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PhD PROGRAM IN EDUCATION SCIENCES

*Alignment of Learning Outcomes, Course Content and Assessment in English as a Foreign Language Program (University Language Preparatory School)*

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## INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of education worldwide nowadays is not only to equip the learners with the knowledge in the field, but also to train them to use this knowledge in practice and real-life situations, as well as to build the basis for the continuous development/self-learning in the future. Writing an effective syllabus for a course / curriculum for a program is a significant way to provide knowledge and skills applicable in the future professional activities. Besides many other requirements to the syllabus the logical alignment between its components is of utmost importance. While seeking for the alignment between the competencies a learner must acquire, teaching and learning methodology and the way of measuring the attainment of the learning goals, every component of an educational program has to be viewed not as an independent issue, but as an inseparable part of an education mechanism.

Intended learning outcomes are the measurable and observable statements of what a learner is expected to know and able to do at the completion of an educational process (Arum, Cook, & Roksa, 2016; Byram & Hu, 2013; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2015; Morss & Murray, 2005; Nygaard, Holtham, & Courtney, 2009; Solnyshkina et al., 2016; Spady, 1994; Spector, 2013). Having a clear knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes on every stage of learning and teaching process makes education more purposeful and meaningful. So students can choose a university to study at according to what learning outcomes they will be able to obtain upon the completion of the program and can be more aware of what they are expected to acquire to successfully finish certified programs. From teacher perspective, the clearly stated set of the intended learning outcomes can be used as a framework for the development of the content of the program and appropriate assessment methodology for the measurement of the attainment of the learning goals (Stiggins, 2017).

Depending on the scope of the educational program, the definition of the learning outcomes can be based on the data received from the needs analysis on national, regional, institutional, faculty, departmental, or class level. The decision should be made very scrupulously, since the learning outcomes statements decide the fate of the development of follow-up actions - the development of the content of the course, teaching, and assessment methodology (Arum, Cook, & Roksa, 2016).

The content of an educational program is supposed to equip the learners with the sufficient knowledge and skills in the field of study, so the depth and the width of the content should support the attainment of the desired learning outcomes.

The role of assessment is to measure how well/much the learning goals were acquired on every stage of the educational process and to take, if needed, necessary actions to improve teaching and learning strategies, such as providing learners with the constructive feedback, including recommendations for the further development.

For a long period of time English has been taught in Iraq through rote memorization of grammar rules (very often using students' native language), sentence and dialogue chunks, plus some vocabulary (Ismael, 2017). In fact, this way of teaching has appeared insufficient to prepare students for real communication. Furthermore, English language learners have been expected to be able to communicate in oral and written form, but the assessment has been conducted in 'paper and pencil' format, which consists of a limited variety of assessment tools (Ismael, 2017). Consequently, the learners and the teachers focus on what is assessed in order to succeed in the exams. This includes such classroom activities and assessment, which imitate final tests.

The researcher<sup>1</sup> has been teaching English as a foreign language since 2001, including three years of experience as a member of the university language school testing office, where she was responsible for preparing, organizing and conducting examinations. Observing students' / teachers' performance before and after exams and analyzing the exam results to give feedback to students, parents, and principals in order to develop further strategy, the researcher has faced with a number of situations, such as:

- The quality of students' performance in the class during the semester sometimes contradicted the score they had for their final exam.
- Some students, even though they managed to get a passing grade, were not able to communicate in English (written, spoken or both).
- Students often have difficulties in interpreting and using assessment reports.

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<sup>1</sup> As 'the researcher' in this dissertation its author, Venera Ulker, will be mentioned.

- Some EFL learners attending all classes, regularly doing homework and engaged in classroom activities are not able to acquire the required material in an appropriate way, thus are not able to get at least the minimum passing grade.
- Centralized exams and teacher-prepared exams may focus on different issues, with the choice influencing students' performance on summative exams.

All these make the topic of my research **significant**.

**The problems** of teaching EFL in Iraq are the inability of EFL language learners to obtain the desired learning outcomes upon the completion of language preparatory programs due to the low level of alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment at university language preparatory programs, caused, in its turn, by EFL teachers' insufficient competence of development effective syllabuses / curriculums.

The **goals** of this research, correspondingly, were:

- to develop a detailed and effective procedure of providing alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment;
- to increase the EFL students language skills' levels as result of application of the suggested procedure;
- to find out the causes that students and teachers gave for language skills and satisfaction increase;
- to increase student satisfaction level through the suggested alignment model;
- to develop recommendations for EFL teachers that will help them to design more relevant syllabuses.

The **hypothesis** of the research is:

Carefully working on the alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment according to the suggested by the researcher procedure will increase EFL students' language skills' level as well as their satisfaction level.

The suggested model / procedure (presented in detail in conclusions to chapter 3), in particular, involves:

- developing such learning outcomes which include communicative (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic) and general (background, cultural and learning) competences, as well as values, to be provided by the lesson / course / program;
- offering the materials, topics, language functions, and applying learning activities in congruence with the learning outcomes;
- carrying out formative and summative assessments relevant to the expected learning outcomes;
- providing feedback while applying formative assessment that will help to attain the desired learning outcomes.

To find the solutions to the problems mentioned above, the following **methods of research** were used:

- Analysis of the literature on the topic under the investigation
- Experiment applying the suggested procedure
- Assessment before, during and after the experiment
- Questionnaire applied to students
- Interview applied to students
- Interview applied to teachers
- Analysis of the students' answers to the questionnaire
- Analysis of the interview applied to students
- Analysis of the interview applied to teachers
- Analysis of the experiment results

Thus, the methods of the research were quantitative and empirical.

### **Novelty of the research**

The alignment between the components of an educational program is usually associated with the name of John Biggs (2011), who described and gave recommendations for the implication of alignment to the courses of the university major programs on the example of University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong) and University of Tasmania (Australia). The implication of this model has gained recognitions by researchers (Dillon et al, 2007; Fink, 2013). The idea of alignment was faced both positive and negative criticism (Carless, 2015; Gardner, 2011). Yet there have been very

few studies to show whether it is advantageous when compared to traditional way of teaching English as a foreign language. Furthermore, very few empirical studies were conducted in university language preparatory schools and none in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where the given research was held.

### **Theoretical value**

The theoretical bases of the current research are:

- the notion of student learning outcomes (e.g. Arum, Cook, & Roksa, 2016; Banta & Palomba, 2014; Beyerlein, Davis, & Apple, 2009; Dillon, Reuben, Coats, & Hodgkinson, 2007; Khan & Bontha, 2017; Nygaard, Holtham, & Courtney, 2009; Watson, 2002);
- the design of the desired learning outcomes (e.g. Anderson & Krathwoh, 2001; Assaly & Smadi, 2015; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956; Daugherty, Black, Ecclestone, James, & Newton, 2011; Marzano & Kendall, 2007);
- the ideas of EFL program syllabus design (e.g. Banta & Palomba, 2014; Briggs & Wager, 1981; Brown & Green, 2015; Connelly & Connelly, 2013; Das, 2013; Diamond, 2011; Luke, Woods, & Weir, 2013; Nunan, 1988; O'Brien, Millis, & Cohen, 2009; Richards, 2001; Sierocka, 2014);
- the major requirement of effective assessment (e.g. (American Educational Research Association; American Psychological Association; National Council on Measurement in Education; Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 2014; Banta & Palomba, 2014; Black & Wilian, 2012; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013);
- the idea of outcomes-based assessment (e.g. Deardorff, 2015; Dillon, Reuben, Coats, & Hodgkinson, 2007; Khan & Bontha, 2017);
- alignment of intended learning outcomes, course content and assessment (e.g. Biggs J. , 2014; Stiggins, 2017; Yamanaka & Wu, 2014).

The detailed procedure / model of providing the alignment between the on the alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment constitutes the main theoretical value of the dissertation. It can be used as the theoretical foundation of the assessment policy in university language schools.

The practical materials and the recommendations developed in the dissertation will, hopefully, enable teachers / assessors of English as a foreign language to assist their students' language acquisition, as well as to provide more reliable, objective and interpretable data about students' learning progress, which might generate the **practical value** of the study.

### **Structure of dissertation**

The dissertation consists of the following parts: Introduction, 4 chapters, conclusion, and appendixes. There are 18 tables and 10 figures in it. The dissertation is printed on 134 pages.

## **CHAPTER 1. SYLLABUS DESIGN AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Nowadays, education is under the pressure of time and the demands of the rapidly changing and developing world. Educators are required to be involved in continuous research seeking new approaches, methods, and techniques to improve the quality of education in general and meet various constantly changing needs of the learners. Being restricted by time, students and teachers are obliged to find the shortest and the most appropriate ways to achieve the learning goals.

Learning goals, or intended learning outcomes, are the statements of what a learner is expected to know and is able to do in order to successfully finish a course or a program. They are usually expressed in the form of observable and measurable verbs (identify, categorize, compare, conclude, etc.), and avoid use of vague or ambiguous words or phrases which are difficult to assess (believe, memorize, understand, know, think, etc.)

One cannot expect to attain any goals without having these goals identified. There are various sources for the information regarding learning objectives and variables influencing the selection of them. The learning outcomes can be derived from the learners themselves, some accepted standards, employers' requirements, etc. The data received from these sources give educators a better understanding of the expectations from an educational program. Defining the desired learning outcomes, it is important to ensure that all of them are clearly stated, realistic, accessible, and assessable. It is necessary for the development of the other components of an educational program (content, tasks, activities, assessment, etc.).

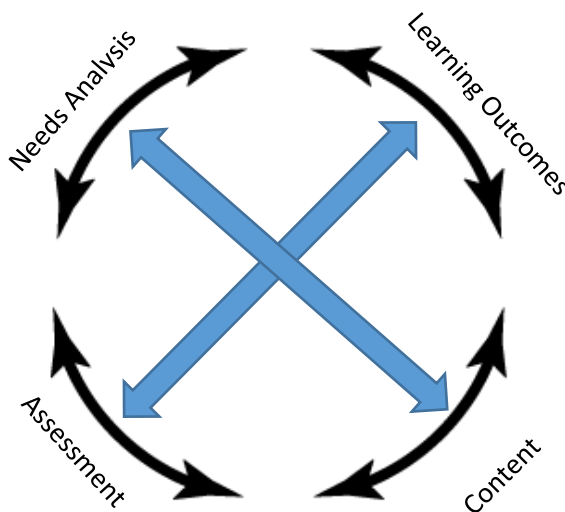


Another important procedure is the examination of the students' current situation in order to obtain information about what they already know and are able to do. These data enable educators to identify the starting point and decide on the most appropriate input to achieve the learning goals.

Once the general learning outcomes (long-term learning outcomes) are defined and the information about the learners is obtained, curriculum/syllabus designers make decisions on specific learning outcomes (short-term learning outcomes), the achievement of which will lead to the achievement of the course goals.

To provide a stronger balance between the components of an educational program (learning outcomes, course content, and assessment), educators are recommended to use Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives and its revised version. Both include lists of learning outcomes on Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor domains in hierarchical order, so they can be used for reference in syllabus and lesson plan design.

Based on the literature review in this chapter, the following model of syllabus design can be recommended (figure 1):



**Figure 1. Syllabus design model (designed by the researcher)**

As it is illustrated in the figure, all the constituting parts of a syllabus are interconnected and based on students' and future employers' needs analysis. The decision on one of the components cannot be done without taking into consideration other variables. Sometimes, even a very carefully designed syllabus may not fit the needs of a particular group of students, so teachers should be ready to make

the necessary changes to improve teaching and learning. The presented model of syllabus design is believed to be helpful for educators to provide the alignment between learning outcomes, contentment of a course and assessment.

## **CHAPTER 2. ASSESSMENT IN EFL**

Assessment is a very important part of higher education and increasingly important for the quality of student outcomes. As presented in this chapter, assessment can be classified into several different types and all of them have their application in higher education. Oral and written, subjective and objective, traditional, testing and alternative assessment types, formative and summative assessment are analyzed in the chapter, to identify their advantages and disadvantages, and their link with various learning outcomes.

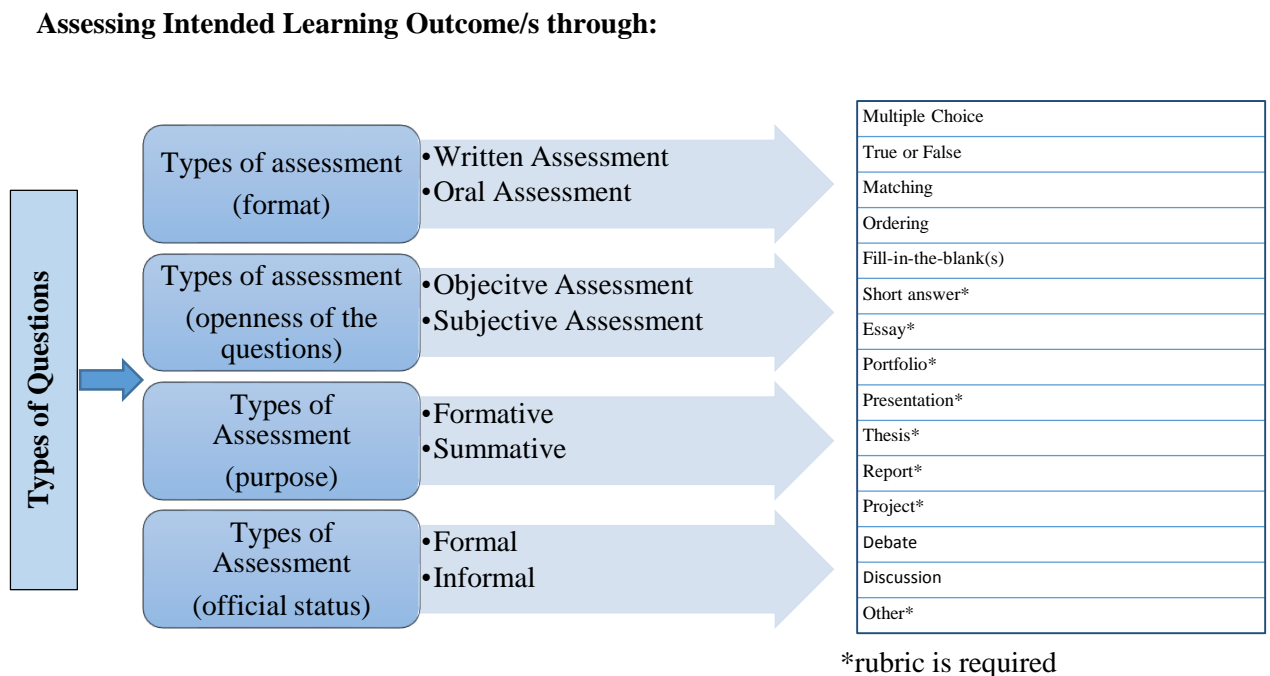
As language communication exists in oral and written form, both types of assessment of EFL skills should occur in the process of teaching the language. This is a specific feature of the assessment of foreign language skills compared to many courses / subjects whose knowledge and skills may be assessed only in written.

Apart from the different types of assessment, varying the strategies of assessment are very important. Students do not need only a grade at the end of a course or program. Of course, it is necessary to measure students' learning, but what they also need is as good guidance through the whole study program as possible. This guidance can be provided with the help of formative assessment and constructive feedback.

Objective assessment is necessary, as students need to feel they are fairly assessed. On the other hand, subjective assessment permits to assess students' analytical skills, creativity, etc. Whenever we deal with subjective assessment, the use of rubrics is one of the most important parts of the assessment procedure in the educational sector for assessing students in a formative and summative way. The use of rubrics is highly recommended by scholars for more than just one aspect. For example, they are good for detailed feedback to students after and during the assessment. Another meaningful application of rubrics is the guidance of students and their improvement in learning, which is very important for the quality of an educational institution. The major requirement to the rubrics is their ability to assess and demonstrate students' attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

In order to increase the effectiveness of assessment procedures, educators must take into consideration its validity, reliability, usefulness, practicality, authenticity, transparency and security. All these characteristics must be considered to make assessment meaningful, purposeful, and reliable in terms of being able to measure and demonstrate the degree of attainment of the desired learning outcomes.

Based on the literature review for this and previous chapter the following figure can be recommended to choose the most appropriate assessment procedure (see figure 2).



**Figure 2. Assessment design inventory (designed by the researcher)**

It is possible to see that various types of assessment (according to format: written / oral, to openness of the question: open, closed, to the purpose: formative and summative; and its degree of formality: formal / informal) may also involve various types of questions (for **written**: multiple choice, true/false, matching, ordering, gap-filling, short answer, essay, portfolio, thesis, report, project; for **oral**: dialogue/role play, individual or group presentation, portfolio, project, discussion / debate; for **objective**: multiple choice, true/false, matching, ordering, gap-filling, short answer; for **subjective**: short answer, essay, portfolio, thesis, report, project, etc.; all can be used both for formative and summative, as well as for formal and informal assessment).

### CHAPTER 3. DEVELOPING THE MODEL FOR PROVIDING THE ALIGNMENT OF ASSESSMENT, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND SYLLABUS

While developing and applying an EFL lesson plan, syllabus or curriculum the educators must carefully choose the components (content, materials, activities, and assessment) to provide the attainment of the desired learning outcomes, ensuring that all of them support each other and there is a balance between them.

Even though alignment between the lesson / syllabus / curriculum components is not a linear process, the development of the aligned educational program should undergo several stages, which should function cyclically. First, it is necessary to conduct an appropriate needs analysis and define the desired learning outcomes, which must be measurable and observable. Second, the appropriate content – topics, materials, teaching and learning activities must be designed. Third, educators must decide how the attainment of each learning outcome can be measured. For the selection of the most appropriate course content and assessment for the desired learning outcomes the following table is recommended (table 1).

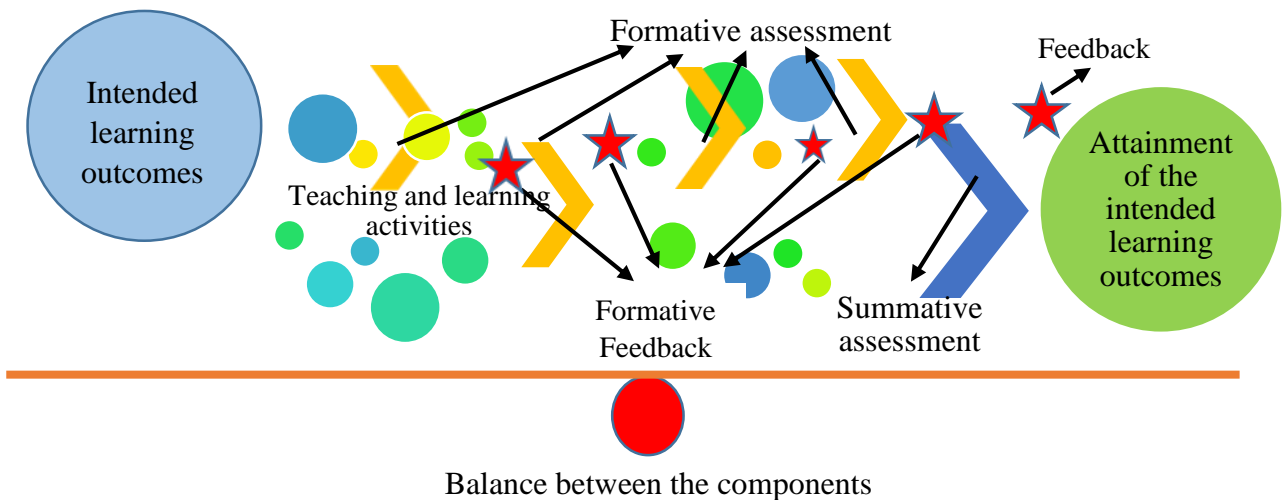
**Table 1. Alignment model** inventory (developed by the researcher, based on CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001))

Learning outcomes:	Competences (sub-components)	Course content	Assessment
Communicative competences:			
Linguistic:	Lexical, phonological, orthoepic, orthographic, semantic	Knowledge of vocabulary pronunciation, spelling, denotative and connotative meaning, word-building, collocation, grammar forms	Close-ended tests, reiterating words after the recording (with assessment software)
		Ability to comprehend vocabulary while listening and reading and use it while speaking and writing in accordance with this knowledge	Listening/reading comprehension tasks, oriented on vocabulary meaning; dialogues, discussions, debates, portfolios, projects, presentations and essay-writing, highly requiring the given vocabulary (with rubrics)

	Grammatical, phonological, orthoepic, orthographic, semantic	Knowledge of structures and morphology	Close-ended tests
		Ability to comprehend structures and morphological forms while listening and reading and use them while speaking and writing	Listening/reading comprehension tasks, oriented on the given grammatical materials; dialogues, discussions, debates, portfolios, projects, presentations and essay-writing, highly requiring the given grammar (with rubrics)
Sociolinguistic		Basic knowledge about style, politeness, turn-taking rules, dialect and accent	- (not assessed, but has a certain impact on assessment, especially on higher levels)
		Ability to apply this knowledge to form utterances, relevant to the goals and situation by style, politeness, turn-taking, dialect and accent	Essays, letter-writing, dialogues, discussions, debates
Pragmatic	Discourse: listening, speaking, reading, and writing	Knowledge about text structure, its coherence and cohesion	Essays, letter-writing, projects
		Ability to listen, speak, read and write according to topics and communicative functions within the given level	
General competences:			
Background		Knowledge, corresponding to the education level, of the world which enables to comprehend the utterances while listening and speaking	- (is not assessed, but has a great impact in the process of assessment)
Sociocultural		Knowledge about one's own and various, especially English-speaking, cultures, which enables to provide adequate communication	- (is not assessed, but has a great impact in the process of assessment)
Study	Autonomous learning / Independent language study	Vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension, planning, editing, etc. strategies; memorization and recollection	- (is not assessed, but has a great impact in the process of assessment)

		strategies, elicitation strategies	
Values	Linguistic	Positive emotions towards the language under study	- (is not assessed)
	Cultural	Positive attitude and/or tolerance towards the culture(s) of the English-speaking and other nations	- (is not assessed)

The application of the alignment model should start from informing students about what they are expected to master and how this mastery will be measured and graded. By doing so the learners are expected to be more involved in the learning process and better aware of what and how they need to study in order to successfully finish the course or obtain the certificate. The course content (including teaching methods, approaches, techniques, as well as the materials, topics, language functions, tasks and activities) should empower students with the necessary knowledge in the field and sufficient practice. Teachers may start from guided / teacher-assisted practice, followed by less guided practice and end up with independent practice supported by formative assessment and constructive feedback. Figure 3 is provided to visually show the process of application of the alignment model into practice.



**Figure 3. Application of the alignment model (developed by the researcher)**

The EFL teaching methods, providing the given learning outcomes, should be communicative and interactive, based on student-centered teaching approach. The learning materials from the textbook

and the ones provided by the teacher should be carefully assessed for the correspondence to the intended learning outcomes and modified, if necessary (if there is lack of correspondence). The alignment model presented in table 1 and figure 3 served the basis of teaching in the experimental group during the experiment.

#### **CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study investigated the effect of alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment on the development of the overall language proficiency of EFL learners. The research was held at Ishik University Language Preparatory School, Erbil, Iraq, during 2016-2017 academic year for approximately six months. Forty three students with A2 level of English skills initially volunteered to participate in this study. They were at random placed to two groups, but finally 40 students remained (three students dropped out due to various reasons). Eventually there were 19 participants in the experimental group and 21 - in the control group.

The control group received the instruction in the traditional way, applying the school curriculum, while teaching in the experimental group, in addition to the regular program (same textbooks, period of time, etc.), was done according to the suggested alignment model: the teacher in detail analyzed the learning outcomes and then carefully aligned them with course content and assessment. The students were continuously informed about the aims/learning outcomes, why they needed the particular materials, themes, language functions and activities, as well as the methods of assessment.

Before the experiment a pre-test was conducted to ensure that the starting levels of English language proficiency of the participants in both groups were similar, at the end of which the students were asked to participate in the questionnaire survey in order to find out their experience and attitudes towards the proposed method of teaching and assessment.

In the middle of the experiment, a while-test was applied in the control and experimental groups to measure the progress in both groups. As soon as the experiment was over, an immediate post-test was applied in order to determine the overall final level of the students' performance. Approximately one month after the experiment, the delayed post-test was held in order to determine the persistence of the obtained learning outcomes.

The present study aimed to reveal the impact of application of alignment model on the development of a university language preparatory school students' English language proficiency. The following conclusion have been made:

The quantitative results of the experiment show that the improvement of English language proficiency level in both groups, control and experimental, took place, however, the improvement of results in the experimental group was more significant, compared to the control group (Table 2). The control group improved by 22.95% (M=55.86→68.67)) from the beginning to the end of the experiment, while experimental group showed an increase by 34.66% (M=55.96→75.32)) within the same period. Thus, the hypothesis of the research was supported by means of the quantitative data obtained from the comparison of the pre-, while-, and post-tests in both groups.

**Table 2. Summary of Testing Results out of 100%**

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test	Control Group	21	55.86	4.246	.927
	Experimental Group	19	55.95	4.515	1.036
While One Test	Control Group	21	59.14	4.963	1.083
	Experimental Group	19	62.74	5.556	1.275
While Two Test	Control Group	21	63.57	4.377	.955
	Experimental Group	19	67.63	7.197	1.651
Post-Test	Control Group	21	68.67	5.073	1.107
	Experimental Group	19	75.32	7.674	1.761
Delayed Post-Test	Control Group	21	66.76	5.403	1.179
	Experimental Group	19	74.16	8.368	1.920

According to the results of the delayed post-test, the experimental group (M=75.32→74.16) demonstrated a more durable resistance to change than the control group (M=68.67→66.76), with the decrease in the CG (- 1.905) and in the EG (- 1.158). That enables the researcher to assume that teaching and learning according to the approach where students' learning outcomes, course content, and assessment are aligned with each other have a continuous positive effect even when no manipulation (teaching and learning) is implemented.



With the respect to the questionnaire, it was revealed that the students were in favor of being informed about what they were expected to master, how the attainment of the learning goals was going to be measured, and how much the content of the program supported their learning. It was found out that there was a positive relation between the aligned approach to teaching and learning and students' satisfaction of the whole course.

The interviews revealed that both teachers and students found intended learning outcomes statements useful if they are given at the beginning of the course and then periodically in the process of studies. All participants had the same opinion and stated that it can be very helpful if teachers periodically inform students about what they are expected to know and to be able to do in order to succeed on the exams, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the probability of attainment of the desired leaning outcomes increases if the students, as well as teachers, have a clear understanding of the purpose of teaching and learning process. Both groups of interviewees totally agreed that assessment is a strong motivational tool which not only pushes teachers and students to perform better, but also reveals what is done well and what is needs improvement.

The quantitative results together with the qualitative ones, enabled the researcher to conclude that the hypothesis of the present study was fully addressed.

## CONCLUSION

1. Education nowadays aims not only to empower learners with theoretical knowledge, but also to promote the development of the ability to apply this knowledge in practice, as well as to improve real-life skills, abilities, attitudes, and mental processes, such as analysis, synthesis, and creation of new ideas. The goals of an educational program are indicated in the learning outcomes statements in the curriculums and syllabi worldwide.
2. Learning outcomes are the statements of what a learner is expected to know and to be able to do at the completion of an educational program. These statements are the results of a scrupulous needs analysis collected from the learners, graduates, parents, documents related to the field of study, employers, teachers, researchers, etc. Learning outcomes are the 'axis' on which the whole educational process has to be built.

3. Carefully designed intended learning outcomes statements provide information to a wide spectrum of consumers:
  - Students can receive a clear information about what knowledge and skills they need to obtain to be employed and to use in real-life situations;
  - School graduates (and their parents) can/should choose a program and educational institution based on the learning outcomes it provides, if they care about their future;
  - Students can have a clearer picture of what they are expected to know and to be able to do in order to successfully finish the course and obtain a certificate;
  - Teachers can use the learning outcomes statements in order to choose, develop, and improve their teaching methodology to help learners to achieve their learning goals;
  - Administrators can use learning outcomes statements to indicate the directions and specialization of their programs;
  - Faculties use the learning outcomes statements to make decisions about the student achievements;
  - Employers can make their employment decisions based on the learning outcomes statements in diploma supplements; etc.
4. The learning outcomes are usually stated in the description of an educational program which is usually called curriculum. The purpose of this document is to inform its users about the program objectives, teaching and learning activities, course prerequisites and contents, and assessment procedures. The goal of the syllabi within the program is to provide analogous information on each study course. Lesson plans should also reflect the alignment among teaching goals, educational materials, and instructional and assessment methods. The learning outcomes of the curriculum / syllabus / lesson plan have to be provided by adequate materials, topics, activities and assessment.
5. Assessment is a powerful driver that motivates learners to actively participate in the learning process and perform better. From teachers' perspective, assessment helps teachers to choose the most appropriate teaching methods and activities, to reveal the degree of acquisition of the target material, and to give feedback to the learners for the further improvement. The assessment also gives valuable information to administration, so they can judge students' performance, the productivity of teaching and learning activities, and make decisions for future changes and developments for the development of the instruction and the increase of

the quality of the knowledge and skills to be acquired. Furthermore, assessment is used to analyse a wider picture of the condition in the field of education on national and international levels.

6. The bridge between the intended learning outcomes and assessment is the course content. The major purpose of the course content is to provide the attainment of the intended learning outcomes. The depth and width of the content should be closely connected to the assessment tools and instruments chosen to measure the attainment of the learning outcomes. Thus, all three components: learning outcomes, course content, and assessment, must be in harmony and support each other.
7. The alignment between the intended learning outcomes, course content, and assessment, directly influences the most important characteristics and requirements of assessment: its validity, reliability, usefulness, and practicality.
8. The design of aligned outcomes, course content, and assessment model teaching and learning should undergo several stages:
  - Needs Analysis;
  - Definition of the learning outcomes;
  - Selection of the content for the intended learning outcomes;
  - Assessment and selection of the activities for the intended learning outcomes;
  - Selection of teaching / learning methods, strategies and approaches relevant for the intended learning outcomes;
  - Assessment design adequate to the intended learning outcomes.

Having made the decisions on what learning outcomes the course will focus, what teaching and learning activities will be used, and how the attainment of the learning goals will be measured, teachers should reflect them in the syllabus, which later must be distributed to the students, so as the learners will be able to refer to it whenever necessary.

9. The implementation of the suggested model has to involve several operations that should be applied cyclically: briefing or informing students about first long-term and then, regularly, short-term learning outcomes; lesson planning or provision of the necessary input and practice of its acquisition supported by formal assessment and feedback; formative assessment of students' achievements; and their final assessment.

10. It was hypothesized that implementation of the suggested alignment model in teaching English as a foreign language in a university language preparatory school would improve students' English language proficiency level more than in the traditional way of teaching. The quantitative results showed that both the control (CG) and the experimental groups (EG) improved their mean scores on first and second while-tests and post-test compared to the pre-test, but EG demonstrated a significantly better improvement rate than the CG. The statistical significance of the better changes in the experimental group was also revealed through paired samples T-test, which supported the hypothesis of the present study. The CG students mean score increased from 55.86 to 68.67 in post-test, but decreased to 66.76 in delayed post-test, while the EG students' score increased from 55.96 in pre-test to 75.32 in post-test, but in delayed post-test decreased to 74.16, exhibiting a more resistant result. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed.
11. The questionnaires applied before and after the experiment in the control and experimental groups reveal that there is a positive relationship between showing students the learning targets, balanced approach in choosing teaching and learning materials, assessment and students' level of satisfaction. The students of the control group liked the course slightly more than the one they had had before they were accepted to the university, so the mean changed from 1.8 to 2.19, while in the experimental group the increase was significantly higher, so the mean drastically changed from 1.89 to 3.21 points. Thus, the quantitative data obtained from questionnaires supported the hypothesis of this research.
12. The qualitative (interview) results show that students were in favour of being informed about what learning outcomes they were expected to obtain, and the experimental group teachers found it effective to inform students about what they are expected to know and to be able to do at every stage of the learning process. The teachers realized that with the suggested steps they could choose course content, teaching and assessment methods that would maximally promote the achievement of the intended learning outcomes by their students. The more carefully realized alignment between the learning outcomes, course content, and assessment led to a higher satisfaction with the whole program. The students of the experimental group and their teacher emphasized that there are the following benefits of the way the teaching / learning was done in the group: it helps to focus on the activities and on lesson goals, to study for exams, to realize the problems that the students have, with independent study, to

choose on what to concentrate attention, to see the knowledge and skills in progress. The activities become more meaningful, students' self-confidence increases, and students get constructive feedback.

13. It was found out that aligning learning outcomes, course content, and assessment positively influences students' satisfaction level, who find teaching and learning more transparent, purposeful, meaningful, and practical as a result of the implementation of the alignment model. So, this model can be recommended to be used to increase the learners' satisfaction of an educational program, to involve students into active learning, and to help them to achieve their learning goals.

From teachers' perspective, the alignment model enables teachers to develop their teaching methodology, choose the most appropriate tasks and activities to support the acquisition of the intended learning outcomes, and use assessment to measure the degree of attainment.

Thus, the alignment model can be recommended for teachers as a template for the design of informative, transparent, and practical syllabi.

14. Based on the literature review and the data received from the interviews, it was revealed that the application of the alignment model may be time-consuming for teachers and students, as well as too conscious, so not permitting students and teachers to relax. To overcome these disadvantages the following recommendations can be given:

- Planning ahead, making a plan can save time
- Focusing on tasks and activities that support the attainment of the intended learning outcomes, reducing the time or avoiding the irrelevant activities.
- Instead of using a lot of extra material, tasks and activities, teachers should update, reshape, or make some changes of the already existing (e.g., provided in the textbook) ones, making them more engaging and interesting (e.g., in the form of games or competitions).
- Giving some of the tasks as homework, so save class time and develop learners' autonomy.
- Implementing communication technologies, so as to make lessons / activities more engaging (e.g., for peer assessment, peer review, group/pair projects using Google Docs)
- Spending less time on teacher talk and more time on student practice, etc.

15. The results of the experiment, questionnaires, and interviews, which were used to assess the effectiveness of the alignment model, proves that the suggested in the research model is an effective way to develop EFL learners' overall English language proficiency. It can, after additional research, be recommended for implementation not only for university language preparatory school, but in any program on any educational level.

The major results of the dissertation were published in the following articles:

1. V.Ulker, U.Ulker. (2015). Implementation of speaking summative assessment rubrics in the educational process. The 5<sup>th</sup> International Research Conference on Education, English Language Teaching, English Language and Literatures in English (IRCEELT), p. 453-464. Tbilisi
2. V.Ulker, (2017). Foreign language course content development: psycholinguistic nature of speaking skill. The 7<sup>th</sup> International Research Conference on Education, English Language Teaching, English Language and Literatures in English (IRCEELT), p.908-914
3. V.Ulker (2017). Impact of alignment between learning outcomes and assessment on English as a foreign language students' writing skills development (Ishik University Language Preparatory School Case). Journal of Education in Black Sea Region, vol. 3, iss.1, p. 139-148
4. V. ULker, (2017). The Design and Use of Speaking Assessment Rubrics. Journal of Education and Practice, Vol. 8, No 32, p. 135-141
5. V. Ulker, (2017). The Alignment of Teaching Methodology and Learning Outcomes: The Effect of Students' Presentations on the Development of English Language Proficiency of Adult Learners" International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 132-139