the departments under the study. This order is differently implemented in University K. The French Language I and II were previously studied in year one and year two, respectively. They have been shifted to year two and year three, whereas they are

entirely removed from the curriculum in University T. The Head of the ELD in University K, justified this change as in the following:

By the time the students graduated, they either had forgotten things they had learned and they had lost the interests they might have had to further develop their skills. Hence, we made this shift.

In University T, the Head of the ELD justified the department's decision to remove it as in the following:

We found out that this module is not favoured by students and the students only studied it to pass it. Having this module was not of help for most of the students towards the specialism of the department.

The students had different view about the study of French language in their courses. Some of the students in both universities believed that this module is not so helpful for them in the future as they cannot learn it well enough to use it or refer to it as an extra language in their CVs. However, a small number of students expressed their interest in this module and their desire to take extra courses after graduation.

Removing this module in University T indicated that the departments did not want to implement this particular change, in spite of the existence of centralised policies. This perhaps stems from the fact that the requirement for studying in the third language is too generalized, with little explicit specification of how to apply it. It also shows a mismatch between centralised policies that focus on introducing a third language and the views of most of the teachers and students who find it unnecessary. This also shows that the value associated to a module, and whether is necessary or not, for some depends on its usage, and personal interest for others.

5.4.2.3 Communication Skills

One of the other changes that happened in both universities was to integrate the modules of Writing Composition I, Conversation I, and Comprehension I into one module entitled Communication Skills I. These modules used to aim to improve the students' overall linguistic abilities. The integration was introduced in 2011 in order to interweave the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The Head of CDD in University K justified this development as in the following:

Before that, there was not enough coordination among the instructors. The content of the modules were irrelevant in most of the cases and sometimes the same thing

was repeated in all these modules. But this integration aimed at getting optimal communication skills.

However, since 2013, University K has returned to segregated skills teaching through cancelling communication I and communication II in year one and year two, respectively. The teachers and the Head of the ELD in University K described the reason behind this shift to be the decision of the academic committee. They did not reject the idea of integrating skills in theory, but they referred to the problems they had with putting it into practice as they found it logistically easier to deliver the lectures on writing isolated from speaking, or on listening separate from reading. They believed that it was difficult for teachers to concentrate on more than one skill at a time. So, the ELD in University K made this change, but then reverted back to a segregated approach for the reason given above, but the ELD in University T have continued to teach it in an integrated way.

Once again similar to the academic skills module, this indicates that in spite of the fact that the need to integrate has been clearly identified in University K, they have failed to achieve it due to the difficulty of introducing change holistically and getting all teachers to cooperate with the change.

5.4.2.4 Grammar

Grammar as one of the areas of the study in both departments was discussed by participants. The decision makers, including the Heads of ELDs, members of the academic committees and teachers all believed that grammar should be studied systematically, as they believed that this area is directly related to the specialism of the departments. Therefore, grammar as rules of language to generate meaningful sentences is studied in year one and year two in both departments. The members of the academic committees in both departments felt it necessary for students to take these modules as they believed that without knowing grammar it would not be possible for students to express themselves properly. At the same time, they confirmed that most of the students, in spite of passing the tests, are not able to write or speak in a grammatically acceptable way. Ahmed's statement confirms this problem and shows that students' knowledge about grammar such as their ability to identify, name and analyse grammatical parts and structures does not necessarily translate into their ability to apply their knowledge effectively when producing language through speech or writing.

Sometimes, students in their writings or when they speak make punctuation, word order, tense choice, negation, passive and active voice and other grammatical mistakes. They have studied all these. At the same time, they have passed their grammar tests.

This shows that grammar is still studied in the traditional sense in both departments, i.e., explicit knowledge of linguistic terminology and grammatical structures, in spite of the fact that teachers are well aware that this is not achieving the aims they would like it to.

Similarly, most of the students believed that knowledge of grammatical rules does not help them speak or write grammatically correct sentences. In other words, they believed that declarative knowledge of grammar does not necessarily translate into procedural facility with language. Almost all of the students in the focus group confirmed their classmate's statement about this problem. For instance, Kani from University K stated that:

We want to learn the language. We want to be able to use the language properly. We know that the third person singular verb in simple present tense takes s or es, but we mostly fail in applying these rules in our language use. (TFK)

The Head of the ELD in University K was aware of the students' problems and believed that "all the modules and specially grammar module should be taught in more student-centred manner". This rather vague assertion suggests that they see the problem is situated in the pedagogical approach, rather than the content of the module itself.

From the perceptions of grammar, it is apparent that there is a mismatch between the declarative knowledge of grammar that is taught and the functional (procedural) knowledge which students and some teachers believe is more important to develop, but the interviewees did not show a detailed understanding of this point. However, the reason why such an ineffectual method is followed might be related to a lack of understanding of exactly what the problem is, the lack of time to make changes, pedagogical expertise, trainings or a belief that the entrenched ways of teaching are the best ways of doing it.

5.4.2.5 Pronunciation

The members of the academic committee and the lecturers in both universities found this module crucial for students. For them, this module provides the basics of English

language phonetics. In this module, the students are taught the organs of speech, articulation of the consonants and vowels, consonant clusters, words in company and intonation (Pronunciation Module Descriptor). According to the teachers, these topics are integral to any introduction to study of any language. Sana, the lecturer of this module in University K believed that this module is “important and necessary” as it contains lots of “new and useful information”.

Similarly, most of the students in both universities confirmed that this module contained lots of interesting information. However, they believed that this module has not helped them to speak, pronounce words and sentences noticeably better than they did before the start of the module, introducing a similar problem to that found in relation to grammar above – a gap between the declarative knowledge gained, and students’ ability to put it into practice. Azhin in University T, referred to the same problem as in the following:

Like Grammar, we memorize the rules of, for example, the articulation of the /p/ sound. We learn that /p/ is stronger than /b/. We also learn that /p/ is aspirated. We learn that it shortens the preceding vowel when it occurs at the end, but the point is that it does not help us pronounce the /p/sound any better than we did. (TFK)

On the other hand, there were a few students in both universities who found the manner of articulation of some sounds helpful in improving their pronunciation. Kavi, from University K had a different view stating that:

When I carefully listened to the articulation of /t/ sound, it was clear that there are differences between /t/ in English and my mother tongue language (Kurdish). I tried to apply the articulation rules of /t/ and tried to pronounce it the way it is pronounced in English. With lots of practice, I was able to pronounce English /t/. I am sure that if we are required to practice and put into practice what we study will be really helpful. (TFK)

This raised the discussion of to what extent it is obligatory for students to sound like natives. Some students believed that it is necessary for them to speak native-like, while some others believed that it is normal not to sound like a native speaker and that this is not a problem as long as it does not cause misunderstanding.

5.4.2.6 Information Technology

The Head of CDD in University K and the Head of ELD in University T stated that “this module is compulsory for all year one undergraduate courses in the region”. The Head of CDD in University K added that there is a “unified IT content for all humanity courses

across the university” which follows a central assessment. However the teachers and students had various views about this module. There was a belief that this uniformity has made the content more suitable for some majors than others. Amin, from University K, believed that this module is no longer needed as “students nowadays have access to internet, smart phones and they are aware of many applications”; therefore, they cannot be considered computer illiterates. Dosti, from University T, believed that “the theoretical parts that the module is focusing on are not favoured by students” and the practice part is mostly related to things that either “most of the students know or it is of no use for them”. He also suggested that this module could be “replaced with workshops” in which some programs related to the department’s specialty could be presented to students.

Students, in general, did not feel any major problem with this module. Some students found this module useful. Some other students in both universities believed that studying a program like Microsoft Word is too easy to be included in this module. Most of the students agreed that it would be more beneficial if the content is mostly related to programs directly related to the presentation skills, speedy writing techniques, searching strategies and other useful programs. This presents evidence of the difficulty of ensuring that module content is sufficiently up-to-date, particularly in the fast-changing world of information technology.

5.4.2.7 Students’ Perceptions of the Literature Modules

As it is evident in table 5.4, the literature modules in both universities are quite different. Therefore, the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the literature content are dealt with separately.

Literature modules in University K

The three modules of English Drama, English Novel, and English Poetry exist in the second, third and fourth years of the programme. The study found that for the ELD University K, drama, poetry and novel are the most important genres of literature that are studied in three years of the programme. The scope of the modules at the horizontal level is genre-based and at the vertical level it is chronological. The members of the academic committee believed that students need to have a thorough knowledge of these modules as they are supposed to become the specialists in English. These

modules are regarded as fixed modules that every student should pass in one stage before they proceed to the next stage. Isa seriously advocated the presence of the above mentioned modules as in the following:

When we give our students the certificate, we acknowledge that they have met the requirements to be granted BA in English language and literature. It would be a false claim if these modules are not included in the curriculum.

The students had various views about these modules. The students in general find these modules important, useful and interesting. However, some students had personal likes or dislikes with regards to one or two of these modules. Some students had concerns about the extent of the content studied in each module, sequence of the content in each stage or the way these modules are taught. Fenk had the following comment regarding the amount of content.

I think we study a lot of material in these modules. We study two novels, two plays and two ages of English Poetry each year. This is too much. I think it would be better to study less with greater detail. (TFK)

Mani, one of the novel lecturers, agreed with this point as he believed that “studying novel does not accomplish the objectives” because the students rely on “the abridged forms of the text”. Moreover, he believed that there is not “enough time to discuss all the key topics” in a novel when they are required to study “two novels” each year.

Another concern of some students was the arrangement of the content of the drama module across the three years of the program (Year two, year three and year four) as in the following:

What we study in year two, for example in year two Drama, we studied two tragedies. The Language was very difficult. This year we study comedy. I think that it would be better if ...uh... what we studied this year has been studied last year. (Hasan, TFK)

Therefore, the idea was that the order of the content should have been changed so that the students had studied modern texts which have more accessible language before the older texts, which they thought, have archaic Language. In contrast, Vida suggested that the modern texts have more complex ideas which should be approached later, after the older texts had been studied, and noted that the problem of language difficulty has been overcome by using “the modern English equivalent texts” of the old plays. In addition to

that, she believed that “the complexity of ideas in the modern literary works would be even worse if the modern literature is studied first”.

Most of the students went further and linked their likes and dislikes and experiences to the implementation of other components of the curriculum such as pedagogy and assessment. Shilan stated the following and most of the students in the group were in agreement with her.

Sometimes it really matters who and how we are taught a module. Different teachers have different ways of teaching these modules. This makes us like or dislike a module more than the other. (TFK)

Here, what students suggested indicated that it is not always possible to disentangle the content of the curriculum from the pedagogical approach taken.

A few students raised another issue related to the fulfillment of one of the aims of the whole course, i.e., understanding British Culture. For instance, Kani believed that understanding the western culture or specifically “British culture is not feasible through the works of 200 years ago”. However, the opposing students believed that the works written in the past are more relatable than some of the recent works. They found Renaissance and Victorian Literature more relevant to themselves. They claimed that they can better “relate, understand and feel the plot and theme of the 17th and 18th centuries”. (Dastan, TFK)

Hence, there is again no agreement amongst the students or the staff with regards to the content of the modules; however, there is a sense that some lecturers and students considered the concept of a literary canon, while others were more concerned about using more contemporary texts to develop an understanding of current culture.

Some students also complained again about the lack of integration and coherence within the syllabus, with “repeated modules related to the same genre at different stages” (Razhan, TFK).

Literature modules in University T

In the academic year 2012-2013, for the first time in the KR, creative writing was incorporated into the curriculum of ELD in University T. The introduction of this module

was through the partnership and accreditation programs that some departments went through in 2012-2013. Therefore, as the Head of ELD stated, at first, “the feelings were mixed, there were different anticipations, varied opinion regarding this new experience”. She believed that at first creative writing was a challenge for most students. She considered that change a success and she believed that some students’ works have been above her expectations.

Most of the students’ in general liked this module. They stated that the way they produced a piece of writing, the way they developed it, and the way they moved forward and backward from ideas to expressions gave them a great feeling. Meanwhile, they considered it an arduous task as non-native speakers of English which required them to have both a high level of language control as well as creativity. They also linked it to their limited knowledge of English vocabulary and the challenges they had in expressing what they really wanted to say. However, a few students expressed their reluctance towards this module and writing in general. They found creative writing to be an art that can only be taught to those who have got the talent. Sirwan stated that “it is a complicated task to tie the ideas together into a coherent piece” (TFK). Another student expressed her hopelessness with this module as she believed that:

the way we have practiced writing from school and even in the university only depended on memorising grammatical rules and grammar-focused writing lessons. We don’t have any experience of creative writing. Most of us have not had serious writing attempts even in our mother tongue language. (Jinan, TFK)

She went on to suggest that this module would be better as a selective module for those who are interested in it.

This could be seen as another manifestation of a lack of coherence and integration within the curriculum, and the problem of adding a new module without considering how it relates to the rest of the syllabus. The gap between how students are taught to write elsewhere in the syllabus– with a focus on grammatical rules – and the expectations of the new creative writing module are great, and this makes it difficult for students to succeed in the new module.

Studying English and non-English authors

In both universities, teachers and students had a range of views about the content of the modules. One area of disagreement, about the literature content, mainly evident in University K, revolved around the study of works written in English by English or non-English authors. For a few teachers, it was indispensable that the great historic works of early English writers are studied. They considered the great literary figures of English literature as an integral part of the course. Alan strongly believed that “it is not possible to give certificate of BA in English literature if Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jane Austen and others” are not studied. On the other hand, there were few members of staff who preferred studying works produced by non-English writers, novelists, poets or playwrights. They advocated for the study of recent Nobel Prize winners’ works.

This indicates a disagreement between traditionalists who favour the literary canon, and those who advocate for a broader range of literature. The program split in line with teachers’ specific role in selecting module content in University T: it is possible for the teachers to concentrate on a broader range of literature, while in University K, teachers’ obligation to abide by the determined content makes this tension obvious.

5.4.2.8 Linguistic Content

The decision makers, lecturers and students believed that linguistics modules constitute the biggest areas of difficulty in terms of their roles, their content and their use.

The Head of ELD in University T expressed her concern about the linguistics courses. She found it challenging to integrate key transferable skills, such as essay writing and presentation compared to the literature modules. She also found it problematic to integrate practice of the skills of critical thinking and problem solving within the linguistic modules.

Teachers had problems linking the objectives of the modules to the implicit aims of the course. Alan stated the difficulty in the following way:

When we start studying a module, the students immediately ask about the benefits of the module. The students want to know how it helps them know the language better. Most of the time, we find it difficult to arouse students’ interests in these topics as there is very limited room for their opinion.

Some students in both universities found the linguistics modules contrary to their wishes and demands as they believed that the content of the modules and the knowledge they got was mainly theoretical; and the content was delivered mainly through lectures. Furthermore, they negatively stated that they mostly needed to recall the information for their exams and after passing the module they either did not build upon them or they completely forgot them. Moreover, they believed that they only memorized the rules of phonology, morphology and syntax with only a limited number of possible examples. Awara, from university T, exemplified this issue as in the following:

In linguistics topics, we are taught the rules. We memorize the rules. For instance in phonology there is “intrusive r in RP”. The book contains two examples for this rule such as /Africa –r– n Asia/ to say ‘Africa and Asia’. We learn this but we cannot apply this rule in practice in all possible cases. Students rarely say /I saw-r-a film/ when they say: ‘I saw a film’. (TFK)

The students in University K had another concern about the linguistics modules. They were in favour of interdisciplinary fields like computational linguistics, forensic linguistics, technical writing or journalism because they found these areas more interesting. They also believed that having knowledge of those areas help them to find better jobs. This implies a gap between theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge to improve their linguistic skills.

5.4.2.9 Graduation Research Paper

In both universities in the final year students have to present a research paper. The graduates of both universities considered this experience to be the only formal piece of work they have produced. According to Head of ELD in University K, for this module, at the beginning of year four, the students pick a topic among many topics that the department announces every year. He added that after selecting a topic, each student is assigned a supervisor under whose guidance the students start writing a nearly 5000-word paper. At the end of the year the student is examined and the paper is marked. The students associated advantages and disadvantages with this module. They associated a feeling of pride and achievement to it. Zin, a graduate of University K, stated that she understood that topic better due to concentrating on the subject of her choice. However, other students struggled with the process. For example, Adam, from the same department, found it challenging to communicate and maintain contact with his

supervisor. He also added scarcity of library resources as another problem. Similarly, Pari, from University T, described the difficulty she had finding a supervisor, as students in that year, the students were asked to approach the teachers personally, with the expectation that this would allow them to select a teacher they could more easily work with— without consideration of the additional social and interpersonal pressure, that this need to select and establish contact with a supervisor, put on the students. Darin another graduate from University T, was critical of the process, believing that the structure of the course meant that the quality of the papers produced by students were not good. He also expressed his bitter experience in the following way:

The day in which the topics had been announced, I was not in the department. The day after, most of the topics that I was interested had already been selected. Therefore, I could not choose and write on a subject of interest. (TFK)

In both institutions, students experienced some signs of struggle to engage with this component, and this was at least sometimes related to the difficulty in finding a suitable topic or supervisor. This implies that either there have not been adequate arrangements, or again this activity has not been integrated into the curriculum holistically.

5.4.3 Perceptions of Optional Modules

The data revealed that most of the participants advocated the benefits of optional modules and they referred to the problems they had due to a system of all compulsory modules as well as the barriers to optional modules as in the following.

5.4.3.1 The Necessity and Benefits of Optional Modules

The Heads of the ELDs in both universities confirmed that students' lacked the opportunity in deciding whether to study a module or not during their undergraduate study. They did not advocate having an option due to a view that "most of the students' attempts to study less in quantity and low in quality". The Head of ELD in University T elaborated this issue as in the following.

Each year there are a large number of students who complain about the modules; they believe that the syllabus is difficult for them. They demand easier lesson and easier topics. They want all the modules about language learning, translation, and language teaching. Therefore, we cannot involve students in setting the syllabus. In addition to that, it is professional issue that is much higher than students' intellectual abilities.

However, they acknowledged some students' strong preferences for some modules and their sheer boredom with other modules. Some members of the academic committee pointed out the negative impact of the lack of students' choice in relation to optional modules. Hadi explained the core curriculum in the department and its impact on students.

The students have to study and pass all the modules in all years of the study. A student who might be disinterested in poetry still has to study it. If there is a choice that one of the literature modules could be replaced with another module, this student might enjoy the whole course and become more successful.

However, a few of the teachers made a primary-secondary distinction among the modules, believing that some of the modules that are directly related to the specialism of the course are an essential part of the curriculum and should be compulsory for all students, while some other modules could be specified as optional and from which students would be able to choose a certain number in each stage.

Similarly, most of the students in both universities revealed some problems associated with the lack of optional modules. They mentioned a lack of motivation, freedom, interest, and flexibility as the negative effect of having an entirely core curriculum. Some students referred to their "inability to concentrate on the area of their talent or strength as a result of having all compulsory modules which could consequently result in a lack of variety in their final qualification". (Sirwan, TFK)

Some students criticised the departments for not taking their personal likes and dislikes in to consideration. Hasan, from University K, stated that:

Each one of us, may be in a module, we are stuck doing something that we don't like. We didn't expect some of the modules to be part of the course. Now that we have no freedom of not studying it, we are not motivated to do it well. It would be great if we had the option to at least swap a module with another module that we could relate it to our interests, needs and future career. (TFK)

The students unanimously expressed their concern about the core curriculum and their main demand for optional modules. Nada, from University T, mentioned the positive results of having options that "add variety to their study and help them to find their talents or the areas in which that would perform better". (TFK)

Some students had a congruent view with the primary-secondary distinction of the modules that a few teachers had expressed. They advocated modification of the current system. Kavi, from University K, represented this idea in the following way:

We are not asking to abandon this system. It is fine if each year of our course consists of core modules that make up the bulk of your studies. We want freedom to pick smaller supplementary modules that appeal to us, or will help us develop key skills in our areas of interest. (TFK)

Jinan, from University T, also made a comparison with other universities. She stated that “most of the universities abroad are more flexible than ours when it comes to what modules you can choose to study.” (TFK)

5.4.3.2 Challenges of Implementing Optional Modules

The decision makers confirmed the advantages and importance of optional modules. However, some of the decision makers and lecturers believed that adoption of such a system would be excessively costly. The Head of the ELD in University K mentioned that:

The implementation of such a change would require us getting qualified teaching staff, library resources as well as educational spaces. The students pay no tuition fees and adding one optional module a year will add a lot to the cost of the study. I don't think it could be afforded by the university.

On the contrary, some teachers explain the lack of any initiation or attempts in this direction to the universities' preference to keep the current system and so avoid any initiation that might necessitate changes. For instance, Yad, from University T, believed that a limited financial budget is not an impassable barrier.

The administration claims that they do not have the budget to carry out changes or introduce selective modules. Unfortunately, this shows a lack of willingness towards one of the students' biggest concerns. For this to happen, I am sure that students might be ready to pay towards the cost of this change.

This also indicated a mismatch between some teachers who considered the universities unwilling to initiate such a change, while the decision makers attributed that to its unaffordable cost.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to present a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the data collected from different participants' perspectives. The results and the findings were presented on a thematic style, i.e. the perspectives of all participants from both departments in both universities are referred to (if relevant and existed) while elaborating any single idea. The differences and similarities between the two cases and the areas of agreement or disagreement among the participants were also explained.

Driven by an employability-focused ideology, the curriculum reform has not included all components of the curriculum in its entirety. In theory, in spite of the focus on adopting student-centred pedagogy and the participants' awareness of the problems that existed with other components of curriculum such as pedagogy and assessment, in practice very little has changed in the totality of the curriculum. This indicated the gap between top level government directives and what is and can be implemented in universities.

With regard to the aims and objectives of the programme, they were not formally stated and there was disagreement about how they should be formulated and what they should be, except the obvious unanimity over the employment issue and developing skills needed towards achieving this end. However, a number of challenges have hindered it.

One of the challenges was identified to be a lack of cooperation and resistance amongst teachers, between teachers and decision makers, and even amongst decision makers. The study indicated tensions as academic committees and teachers resisting what they see as top-down constraints, and decision makers seeing staff as obstructive and resistant to change.

Over the involvement of teachers and students, the study indicated different views of expertise and authority over who should be involved in curriculum decision making. The dominant idea that it should be the people have been doing the job longest who are thus default 'experts', prevented newer voices being included in decision-making, leaving the teachers critical of having very little role in the changes and demanding more involvement. The idea of deferring to long-serving staff to make decisions is problematic as decisions could be 'entrenched' in a certain point of view. Moreover, the involvement of the students was rejected by decision makers, believing that they are not at a level to know what they need, while in contrast the students requested an active involvement in curriculum decision making.

The study indicated a general perception of some students with weaker linguistic competence both before and during the course suggesting either the need to adapt courses to match students' language skills or to improve selection criteria for those students accessing the programme. Solutions voiced by different groups among the participants were similarly focused on different issues. The students believed that they had to undergo a placement test to identify their level of English and participate in preparatory courses prior to the start of the academic programme, while the teachers focused more on screening them out during the admissions process.

With regard to the changes that have occurred in the content, the study indicated that introducing changes at too small a level, i. e., altering or introducing some modules without considering how they will integrate into the course as a whole would be problematic and would not achieve the aims that it was supposed to do effectively.

The study indicated that while teachers and students are aware of the fact that most of the students' knowledge about grammar and pronunciation does not necessarily translate into their ability to apply their knowledge effectively, there is still a persistent emphasis on the necessity of these modules.

The study revealed that the recent economic crisis had negatively impacted the reform process in general and specifically the implementation of introducing optional modules into the programme and running teacher training programmes; thus implying the effect of external factors on such a process.

6 Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This research attempted to provide a detailed understanding of the aims and content of the curriculum in two departments of English Language in two universities in Kurdistan Region as perceived by the decision makers, teachers, and students. For this purpose, this study attempted to answer three research questions. This chapter interprets some selected findings and brings under discussion in order to deal with the research questions. The findings directly relevant to each research question are dealt with in the following sections.

6.2 Research Question 1: What are the Values and Beliefs that Underpin the Curriculum in the two English Language Departments?

Sleeter and Grant (1991) state, “curriculum always represents somebody’s version of what constitutes knowledge and a legitimate worldview” (p.80). All steps in curricular decision-making are a process of drawing from beliefs and associated values (Phillips & Hawthorne, 1978). Eisner (1994), considers these values and beliefs as the sources of decision making regarding “what schools should teach, for what ends, and for what reasons” (p.47). Toohey (1999) argues that these values and beliefs are mostly tacit and unexamined due to the long-held, unchallenged, and unquestionably accepted conceptions in any discipline. She states that these ideologies affect the formulation of goals and objectives, the content of the course and assessment plans. Among the stated goals and aims of higher education, one can easily find an inclination towards a more significant role in a competitive economy internationally (Hart, 1992). There are a number of areas whose discussion would help to bring those tacit values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum to the fore. Some of those areas are the liberal-vocational dichotomy, issues of depth vs. breadth, multi-disciplinary vs. specialised courses, and the approaches followed in curriculum development, and teachers’ and students’

involvement in curriculum decision making (Toohey, 1999). In the following subsections each of these areas are discussed to answer the first research question.

6.2.1 Liberal-Vocational Dichotomy

For a long time, there have been contrasting beliefs over what the university courses should aim at, and tensions have reappeared from time to time during history (Allen, 1988). All over the world through different stages, at varying degrees, the focus has shifted from liberal towards vocational education and vice versa. In the Kurdistan Region, the MOHESR has formally stated the intention and plan towards more vocational input in the undergraduate courses, fuelled by the desire to meet the needs of the labour market. Thus, the primacy of practice over theory could be noticed in the plan of MOHESR (2010). This plan is in agreement with the worldview that encourages “the growth of employment-friendly cultures in higher education” (Goodman, 1993, p. 2), and can be related to the increasing number of universities: the region has seen growth from one university in 1992 to 14 public and 15 Private universities in 2016, with an overall capacity of 165,414 students (Ala’Aldeen, 2017). A consequence of these developments is mass graduation, and this necessitates the government plans for mass employment, and, as Robertson (1995) suggests, in such situations, there is usually demand for academic programs to consider the employment opportunities. In addition to the demands of the ever-increasing number of graduates each year, the government’s decision came because of having a high rate of employment in the public sector as well as the oil-based economic boom that KRG enjoyed from 2007 to 2014. This oil-based economic boom enabled the region to host a high number of local and international companies, which found the local graduates not fully prepared for the private sector job market (MOHESR, 2010).

In practice, the plans and policies of the ministry are not implemented straightforwardly in the ELD curriculum in the two universities under the study. On the one hand, “the current security and economic crises have slowed” (Ala’Aldeen, 2017, p.2) the implementation, and on the other hand, the change has come up against a deep-rooted cultural structure of education which focuses on abstract theory rather than practice. The central top-down policy and regulations from the MOHESR have come into conflict with the tendency of the academics towards abstract theory, and this has made the

implementation of either ideological approach problematic, leading to a state of confusion. This confusion and indecisiveness are evident from the incongruity between the tentatively stated goals of the English departments (informed by the government policy) and the various beliefs of the senior academic staff.

6.2.2 Depth and Breadth

Different approaches to curriculum design have different ways of organising the content of the curriculum. In some approaches, the aim of providing a representative account of the field happens at the expense of an in-depth investigation of an area of the field of study (Toohey, 1999). In some other approaches, a focus on mastering key concepts and practising essential skills prioritise depth over the broad coverage (Posner, 1995). In the context of KR, there is not an explicit indication of the plan of the MOHESR about the depth or breadth of the courses. However, at the ministerial level, some indicators can be used to argue that depth has been a concern of the reforms. The implication for the involvement of students in small-scale research, seminars, presentations, and essays could be considered as a step towards depth. Shaw (1999) believes that a course can take account of both depth and breadth if students are assigned presentations and essays that make them actively engaged in the process of learning. Another indicator is that the MOHESR states the necessity of adopting new teaching methods, namely student-centred methods of teaching and learning, whose implementation, according to (Liu, Bridgeman & Alder, 2012), is helpful to bring more depth and breadth to the courses. Likewise, Bain (2004) mentions the roles of teachers and the teaching methods in bringing about both depth and breadth to the study.

In the two English departments under this study, there is no clear indication of their aspiration towards breadth or depth. In University T, after completion of the second year, students choose to further their studies in either the literature major or the linguistics major. This could be regarded as a step towards depth because the students choose to study the area of their interest more and, consequently, they have more time to deal with them and gain in-depth knowledge. However, a closer look at the module descriptors (see section 5.3.4) shows that the objectives of most of the modules denote a broad coverage rather than depth. In University K, there is not such a division, and students take both literature and linguistics modules at all stages. However, the recurrence of

modules across years (for instance the modules of Poetry I, Poetry II, and Poetry III) could be indicative of a desire to provide depth. However, since the accomplishment of breadth or depth is dependent on other factors such as implementing appropriate pedagogical methods and appropriate assessments accordingly rather than just changing or adding a module. It could be argued that the elements of depth and breadth are left at the mercy of some other influences, leaving students in a state of confusion and disagreement about the aims of the programme.

6.2.3 Broad-Based (Multi-Disciplinary) or Specialized Courses

In the highly industrialised world of professions on the one hand, and job insecurity, on the other hand, there is controversy over what the aims and foci of undergraduate courses should be. For instance, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011, p. 7) outlined the intended aims of Liberal Education and “America’s Promise” in four sections: (1) “knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world”, (2) “intellectual and practical skills”, (3) “personal and social responsibility”, and (4) “integrative and applied learning.” Apart from the personal and social responsibility, Bennet and Wilezol (2013, p. XVI) find the courses liable

to educate and equip the mind and the soul to recognise what is right and proper in life, to prepare a student for the demands of a modern labour market, and to offer specialised learning in various fields and occupations.

Concerning the KR, like the issue of depth and breadth, there is no clear indication of whether MOHESR is determined to follow the broad-based or more specialised courses. However, there are some implicit indications of a trend towards broad-based courses, with the integration of specific skills, which may provide students with flexible abilities in the insecure job market of the KR. This has been, for the most part, left at the level of theory as in practice the departments under the current study have retained all of the modules from their old courses except for a newly introduced module, Academic Debate (also called Academic Skills in University T). This shows an apparent gap between policy and practice: rather than seeking to integrate more broad-based skills across existing modules, both institutions have added a bolt-on module. Moreover, the implicit broad-based courses advocated by the MOHESR, the minimal changes in University K and the move towards further specialisation in University T further demonstrate this

contradiction between policy and practice. For Wahab (2017), these contradictions and several instances of the inconsistency and contradiction between the policy rhetoric and implementation practices in the KR education system are due to the policymakers' belief in "a linear, top-down relationship between policies as rhetoric and implementation" (p. 151). This top-down approach has been met with resistance at the stage of practical implementation – and the resistance met by curriculum leaders within institutions means that they have not attempted a full-scale revision of their curriculum, but instead sought to respond to demands through adding separate modules. Such an incomplete revision could be attributed to some factors such as low logistic support, limited involvement of all stakeholders that lead to resistance by those uninvolved and a lack of proper orientation and arrangement that lead to uncertainty over how successful the changes could be.

6.2.4 Approaches Followed in Curriculum Design

According to Toohey (1999), it is possible to discern five different approaches to curriculum applied to higher education (section 3.7, pp. 48-56). The findings of the study, which are related to the fundamental issues of course design, will be discussed to find out the philosophical positions adopted by the participating ELDs. The issues are the view of knowledge and the process of teaching and learning, goals of the course, organisation of the content, assessment, and the available infrastructure.

6.2.4.1 The view of Knowledge and the Process of Teaching and Learning

MOHESR (2011) has acknowledged the antiquated view of knowledge embedded in the former curriculum and raised concerns and set plans to change this. The goal is to shift from the old education system that forces learners to memorise materials and save it in their short-term memory in order to feed it back in the summative final exams, to a system, which increases learners' long-term linguistic capabilities. Despite the diagnosis of the original problem and the suggestion of some solutions, the process has been slowed down due to economic conditions and other factors that undermine or at least weaken the desire to change and reform (Hamad, 2018). Moreover, Wahab (2017) argues that the general philosophy of education in KR prioritises theoretical knowledge over practice, and this study provides further evidence of how this is playing out in two

universities. Toohey's (1999) explanation of the way knowledge is viewed in the traditional approach to curriculum fits the approach followed in the two participating universities. For example, textbooks in most of the modules in both departments were viewed as the primary source of knowledge, showing a continued emphasis on the authority of the 'expert' and the idea that knowledge is transmitted to students, rather than a focus on students as constructors of their understandings. The implementation of elements of report writing, library research, allocation of multiple references rather than selected chapters of a single textbook for each module are in their infancy and could be considered as slight shifts from the traditional view of knowledge.

Concerning teaching and learning, Toohey (1999) explains the traditional view as the process of transmitting concepts, information, and facts from the selected resources to students through teachers. This is similar to Freire's (2000) 'banking concept' that is void of any critical involvement on the side of students as well as teachers. In the KR, Kirmanj (2014), Saeed (2008), and Wahab (2014) argue that indoctrination and memorisation are the convenient and conventional methods of teaching and learning. The findings of this study support this claim since mostly the teachers aim to convey knowledge through lecturing. Besides, learning to know about the subject matter is shortened to students' understanding of the subject matter. This Cartesian view of knowledge as substance and learning as knowledge transfer is far from the social view of learning which aspires to learners' full participation (Ramsden, 2003).

As mentioned above, according to MOHESR (2010), the government has realised the shortcomings of the prevalent methods of teaching, so it has developed plans to change them. However, this study indicates that, in the participating universities, the plans have not been put into practice as the students expressed their dissatisfaction with the dominant lecturing method of teaching. The MOHESR (2011) has recommended students' participation in small-scale research, as well as teacher-training courses and workshops for teachers. However, the degree and extent of the implementation of these plans is questionable. These possible downsides are due to the deep-rooted long-held practices of the traditional methods of teaching and learning. Wahab (2014) argues that education in the KR has inherited the traditional approach from the Ba'th Party in Iraq, and also the changes have only been at the level of partial administrative, technical and

policy issues. This shows that the principles of the traditional approach have been fixed and deep-rooted. Therefore, as Ala'Aldeen (2013) posits, any solutions to the problems and concerns with the educational issues are linked to the general political will of the political elite and high-status figures in government. Therefore, it is recommended that the curriculum planners seek wider support to mitigate the counter views and inform the political elite.

The findings of this study show that the change process has faced resistance from the teachers. This may also be partly related to teachers' minimal involvement in curriculum decision making and the dominant view, in both universities, that the best people to design the curriculum are those who have the longest-standing experience. It is possible that these 'experts' are also the people most entrenched in traditional conceptualizations of curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, Saeed (2008) states that there is a noticeable absence of appropriate mechanisms of implementation of the changes in addition to the negative consequences of the interference of the political parties in educational practices. This was certainly borne out in this study, where clear procedures for change and development were mostly absent. Similarly, Wahab (2017) states that, despite a democratic system of government, the education system in KR is similar to dictatorial regimes and the existence and persistence of this model is because KRG has adopted the old educational system of Iraqi Ba'ath Party Regime with no substantial change.

The findings of this study replicate these significant issues and a closer investigation of the documents reveals that the way knowledge is viewed across the universities is in line with the traditional approach to curriculum design. Meanwhile, the intentions to shift the dominant view of knowledge as an independently available body of theory to be transformed to students towards a more action-oriented knowledge are one of the features of the performance-based approach to curriculum design. The intention of the MOHESR for developing a critical consciousness in students shows the inclination towards some elements of the socially critical approach to curriculum design, but these intentions have not been realised in either institution studied here. Therefore, it is advisable to initiate these changes through active involvement of stakeholders along with seeking wider support among political elite and academic community.

6.2.4.2 Assessment

Assessment has been the least affected area in the curriculum in the higher education institutions in the KR. Wahab (2017, p. 152) states that the summative end of the year exams serve as the sole method of assessment in the KR education system. On this point Ismael (2016), more specifically, states that the ELDs in the KR mostly follow a traditional system of assessment. He further explains that traditional exams comprise around 90% of the whole mark of the modules. Although this study shows that there are a few exceptional modules in some stages at the English Departments, which do not fall under the traditional assessment category, the system of assessment has not been a significant concern of the curriculum development plan. Moreover, the students in most of the cases do not receive any feedback on their answers to the tests. Students find it necessary to recall knowledge to be able to pass the modules. The fact that assessment has not been the subject of change, even at theoretical level, could be indicative of the belief that either does not consider curriculum components interlinked or most probably that the changes on curriculum components do not have to be taken place collectively. Therefore, it is suggested that the changes in curriculum need to be inclusive of all components of curriculum as on package.

In addition to the pen and paper assessment method, another norm, which is pertinent to the assessment system, is that the students are ranked against their peers. This type of ranking is manifested in students' transcripts, the order of the graduates' names in the graduation guidebook, and the privileges given to the top three graduates in terms of the employment entitlement of the MOHESR and the right to apply for graduate courses. All these specifications about the assessment in the higher education institutions, in general, show that the assessment system in the two departments under the current study is entirely in line with the traditional discipline-based approach to curriculum design. Therefore, it is vital that adopting alternative assessments are considered along with changes in other components of curriculum.

6.2.4.3 Expression of the Aims and Objectives

The changes in the content of the study have taken place based on the mission of MOHESR (2011, p. 28) to "produce the best administrative and professional staff for the

region's markets.” This aim was found to be a shared expected outcome for decision-makers, teachers, and students. The MOHESR (2011) associate this to all degree courses in general. Therefore, these aims are general statements of purpose, which are shared across all institutions of higher education regardless of the specialty of the course or university. This is in line with the generic attributes stated by the UK Higher Education Quality Council's (Sited from William, 2010) indicating the graduateness criteria. MOHESR (2011, p. 28-29) has determined some means such as developing “education and training style,” to enable students to “research information, think independently or contribute to academic debate”, “learn the second or third language”, and computer, internet and electronic communications skills”. These specifications indicate that some aspects of “cognitive learning” and “practical competence” have been attached importance, whereas “the emotional or moral development” has been disregarded (Allen, 1988, p. 99, 100, 101).

The findings of this research revealed that the objectives of the undergraduate course in English Departments have not been established or formally stated. The decision makers considered the process of setting objectives for the undergraduate courses under the study as the priority for the next stage of curriculum development. The decision makers, teachers, and students acknowledged the importance of having a formally stated set of objectives for the courses under the study. Clearly stated aims and objectives for any program are considered a pre-requisite because it informs the other components of the curriculum (Behar-Horenstein, 2010; Herrings III & Williams, 2000; Toohey, 1999; Tyler, 1949). Additionally, no model of curriculum design excludes the element of setting aims and objectives from the curriculum design (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). The reason for not feeling the necessity of having objectives might have historical roots. The first ELD in the KR, which was established in 1971, had to start and adopt the same syllabus as the one followed in Baghdad University, established in 1949. This is true for all of the English departments in the universities in the KR that operate under MOHESR. Most of the newly established universities in the KR used to be the campuses of other universities in other towns that had to copy the same syllabus. Therefore, all similar departments had to have a similar syllabus, and any change had to be decided or approved through holding a conference and approval by the MOHESR. Therefore, the universities had the role of curriculum implementers rather than curriculum developers.

However this condition has changed, and the university council is authorised to approve the changes without holding a conference (MOHESR, Ministerial Order no: 17717/3, 2011). Furthermore, the graduates of ELDs could apply to vacancies in high school teaching positions in the public sector until 2009. Therefore, it seems that one of the aims was to meet the need for teaching staff in schools. However, since 2009, the priority of employment for teacher positions was given to graduates of English departments at the faculties or colleges of education in the KR universities.

6.2.4.4 Selection of the Content

The content of the undergraduate courses in the English Departments follows a top-down and unified model for three modules in year one of all undergraduate programs across the KR which are determined by the MOHESR (2011). For the rest of the modules and the other stages (years) of the program, the departments have been asked to generate their content on the condition that they take the guidelines of MOHESR (2010) into consideration. Each of the institutions has reformed the syllabus in coordination with an American or European University. A closer look at the list of the modules in the two departments shows that the content is planned in agreement with the nature of the discipline. Toohey (1999, p. 79) provides four sources of information to carry out the content selection such as “published educational material . . . , information from academics teaching in the field” as well as “students and recent graduates” and “information on current professional practice”. The implementation of this process in the two programs under the study has followed these four resources to different extents. The findings of this study show that information from a selected academics teaching in the program, called the academic committee, carries the highest share, whereas information from the students or recent graduates has the lowest share (or no share at all) in the process of content organisation. The dominant ideology of dependence on and legitimacy of ‘experience’ along with the exclusion of teachers and students from any curriculum decision making underpins the curricular decisions. Therefore, inclusion of all four sources of information in content selection (Toohey, 1999) is advisable.

6.2.4.5 The Available Infrastructure

Several barriers to change – and particularly to pedagogical change – were delineated by the study. The limited financial budget, limited spaces of the classrooms, insufficient library resource, aggravation of the economic crisis and the ever-increasing number of students are the points repeatedly mentioned by participants. With very few exceptions in some modules, as mentioned previously, there is very little interactive small group work. As mentioned by students and acknowledged by some of the teachers, students do not have enough access to teachers. Lack of appropriate space for teachers to spend their office hours and not being required allocating some, time to deal with student problems seems to be some of the reasons for this. In most of the cases presented by students, knowledge learned is barely translated into practice.

Insufficient teacher training courses for teachers, limited available class time, missed class times either from the side of students or teachers due to either students' mass skipping the lectures on certain occasions, teachers' absences, or unannounced holidays, leave the teachers with the options of either superficially covering the content or narrowing the content.

Another finding of the study was that the teachers mostly followed the teaching approach that they had experienced when they were students. Therefore, as Saeed (2008) states there is a lack of expertise from the side of teachers or decision-makers who are not fully aware of alternative pedagogical approaches.

The findings reveal that the main belief system has not considered the external factors such as cost, logistics and the downsides of the available infrastructure to be relevant to curriculum design/redesign. Therefore, the role of external factors and the potential impacts of the infrastructure should be taken into consideration in curricular decision-making.

6.2.5 The Model Followed in Curriculum Development

The findings of this study show that, at the policy level, the content and the pedagogy as the two components of the curriculum have been at the center of the curricular reform; however, in practice, the focus has only been on the content of the curriculum and other

components of the curriculum have not been the target of the reforms noticeably. Due to the complex interrelation among curriculum components, a view that applying changes to one component without being informed or informing other components is not compatible with any model of curriculum design. However, according to the statements by the Heads of CDD and Heads of ELD, the aims and other components would be implemented in the following years, then it could be argued that the model followed in the two departments under the study fall under the 'focused opportunistic' model. Tessmer and Wedman's (1990) refer to a primary disadvantage of this model from the point of view of efficiency as Nation and Macalister (2010) state that a comprehensive effort on one component might turn out to be a complete waste as the findings or the reforms in one part might not be compatible with other less elaborated components. However, Nation and Macalister (2010) find this model practical for those reforms whose implementation needs to be carried out in a comparatively short amount of time. This conformed to the findings of the study when the decision makers referred to the amount of work they had to do in a short period.

In fact, all aspects of the curriculum in the higher education institutions in the KR and specifically the two participating departments need a great change. Because the existing curriculum as a whole is not coherent and the changes have not included thoroughly the essential element of assessment, which is a disadvantage associated with the 'focused opportunistic model'. Therefore, it seems that shifting now to a different model such as the 'layers of necessity' would be advisable.

6.2.6 Teachers' and Students' Involvement in Curriculum Change

Garner and Acklen (1979) state that there is consensus over some degree of students' involvement in decision making given that they are the primary reason for the existence of the curriculum. For them, this involvement could take the form of offering suggestions, promoting cooperation, and carrying out evaluations. According to the findings of this study, the only instance of students' participation includes gathering feedback at the end of the course regarding the overall teaching process. This type of feedback, as the participants of this study mentioned, seems to inform the teaching process or teachers' performance for the following years (Bovill, 2013). However, there has been controversy over the degree of involvement of students.

With regard to higher education, there is an increasing tendency towards students' having more opportunities for participation and cooperation during their learning journey (Davis and Sumara, 2002; McCulloch, 2009; Collis and Moonen, 2005). In this research, the decision makers and teachers were apprehensive of increased student engagement in curricular reform. Bovill (2013) relates this to the decision makers' and teachers' feelings about power shift, uncertainty about undertaking something different, and their perception of students' potentialities. The teachers and decision makers' common viewpoint was students' limited ability to offer useful input to curriculum change replicate this, and they repeatedly claimed that curriculum is the territory of the academic staff and curriculum planners (Giroux, 1981).

This research revealed that the students were in favour of, and indeed some demanded more involvement in decision-making. This point is reiterated in the literature (Martyn, 2000; Bovill, Morss, & Bulley, 2008). Their perceptions were that potential positive impacts of this involvement would include a motivating sense of being listened to, and higher achievement of their objectives. This point is in line with the claim that it helps students find out "the depth of faculty commitment to their learning" (McKinney, Jarvis, Creasey, & Herrmann, 2010, p. 89). Similarly, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) believe that active student participation is an essential enhancing and supporting factor in learning. Moreover, Having a chance to participate in designing and managing curriculum could give students a sense of satisfaction and ownership (Martyn 2000), lead to students appreciating 'the depth of faculty commitment to their learning' (McKinney et al, 2010, p. 89), enhance their knowledge of the discipline and the learning process, increase their confidence to communicate their concerns in academic environments (Delpish et al, 2010), and improve their skills of working in groups and shared accountability, (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten, 2011).

Concerning the teachers' role in curriculum design, the research revealed that the teachers had limited roles in the curricular decision making with some degrees of difference between the two institutions concerning their role in determining the content of the modules that they were teaching. Most of the teachers acknowledged that they have limited knowledge and experience in curriculum design. Therefore, any attempt to increase their role in this process seems challenging for them. Besides, some of the

teachers did not find their limited role in overall curriculum decision making problematic probably because of the relatively greater freedom they had in their teaching. However, the teachers' role in the curriculum design process is considered crucial as their "teaching and learning belief systems influence the success of a course design" (Ziegenfuss & Lawler, 2008, p. 156). Moreover, they consider it essential for the instructors to go beyond their traditional responsibilities of teaching and conducting research.

Similarly, Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen, and Voogt (2014, p. 33) claim that "successful implementation of reforms depends on teachers' ownership of, and their knowledge about reform ideas: since they are the ones that put reforms into practice". As a solution, Olateru-Olagbegi (2016) asks for more investment in faculty training as well as enhancing and encouraging collaboration among faculty. These concerns are borne out in this study: although teachers did not, on the whole, express a great desire to be more involved in curriculum development, their lack of investment in change did contribute to the lack of success in moving away from traditional pedagogies and a theory-orientated curriculum. It seems then that encouraging teachers to see themselves as curriculum designers, rather than just following traditional methods of teaching, may be a necessary step before any significant curriculum overhaul can be achieved. In support of this suggestion, Finch (1981) linked a discrepancy between intended curriculum and taught curriculum to teachers' not being involved in curricular reforms. Most noticeably, these are the factors behind teachers' resistance to the changes. In addition to that, for a better input from teachers, they should be empowered through essential pieces of training and workshops to provide them with the skills and knowledge to encounter the challenges they face and to enable them to incorporate their ideas and opinions into the curriculum. Therefore, teachers' active roles and involvement of teachers and students through an appropriate mechanism at all stages of curriculum design/redesign would be worth considering. In addition, the dominant system in which the teaching staff members are expected to be implementers of the standardized curriculum should be questioned, and teachers should be viewed as stimulators of successful initiatives towards curriculum reform.

6.2.7 Comparison Between the Two Departments

In all the topics mentioned in this section, the two departments show considerable degrees of similarity. The differences were not so significant to ascribe them to any difference in the values and beliefs that underpin their curriculum. This could be because the two institutions are operating in the same context and consequently they are equally subject to the orders and guidelines from the MOHESR. In addition to that, both of the universities are public universities, and any factor hindering the reform process in one university would usually influence the other. However, at the deeper levels of module content selection, coverage of depth and breadth of the course and available infrastructure there are some slight differences, which will be dealt with in the next sections. These concerns are borne out in this study: although teachers did not, overall, express a desire to be more involved in curriculum development, their lack of investment in change did contribute to the lack of success in moving away from traditional pedagogies and a theory-orientated curriculum. It seems then that encouraging teachers to see themselves as curriculum designers, rather than just implementers, may be a necessary step before any significant curriculum overhaul can be achieved.

6.3 Research Question 2: How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the aims and objectives of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?

In this section, the main findings related to the participants' perceptions of setting goals and objectives, their perceptions of implicit current aims and students' reasons for choosing to study in ELD are discussed. Furthermore, this section provides a discussion of the participants' perceptions of the achievement of the goals and objectives as well as the challenges for achievement. Finally, the intended learning outcomes, expressed in the module descriptors, are discussed.

6.3.1 Setting Goals and Objectives

The current study found that changes in the curriculum did not include all components of the curriculum. According to most of the models of curriculum development, (Charters, 1923; Wiggins & Mc Tighe, 2005; Taba, 1962; Tyler, 1949) the curriculum design or development begins with a statement of the purpose. Similarly, for language related curricula, Nunan (1988, p. 24) regarded the identification of goals as a critical stage since they "provide a rationale for the course or programme." Plans to start the changes with the content of the curriculum at both universities imply that a sense of urgency and priority is attached to the content and the formulation of the goals and objectives have not been considered as equally important. It seems that what these departments have adopted is in line with the subject-matter analysis method of the task-analyses model in which the subject matter or content is the starting point. In this model, the subject-matter experts decide what knowledge is essential for the students. One possible explanation for this finding would be related to the meaning associated with the notion of the curriculum in the Kurdish educational context. Apart from the curriculum professionals the word 'curriculum' is used to mean the 'content of the curriculum'. Therefore, any plan for development or improvement is more likely to start with the content of the curriculum. However, this does not mean that the changes to the content have happened in a vacuum and the changes have been applied for a reason. Another explanation for prioritising the content would be the insistence and pressure from the MOHESR, which provided guidelines about the application of the changes that go beyond a general statement of purpose and include orders at the module level. Therefore, these ministry specifications could have been regarded as a rationale for the changes.

The study found that the ELD in University K has an awareness of the need for establishing a conceptualised set of aims, goals, and objectives for the programme. What is apparent is that this task is supposed to be carried out by the academic committee of the department by considering the guidelines of the MOHESR and gaining input from similar departments in European universities. In the literature, it is stated that the aims that address the bigger societal demands and students' personal needs must be translated into operational and attainable goals by a specialised team (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986). Since the guidelines of the MOHESR have been specified in response,

supposedly, to the needs of society and students, it could be argued that the main aims in the context of this study could be equivalent to the guidelines of MOHESR. However, these guidelines need to be translated into institutional-level aims that acknowledge the specific context in which they are operating, and they also should be specified as a result of the 'master-performer analyses' by either asking a group of experienced practitioners and through conducting other research (Toohey, 1999). According to the CDD in University K, the role of the members of the academic committee would be to find out what those abilities mean to graduates in the ELD.

Another finding of this study is that, in the process of setting aims, there is no mention of students' involvement in any form. This is not in agreement with trends towards students' role in curriculum planning. For instance, Hunkins and Ornstein (2018) believe that the students can be useful in providing information about their needs, interests and learning characteristics to provide a comprehensive analysis of situational factors. Similarly, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) believe that eliciting the needs and expectations of students makes them feel connected to the curriculum or objectives of a course, which motivates greater engagement. In the same way, Lytle (1988) considers learner's perspective as an essential part of any instructional program design.

Another finding of the study concerning setting aims is that the academic committee can consider similar departments to learn from their experiences. This idea seemed efficient and was supported by some members of the academic committee as it suggests an openness to other alternatives; but a direct transport of one solution from one context to the next might indicate a lack of awareness in understanding the local context. Therefore, unique characteristics of the educational context, various societal, and students' needs should be taken into consideration.

6.3.2 The Decision Makers' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Implicit Current Goals and Objectives of the Course

The findings of this study indicated that the different parties in the ELD in University T were in a state of confusion concerning the goals and objectives of the programme. The perceptions of the potential current goals of the department included teachers' job-related statements such as providing the workforce for the private and public sectors in

the fields of teaching, translation, or journalism through providing expertise in English linguistics. For this to be achieved, the modules of Translation I, II, and III, and Introduction to TESOL are studied in the programme (see Table 5.4). This could have been valid for the time when the professional courses of translation, TESOL, or journalism were not available in most of the universities in the KR; however, currently, most of the universities offer undergraduate courses in these areas.

The findings of this study reveal a tension between the job-related goals of the programme and the decision to separate the majors of linguistics and literature. The rationale for this decision was, firstly, to provide more depth in one area rather than a general coverage of knowledge in both areas; and, second, to give the students an opportunity to study their favoured area. Both rationales seem problematic because there is no mention of the impact of studying in depth on employability (which is positioned as the driving force for curriculum development), nor on whether depth itself could be guaranteed by separating the two majors. This rationale is based on a presupposition that the student always prefers one of the areas, which is not appropriate, as many students equally like to study both areas.

The study also found that the Heads of the ELD has both stated their goal as enhancing students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in order to enhance employability opportunities for the graduates. Concerning the Head's reference to critical thinking abilities, it could be argued that these general goals could be attached to any programme regardless of the area of study. Taking Willingham's (2007) argument that thinking critically should be taught in the context of subject matter, knowing that one should think critically is not the same as being able to do so, it is required that critical thinking is nested in the specific knowledge of the domain and practised by students. Furthermore, as Mahoney and DeMonbreun (1981) posit, there is no measure of whether or not students can transfer their acquired thinking ability to areas that differ from those used in the program. In addition to critical thinking, in the literature, enhancing employability is meant to be achieved through providing the graduates with a range of generic attributes or skills (Yorke, 2006). These skills can be discipline knowledge, information skills, communication skills, international perspective, cultural understanding and professional skills (Oliver, 2013) and these generic skills or attributes

should be incorporated into the programme through the implementation of new tools and processes (Oliver, 2013).

The members of the academic committee and the teachers' perceptions of the potential current goals and objectives of the programme in University K were consistent with some of the points mentioned in the tentative draft of the goals and objectives of the programme. For example, "to enhance the level of communication in the four skills and familiarize the students with English culture and history" (see section 5.3.2). However, there was no mention of "enhancing the value of democracy and culture of accepting differences, critical thinking, and research abilities" that have been laid in the draft according to the general guidelines by the MOHESR. The reason behind the teachers' lack of awareness of these goals could be related to a number of potential issues some of which are mentioned in the literature. Firstly, in the context of KR higher education, incorporating these attributes into degree courses is fresh, and it is more an intention or an idea with very little practical steps. Secondly, the universities have not identified distinct mechanisms for their incorporation. Thirdly, the assessments of such goals and objectives are complex and multi-layered (Rhodes, 2012). Fourthly, teaching staff lack a shared understanding of what is meant by graduate attributes (Barrie, 2012) and may be disengaged with these goals due to their preference for disciplinary content (de la Harpe et al., 2009).

Concerning research abilities, in the context of KR universities, the graduates have very few opportunities to demonstrate their research skills throughout their tenure of educational degrees because most of the assessment methods do not rely on assignments such as essays, reports, or presentations. It is only in the final year that students are required to produce a short paper on a topic announced by the department.

Therefore, it is essential that the departments formulate goals and objectives through effective mechanisms along with implementing appropriate methods of teaching and assessment.

6.3.3 Students' Reasons for Choosing to Study in ELDs

The findings of this study indicate that the students have joined this department mainly to be able to learn the English Language for the same reasons similar to the English learners in different parts of the world. Among the reported reasons by students employment opportunities are mostly cited, and then personal knowledge, cultural communication and language competency. In addition to these reasons, in the literature, some other reasons are associated with learning the English language such as more pleasant travel to many countries, and the high global status of English and the subject being a priority in the country's foreign language teaching policy (Estliden, 2017; McKay, 2002). However, this study points to some other factors that boost this predisposition; among them are the prestige associated to the English Language in Kurdish society and the sense of pride and satisfaction that the English speakers have in the KR (Sofi-Karim, 2015). This type of feelings are similar to the English Language pride in Jordan (Al-Saidat, 2009) or South Korea (Edwards, 2006) or the general attitude in the KR that embracing English Language will promote the country (Salisbury, 2004). This study also shows that despite the abundance of English Language courses provided by private organisations or offices in the KR, the students seem to be more in favour of a degree (BA) in the English Language.

Another notable finding of this study is that the students prefer a better command of spoken English to all other skills of reading, writing, and listening. For them, in most of the steps towards employment or the practice of their profession their oral English skills matter the most. They also believed that the excellent command of spoken English gives them the chance to interact in class activities and the ability to get involved in discussions or even boost their confidence or courage to ask questions, thus enhancing their ability to learn the language. Additionally, among the other reasons one could attribute this interest in spoken language to the historical role of oral culture in communication process in Kurdish society (Yüksel, 2010). This reason could be due to the oppression against and denial of Kurdish Language and identity by the ruling governments (Izady, 2015) as well as the considerably higher rates of illiteracy in the society (World Bank Group, 2017). The students' preference for oral communication is

not entirely aligned with the curriculum taught. There is a bigger focus on the study of literary genres and linguistic disciplines.

The findings of this study show that despite the importance of reading skills for language courses and its role in improving other skills (Carrel, 1989; Lynch and Hudson, 1991), this skill is the least favoured among the students. The reason for this unwillingness could be related to the school system and to some extent, the university system in which reading books has been eliminated due to the existence of pamphlets that contain a summary of the main points in the books.

Travelling is another factor mentioned in the literature that is not mentioned by the students as the people in this country have minimal chances of travelling to English speaking countries.

The study revealed that familial encouragement or (probable control) had had a role in some female students' choice of studying English in University T. This could either be attributed to those female students' dependence on other members of the extended family as Sweetnam (2004) considers interdependence as a valued feature of Kurdish Culture; or less probably to the control that is exerted by some members of most of the families over some other female members as (Hassanpour, 2001) finds Kurdish society to be male-dominated. Moreover, the issue of parental control extends to the later stages of children (especially girls) lives differently in different families (Barbara, 1996).

In addition to this, a few female students' rationales behind their interest to learn the English Language was different from most of the male students in that the female students were expecting simply to find jobs more easily, no matter if they were simple or lower-paid, while the male students were expecting remunerative jobs. This could be related to the women's relatively limited options in the job market compared to the men's freedom to either work away from the family or under different conditions (Noori, 2012; Ranharter, 2013). This issue could also be related to the fact that in Kurdish culture breadwinning is mainly the responsibility of the men rather than women; therefore, even earning more money compared to men does not seem to be a big concern for women in general.

In general, it is quite clear that in some cases familial encouragements and mostly employment is the most substantial reason behind students' motivations to get a qualification. This is in line with the Ministry's plans for change, but in practice, the students' reasons for undertaking these degrees have not been fully reflected in the perceived aims and objectives of the curriculum. Therefore, it is important that students' needs, interests, expectations and previous knowledge are taken into consideration, and the presence of students in curriculum decision making is advisable to this end.

6.3.4 Students' Perceptions of the Aims and Objectives of the Programme

This study indicated that, before being admitted to the course, the students, in general, had minimal information about the programme probably due to the unavailability of special events organised by the university, similar to the UK University Open Days, or consultation programmes or workshops in the last stage of high school. The findings indicated that the students believed that they should have been provided with information about the course including the goals and objectives so that they could have made informed decisions over their choices. Dawes and Brown (2003) state that it is essential to explore the process of students' decision-making about their degree choice to guarantee that students make sensible and wise decisions. Prior information for prospective students is crucial, as it allows the students to become informed about the curriculum and the facilities that will help them to decide (James, 2000). However, it could be argued that universities do not organise such events regularly for two reasons. Firstly, because the ever increasing number of high school graduates' who apply to obtain a place in public universities exceeds the supply by the MOHESR. Secondly, the public universities are fully governmentally funded and do not charge tuition fees, and student recruitment is not a source of funding for the universities.

The findings of this study indicated that, after three years of studying, the students had different perceptions about the aims, goals, and objectives of the courses. They were doubtful whether the decision makers ever considered students' needs and interests. Most curriculum design processes start with the examination of the "extant situation, analysing the learners and their needs" (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018, p. 214). According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), one of the guidelines for setting objectives is that, during this process, students' interests should be considered; otherwise, the objectives

may turn out to be incongruous because they might either require behaviour beyond the students' capability or be of less interest to them. The reason that this is lacking in the departments in this study is that they did not have set goals and objectives for their undergraduate programs. This might be attributed to the fact that these departments were established as copies of other previously established departments, based on the MOHESR's supply strategy to cope with the high demand from students. Meanwhile, the findings show that the job-related goals dominated students' motivations for choosing this course and accordingly they expected that the goal of the ELD would be to raise their linguistic skills.

Concerning the students' perceptions of the probable goals and objectives, this study indicated that what the students thought to be the aims, goals, and objectives of the departments was the simple information given to them by some of their teachers with various levels of specificity and accuracy. The differences or the lack of conformity regarding the probable goals and objectives of the courses can affect the achievement of the real goals of the course (Toohey, 1999). Similarly, although the intended outcomes of the modules were mentioned in the module descriptors, the students were not aware of the objectives of the modules and the position the modules have in the overall programme. The students wanted to know the rationale behind the inclusion or exclusion of the modules at different levels of the course and they regarded this information as vital to their achievement. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) state that precisely stated goals and objectives help students to think and reflect upon what they have learned. Moreover, they allow students to recognise what they know, or even communicate what they know to their peers. Therefore, students' awareness is considered crucial for active learning.

Another finding of the study is the students' demand for a critical and urgent revision of the curriculum in general and the implicit goals and objectives in particular because they believed that the grounds on which the government mandated reform was initiated, have since been dramatically changed. This is in line with Ornstein and Hunkins's (2018, p. 229) guideline that necessitates regular periodic revision of aims and objectives. They believe that the changes in "society," "students," "knowledge," "instructional strategies" and "competencies required for functioning in particular aspects of society" should be

reflected in the revision of aims and objectives. The dramatic change to the economic situation in the KR has been so far-reaching and has overshadowed all aspects of society. In the context of this study, formulation of aims and objectives is valid requirement rather than their revision due to the point that the departments under the study do not yet have clearly expressed goals and objectives.

The findings of this research indicated that most of the students in University T expressed their dissatisfaction with the department's critical decision to separate the literature and linguistics majors. Students were unaware of the rationale behind the separation. This division of the department into two separate majors of linguistics and literature is not compatible with the multidisciplinary approaches to university courses as well as the aims of the current university plans to provide the graduates with more opportunities in the job market. The students claimed that studying literature modules could have helped them achieve their aims of learning English language and culture. The impact of studying literature for language learning is confirmed in the literature (Collins, 1993; Lado, 1964; Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011; Onukaogu, 2002). However, a few students in each major who were not interested in the other major regarded the separation as a good step. This appreciation could be related to those students' dislikes of probably one or two module(s) in either major, which is linked to the core module system, followed in the department or as some students mentioned the impact of some of their teachers. It could also be argued that some of these influences on students' choices are surface issues rather than been informed by the aims and objectives themselves. Therefore, such decisions should be informed by the study of students' needs and expectations, societal demands and consideration of other alternatives such as implementation of optional modules system.

6.3.5 Achievement of the Goals and Objectives

The current study found that the students' concern over their achievement was related to the inconsistency between their previous language skills and their minimal language abilities leaving them unable to meet the demands of the course in year one. As mentioned previously, the high school graduates need to meet certain criteria to enter a competition to be enrolled at ELDs. Moreover, in the academic year of 2007-2008 the Ministry of Education substituted the traditional English language program with "a new

one entitled Sunrise program which is based on communicative approach" (Rajab, 2013, p. 1736) supposed to improve students' communicative competence by adopting realistic and communicative tasks (Ebadi and Hasan, 2016) as well as integrating the four language skills (Biarayee, 2009). Therefore, in theory, the students' linguistic abilities should be adequate for the ELD curriculum. However, in practice, the students cannot meet the required level of the English language due to the use of ineffective teaching methods, the shortage of English teachers and teacher training programs and inappropriate teaching and learning environments (Hassan and Ghafor, 2014; Murad, 2017; Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez, Culbertson & Constant, 2014).

This study found that the students had concerns over inappropriate teaching and assessment methods as well as a lack of evaluation plans or follow up mechanisms. As mentioned previously, lecturing is the dominant method of teaching at both departments, and apart from a few modules, the final summative written tests are the prevalent mode of assessment. It has long been recognised that pedagogical approaches and assessment methods have a crucial impact on learning (e.g. Toohey 1999; Tyler 1949). Kumari and Srivastava (2016) also note that the components of the curriculum are interrelated in a way that any problem in one component affects the others, so issues of pedagogy and assessment cannot be entirely disentangled from objectives, for example. Similarly, an assessment system, which relies mostly on students memorising the words in the books or words expressed by the teacher, cannot bring about deep-seated learning for students (Derakhshan, Rezaei & Alemi, 2011; Hancock, 1994; Lynch & Shaw, 2005).

Another finding of this study is that the students perceived that the lack of regular evaluation programs and effective implementation mechanisms has negatively affected the implementation of changes, and has affected student achievement. The programme evaluation is considered an integrated part of the curriculum that is carried out to determine programme effectiveness, to identify any hindrances, to bring about improvements in the curriculum and defend its utility for accreditation bodies (Brown et al., 1989; Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). The decision-makers considered the lack of professional and financial resources as the main factor that has hindered running evaluation programs. They also revealed their plan to carry out a thorough critical

evaluation of the curriculum after the changes at all levels and all curriculum components are applied. This evaluation plan is referred to as 'summative evaluation' in the literature. This plan is in agreement with Weir and Roberts's (1994, p. 5) explanation that summative evaluation "examines the effects of a programme or project at a significant endpoint of an educational cycle or its completion date". According to Brown et al. (1989), this type of large-scale evaluation could lead to radical changes in the programme. However, the students' demand for evaluation programs during the implementation of changes is more consistent with the formative evaluation (William & Black, 1996) to guarantee that the changes are implemented in an effective manner (Morris and Fitz-Gibbon, 1978) with the possibility of applying rapid and constant improvements (Brown et al., 1989).

The study found that the students demanded evaluation and effective administrative processes as well as different teaching and learning strategies. This type of evaluation that consists of teaching and learning methods along with decision-making processes is the 'process evaluation' (Popham, 1975) which is carried out to identify any failings in the procedural design to support the kinds of decisions that aim to improve the programme (William & Black, 1996).

The study found that the MOHESR has designed a feedback questionnaire as tentative regular feedback instrument for the curriculum. However, these opportunities for feedback are run by the departments towards the end of the year. Due to the time restrictions and improperly managed feedback collection as perceived by students, this process has not been successful. This mostly quantitative questionnaire focused on limited aspects of the curriculum, i.e. on the outcomes and the teaching methods and according to Kelly (1999, p. 45), "education cannot be evaluated by reference to its outcomes but only by its processes." Therefore, as Nazari (2002) puts it, qualitative evaluation seems appropriate for revealing the relationships among different components of the curriculum as well as investigating the likely reasons for students' achievement problems. Similarly, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) state that curriculum evaluation should provide more reflective information about the curriculum and its processes than is achieved through tests and avoid questionnaires that fail to provide as much insight into educational practices as qualitative approaches.

Furthermore, the qualitative evaluation process could employ a variety of tools such as observations while the curriculum is in progress to enrich and make the evaluation more effective and inclusive.

Thus, the study reveals a significant tension between students' desire for broader, more formative evaluation processes which would they believe have the potential to affect their studies positively, and the existing limited summative evaluation processes, which are constrained by time and resources.

6.3.6 Challenges to Achievement

The findings of this study show that the decision makers considered some challenges to the curriculum such as a lack of proper coordination among the academic committee and the CDD, teachers' resistance to change, lack of appropriate evaluations and limited resources. These causes seem very interrelated such that any cause could easily lead to another cause and consequently hinder the whole process. For example, lack of coordination could presumably be related to the variations among personal belief systems about the whole curriculum development process or to the disagreement among the members of the academic committee and the CDD. As Toohey (1999) posits, the achievement of change depend on teachers' and decision makers' engagement in productive professional relationships, which enable them to explore options and determine what is valued. Moreover, there are insufficient teacher professional development programs to prepare teachers to deal with the demands of the required changes. One possible reason why their resistance goes without any apparent sanction could be due to the staffs' permanent employment status, and they are so secure in their jobs that this sort of low-level lack of cooperation is unlikely to threaten their promotion. Concerning the lack of financial and professional resources to carry out better work plans, the financial crisis that started from early 2014 also introduced additional limitations to the accomplishment of the plans such as recruitment of foreign professionals to train teachers.

6.3.7 Intended Learning Outcomes (Module Objectives)

The findings revealed that the intended learning outcomes (referred to as module objectives in the module descriptors) were expressed as 'gaining knowledge in ...', 'gain understanding of ...', 'becoming familiar with....', and 'knowing....' a number of topics, subtopics or concepts that are dealt with during the course. These expressions do not mention what the students will be able to do because of this learning. Taylor and Hamdy (2013) argue that the objectives should be associated with action words rather than lists of topics to learn. The students did not find this type of the statement useful because ostensibly, as Mager (192, p. 20) posts, it fails to point to "the quality or level of performance that will be considered acceptable." Students are supposed to achieve from the learning experience through specifying the "kind of behaviour to be developed in the student and the content or area of life in which this behaviour is to operate" (Tyler, 1949, p. 46-47). Because of this clarification, as Mager (1962, p. 6) states, the students could "organise their efforts towards the accomplishment of those objectives."

Investigation of the module descriptors revealed that some of the teachers had used expressions such as: describe, demonstrate, identifying, develop, recognise, distinguish, use, analyse, and evaluate... some issues and topics within each discipline. Although Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives (1956) has been critiqued, it is widely used as a tool for categorising cognitive skills or outcomes, and if the above expressions are matched with the taxonomy, it could be argued that some of these expressions indicate intended teaching outcomes. For example, it states, "in this module, the students become familiarised with". Expressions such as 'identify', 'demonstrate', 'describe' and 'distinguish' suggest the comprehension level (second level); 'use' suggests application (third level) 'develop' suggests the level of synthesis (fifth level); 'recognize' suggests knowledge (first level) and 'analyse' and 'evaluate' have direct equivalents in analysis (fourth level) and evaluation (sixth level).

It could also be concluded that there is no significant difference among the objectives of the modules at different stages. For example, 'gaining understanding' and 'being familiarised with' are repeatedly used as indications of objectives across all stages, which also confirms another finding of the study that the theory-practice distinction which was supposed to be evident between year two and the last two years of the programme

is absent. Gosling and Moon (2001) argue that various disciplines differ in the skills they require at various levels. For example, the word 'evaluate' has only been used twice in the intended learning outcomes section of all module descriptors for both departments, one of which is in the 'Introduction to Literary Criticism' in year four in University K.

The study also revealed that the intended learning outcomes in both departments had not passed the boundaries of subject knowledge. One cannot find links between the outcomes identified and the essential skills that were identified in the reform process. One reason for this might be related to the belief that vital transferrable skills are the by-products of the educational process. This puts the role of the programme in achieving such skills, which contribute to students' employability under question.

The study revealed that most of the students in both universities considered the learning outcomes to be general in a sense that there was no explicit mention of specific outcomes as well as the procedures or activities through which the outcomes could have been achieved. The students' demand for specific, measurable outcomes seems to be driven by their desire either to pass the modules or to get high marks. Mager (1962, p. 20) states that the language used to describe the objectives should avoid "slippery words that are open to a wide range of interpretation." This could be risky because then the explicitly mentioned learning outcomes drive the teaching and learning process (Hussey & Smith, 2002) and attempting to add more detail to outcomes does not necessarily make them any more meaningful or clear for students. In the literature, this style has been criticised for failing to address non-behavioural objectives, too (Allan, 1996). Moreover, Eisner (1979, p. 98) claimed, "One should not feel compelled to abandon educational aims that cannot be reduced to measurable forms of predictable behaviour."

The study also revealed that the students found the module objectives to be the objectives of the discipline. This shows that the students not only wanted to know what they need to know but also wanted the reasons behind its role in the whole programme and the reason behind the inclusion of the module in the programme. Probably, for the same reason, Jackson, Wisdom and Shaw (2003, p. 4) state that, in writing module objectives, teachers "should be aware of how the module fits into the overall programme and the outcomes for the programme." The students' eagerness to know the rationale

for studying these modules could be attributed to their expectations of the programme because as Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) posit, adult learners want to know why they need to know this or that. It could also be related to the gap, which resulted from the lack of official goals of the programme since module objectives cannot be checked for their alignment with programme goals (Gelade & Fursenko, 2007; Huet, Oliveira, Costa, & Estima de Oliveira, 2009). This checking, according to Biggs and Tang (2011), guards against complaints that students might have about programme goals and module objectives.

A closer look at the module descriptors reveals that unlike the content, which is determined by the academic committee (in University K), the intended learning outcomes are only generated by the module teachers. This is also problematic because of the lack of communication and collaboration between the content designers and the outcome designers – meaning that two elements, which should be developed hand in hand, are created in isolation. The inclusion of learning outcomes in module descriptors is in its early years of implementation in KR universities, and there has not been any training for the teachers in this respect. The module descriptors, which are in theory supposed to be reviewed by a peer, in practice, do not undergo revision or modification based on feedback from either a peer or an examiner or a higher authority. Therefore, it is likely that intended outcomes could have detrimental effects on overall student progress if they are not produced thoughtfully and managed carefully; for example, Rust, Price, and O'Donovan (2003) argue that narrowly outcome-based learning leads to shallow knowledge. Therefore, teachers should "begin to frame them more broadly and flexible, to allow for demonstrations and expressions of appreciation, enjoyment and even pleasure" (Hussey and Smith, 2003, p. 367). Without appropriate guidance and training, this may well not happen. Besides, if teachers develop their module outcomes without guidance, there is no overview of the different outcomes across the course as a whole, creating fragmentation and limiting the overall coherence of the curriculum.

Therefore, it is recommended that teachers get the necessary training to be able to formulate the intended learning outcomes and identify the content of the modules in alignment with the programme aims and objectives.

6.3.8 The Comparison Between the Two Departments

The findings of this research indicated that most of the students in University T were not in favour of the department's critical decision to separate the literature and linguistics majors because they were not aware of the rationale behind the separation. Although a few students in University K suggested a similar approach, most of them did not advocate this approach as they considered language and literature as two sides of the same coin. This shows that such a decision has not been successful because delimiting or separating the majors based on the view that students only favour either linguistics or literature is problematic. For this reason, in order to deal with students' likes or dislikes other solutions such as having an optional module at each stage would probably be more effective.

6.4 Third Research Question: How do decision makers, teachers and students perceive the content of curriculum in the two English Language Departments?

In this section, the changes that happened at the module level, perceptions about the process of module selection, and a number of modules that have either been changed or removed, or highly referred to by participants, and perceptions of selective modules will be discussed.

6.4.1 Modules of the Programme

The study found that, in University K, apart from adding an 'Academic Skills' module to year one of the programmes in accordance with the initiation of the reform process by the MOHESR, the changes in other modules of the programme have included mostly replacement of some of the existing modules. Prior to the reform process, the programme amendments including addition or deletion of a module from a programme had to be suggested by the academic committee and approved in a conference that had to be held for this purpose. However, after the elimination of the conference requisite for approval of the changes (Ministerial Order No. 805 on 23/10/2011) and authorising the universities to approve curricular changes, the curriculum at the content level has changed very little. A possible reason for this could be the fact that the department has

not set goals for the programme and therefore, there is no clear basis upon which changes could occur. Another apparent reason would be the approach that has been followed in the content selection and specifically in module selection of the programme. The high resemblance of the list of modules to a similar programme offered in the oldest university in Iraq, University K reveals that even after the passage of more than 20 years, and no administrative or scientific obligation to imitate that programme, the influence is still evident.

Another finding of this study is that the modules of the programme have been selected initially based on the nature of the discipline especially in University K. Most of the modules at all stages correspond to the study of the components of language and the genres of literature in which students learn a practice of making generalizations without demonstrating criticality is typical of the traditional curriculum design. In the literature, the discipline-based approach is criticized, and, in contrast, there has been an emphasis on integrating the modules to demonstrate the unity of the programme and the interrelationships between disciplines, to motivate the students, to improve their educational effectiveness, to develop higher level objectives and to promote staff communication and collaboration and to bring them together (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011). The approach followed in the context of this study is highly influenced by the traditional approach possibly due to its feasibility in covering prior discipline knowledge as well as the advocacy it enjoys from decision makers and teachers, whose perspectives suggest that they are typically entrenched in the system.

Despite this dominant perspective, the study found that the module organisation in University T has witnessed a slight shift from a purely discipline-based approach to some instances of integration of the disciplines in some modules such as psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics in the linguistics branch and literature and ideology in the literature branch. This strategy might have been adopted to reduce previously existing content and to focus instead on new content. However, like any other change, this could provoke a number of challenges, that if not taken into consideration, this strategy to achieve a wider scope of knowledge could be risky "as students race through the topics they have less opportunity to engage in the process of sorting, comparing, prioritising and critiquing ... ideas" (Clark and Linn, 2003, p. 482). There is also

possibility of information overload probably at the expense of in-depth study (Knight, 2001).

There seem to be two possibilities concerning identifying a rationale behind the division of the programme into two majors of linguistics and literature. One apparent reason would be to deal with the knowledge explosion that all the disciplines including linguistics and literature have witnessed. Therefore, removing the linguistics or literature related modules might make more room for the addition of some other new content. The second rationale for this separation presumably would be to give the students the option to study in their favoured branch.

6.4.2 Perceptions about Module Selection

The students had concerns over the selection of the modules for the programme. The students wanted the modules to be linked to their prospective carriers in the future and more practical topics to be incorporated into the content. The students' requirement has also been emphasised in the reform process of the MOHESR. However, apart from the addition of the Academic Skills module, no notable changes have taken place to deal with the ministry's urge for incorporation of practice with theory. It also seems that there is a mismatch between students' perceptions of practical skills and those of decision makers. For students, those skills should serve as job training such as translation skills or teaching skills, but for decision makers it means criticality, being responsible to the common good and being able to apply the knowledge they get in real life contexts. Van den Akker (2004) argues that the content of the curriculum should manifest a balance between three significant sources of knowledge, society, and the individual learner. This means that content selection should be for the sake of knowledge as well as problems and issues related to society and the elements that are of importance and interest to the learners. The key here is related to balance and not to prioritizing one form of content over another.

The findings of this study show that there is an agreement between the students and the decision makers' perceptions of the sequence of the modules in the curriculum in both

departments. Even though both groups of participants favoured a 'simple to complex' (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018) sequence for the modules, some students did not support the chronological sequence of the literature modules in year two, three and four considering the early forms of literature difficult for the early stages. This was rejected by the members of the academic committee who claimed that if the language of the 16th century is difficult, the problem has been solved by using special books that have a modern English equivalent, but there is not an equivalent simple solution for the complex ideas in modern literature. There is unanimity in the literature that curriculum content in general and literature modules should fit students' level (Bilbao, Lucido, Iringan, & Javier, 2008; Beach et al., 2011). Nevertheless, within a class, students differ in their reading ability. In the literature, there are claims in favour of the historical study of literature, but this is not the only approach to sequence the modules in a programme (Lazar, 1993). Beach et al. (2011) argue that writers' work would be studied as shaped by their historical and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is necessary that decision makers consider other alternatives and their potential impact to address the existing issues.

6.4.3 Approaches to Literature Content

The study found that the students' perception was that the literature modules are more useful due to the nature of learning and teaching on the literature modules that gave them the opportunity to express themselves in a free manner. Apart from a few students who referred to literature as an approach to texts as an aesthetically patterned artefact, the study found that most of the students viewed and wanted the study of literature to be used as a resource for language learning. This shows that the distinction between the two views of literature drawn by Maley (1989) is evident in both departments. However, these two different approaches are not mutually exclusive. The study of literature could be exploited for language learning purposes, and similarly, apart from the knowledge of critical concepts and conventions, greater understanding and appreciation of literature is dependent on language growth and development (Carter and McRae, 2014).

This gives rise to another point raised by a curriculum driven simply by employability concerns and more specifically by students' desire for learning the English language

might see language and linguistics as taking priority over and above literature, but the students' suggestions here indicate that how they studied literature had an impact on their language skills.

The study found that the members of the academic committee in University K were advocating the study of classic canons. There is an assumption that non-canonical texts are not academically rigorous and that the classic canons are valuable. Viswanathan (1995) relates this to the direct consequence of colonisation that resulted in the socio-political control of colonised societies/countries. It could be argued that Iraq, in general, has not been a British colony, but it used to be under British mandate from 1921-1932. This is in line with Attach's (1995) statement that colonial control and its influence has been extended to nations that had not been under direct colonial domination. During the British mandate period in Iraq, the currency was the Indian rupee, and the police force was made up mostly of Indians (Hunt, 2005). This shows that the British influence extended, via India, into the region. Altbach (1995, p. 455), also argues that "the influence of the advanced industrial nations has continued beyond the period of traditional colonialism. One of the basic facts of economic, political, and social life of the developing world" through funding and establishing departments on topics related to those nations which "will help to produce over the long run a group of professors favourable" and "professionally tied to" (p. 456) those countries.

The presence of India has continued in the country and "before the Gulf war in 1991, there were more than 80,000 Indian nationals in Iraq" (Embassy of India, Baghdad, Iraq, 2018, para. 23) working in different sectors including higher education. In the context of the KR, the colonial influence that is evident in the curriculum seems to be related to some Indian professors who were teaching in the ELD in University K before the 1991 Kurdish uprising. The members of the academic committee are among those who have been taught by those professors or who started teaching under their control. Therefore, this deeply rooted association of value and the greatness of the British classical canon could be related to the professors' personal beliefs, shaped by their experience of studying the traditional canon in their post-graduate studies. Similarly, Docker (1995) argues that university hierarchy and staff whose primary teaching interests are expected to lie in English literature enforce Anglo-centric stability and continuity. This becomes

more apparent when University K is compared to the shift of literature content towards a combination of both established and less widely known texts in University T. These changes have resulted from the personal preferences of the two foreign senior lecturers at the department and some other assistant lecturers who got their MA degrees from mostly the UK universities who apparently do not hold solidarity with the canon as do those of the older generation. In the literature, a balanced programme is recommended, so that the syllabus contains both the traditional canon and a new and more multicultural canon. Through the study of the traditional canon students get information about the origin of the literary ideas, and from there they can make these comparisons, analogies, and connections between texts. The opponents of this view consider the study of the canon to be wholly outdated and suggest adopting a methods-and-theories based literature course design.

6.4.4 Grammar

The findings of the study showed that the teachers and students both confirm the importance of grammar within the curriculum they experience. The students' dissatisfaction with grammar results from their exposure to grammatical rules and structures that they believe do not contribute to effective communication. This indicates that grammar is considered as a set of rules to be memorised. This study also revealed that the deductive and de-contextualised pedagogical approach followed in teaching grammar falls under what may be referred to as traditional grammar teaching (Phipps & Borg, 2007). The problem with this knowledge-transmission approach to grammar is that for most students it leads to limited language acquisition.

The study found that while students are obliged to know the rules of grammar, they are often unable to use this grammatical knowledge in their communication. In the literature, this has been one of the shortcomings or disadvantages of traditional grammar teaching. In different parts of the world, as a result of this observed gap between knowledge of grammar and its successful application, there have been alternative approaches to grammar instruction that view grammar less as a body of knowledge to be studied but as a skill to be practised and developed. Therefore; as Larsen-Freeman (2001) states that the importance of grammar knowledge lies in its ability to help students to communicate "accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately" (p. 256).

The underlying factor behind the tendency to follow this approach to the teaching of grammar could be related to the teachers' background. Up to this day, grammar-translation is the dominant method of language teaching and therefore teachers tend to follow the same method. Therefore, it is important that teachers become aware of other pedagogical strategies and adopt alternative methods of teaching grammar so that students put their knowledge of grammar into practice.

6.4.5 Pronunciation

The study found that the students had opposing approaches to phonetics and phonology modules, as they wanted the linguistics modules to have immediate and direct impact on their language use. They also found the information about the branches of linguistics less useful as they mainly depended on memorisation to pass the modules and they believed that they would forget this information in the future. Concerning pronunciation, the students expected that because of studying a module their pronunciation becomes like native speakers. According to Yoshida (2016, p. 1), this expectation is problematic as "there are so many varieties of English and so much variation within each type that it is almost impossible to define that elusive "ideal" pronunciation". Moreover, it is near to impossible for many adult learners living in non-English speaking communities, regardless of how hard they work, "to sound exactly like their preferred pronunciation model."

The teachers also believed that through applying the knowledge they gain in this module, the student's pronunciation skills improved in various degrees according to their efforts and practices. This dominant teacher perspective seems more realistic and achievable than the students' desire to sound like a native speaker, because it is more in line with Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin's (2010) intelligible pronunciation whose aim is to understand and be understood without much effort.

The study also revealed that another aspect of students' concern was related to the content of the pronunciation module. The students found a lack of balance in terms of the module content between segmental and supra-segmental features. The reason behind this perception could be related to their previous information about English

sounds that are found in their high school textbooks; and therefore, those parts of the module content which deal with the English sounds would be repetition. In addition to that, the student perspective is that the knowledge of the sounds and their production does not lead to the correct pronunciation of the sounds. There are still a few students not able to pronounce /θ/ and /ð/ correctly as these two sounds are not found in Kurdish sound system. This could also be related to the sequence of the lessons in the modules, which follows the sequence of the topics in the discipline or the books that are written on this discipline. Another interpretation of this could be related to the developments in the field of teaching pronunciation that in the last two decades, according to Yoshida (2016), teachers and researchers have paid more attention to the supra-segmental aspects of pronunciation. Furthermore, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) emphasise the teaching of these aspects more strongly. Lane (2010) and Gilbert (2008) have claimed that teaching individual sounds is not so important, and intonation, stress, prominence, and rhythm should be emphasised above all.

Therefore, the changes at the module level, either adding, removing or changing module contents, should also be informed with the latest advances in the discipline. Moreover, such changes are not likely to be successful if they are not addressed by appropriate methods of teaching.

6.4.6 Graduation Research Paper

The study found that students associated a sense of pride, production, and achievement through producing a research paper, also a better understanding of the topic and a appreciation of the option they had to dig deeper into a topic of their choice although they spoke of difficulties they faced in their relationship with the supervisor lecturer. The sense of pride and achievement is not highlighted in the literature because probably it is because, during the whole of undergraduate course, this work is the only instance of its type. Apart from the benefits found in this study, in the literature a number of other benefits are associated with undergraduate research experiences. Those benefits can be technical and interpersonal skills (Landrum & Nelsen, 2002), analytical, logic, synthesis, and independent learning skills (Ishiyama, 2002), improving their potential ability to gain entrance into competitive graduate programs (Kierniesky, 2005) as well as

increasing awareness and confidence in their research skills (Russell, Hancock & McCullough, 2007).

The reason why all the established benefits in the literature are not evident in the perspectives voiced in the context of this study might be attributed to the mechanism followed by the department under which the students carried out the research: such as the choice of topic for research, assigning the supervisor, or the resources and prior experiences that students need to have. Moreover, such attempts by students could demonstrate achievements if researching practices will be embedded in the curriculum from the first year of the programme.

6.4.7 Academic Skills

The study found that the content of this module contains many topics to be covered in one year. The possible solution could be that either the number of hours for this module be increased or it should be extended to be studied in the second year as well. The study indicates that students' demanded their involvement in selection of topic of their interest for their final assessment. Snider and Schnurer (2002) support students' participation in deciding the topics and they find it empowering for students to see their contribution being accredited. Regarding students' problems with the way this module was taught and very little support that students had, Snider and Schnurer (2002) state that teachers should support students in identifying the resources and familiarise them with the research process and other practicalities. The failure to fulfil the requirements of this module completely indicates that even in the modules that have been added through the change process the success is dependent on other factors such as students' input, proper teaching methods and suitable infrastructure.

6.4.8 Creative Writing

The findings of this research showed that the students in general, were content with the creative writing module as they could use it as a channel to express their imagination freely. Even those students who did not want to have a Creative Writing module in their programme, believed that this module should be available as a selection module for those who are interested in it. Kelen (2014) finds such a motive crucial for students to

attempt to participate and possibly produce literary texts. Anae (2014) considers the development of confidence and competencies among the students a necessity for successful creative writing experiences. In this study, a student had concerns about the quality of their products compared to a text written by native speakers. This shows that, despite being interested in this module, there is a feeling of uneasiness and distress among some of the students concerning the writing in the second language especially where there is no equivalent serious writing attempts in their mother tongue. This is related to the claim made by some critics that "one can only express oneself in one's mother tongue" (Sridhar, 1982). However, Achebe (1965) believes that it is possible for anyone to write in a second language as effectually as the first language. Sridhar (1982) states that genre is a determining factor behind the choice of language for some non-native writers, a view shared by Achebe who stated that "I think certain ideas and certain things seem better done in Igbo and other things seem better in English" (Achebe, 1975 cited in Sridhar, 1982, p. 294). To deal with such a concern, Spiro (2014) suggest that students be informed of "the fact that the learner writer may transform into the serious writing practitioner with the appropriate nurturing" (p. 25). Therefore, for this module to be effective, students should be provided with necessary support and encouragement to find their area of interest, and to start practising in their genre.

The findings of this study show that some of the students considered the Creative Writing module was challenging due to their limited knowledge of English vocabulary and the challenges they had in expressing what they intended to say. Hanauer (2014) believes that getting the words that match the feeling is a demanding task. In the literature, these concerns and other student challenges in the creative writing process are related to the pedagogy of creative writing. In the presence of motivation, Hanauer (2010, p. 85–86) suggests that stimulating memory and "autobiographical exploration"; and trialling with writing and language itself as two critical pedagogical elements for the writing to come to existence. Hanauer (2014) reveals some of his different methods of interacting with students such as private meetings with students, reading students' work for content and commenting on aesthetics of their work and not being over-involved with issues of accuracy in form. This shows that considering the alternative approaches in teaching creative writing, and that following different methods of interaction with students are likely to impact the students' performance in this module.

6.4.9 Core and Selective Modules

One of the significant findings of this study was that the students in both universities expressed dissatisfaction with the all-compulsory module programme and lack of any particular optional modules in their programme. The students' argue for a modular system that offers some degree of choice and flexibility among the core modules and selective modules have some advantages. For example, students have the option of choosing an alternative instead of the module that they are not interested in. It is claimed that, "students who choose out of interest will learn more, enjoy more and as a bonus, they may also get higher grades because they will have a better understanding of the subject" (Howorth, 2001, p. 28). However, these benefits depend on how responsibly students act in the process of decision making and how appropriately the organisational modifications and teaching quality are adjusted which otherwise might negate the potential benefits (Roper, 1994). Likewise, Ramsden (1992, p. 81) argues that "opportunities to exercise responsible choice in the method and content of study" leads to a broad learning approach. Therefore, like Hedges, Pacheco and Webber (2014) argue, universities should develop a clear understanding of students' (intrinsic and extrinsic) motivations behind their choices and consequently provide them with sufficient and correct information to guarantee proper selections. The students' choice might be dependent on many factors such as the apparent difficulty of the module and the lecturer's reputation, and the possibility of getting good results or the module can facilitate getting a better job or easy access to postgraduate studies (Howorth, 2001; Koceic et al., 2010).

In the context of this study, the students' choice is highly likely to be affected by the extent the previous year students recommend a module. The module is more likely to be selected based on its perceived easiness to pass or get better marks. In the context of KR, the hard-working students mainly worry about the marks and most of the students worry more about passing the modules and consequently get a certificate because the chance of being employed by the university is guaranteed for the first top three graduates of each department. In other (especially public) sectors, the graduates' marks overshadow other qualifications. This emphasis on marks and outcomes is a key driver of both curriculum design, curriculum change and students choices.

One of the reasons for implementing an entirely compulsory-module programme is attributed to the cost that is added to the programme implementation by the introduction of elective modules. Moreover, it could be related to the culture of academia in the context of the KR higher education and the distrust of and uncertainty about students' ability to make informed choices when selecting the modules for their programme. Another reason could be related to the fact that universities in the KR do not feel obliged to consider students' concerns because students do not pay tuition fees to public universities; thus, they cannot put pressure on universities for their increased involvement nor in relation to the conducting of changes.

Despite the potential positive effects of providing the elective modules, Jenkins and Walker (1994) argue that it might negatively affect the coherence and result in the fragmentation of the programme especially when students' extrinsic motivations drive the module choice. Hedges, Pacheco and Webber (2014) refer to some difficulties that are associated with optional modules such as timetable management and the shortage of time and resources.

For the context of this study, it is unrealistic to assign power of ultimate choice to the students. However, it would be practical if the English departments offer only a limited choice in each year or only in the final year which should include providing students with help in the process of decision making and incorporating the research interests of the universities and the teaching staff within them.

6.4.10 The Differences Between the Two Departments

The two departments under the study do not significantly differ in the number of modules that the programmes contain. Overall, the number of modules in both departments at first year is very different, but in reality the modules of English pronunciation, reading comprehension, writing and English vocabulary are studied separately. These modules are studied under the module of English language and communication I in University T that follows an integrated approach to the teaching of language skills. The integrated approach to the teaching of language skills was prescribed on all English departments in the KR before the reform process. However, during the process of curriculum change,

the ELD in University K readopted the segregated approach to the teaching of language skills. The reasons why such a traditional method is followed in University K could be attributed to the teachers and administrators' belief that it is logistically practical to offer courses on each language skills separately, although proponents of the segregated approach "believe that it is instructionally impossible to concentrate on more than one skill at a time" (Oxford, 2001, p. 18). This problem could have been solved by providing appropriate training for teachers to enable them to cope with the challenges of the integrated approach to teaching language skills. The findings of this study showed that even in University T that, although the skills are structured under one module, they are still studied separately by some teachers, each responsible for a separate skill. The students demand, and perceptions of the study of the language skills are more in line with the integrated skills approach in which they are exposed to authentic situations in which they could interact naturally in the language. Oxford (2001) states that in courses that focus on one skill, multiple skills could be incorporated in it if teachers are trained to choose suitable instructional materials and appropriate tasks. Therefore, the departments under the study could reconsider the integrated skills approach and provide the necessary support for its implementation.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the main findings of the study were discussed in the context of broader literature. In this concluding section, some of the main points related to the research questions, which were raised in this study, are explained below. The points include the approaches followed in curriculum re/design, the extent of the implementation of curriculum change, the challenges faced, and the reasons behind failure in fully implementing the changes, the critical matches or mismatches, tensions between government policy, decision makers, teachers, and students, and the students' perceptions of the modules.

6.5.1 The Approaches Followed in Curriculum Re/design

Driven by an employment-based ideology, in spite of the identified drawbacks of the curriculum, the plans have not shifted the view of knowledge. There is lack of a clear

vision about an inclination towards depth or breadth due to the mismatches between policy and practice. Similarly, although the reform plan emphasises embedding vocational skills in the courses, in practice, it has confronted resistance from a deep-rooted ideology that prioritises theory over practice. The plans have not also targeted the outdated pedagogical approaches and the assessment system the heavily relies on summative final exams. These are indicative of following a traditional approach to curriculum design.

6.5.2 The Extent of the Achievement of the Intended Plans

The curriculum reform process, which was supposed to be a comprehensive process covering all aspects of the curriculum, in practice, has only included a change in some aspects of the content. Those changes implemented to the content have not turned out to be efficient because if the curriculum is not considered as one package, either any change to one component without changing the other components would fail or the success would not be noticeable.

6.5.3 The Reasons behind not Fully Implementing the Changes

The unsuccessful changes in the area of curriculum could be attributed to two types of external and internal factors. The external factors are related to the overall governance system including higher education, political instability due to the war against ISIS, and the economic crisis, and all have negatively affected all sectors in education including the reform process. In addition to this, some internal reasons had a damaging impact on the success of the process. Firstly, the reform process followed a top-down direction, and in the guidelines, there was no room for the flexibilities and specialities of the different academic fields. Secondly, it is evident that teachers and students were disconnected from all steps of curriculum change. Because of not being involved, there was not enough cooperation among different parties. Thirdly, the changes and their implementation have not followed a well-thought plan which has resulted in limited preparation, limited cooperation among different sides, a lack of necessary training for teachers, no concern for potential obstacles and above all dealing with only one component of the curriculum at a time.

6.5.4 The Mismatches and Tensions among Different Sides

Some mismatches were identified in this study such as the mismatch between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum either at the level of the curriculum as a whole or at the lower levels. For example, according to the reform process, pedagogy should have been one of the profoundly changed components of the curriculum. Even at the content level, there is a mismatch between the policy focusing on the employability factor in module organisation and no reflection of this in practice. Another instance of mismatch is between students' desired aims and objectives, content, methods of teaching and assessment system with those that are applied in practice.

Some tensions among different participants were identified; for example, the tensions between Heads of CDD, members of academic committees and teachers. Heads of CDD consider the members of academic committees and teachers as resistant to change and not fully cooperating, while the teachers and even members of the academic committees consider this process a top-down order imposed on them without any noticeable input from them. This tension could be attributed to the teachers' and students' not being involved in the process of curriculum decision-making that has resulted in these groups being less interested in change or resistance to it.

6.5.5 Students' Perceptions of the Content

The students' perceptions of the newly introduced modules and their dissatisfaction with the all-compulsory modular system as well as their urge to have optional modules indicated that the content of curriculum along with other components of curriculum require a comprehensive revision plan that would involve and take the input from all sides and would take other alternatives into consideration.

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Overview of the Chapter

Following the discussion of the research findings in the previous chapter, in the first section, this final chapter will provide a summary of the main findings of the study, drawing out the significant issues. In the subsequent sections, it will present the contributions of the study, suggestions for further research and personal reflections on the research journey.

7.2 Summary of the Findings and Their Implications

The curriculum reform initiated by MoHESR (2010) was based on the needs of the job-market and the fact that the knowledge and skills of graduates did not meet these needs. Therefore, the plan was to implement some changes in terms of adding some vocational element to the courses, as well as paying more attention to practical application of the theoretical knowledge in the field. MoHESR has focused on two components of curriculum, namely the content and pedagogy. The reforms to the content included the introduction of some new modules in year one and restructuring of the content in the other stages of the courses based on some guidelines from MoHESR. The study shows that, in spite of the guidance for these reforms, these intentions have not been effectively fulfilled.

Without a clear strategy from the universities, the departments remain in a state of confusion with regard to the breadth or depth, and the theoretical or practical elements of the courses. Repetition of some module foci across different years in one institution, and the division of the course into two majors in another, indicate a grey area with regard to adopting a multi-disciplinary or specialised course.

With regard to the view of knowledge and teaching, the intended reforms could be seen as attempts to shift from a traditional approach to adopting a socially critical approach to view of knowledge and teaching. However, on the ground, the implementation has faced

some significant challenges. As far as assessment is concerned, with the exception of a very few modules at some stages of the two courses, this continues to follow the traditional assessment system. With assessment still focused on mainly memorisation and exam performance, it is harder for content and pedagogy to evolve. In addition, the lack of clearly stated aims, goals and objectives for the courses could mean that problems have occurred due to not having a clear, unified, strategic and shared understanding of what the courses hope to achieve. It is possible to infer some tacit values or ideological standpoints among decision makers and teachers from both universities, and to see how these have influenced how the practical guidelines from the MoHESR have been translated into implicit aims, goals and objectives, and have informed the process of content selection.

It is also clear that the available infrastructure is not compatible with the demands of the modern approaches to curriculum, and that effective and efficient systems for change have not been implemented. Decisions at the departmental level have been made by a group of selected academic staff, with a limited degree of involvement from teachers at module levels and without any involvement from either graduates or current students. This is typical of traditional approaches to curriculum design, and indeed the belief that experience (as measured by years of service) is the most important indicator of ability to design the curriculum may be hindering the development of non-traditional content, pedagogy and assessment, particularly in Institution K.

The two institutions under study show a greater degree of similarity with regard to the approaches followed in curriculum development, and consequently the values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum. The fact that, in general, the similarities outnumber the differences indicates that, although one might expect very diverse results in a long-established university from a newer one, in fact similar problems have occurred. This could be attributed to the very similar context in which these two universities operate. Furthermore, this could imply that the findings of this study are highly likely to be generalisable over other ELDs in the region.

7.3 Contributions of the Study

This research contributed to the area of curriculum studies in different ways. The main contribution of this research is towards investigating the understanding and perceptions of the decision makers, teachers and students concerning the ELD curriculum in the context of the KR. The study also contributed to the domains of theory, methodology, and policy and practice.

7.3.1 Contextual Contributions

English language is gaining higher status in the context of the KR and the number of students that participate in either ELDs in universities or purely private language courses has been considerably increased. Almost all 32 public and private universities in the KR award BA degrees in TESOL or English Linguistics and Literature. However, no studies have previously been conducted to investigate the different parties' perceptions of the curricula, and explore the tensions and problems this raises. As mentioned in the literature review, a few studies have tackled issues in some components of curriculum, mainly in relation to pedagogy and assessment. The findings of this study provide detailed understanding of the area of curriculum studies in the ELD at two universities in the context of the KR. This research, to the best of my knowledge, is the only study so far in the KR universities to deal with two less studied components of the curriculum; namely the aims, goals and objectives, and the content.

Although this study only included two departments, and a selected number of participants having different roles within the institutions, it nevertheless revealed tensions and challenges within both contexts as they each sought to implement similar changes that impacted differently on different groups within the department. I did not aim at arriving generalisable findings, the reader, noting the procedures followed to bring about transferability and transparency, may be able to deduce conclusions which resonate with experiences within other departments in the context of the KR. Moreover, being the first research in terms of the area of the study and its focus, this study could

also be considered as a foundation stone for further studies in the macro context of the KR curriculum.

The study is particularly significant in unpicking the problems that beset the attempt to revise the curriculum in these universities – particularly those arising from the lack of clarity around aims and objectives, the tensions between traditional and progressive conceptions of knowledge, and the inability to implement pedagogical processes, and the deformative impact of assessment procedures which are out of step with attempts to modernise course content. Many pragmatic problems were revealed – including issues relating to time, resources, and the alignment of priorities and values between different members of staff, and between staff and students.

7.3.2 Theoretical Contributions

Through a lengthy and thorough search of available literature, to the best of my knowledge, I found that empirical research on aims, goals and objectives, and content of curriculum is scarce, and so this work and its findings will add to the limited literature on the topic. At the undergraduate level, research about the perceptions of students towards an English language curriculum is very rare. The current study contributes to this area by taking a more inclusive approach and including selected samples from all parties that are involved directly or indirectly in the process of curriculum design, change, and implementation. This research and its findings are the result of presenting the voices of students, teachers and decision makers, and exploring the interrelations between their perceptions and their underlying implications that can serve as a valuable source of knowledge, and as the basis for further research locally and internationally.

This study built on the work of the Purdue Research Foundation (2013) by applying the Purdue's Interactive Course Re/Design model, with procedures which are similar to those mentioned in Toohey's seminal work of curriculum development (1999), to new data. It, therefore, offers further support for this model as a useful approach to

investigating curriculum design. This model was specifically useful in that the steps that are identified in the process of course design could be applied to the KR context.

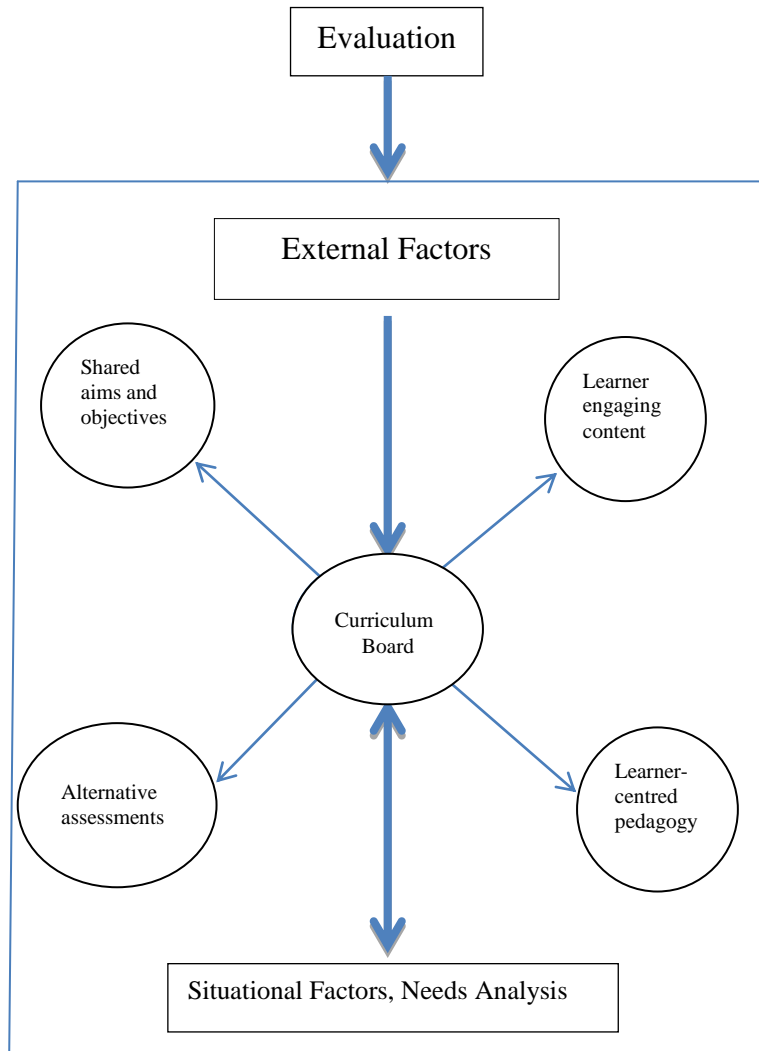
However, the study went further in building on the Purdue model by incorporating aspects of other models which relate to different aspects of curriculum. For instance, it drew on the model by Nation and Macalister (2010) in which evaluation encircles the model, which indicates that evaluation must be holistic, and that curriculum development demands an overall evaluation of not only curriculum components but also the context in which curriculum operates.

Similarly, this study also built on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001) and the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001), that mainly focus on providing learner-centred teaching in which, through the provision of a supportive learning environment, students experience a learning activity, reflect on their experience to give rise to new ideas, and apply it in the real world. Therefore, this type of learning is included in the proposed model as 'learner-engaging pedagogy'.

It also incorporated attention to the first point in Fink's Integrated Course Design (Fink, 2003) that focuses on analysing situational factors (needs analysis). Due to its underpinning of the findings of my study for the necessity of needs analysis, this element is incorporated in the proposed model.

The Connection-Engagement-Empowerment Model (Yearwood, Cox & Cassidy, 2016) that emphasises employing strategies that result "in engagement with course content via events designed to access and use student's prior knowledge" (p. 3), was also used to inform the focus on content selection and pedagogy. Therefore, data collection and analysis were underpinned by some of the most influential models available in the literature. In figure 7.1, I show how this study has therefore developed an eclectic model for curriculum re/design that builds on Purdue's Interactive Course Re/Design model by combining it with applicable elements from other models. This may be used to contribute to the developing body of research into curriculum design and change internationally, as well more specifically offering an alternative to the lack of any explicit course design process in the context of the KR.

Figure 7.1: A proposed model of curriculum re/design



While informed by the commonest models of course design, Purdue’s Interactive Course Re/Design Model includes aspects which have been generated by this study. However, some aspects are added from the current study as well. For instance, the models in the literature have not considered external factors as potentially affecting the whole process, but this study has indicated that certain factors in the macro context such as political instability, war and economic crisis have negatively impacted the curriculum change. Also, this model identifies the curriculum decision makers as a curriculum board which is responsible for carrying out the re/design process. The proposed model has incorporated the curriculum board, including teachers and students, within the

curriculum process, following the recent literature advocating the role of students and teachers in curriculum decision making, as well as the findings of this study that indicated a possible link between teachers' resistance and lack of a shared understanding between different parts.

Evaluation in this model is specifically informed by the model developed by Nation and Macalister (2010), in which evaluation is conducted on the overall process, and in the proposed model it is not necessarily carried out by the curriculum board. The proposed model also builds on previous models by including 'shared aims and objectives'. This shift in wording is due to the fact that this study revealed the importance of students, teachers and curriculum leaders sharing an understanding of the overall aims and objectives of a course – demonstrating the dissatisfaction and tension which results from the failure to develop these explicitly. It indicates how this lack of a shared vision also pitted curriculum developers and staff against each other, directly hindering the introduction of change.

Therefore, investigating stakeholder's perceptions of different components of curriculum and the subsequent findings are so important in that they contribute to the different levels or stages of curriculum design. For example, analysing the situational factors, formulating goals, designing feedback and assessment procedures in Fink, and Nation and McAlister's Models can be implemented effectively through studying perceptions of teachers and students. The findings of this study has confirmed this and the external factors such as economic recession and outburst of the war in the country as well as the factors based on which the MoHESR has initiated reform plan has been embedded in the proposed model in this study.

Moreover, identifying aims and objectives, and structuring course components in Purdue's Interactive Course Re/Design Model, the condition of shared understanding promoted by multiple levels of engagement from different parties advocated by Connection-Engagement-Empowerment Model, establishing supportive learning community in Community of Enquiry Framework, and the element of experience in Kolb's Experiential Learning can be fulfilled through understanding decision makers, teachers and students' perceptions of the aims and objectives. Investigation of perceptions is an effective step towards identifying problems and providing solutions in

implementation of these models. In the context of this study, perceptions of the aims and objectives revealed a number of findings such as tensions among different stakeholders, mismatches between elements and perceptions of different parties, and resistance to change have informed and contributed to the proposed model by this study.

7.3.3 Methodological Contributions

This research has made a number of contributions at the methodological level. It was the first experience for the students, and a rare experience for the teachers, of participating in a qualitative research study. The students were enthusiastic to have their views heard in such minute detail, and to have their voices and concerns presented to the teachers and decision makers either through the process of data collection or through the findings that would be directed to the policy making agents.

At the level of data analysis, due to the fact that I had only one month to collect the data and carry out a significantly large number of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, while also needing to travel to University K and University T, I did not have the time to run an initial coding process concurrently with the data collection. As I wanted to get the most relevant points from the data and to ascertain that the coding process had been conducted properly, I decided to run a second coding of the data after the initial coding was completed. I found this act, which to the best of my knowledge is not found in the literature about data analyses and coding qualitative data, resulted in peace of mind for me as a researcher, as well as the addition of a few new codes and rewording of some of the previously stated codes.

At the level of presenting the findings, I adopted a topic based approach to presenting them and integrated the findings from all types of participants from both institutions around different categories. I only highlighted the areas of difference between the two institutions to deal with the relevant research question. In this way, I saved a lot of repetition which would otherwise result in verbosity and monotony.

7.3.4 Contributions to Policy and Practice

Many universities have made successful improvements to their educational policies. After confirming the need for curriculum development in every department, the MoHESR-KR began to adopt new policies that were more explicitly involved with the agenda of curriculum development and reform. The findings of this study at this critical time could be considered as another step towards better implementation of the reform plans and consequently may help to bring about changes or modifications on the ground.

After identifying the problems, challenges and tensions, this study suggests the following recommendations to achieve most of the desired purposes of MoHESR. First of all, there is an urgent need for a curriculum change board to be established in each department. This board should include either every member or representatives of the different parties: namely the Head of ELD, members of academic committees, teaching staff, representatives from relevant administrative staff to coordinate activities, members from IT staff, students and representatives from employer agencies or companies. A question is raised here as to whether all teachers or students would be willing to participate in such a board, or to what extent it is practical for so many people to work together and come to an agreement. One possible solution for this would either be to reduce the participation of teachers and students only to those who are willing, or find other efficient channels through which all of them can contribute without the need to come together. For instance, the IT members in this board could develop an online forum through which all participants can offer their input.

Secondly, the above mentioned board should carry out the following:

- 1- identify the main ideas, knowledge and skills that need to be developed
- 2- gather information about similar programmes in different parts of the world
- 3- identify the requirements of the accrediting bodies
- 4- identify students' prior knowledge or experiences
- 5- identify the problems with the current programme

Thirdly, the board of curriculum change should develop the goals of the programme as well as their rationale. This could be done by scrutinizing and questioning what has long been believed to be most important in order to ensure that all students, staff and curriculum designers together develop a shared understanding of the aims, and come up with the goals and explicit objectives, and the best ways to achieve them. These steps could be finalised with support from curriculum specialists.

Fourthly, the goals and objectives should guide the development of content. At this stage, decisions could be made concerning the number of modules to be included, the type of knowledge and skills that should be embedded in the modules, as well as including optional modules which anticipate choices that students might want to make. It is so important to raise awareness of the need to readjust the understanding of expertise and authority – to recognise that teachers with the longest standing experience are not automatically the best people to determine curriculum content.

At the next stage, they have to identify the changes that need to happen in the current teaching that has failed to bring about those changes. They should determine the challenges that might be faced and find solutions for them. Some preemptive preparations that could be made would be raising awareness of the teaching staff about the drawbacks of their current practices, encouraging them for their commitment and above all through providing training and support for the teachers. Otherwise, any “change in the nature of the job can be devastating for the unprepared” (Toohey, 1999, p. 32). So, it is very important that the teachers believe that the changes are necessary.

In addition to the changes in the process, the focus should be on designing assessment to be in accordance with the teaching methods. The constraints should be identified and alternative assessments should be put into practice so that it could support the changes rather than hindering them.

It is so important to carry out the changes to all components of curriculum as a whole, to develop a course holistically rather than only working on one component; this study indicates that an atomised approach will lead to failure. In addition to that, a comprehensive evaluation programme should be designed to reveal the rate of success

and to determine obstacles, and to identify further changes to be implemented in the future.

The study also indicated that there are a number of external factors such as the overall higher education system, government system, economic crises and disruptions to political stability that have affected the reform process. Therefore, in undertaking curriculum reform, the departments should seek wider support to be able to mitigate their impacts.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This research attempted to provide an understanding of the decision makers', teachers', and students' perceptions of the aims, goals and objectives and content of the English language curriculum in two departments in two universities. Conducting similar studies on the other components of the curriculum which were examined more briefly, here namely pedagogy and assessment, and the interrelation of these components, would now be worth pursuing. This is particularly the case because the findings indicated that curriculum and pedagogy cannot be fully disentangled from the aims or content – it is clear that changes to any one aspect of the curriculum will be influenced or constrained by the other aspects

This study is limited to only two departments in two public universities in the KR. Conducting similar studies on the English departments in the private universities, and researching the implications of the similarities and the differences among the private universities on the one hand, and between public and private universities on the other hand, also merits further research. This is particularly suggested by the limitations of resources which were referred to by curriculum leaders, teachers and students in this study, as well as the influence of the historical curriculum development in public universities – exploring whether these differ in a private context, and whether there is a different impact on the process of curriculum development, would yield greater insights into how differently the process of curriculum design and change might occur.

At the moment, due to the centrality of policy and administrative restrictions, and the impracticality of introducing large scale changes in the curriculum, conducting small

scale action research projects based on the findings of this study could be a practical and effective step towards bringing about positive changes into the ELD curricula in different institutions. These small-scale researches could be conducted at the department level to raise awareness among the members of academic committees and teachers of the need for cooperation between them, and the importance of the role of teachers' role and even potential input from students. It could also take the form of encouraging individual teachers or decision makers to scrutinise their own judgments and problematise them, and open them up to challenge from students and peers. These types of research seem to be good steps towards problematising the long-held beliefs about the way experience and expertise are employed in the departments.

This study was an attempt to study the formal explicit enacted curriculum as intended in the documents and enacted by the decision makers and perceived by students. The study of the hidden curriculum in the English departments in the KR could be a potential area of investigation and further research.

Due to practical restrictions, the student participants in this study were only selected from the third year cohort. To get a more complete picture of the programme, conducting similar studies with participants from all stages of the programme, or with the same participants at two different times of the same year, or a longitudinal study of a group of participants from their start of the programme up to post graduation could offer significantly more nuanced data, particularly in allowing the researcher to relate student opinions and experiences to employment outcomes after graduation, although this would come with a number of practical challenges.

Due to the logistic and methodological limitations of this research, the interview schedules for the interviews were not designed to secure specific and detailed answers regarding the objectives and content of all the modules of the programmes under the study, so, at module level, data was only generated by spontaneous references by some of the student participants to certain modules when giving an example, proof or explanation of their perceptions. Consequently, it was those modules that were extensively referred to by participants which were chosen to be topics of discussion.

Therefore, studies with some alterations in the research questions and corresponding interview schedules could be designed to refer explicitly to all of the modules in the programme, in order to find out the differences and similarities between students' perceptions across the modules in the programme and their implications.

The time of conducting this research coincided with the economic recession that the government of KR was facing due to the sharp fall in oil prices starting from early 2014. Other negative factors in the country at the time included the longstanding tensions between the KRG and the Central Government that consequently led to cutting the allocations of the KR from the federal budget, the existing deep rooted corruption in all aspects of government such as a large number of ghost workers or double dippers in the public sector, and above all the attacks launched by ISIS. KRG had to defend nearly 1000 km of front lines. In addition, the country was hosting nearly two million Syrian refugees and IDPs. All of these circumstances were referred to by the participants as being relevant to, and having devastating effects, on the whole of life for populous including the area under the study. Therefore, the study of the impacts or the consequences of this situation on higher education and curriculum enhancement is highly worthy of future research.

7.5 Personal Reflections

It is undeniable that I started this research to fulfil the requirement of my PhD after I was selected to study for it through the Human Capacity Development Program launched by KRG, and I had the desire to pursue my study in the UK. However, this extrinsic motivation combined with my intrinsic motivation and intention to conduct research on an under researched area of higher education in the KR. I decided that it was extremely necessary to conduct research on the curriculum. I was also interested in this area of study. Therefore, I started this study with the intention of providing a thorough understanding of the aims and content of the curriculum in English Departments as perceived by all parties involved in the programme.

Although from the start of this research I encountered a number of problems at different levels each affecting the progress of my research in one way or another, finally I was able to deal with those complications with the aid of the support I received.

Despite the ups and downs of this journey, doing this research was rewarding in a number of ways. One of them was when it was noticeable that this research and specifically the interviews and focus groups raised the participants' awareness of some tacit issues. Without any attempt on my side to impose anything or challenge their views, I could see that they were suggesting improvements and changes to the status quo. For instance, during my interview with the Head of ELD in University T, she started to write a note in her work planner book to prioritise taking steps to formally state the goals of the ELD.

One of the other rewarding and motivating aspects was the readiness and enthusiasm of the participants. Before the start of data collection and my approaching the prospective participants, awareness of cases where participants were reluctant to contribute to focus groups or interviews, and considering the miserable situation of people due to attacks launched by ISIS, caused me to think that convincing participants to take part would be challenging. However, contrary to my uncertainties, it turned out that the process of recruiting and approaching the participants was straightforward and trouble-free. Although most of the students had very little, or perhaps no, experience of participating in focus groups, they mostly welcomed it in a unique manner. For instance, I suggested to the student participants in University K that there was a need for an extra focus group session because there were still some points needed discussion. To my surprise, most of them suggested to come to the department on a day in which they had no commitments because there were no lessons due to the fourth year Class Photo Day. They were more eager to participate in the focus group than to join their fourth year friends' party.

To see the decision makers', teachers', and students' involvement, enthusiasm and unparalleled participation in data collection process, amid a number of problems that all the people in the country were experiencing, was so rewarding, and was a validation of my choice of research question: I discovered that this is a subject that many people were passionate about.

It was also encouraging to find out that many students were looking forward to having the findings presented to the decision makers and seeing the recommendations of this study put into practice.

All of these positive points fuelled my interest and consequently resulted in the composition of a paragraph, a section, and a chapter, which followed by the feedback from my supervisors, helped me complete this journey.

In general, this research contributed to my academic development in many aspects. This long journey was a good opportunity for me to dig deep into the perceptions of decision makers, teachers, and students about the ELD curriculum. It resulted in developing and improving my skills in academic reading and writing. Conducting quite a large scale research project for the first time helped me engage with and gain expertise in dealing with the available literature, identify the research area, refine my research questions, adopt appropriate methodology, collect qualitative data, and analyse and present findings. At the end of this research, I feel more confident and able to embrace the necessary skills for my future studies.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Certificate of Ethical Approval

 UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Hazenby Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU
<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: An investigation of the students' and decision-makers' perception of the aims and content of the English Language Department curriculum in two universities in Iraqi Kurdistan

Researcher(s) name: Ali Yousif Azeez

Supervisor(s): Annabel Watson
Susan Jones

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01.04.2016
To: 01.09.2016

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/15/16/28



Signature: Date: 24/02/2016
(Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee)

Appendix 2:

Information Sheet and Consent Form

Title of Research Project

An investigation of the students' and decision-makers' perception of the aims and content of the English Language Department curriculum in two universities in Iraqi Kurdistan

Details of Project

This research will focus on understanding the aims and content of the English Language Department in two institutions of higher education in Kurdistan Region-Iraq. Towards that end, the researcher will draw on the perspectives, experiences and roles of different parties involved within the higher education institution, namely students; both graduates and undergraduates, and senior administrators. This study aims to understand curriculum development from the eyes of different participants and the roles they play and how these together provide a complex view of how curriculum is perceived and experienced. More specifically, this research will address the following research questions:

- 1- How do decision makers perceive the aims and content of the English Language department curriculum?
- 2- How do students perceive the aims and content of the English Language department curriculum?
- 3- What are the matches and mismatches between the curriculum content and the aims and intended learning outcomes?
- 4- To what extent do the students' desired aims and outcomes match or mismatch with the intended aims, outcomes and content of the curriculum?
- 5- What are the differences and similarities between the two institutions with regard to the aims and content of the curriculum as perceived by students and decision makers?

Contact Details

For further information about the research /interview data, please contact:

Name: **Ali Yousif Azeez** E-mail: ayaa202@exeter.ac.uk Mobile: **07504608987**

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Supervisors: **Dr. Annabel Watson** via: A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk or

Dr. Susan Jones via: Susan.M.Jones@exeter.ac.uk

Confidentiality

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Anonymity

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name through pseudonyms and any identifying factors that could reveal the participants identity will be removed from the data and findings of the research.

Second Phase of Data Collection

Please tick the box if you want to participate in the second phase of data collection which might happen in the form of online discussion.

Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- My participation is on a voluntary basis and I am free to decline to answer any question or to withdraw at any stage.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.
- The discussion will be audio-recorded and the information provided will remain anonymous and confidential.
- The data obtained from the discussion will be solely used for this research purpose and will only be accessible to the researcher.
- My signature indicates that I have read the aims of this research and the information provided above and have decided to participate.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

.....
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher. Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 4: Pre-pilot Interview Schedule and Focus Group Guides

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELD and members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session I

- 1 Who are involved in the process of curriculum design and development?
- 2 What is your opinion about students' involvement in the process of curriculum design?
- 3 What do you think the students' needs are? How do you find about what students need? How do you find about what society needs? How do you find about what the market needs?
- 4 How do students access knowledge?
- 5 In your opinion, what types of knowledge students should learn?
- 6 What are the sources of knowledge for students?
- 7 What types of information do you think that students should learn?
- 8 How they decide about the breadth or depth of what the students should be taught?
- 9 How do you want learning process to happen? What is the role of teachers? What is the role of students? How motivated are the students? How do you think it could be improved?
- 10 How is learning assessed? What types of tests are available? How is the marking system?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of this assessment? Have you ever thought of a different method of assessment? What are the challenges that you think you would face if you were to adopt another system?

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELDs and members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session II

- 1 How is/are the general aim(s) of the whole program divided into four years of study? How does the combination of the aims of each year related to the aim of the whole program?
- 2 How do the aims and objectives of each module participate in shaping the general aim of the course?
- 3 How do you carry out the process of setting aims and objectives for the department? What factors affect this process? Are there any obstacles in this process?
- 4 Could you arrange the following list of the general aims according to the order of importance? Why?
(developing attitudes and emotional integrity, cultivating the intellect, employment through adaptable workforce with a broad range of skills, knowledge and research, develop culture or standards of citizenship)
Are there any other important aims that you think are also important?
- 5 What are the characteristics, in terms of specialization and practical ability, which graduates should have by the time they graduate?
- 6 How do you account for students' needs and interests?
- 7 What do you assume about students' prior knowledge?
- 8 How do you evaluate the attainment of the aims?
- 9 Are there any changes you think you need to make? Why? How easy do you think these changes would be? Why?
- 10 How often are the aims and objectives updated and re-organized? Why?

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELDs, members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session III

- 1 How are the modules and subjects determined? How does the process of selection in terms of breadth and scope of the subjects take place?
- 2 Is there any flexibility in planning courses? At what stage are teachers given a voice in the process of selection of the content? Why?
- 3 Do students have a voice in determining the content of the curriculum? Why?
- 4 Have you ever thought about applying another system apart from core curriculum? Why? What are the obstacles?
- 5 How are the number of modules and the credit hours for each module decided?
- 6 How is the taught content of each module selected? Who is involved? What is more emphasized? Theory or practice?
- 7 How do you decide about what is important for students to know? How do you set priorities?
- 8 How often and on what bases is the content of program updated?
- 9 How is the content linked to students' prior knowledge?
- 10 How do the modules in one level prepare the students for the next level?

Questioning Guide for Focus Groups

Session I

- 1 Why did you decide to join this English Department?
- 2 What did you expect before they join this department? What did they think the department would offer them?
- 3 What are the skills, abilities, and knowledge the department offers to you? Why?
- 4 What type of skills you want to develop through studying in this department?
- 5 What sort of skills, abilities, and knowledge do you think that are neglected by the department?
- 6 Do you think that your expectations are met with regard to aims of the department?
- 7 What type of skills you think you gain from studying in this department?
- 8 What are the things or changes that you think that could be done to develop the aims?

Questioning Guide for Focus Groups

Session II

- 1 What language skills, what field of linguistics and literature do you want to be taught? Why?
- 2 What language skills, what field of linguistics and literature do you like not to be taught? Why?
- 3 What will you remove or add if they are given a chance to do so? Why?
- 4 What modules do you think that are the most important? Why?
What modules do you think that are the least important? Why?
- 5 How do you make sure if you have learned what you have been taught? What are your own criteria?
- 6 What do you think the contents of the modules concentrate on? What types of knowledge? What types of skills?
- 7 Which subjects do you think that should be given more time? Why?
- 8 What are the strengths of the content in terms of the scope?
What are the weaknesses of the content in terms of the scope? What are your suggestions?
- 9 What are the strengths of the content in terms of the selection?
What are the weaknesses of the content in terms of the selection? What are your suggestions? (are there redundancies, contradictions, insufficient concepts, burdensome modules, difficult modules, irrelevant or inapplicable to real life, or any other problem) Note: the explanation between brackets will serve as prompts for further questions.
- 10 What are the strengths of the content in terms of the sequence?
What are the weaknesses of the content in terms of the sequence? What are your suggestions?

Appendix 5: Post-pilot Interview Schedule and Focus Group Guides

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELDs, members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session I:

- 1 Can you please explain the process of curriculum reform and development?
Possible probes: rationale, procedures, areas affected by change, the people involved
- 2 What is your opinion about students' involvement in the process of curriculum design?
Possible probes: reasons, advantages, disadvantages, possible consequences
- 3 How do you incorporate students' needs and interests in the curriculum?
Possible probes: What do you think the students' needs are? How do you find about what students need? How do you find about what the market needs?
- 4 How do students access knowledge?
- 5 In your opinion, what types of knowledge students should learn?
- 6 What are the sources of knowledge for students?
- 7 What types of skills do you think that students should learn?
- 8 How do you decide about the breadth or depth of what the students should be taught?
- 9 How do you provide learning opportunities to your students? What is the role of teachers? What is the role of students? How motivated are the students? How do you think it could be improved?
- 10 Can you explain the assessment process?
Possible probes: types of tests, any other forms of assessment, the marking system, advantages and disadvantages of this assessment, any improvement attempts, the challenges that you might face if you want to adopt another system

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELDs, members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session II

- 1 Can you please explain the process of setting aims and objectives for the department?
Possible probes: factors affecting this process, any obstacles in this process
- 2 Could you explain what the aims of the English Language Department are?
Possible probes: which ones are more important than others?
- 3 How could you arrange the following list of the general aims according to the order of importance?
(developing attitudes, cultivating the intellect, employment through adaptable workforce with a broad range of skills, knowledge and research, develop culture or standards of citizenship)
- 4 How is/are the general aim(s) of the whole program divided into four years of study?
Possible probes: What is more important to be achieved in each stage?
- 5 What are the characteristics, in terms of specialization and practical ability, which graduates should have by the time they graduate?
- 6 What do you assume about students' prior knowledge?
- 7 How do you evaluate the attainment of the aims?
Possible probes: To what extent are these aims achieved? How do you evaluate them?
Are you satisfied with their achievement?
What do you think the obstacles are?
What do you think the solutions are?
- 8 What is your opinion about updating and re-organizing the aims and objectives?

Interview Questions for Decision Makers (Heads of CDD, Heads of ELDs, members of academic committee) and Teachers

Session III

- 1 How are the modules and subjects determined? How does the process of selection in terms of breadth and scope of the subjects take place?
- 2 Is there any flexibility in planning courses? At what stage are teachers given a voice in the process of selection of the content?
- 3 Do students have a voice in determining the content of the curriculum?
- 4 Have you ever thought about applying another system apart from core curriculum? Why? What are the obstacles?
- 5 How are the number of modules and the credit hours for each module decided?
- 6 How is the taught content of each module selected?
Possible probes: Who is involved? What is more emphasized? Theory or practice?
- 7 How do you decide about what is important for students to know? How do you set priorities?
- 8 How often and on what bases is the content of programme updated?
- 9 How is the content linked to students' prior knowledge?
- 10 How do the modules in one level prepare the students for the next level?
- 11 How does the content prepare students for post university life?

Questioning Guide for Focus Groups

Session I

- 1 Why did you decide to join this English Department?
- 2 What did you expect before they join this department? What did you think the department would offer you?
- 3 What are the skills, abilities, and knowledge the department offers to you? Why?
- 4 What type of skills you want to develop through studying in this department?
- 5 What sort of skills, abilities, and knowledge do you think neglected by the department?
- 6 Do you think that your expectations are met with regard to aims of the department?
- 7 What type of skills you think you gain from studying in this department?
- 8 How do you think about your achievement of the aims?
Possible probes: any challenges or obstacles?
- 9 What are the things or changes that you think could be done to develop the aims?

Questioning Guide for Focus Groups

Session II

- 1 What language skills, what field of linguistics and/or literature do you want to be taught? Why?
Possible probes: Which ones you do not like to be taught? Why?
- 2 What will you remove or add if you are given a chance to do so? Why?
- 3 What modules do you think are the most important? Why?
What modules do you think are the least important? Why?
- 4 How do you make sure if you have learned what you have studied? What are your own criteria?
- 5 What do you think the contents of the modules concentrate on? What types of knowledge? What types of skills?
- 6 Which modules do you think should be given more time? Why?
- 7 What do you like about the content of the course?
Possible probes: What are the weaknesses of the content? What type of knowledge do they cover? What are your suggestions?
- 8 What are the strengths of the content in terms of the selection?
What are the weaknesses of the content in terms of the selection?
Possible probes: What are your suggestions? (are there redundancies, contradictions, insufficient concepts, difficult modules, or any other problem) Note: the explanation between brackets will serve as prompts for further questions.
- 9 What are the strengths of the content in terms of the sequence of the modules?
What are the weaknesses of the content in terms of the sequence? What are your suggestions?
- 10 Do you think the content you learn will prepare you for post university life?

Appendix 6: List of codes generated by the data

Note: The Abbreviations Doc., Int., FG, and MoAC refer to Documents, Interview, Focus Group and members of academic committee, respectively.

Table 5.2.1: Key issues related to curriculum development

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Rationale	Statements suggesting the reasons behind curriculum change	Doc. Int.	6	Head of CDD Head of ELD	University K and T
Change Standards or guidelines	Statements suggesting the reasons behind curriculum change	Doc. Int.	14	Head of CDD Head of ELD	University K and T
Areas of change	Statements suggesting the areas affected by the plan	Doc. Int.	5	Head of CDD Head of ELD	University K and T
Areas not affected by the change	Statements suggesting the areas not/less affected by the plan and the problems that exist in these areas	Doc. Int.	31	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Types of changes	Statements suggesting the types and characteristics of changes	Doc. Int. FG.	25	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Responsibility of carrying out the process	Statements suggesting the responsibility of carrying out the process of changes	Int.	10	Head of CDD Head of ELD MoAC	University K and T
Steps	Statements suggesting the steps of evaluation process	Doc. Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Areas covered by feedback	Statements suggesting the areas covered by feedback	Doc. Int.	4	Head of CDD	University K and T
Types	Statements suggesting the types of feedback	Doc.	1	National level	National level
Areas not included	Statements suggesting the areas not covered by feedback	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T

Table 5.2.2: Challenges and obstacles of implementing the process

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Resistance	Statements suggesting any resistance on the side of teachers	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Cooperation	Statements suggesting limited or lack of cooperation	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Limited authority	Statements suggesting their limited authority	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Limited resources	Statements suggesting lack of necessary resources	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Limited time	Statements suggesting lack of sufficient time	Int.	2	Head of CDD	University K and T
Wrong target	Statements suggesting incomplete or inappropriate targets	FG	8	Head of CDD	University K and T
Drawbacks	Statements suggesting implementation drawbacks	FG	10	Students	University K and T
Financial Crisis	Statements suggesting the relevance of economic crisis	FG Int.	12	Students teachers	University K and T
Student related problems	Statements suggesting any resistance on the side of students or other problems	FG Int.	10	Head of CDD Students teachers	University K and T

Table 5.2.3: Teachers' and students' involvement in curriculum development

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Teachers involvement	Statements suggesting the degree, manner and method of involvement	Int. FG	12	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Teachers limited involvement	Statements suggesting teachers limited involvement	Int. FG	10	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Students involvement	Statements suggesting the degree, manner and method of involvement	Int. FG	14	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Students limited or no involvement	Statements suggesting students limited involvement	Int. FG	14	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Reasons for either case	Statements that express the reason for their involvement or not being involved	Int.	10	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers	University K and T

Table 5.2.4: Students' needs and expectations

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
First days	Statements suggesting students' first days feelings and needs	FG Int.	13	Students Head of ELD	University K and T
Their challenges	Statements suggesting students first days challenge	FG Int.	14	Students Teachers	University K and T
Justifications	Statements suggesting the decision makers' justifications	Int.	4	Head of ELD Teachers	University K and T
Solutions	Statements suggesting solutions for students' problems	FG Int.	12	Head of CDD Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T

Table 5.2.5: Splitting the programme in University T

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Rationale	Statements suggesting the purposes behind the splitting	Int. FG	6	Head of ELD Students	University T
Likes or dislikes	Statements suggesting the likes or dislikes behind the splitting	FG	8	Students	University T
Problems	Statements suggesting the problems associated with the splitting	FG	5	Students	University T

Table 5.3.1: Setting aims

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
National level aims	Statements suggesting existence of national level aims	Doc. Int. FG	12	Head of CDD Head of ELD Students	University K and T
Steps of the process of setting aims	Statements suggesting the procedures of setting aims	FG Int.	14	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Areas of disagreement	Statements suggesting the areas of disagreement regarding the aims	Int.	8	Members of academic committee	University K and T
Students' role	Statements suggesting students' role in setting aims and objectives	FG Int.	8	Head of ELD Students	University K and T

Table 5.3.2: Intended aims of the course

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Implicit aims	Statements suggesting the implicit or indications of the aims	Int. FG	15	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Actual aims	Statements suggesting the actual or future aims	FG Int.	12	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Possible aims	Statements suggesting the possible aims	FG	10	Students	University K and T
Expected aims	Statements suggesting the students' aims	FG	6	Students	University K and T

Table 5.3.3: Achievement of the aims and objectives

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Achieving aims	Statements suggesting the extent of the achievement of the aims	Int.	20	Head of ELD MoAC Teachers Students	University K and T
Challenges and obstacles	Statements suggesting challenges and obstacles of achieving the aims	FG Int.	16	Head of CDD Head of ELD MoAC Teachers Students	University K and T
Solutions	Statements suggesting the steps to be followed to better achieve the aims	FG	15	Head of CDD Head of ELD MoAC Teachers Students	University K and T

Table 5.3.3.4: The intended learning outcomes

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Features	Statements suggesting the quality, clarity, generality and use of outcomes	FG	14	students	University K and T
Classification	Statements suggesting the classification of the intended learning outcomes	Doc.	60	Module Descriptors	University K and T

Table 5.4.1: Setting and approving the syllabi

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
History	Statements suggesting the historical aspect of setting syllabus	Int.	3	Head of CDD	University K
Process	Statements suggesting the process of setting aims	Int.	3	Head of CDD	University K
Number of modules	Statements that refer to the number of modules in each stage	Doc.	3	National level	National level
Classification across years	Statements that refer to classification of the modules at different years	Doc. Int.	6	Head of CDD	University K
Implementation of guidelines	Statements that refer to implementation of guidelines	Doc.	5	National level	National level
Conditions	Statements that refer to the standards of module content	Doc.	1	National level	National level
Process	Statements that refer to the process of setting module content	Int. FG.	12	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T

Roles	Statements that refer to teachers' role in module content	Int.	8	Head of ELD Teachers	University K and T
Number of credit hours	Statements that refer to the number of hours each module is studied	Int. Doc.	12	MoAC Head of ELD Teachers	University K and T
Scheme of the lectures	Statements that refer to how each module is studied	Doc. Int. FG	20	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Approval Process and steps	Statements that refer to how curriculum content is approved	Doc. Int.	6	Head of CDD	University K and T

Table 5.4.2: Perceptions of the content of the modules and the changes

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Academic Debate/ skills	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with Academic skills	Doc. Int. FG	10	Teachers Students	University K and T
French Language	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with French Language	Doc. Int. FG	12	Head of ELD Studetns	University K and T
Communication Skills	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with Communication Skills	Doc. Int.	6	Head of CDD Teachers	University K and T
Grammar	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with Grammar	Int. FG	18	Head of ELD MoAC Teachers Students	University K and T
Pronunciation	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with pronunciation	Int. FG	12	MoAC Teachers Students	University K and T
Information Technology	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with IT	Doc. Int. FG	10	Head of CDD Teachers Students	University K and T
Literature modules in University K	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with Literature modules in University K	Int. FG	14	MoAC Teachers Students	University K
Literature modules in	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with	Int. FG	10	Head of ELD Students	University K

University T	Literature modules in University T				
Studying English and non-English authors	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with French Language	Int. FG	10	Teachers Students	University K and T
Linguistics Modules	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with linguistics modules	Int. FG	14	Head of ELD Teachers Students	University K and T
Graduation Research Paper	Statements that refer to the implementation, importance and problems associated with Graduation research paper	Doc. Int.	8	Head of ELD Students	University K and T

Table 5.4.4.1: Perceptions of optional modules

Code	Definition	Sources	Refs	Participants	Case
Importance and necessity	Statements that refer to importance and necessity of optional modules	Int. FG	16	Head of ELD MoAC Students	University K and T
Effects and benefits	Statements that refer to consequences and benefits of having or not having optional modules	Int. FG	14	MoAC Students	University K and T
Challenges	Statements that refer to challenges of introducing optional modules such as cost, infrastructure, academic resources or other barriers	Int. FG	14	Teachers Students	University K and T

Appendix 7: List of Modules in Undergraduate English Programme in Academic Year 1998-1999 in University K

First Year	
Modules	Credit Hours
Introduction to Literature	4
Comprehension I	3
Introduction to Phonetics	3
Grammar I	3
Writing I	3
French Language	2
Kurdish Studies	2
Second Year	
Modules	Credit Hours
Drama I	3
Comprehension and Writing	4
Novel I	2
Grammar II	3
Introduction to Phonology	3
French Language	2
Poetry I	3
Third Year	
Modules	Credit Hours
Translation I	3
Drama II	3
Novel II	3
Essay Writing	2
Introduction to Morphology	3
Spoken English	2
Poetry II	3
IT	2
Fourth Year	
Modules	Credit Hours
Translation II	2
Drama III	3
Novel III	3
Introduction to Literary Criticism	2
Theoretical Linguistics	3
Grammar III	2
Poetry III	3
Introduction to Applied Linguistics	2
Graduation Paper	2

Appendix 8: A Coded Sample of Data (First Session of Interview with Head of ELD in University T)

Me: Thanks for participating in this interview.

Head of ELD: It's my pleasure.

Me: Can you please explain the process of curriculum reform and development?

Head of ELD: It started in 2009-2010, I think. Ministry in the sixth cabinet of KRG started a reform process, uh, part of it was related to curriculum. They introduced some standards that each department had to follow in this reform. (Code: A top-down policy for reform)

Me: What was the reason behind this reform?

Head of ELD: It was to renew the curriculum, to introduce critical thinking to the programmes, balance theory and practice and to add some modules to equip the graduates with necessary skills for their after university life. (Code: the areas of change, the aims of the reform) The ministry's plan is to internationalize the curriculum. (Code: Area of change) For this, some modules are added to year 1.

Me: In your department, who were involved in this process?

Head of ELD: We were all involved.

Me: I mean, who was responsible to carry out the reform?

Head of ELD: So, There were six people on the academic committee (Code: Responsible for carrying out reform), we sat together, we talked about what could be offered, (Code: holding meeting(s) , no mention of other methods) what we could take away, what would be useful to students, (Code: Addition or omission of knowledge) and from then we developed a new curriculum, it then went to the college council for approval.

Me: Excuse me, why college council?

Head of ELD: We have to send them back to University for approval (Code: Draft is approved by the University), but we don't send them directly from the department. They are collected, unified and put together. Because the, uh, changes include all departments. Yea, this is an administrative procedure.

Me: What was teachers' role in these changes?

Head of ELD: It is done by the teachers, but if you ask me each and every teacher, I would say no. (Code: only some teachers are involved) Who are the members of academic committee? Who is the head of department? We are all teachers. But probably, the members of academic committee are more experienced (Code: condition of being involved in decision making), or have more qualifications and they might indirectly or informally consult the other teachers in some issues.

Me: Did students have any voice in that?

Head of ELD: No, not really, there were not. We wanted to talk with some students to say that we are thinking of doing this, how do you feel about this? But everybody didn't agree. So, we didn't have them in the committee. (Code: no student involvement)

Me: Personally, what is your opinion of students' involvement in this process?

Head of ELD: In principle, students should be able to voice their concerns. We have to hear them. We have to listen to them. (Code: a moderate view) We don't follow this system here. There might be truth in it that at this moment it might not be so useful to ask students what they want. (Code: hesitant about students' involvement) We feel the students' attempts to pass rather than learn. We see it every day. I am sure that they will be asking for less content in quantity and easy material in quality. Based on my experience, students at this level ask for things that are easy. Once we set the curriculum, they say we don't want to study this, this is too difficult. (Code: decision makers: we know better than students what is good for them) The teachers cannot teach us this. We are not going to do this and they cause a lot of problems (Code: The reason behind students' not being involved). I kind of removed that issue in the splitting the curriculum into linguistics and literature.

Me: How do you incorporate students' needs and interests in the curriculum?

Head of ELD: Students need to have necessary skills to be open to the diverse job market after graduation. (Code: job-related skills) Before that, everybody wanted to be a teacher and was expecting to be employed in the public sector (Code: the need for diverse skills). We need to help them know that there are lots of opportunities out there if they acquire necessary skills.

Me: How do you know about their needs related to the programme of their study?

Head of ELD: What students want at this stage is different from what we know they need in the future. (Code: students' current needs and their future needs) At this stage they care about only being able to speak in English (Code: students expected aims, teachers are aware), but for us, university should offer a lot more than a mere language course. We want them to have knowledge about English linguistics and literature. (Code: department's intended aims) In addition to that the content of the curriculum is quite flexible that students can find their interests in it. (Code: major split considered as flexibility)

Me: I will come back to the issue of splitting the programme probably at the end of this session.

Head of ELD: Okay.

Me: How do students access knowledge?

Head of ELD: It is different from literature to linguistics branch. But in general, I can say that the students in linguistics mostly rely on the teachers and books (Code: More traditional teaching in linguistics branch). I think it is more useful for the literature side, because in linguistics, they are learning the syntax of sentences by reading them and having to write them as well. But in literature, they do for example, creative writing and they write a lot of essays and in linguistics learning the way language is put together (Code: instances of different teaching and assessment), so it doesn't flow in the same way.

Me: In your opinion, what types of knowledge students should learn?

Head of ELD: I think there should be a balance between subject knowledge and other skills. **(Code: balance between theory and practice, intention)** Again, for the literature side, because they sometimes have group discussions, essays, presentations, they acquire a variety of knowledge in different areas. I am not saying it is better or it is worse than linguistics, because some people are more technical and it suits them more to look at language in separate areas.

Me: What types of skills do you think should students learn?

Head of ELD: Apart from those skills that could be directly attained as a result of learning the discipline knowledge, the plan of the ministry and our plan is that the graduates have the skills of critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. **(Code: subject knowledge and generic skills)**

Me: Speaking of Subject or discipline knowledge, how do you decide about the breadth or depth of what the students should learn?

Head of ELD: What we have tried to do, is in the first stage, there is foundation year, so they are getting a spread. **(Code: year one as introduction)** The focus is on English language, we are giving them grammar, pronunciation, writing skills, reading skills, they are getting a spread, they are also doing an introduction to linguistics, and introduction to literature. Academic skills, so they are doing things not in depth **(Code: towards more theory)** because they have just come from school. So it is difficult for them **(Code: students' problems when they join university)** as they face a very big change. There are not as many lessons, it is not as structured. So, we try to give them a taste of things. Going into a second year, we start to go a little bit deeper in that we are gonna give them theory of things **(Code: towards more theory)**. So they are gonna do the theory of linguistics and theory of literature, this will give them an understanding and start to think critically about how they will approach a study. Then in third or fourth stage they should get into it very deeply **(Code: more depth in year four)**.

Me: How do you provide learning opportunities to your students? What is the role of students? How motivated are the students? How do you think it could be improved?

HEAD OF ELD: Our aim is that teaching leads into learning. We want to make teaching an active process; we are not just feeding information. (Code: intention for better pedagogy, aware of current teaching problems)

Me: How do you make this happen?

Head of ELD: Good teaching practice, student focused, and this is what I ask my teachers. We had little bits of training in working as a facilitator in the classroom rather than we as teachers stand in the front and we give information and the students receive it, (Code: acknowledgment of current teaching problems) the students have to be involved in their learning. But these trainings should include all teachers and be systematic. (Code: need for teacher training)

Me: Can you explain the role of teachers a bit more?

Head of ELD: Yes. So, I encourage my teachers to do group work, to do seminar work, not just to talk at the students but actually have them involved (Code: suggesting alternative methods of teaching). Unfortunately still many teachers lecture most of the time. (Code: teachers' unwillingness to apply alternative methods of teaching) It is good to have a lecture in the first half and then let them have some work so that they embed the information and the knowledge and understand what is it about.

Me: How motivated are the students?

Head of ELD: Generally, they are not. Yes but of course there are many good students. In general, I would say that they try to find the easy way out if they can, (Code: students focus more on passing than on learning) but as I said that is not all of them. There has been a very distinct change, in the way students are approaching their studying. And I have even noticed with our first year students that they have to write an small exam, a short paragraph about comparing school and the university. Many of them were saying that the school was better because they were told things and they were given one book, and then they had to learn from this book (Code: students find university difficult when they first come), whereas university is much more difficult, because they have to learn and they have to use different sources, but it is better and the teachers are better.

Me: Can you explain the assessment process in your department?

Head of ELD: For assessment, we try to assess our students continuously, certainly for the first stage, there are class tests, pop quizzes, that just fly up every now and then (Code: Traditional assessment), for the other stages as well. Yea, in creative writing we are having a portfolio that it is done over the year, (Code: instances of alternative assessments), I have instances of students that bring me nothing related to what they have ever been taught. So I have created marking criteria, so the students know that this is what I am looking for. Have we used what we have studied during the year. Have used metaphor and similes. How have you presented your work. And the students are given this criteria, clear marking system. The same is available to oral presentations (Code: instances of alternative assessments). We have it for essays, so we are trying to make it fair, all teachers when they are marking something, they have to fill in the sheet, when the student comes at the end of the year and say what is my mark low, and what did I do that I have lost marks. Then, we can show the student that it is because of that reason, you didn't do this. You didn't present this. You didn't use the correct language. And we can show them the marking system.

Me: What about assessment of other modules?

Head of ELD: It is not always like that, we have changed things to best of our ability. If you ask me is it what I want, I would say no (Code: Acknowledging the problems with current assessment) (Code: intention for change). We have mixed up things a lot. My idea is to take the emphasis more off the final exam. So may be 60 throughout the year and 40 for the end of the year. Not only that, if I am given permission, sometimes the final exam in modules like sociolinguistics and research methodology we can follow a different methodology like essay writing. (Code: no authority to apply changes to assessment).

Me: What are the challenges?

Head of ELD: As I said, we are not allowed to carry out the assessment the way we like. They are standardized and the changes that I mentioned have not been done easily (Code: Standardized system of assessment, difficult to change). We also face resistance from teachers, students and authorities (Code: resistance to change). Also, we need to train our teachers for any change we make.

Me: This would be our last topic for this session. Could you please mention the reasons of major split?

Head of ELD: Well, I think that it was needed in that **students were doing lots of modules and for what purpose** (Code: **reduce the workload of students**), they were maybe doing ten, mixed up with literature and linguistics. They are two very different branches. So, **if a student is good at one thing, it doesn't mean that they are good at another** (Code: **assumption that students want either linguistics or literature**). If they enjoy one thing, would they enjoy the other? We found that there was a very big change between the two types of learning. So, in linguistics the students were using a book, and memorizing, because there are more mathematical. Whereas in literature we are introducing essays, understandings, having to know things, we are introducing a much deeper level of understanding of the E language through the literature and demanding more of the students and it was too much work for them really. **Also, this way we can concentrate on depth rather than some general coverage** (Code: **Studying each branch more in depth**). So, splitting them was actually a good idea. I just think that it is good for students to follow one pathway.

Me: Thanks for your time and I am looking forward to continuing this interview in the next session.

Head of ELD: You are welcome.

Appendix 9: List of Documents

	Type of Document	Number
1	2014-2015 Activity Report issued by Curriculum Development Directorate	1
2	Directive No: 5888, dated 17/04/2012, about Guidelines for First Year Academic Debate, issued by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Directive No: 20369, dated 05/02/2011, about First Year Syllabus Revision, issued by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	2
3	Meeting Minute for Heads of Curriculum Development Directorate, dated: 21/11/2013	1
4	Ministerial Order No: 22771, dated: 30/11/2011, General Guidelines for Curriculum Reform Process, issued by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	1
5	Program Development Guidelines, issued by Curriculum Development Directorate, dated: 12/01/2012	1
6	Available Module Descriptors for both English Language Department Undergraduate Programme for Academic Year 2014-2015	40

Appendix 10: Student Feedback Form

Table P2-2
Student feedback on the subject

Subject Title:			
Course	Date	Year	Professor
Department	College	University	

No.	Assessment question	Score (1-5)	Notes
1	Were the objectives and goals of the subject clear?		
2	Was the subject material useful? Was it related to the subject outline?		
3	Was the subject book prepared well?		
4	Did the professor explain the subject objectives well and outline the important points?		
5	Was the professor ready for the class on time?		
6	Was the professor respectful and quiet during the class?		
7	Were the presentations clear and interesting?		
8	Did the professor leave time for questions and answer them well?		
9	Were the learning resources up to date and relevant to the subject?		
10	Overall score		

Assessment scale			
1-2 Not good	2-3 Average	3-4 Good	4-5 Very good

Appendix 11: Timetable of English Department, University T

Day	Room	1 A	Room	1 B	Room	2A	Room	2B	Room	3 Linguistics	Room	3 Literature	Room	4 Linguistics	Room	4 Literature	Time	
Saturday	1	Ac. Skills	2	Linguistics	3	Linguistics	4	Lit. Theory	5	Phonetics	6	Critical Theory	7	Pragmatics	8	Modern Drama	9:00	
	1	Ac. Skills	2	Linguistics	3	Linguistics	4	Lit. Theory	5	Phonetics	6	Critical Theory	7	Pragmatics	8	Modern Drama	10:00	
	2	Linguistics	1	Ac. Skills	4	Lit. Theory	3	Creative non-fiction			7	Translation	6	Semantics	8	PC Literature	11:00	
	2	Linguistics	1	Ac. Skills	4	Lit. Theory	3	Creative non-fiction			7	Translation	6	Semantics			12:00	
										6	2 nd L. Learning				4	Lit. & Identity	1:00	
										6	2 nd L. Learning				4	Lit. & Identity	2:00	
Sunday	7	E. & Commination			2	Creative non-fiction	1	Linguistics			8	Poetry			4	PC Literature	9:00	
	7	E. & Commination			2	Creative non-fiction	1	Linguistics			8	Poetry					10:00	
			2	E. & Commination				6	Communication	8	Psycholinguistics			1	Applied Linguistics	7	Cyber Literature	11:00
			2	E. & Commination				6	Communication					1	Applied Linguistics	7	Cyber Literature	12:00
	2	E. & Commination			1	C. Writing			8	Communication	7	Creative Writing					1:00	
	2	E. & Commination			1	C. Writing			8	Communication	7	Creative Writing					2:00	
Monday			7	E. & Commination			2	Grammar			8	Drama	1	Morphology			9:00	
			7	E. & Commination			2	Grammar			8	Drama	1	Morphology			10:00	
	7	E. & Commination			2	Grammar			8	R. Writing					1	Lit. & Performance	11:00	
	7	E. & Commination			2	Grammar			8	R. Writing					1	Lit. & Performance	12:00	
			7				1	C. Writing			2	R. Writing			8	Folklore	1:00	
			7				1	C. Writing			2	R. Writing			8	Folklore	2:00	
Tuesday	7	E. & Commination	C	IT	8	Prose Fiction			1	Sociolinguistics					2	Modern Poetry	9:00	
	7	E. & Commination	C	IT	8	Prose Fiction			1	Sociolinguistics					2	Modern Poetry	10:00	
			C	IT			8	Prose Fiction			7	Short Story	2	Translation			11:00	
	C	IT					8	Prose Fiction			7	Short Story	2	Translation			12:00	
	C	IT	7	E. & Commination			8		1	Syntax			2	Discourse Analysis			1:00	
	C	IT	7	E. & Commination			8		1	Syntax			2	Discourse Analysis			2:00	
Wednesday	7	Literature			1	Translation							2	Lang. & Ideology	8	Translation	9:00	
	7	Literature			1	Translation							2	Lang. & Ideology	8	Translation	10:00	
			2	Kurdish			1	Translation	8	Translation	4	Novel					11:00	
			2	Kurdish			1	Translation	8	Translation	4	Novel					12:00	
	7	Kurdish	7	E. and Commination	2	Communication			4	Psycholinguistics			1	ELT			1:00	
	7	Kurdish	7	E. and Commination	2	Communication							1	ELT			2:00	

Appendix 12: Timetable of English Department, University K

Day	Room	1 A	Room	1 B	Room	2A	Room	2B	Room	3 A	Room	3 B	Room	4 A	Room	4 B	Time	
Sunday	4	Literature	5	Grammar			L	Novel	6	Linguistics	1	Poetry	7	Poetry	8	TESOL	8:30	
	4	Grammar	5	Composition	L	French Language			6	Morphology	1	Linguistics	7	Criticism	8	Syntax	9:30	
	4	Composition					5	French Language	6	Poetry	1	Essay	7	TESOL			10:30	
	4				L	Novel					1	Morphology	7	TESOL	8	Criticism	11:30	
										4	Essay							12:30
																		1:30
Monday	4	Comprehension	5	Phonetics			L	Composition	6	Linguistics	1	Poetry	7	Criticism	8	Drama	8:30	
	4	Phonetics	5	Comprehension	L	Novel	1	Conversation	6	Translation	7	Linguistics	8	Drama	9	Criticism	9:30	
	L	IT	5	Vocabulary	L	Grammar	1	Conversation	6	Poetry	7	Drama	8	Novel			10:30	
																	11:30	
	4	Vocabulary	L	IT	5	Conversation	1	Phonology	6	Morphology	7	Essay			8	Poetry	12:30	
					5	Conversation	4		6	Drama	1	Translation			7	Novel	1:30	
Tuesday	4	Phonetic	5	Comprehension				7	Composition	6	Essay			7	Drama		8:30	
	4	Kurdology	L	IT	5	Comprehension	1	Grammar	6	French	7	Drama			9	Novel	9:30	
	L	IT	5	Kurdology	4	Phonology	1	Comprehension	6	Drama	7	Essay	8	Novel	9	Drama	10:30	
	4	Kurdology	5	Phonetics	L	Drama	1	French Language	6	Essay			7	Translation			11:30	
			5	Kurdology			1	Drama	6	French	4	Morphology	7	Poetry	8	Translation	12:30	
					5	French									8	Poetry	1:30	
Wednesday	4	Grammar			5	Poetry	7	Phonology	1	Drama	6	Poetry	7	Poetry	8	Syntax	8:30	
	4				5	Grammar	1	Poetry	L	Novel	6	Drama					9:30	
	4	Comprehension	5	Grammar	L	Phonology	1	Grammar	6	Novel	7		8	Linguistics	9	TESOL	10:30	
	4	A. Debate	5	Grammar	L	Composition	1		6		7	Novel	8	Linguistics			11:30	
			5	A. Debate	L	Composition	4	Novel	1	Poetry	6	Novel	7	Novel	8	Linguistics	12:30	
			5	A. Debate											8	Linguistics	1:30	
Thursday			5	Literature	4	Drama	L	Conversation	1	Translation			7	Drama	8	Poetry	8:30	
	4	Literature	5	Composition	L	Comprehension	1	Drama			6	Translation	7	Syntax	8	Drama	9:30	
	4	Composition	5	Vocabulary	L	Poetry	1	Grammar			6	Novel	7	Syntax			10:30	
	4	Vocabulary	5	A. Debate	L	Grammar	1	Poetry	6	Novel	7	French	8	Translation	9	Syntax	11:30	
	4	A. Debate					5	Comprehension			7	French	8	Syntax	9	Translation	12:30	
	4	A. Debate															1:30	

Appendix 13: Module Descriptor Template



Department of

College of

University of

Module Title:

Year:

Module teacher: ...

Academic Year:

Course Book

1. Module name:	
2. Lecturer in charge:	
3. Department/ College:	
4. Contact:	
5. Time (in hours) per week:	
6. Office hours:	
7. Course code:	
8. Teacher's academic profile:	
9. Keywords:	
10. Module overview:	

11. Module objective:	
12. Student's obligation:	
13. Forms of teaching:	
14. Assessment scheme:	
15. Student learning outcome:	
16. Course Reading List and References:	
17. The Topics:	Lecturer's name
18. Practical Topics (if there is any)	
19. Examinations (samples):	
20. Extra notes:	
21. Peer review	

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