



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



Using a Learning-Oriented Assessment Business English Course to Enhance University Students' Employability Skills and Test Scores

*Dr. Ahmed M.M.Abdelhafez**

Abstract

The research aimed at exploring the impact of a business English course on enhancing university students' employability skills and test scores. The course was based on a learning-oriented assessment framework and was given to thirty students at Minia University. Three instruments: the BULATS online test, a learning outcomes questionnaire and student self-reports were used to collect quantitative and anecdotal evidence. The findings revealed that the course had a positive impact on enhancing the students' test scores as well as their employability skills. Eighty percent of the students moved from beginner and elementary levels of language proficiency to intermediate and advanced levels. In addition, the students enhanced their employability skills such as communication, teamwork, using technology, and personal attributes. These skills, in addition to language knowledge and skills, are considered essential in the 21st century competitive market place. The findings were discussed in relation to the socio/cultural context and previous literature.

Key words *Learning-oriented assessment, employability skills, BULATS, university students, 21st century skills*

* Dr. Ahmed Abdelhafez is a lecturer at the Dept. of Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language , Faculty of Education, Minia University. Email address: Abdelhafez.edu@mu.edu.eg



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



أثر مقرر في اللغة الإنجليزية في مجال الأعمال قائم على مدخل التقييم من أجل التعلم لتمكين طلاب الجامعة من مهارات التوظيف وتحسين درجاتهم في اختبار اللغة

د. أحمد محمد محمود عبدالحافظ

مدرس بقسم المناهج وطرق التدريس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

هدف البحث إلى دراسة أثر مقرر في اللغة الإنجليزية في مجال الأعمال على تمكين طلاب الجامعة من مهارات التوظيف وتحسين درجاتهم في اختبار اللغة الإنجليزية في مجال الأعمال. واعتمد المقرر على مدخل التقييم من أجل التعلم، وتم تدريس المقرر لعينة من طلاب جامعة المنيا من مختلف كلياتها تكونت من ٣٠ طالباً وطالبة درسوا المقرر بالجامعة ضمن مشروع الطرق المؤدية للتعليم العالي Pathways وبدعم من جامعة كمبردج والمركز الثقافي البريطاني. واشتملت أدوات الدراسة على الاختبار الإلكتروني للغة الإنجليزية في مجال الأعمال BULATS واستبيان لقياس مخرجات تعلم المقرر (من إعداد الباحث) وتقارير الطلاب الذاتية. أسفرت نتائج البحث الكمية والكيفية عن أثر إيجابي للمقرر في تحسين درجات الاختبار وتمكين الطلاب من مهارات التوظيف لدى عينة البحث، حيث ارتفعت مستويات غالبية الطلاب (٨٠ %) من المستوى المبتدئ والمستوى الأساسي إلى المستويات المتوسطة والمتقدمة في اختبار اللغة، كما تمكن الطلاب من مهارات التوظيف مثل مهارات الاتصال، ومهارات فرق العمل، ومهارات استخدام التكنولوجيا وسمات الشخصية. وخلص البحث إلى ضرورة الاهتمام بهذه المهارات بجانب التخصص للمنافسة في سوق العمل في القرن الحادي والعشرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم من أجل التعلم – مهارات التوظيف – طلاب الجامعة – اللغة الإنجليزية في

مجال الأعمال – مهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين



Introduction

Graduates need a set of skills which will equip them for work in the international economy of the 21st century. Those seeking employment must have not only the subject knowledge required, but also generic skills necessary to operate harmoniously and productively within the organization. In a recent survey of young people, employers and institutions in the wider Middle East and North Africa region, the British Council stated that 'the biggest reported skills gaps were in language, communication, problem-solving and interpersonal skills' (British Council, 2013, p. 4). Thomas *et. al.* (2016) add that the role and outcomes of English language provision remain central to any discussion on graduate profile and the employability of graduates in the global marketplace. It is asserted that employability demands highlight the close relationship between higher education and the socio-political/ socio-economic context in which they operate in the Arab region and foreground the importance of producing work-ready graduates in the coming years (Thomas *et. al.*, 2016).

The relationship between employability and the model of assessment in the educational system could be established here. Kelly (2004) stresses the must of planning the assessment of learners by adopting models which will be supportive of the curriculum because the adoption of unsuitable models of assessment can only lead to distortion. Unfortunately, a mismatch exists between the assessment model and the curriculum orientation and design in the Egyptian context (Gahin, 2001; Abdelhafez, 2011). Current assessment practices focus mainly on written final exams with no room for oral tests or ongoing learning assignments. It is argued that the current culture of examinations is one of the factors that contribute to shallow learning outcomes of graduates who do not have the adequate knowledge, skills and/or attitudes to compete in the current economic climate of competitiveness and rare employment opportunities. The current examination culture focuses on grades. Students look for ways to obtain the best marks rather than to improve their learning.



Teachers look carefully at the type of questions being asked in the test and adjust their teaching to address these forms. This practice results in narrowing the curriculum to reflect the demands of the tests. It also results in the use of teaching practices which are considered most beneficial to successful test performance. However, these practices reflect a mismatch with the assumptions of assessment and teaching for effective learning.

It is worth noting that the old paradigm of assessment viewed exams as an end in itself (focusing on summative tests and high-stake exams) which geared students to cram for tests and digress from focusing on the learning process. This paradigm has been (and unfortunately is still) in place for quite long. One option for resolving this dilemma is by making the exam benefits the learning process. The paradigm shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning (or more recently learning-oriented assessment) is a step forward to place exams in right position. A missing link in the debate is the 21st century employability skills. Students may be prepared well in subject discipline, but they fail to succeed in life because they lack essential generic skills such as communication, team work, problem solving and critical thinking. Education must have a role to play with this regard to bridge the gap between what learners know and what they can do with what they know.

The current study attempts to strike a balance between the role played by formative assessment through the provision of feedback while preparing for a test and the role played by summative assessment in providing an external measure of L2 ability. This balance could not only improve the students' test scores, but also, and more importantly, enhance their employability skills. When students set a goal for learning, e.g. improving their oral presentation skills while preparing for a test, they start to work towards achieving this goal. Besides, they are expected to develop this skill and become goal-oriented. Students could also become motivated because they are tested the way they are taught and learn. In this way, assessment becomes a bridge



linking learning and teaching (Colby-Kelly & Turner; 2007).

Carless (2009) highlights that the goal of assessment should be to stimulate desired learning outcomes, the kind of dispositions that students need in the workplace and beyond. In this vein, Knight (2006) summarizes research into what employers look for in university graduates: (imagination/creativity; adaptability/flexibility; willingness to learn; independent working/autonomy; working in a team; managing others; working under pressure; good oral communication; communicating in writing for varied purposes/audiences; attention to detail; time management; taking responsibility and decisions; and planning, coordinating and organizing). It is worth noting here that focusing on these desired learner outcomes facilitates the acquisition of the necessary employability skills and attitudes of graduates who become more ready for the workplace. Carless (2009) claims that ‘many traditional assessments do not adequately develop these attributes but it is hoped that the notion of learning-oriented assessment can contribute to the development of desired learning outcomes’ (p.86).

Employability skills

Yorke and Knight (2003) identify employability as a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. While there are variations in the classification of employability, there is a broad understanding of what qualities, characteristics, skills and knowledge constitute employability both in general, and specifically for graduates. Employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities (Lowden *et.at.*, 2011, p.vi).

Young and Chapman (2010) highlight that employers who operate in global labor markets now seek employees who possess not only high-level technical or job-specific competencies, but also, high



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



levels of what are known as generic competencies. According to Young and Chapman (2010), these competencies are not specific to any given job or work role, but are generic and critical to success across different types of jobs. They surveyed various frameworks of these competencies and provided a comprehensive list of employability skills based on reviewing several models worldwide. The frameworks came mainly from five advanced countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The Australian framework includes eight employability skills: (1) effective communication; (2) teamwork skills; (3) problem-solving; (4) planning and organizing; (5) self-management; (6) learning skills; (7) initiative and enterprise, and (8) technology skills.

The New Zealand framework underscored five key competencies (the 5Cs) that were considered essential for entry-level employees. These competences were: (1) Communication (e.g., writing, reading and speaking); (2) Cooperation (e.g., teamwork and relating to others); (3) Computer literacy (e.g., accessing electronic information); (4) Creativity (e.g., thinking laterally); and (5) Critical thinking (e.g., evaluating and synthesizing). The British model comprised three basic competencies: numeracy, IT, and communication with each defined at five levels, ranging from: Level 1 – foundation to Level 5 - professional/managerial. In addition to the three basic skills, three wider key skills (teamwork, a commitment to life-long learning, and problem-solving skills) were promoted by the British Government as important to ensure that individuals remained employable throughout their lives.

As for the framework of the United States, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) developed a list of competencies defined as essential to create a highly competitive workforce. The SCANS skills include three foundation skills necessary for effective work: (1) basic skills (e.g., reading and writing); (2) thinking skills (e.g., decision making, problem-solving and reasoning); and (3) personal qualities (e.g., responsibility, self-



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



management and integrity/honesty). Five competencies were also identified that high-performance employees required for work. These competences were: (1) interpersonal (e.g., leading and negotiating); (2) systems (e.g., identifying trends and improving designs); (3) planning/managing resources (e.g., using materials efficiently and distributing work effectively); (4) information (e.g., using computers); and (5) technology (e.g., applying technology and solving technological problems).

The Canadian framework included four categories of skills that reflect the demands of the global economy. These categories were: (1) fundamental skills (e.g., communicating, problem-solving and managing information); (2) personal management skills (e.g., being adaptable, engaging in lifelong learning); (3) teamwork skills (e.g., working well with others, participating actively in projects and tasks); and (4) an orientation toward specific values and attitudes (e.g., demonstrating integrity and responsibility).

It is worth noting from the above-mentioned frameworks that there are six employability skills which are there in almost all frameworks. These are: (1) communication, (2) teamwork, (3) problem-solving, (4) lifelong learning, (5) personal attributes and (6) technology skills. It is also noted that the Australian framework is the most comprehensive one with all these last six employability skills found in it. Young and Chapman (2010) concluded that given that employers in today's economy tend to favor individuals with good generic competencies, nations that focus on developing such competencies place their citizens at a distinct advantage.

The relationship between assessment, from one hand, and employability skills, from the other hand, is established in previous literature. Deeley (2014) investigated the effects of co-assessment on enhancing employability skills and attributes of 8 fourth-year students in a Public Policy undergraduate degree program in a Scottish university. Co-assessment was defined as a shared system of assessment, synonymous with co-operative and collaborative assessment involving self-assessment in addition to assessment by the



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



teacher or a peer while giving oral presentations and requiring the student and teacher to reach a mutually agreed appropriate grade for the assignment through discussion and negotiation. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews and a focus group with the students, Deeley found that co-assessment was discovered to be a major help to students in their learning because it helped to confirm and validate their self-assessment. The opportunity for students to discuss feedback on the content and delivery of their oral presentations on a one-to-one basis with the teacher increased their understanding of the employability skills. Besides, the negotiation and agreement of marks between the students and teacher involved diplomatic communication skills. It was also found that giving oral presentations by the students themselves raised their awareness of the employability skills and personal attributes that they had developed during the course. Deeley (2014) revealed that through the course through oral presentations and their co-assessment, the students developed numerous skills and attributes such as time management, organizational skills, adaptability, flexibility, leadership, decision-making and problem solving, critical reflection, self-evaluation, teamwork, communication, confidence and motivation.

In a recent study in Bahrain in the area of teaching English as a foreign language, Thomas et. al. (2016) suggested a model of employability skills consisting of 8 skills and attributes: communication (including English language skills), teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organization, self-management, learning, and technology. Their research focused on English workplace communication skills amongst a sample of Bahrain employers and students at Bahrain Polytechnic. Using a mixed methods approach, data was gathered through telephone interviews, student workplace simulations and employer focus groups. Findings show that generic employability skills, channeled through English as a second or additional language, are highly valued by Bahrain's employers. In particular, students need to market themselves as confident, knowledgeable individuals during the recruitment process

•••

تصدرها كلية التربية جامعة المنيا

gamel_abdo59@yahoo.com

<http://ms.minia.edu.eg/edu/journal.aspx>



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



and after recruitment, continuing to operate successfully in the sociolinguistic culture of their company. Consequently, it is concluded that English language training in higher education programs needs to move from purely linguistic and degree-related content areas to a broader remit of English for communication purposes that covers both specialized discourse fields and broader generic employability skills and competencies.

Thomas et. al. (2016) point out that having communication skills is key to employability, not just because they are essential per se, but because they are the vehicle to demonstrate being competent in other employability skills. Employers require employees to demonstrate critical thinking/problem solving and workplace engagement linguistically. Not only do employers want employees who can engage with a problem, analyze it fully, understand the context, and move from general idea to specific response so as to arrive at an appropriate and meaningful conclusion, but they want employees that can articulate these critical and analytical processes to others in written or oral form. Thomas et. al. (2016) found that expected employees lack the ability to articulate ideas in a business context and clearly categorizing their thoughts into a structured paragraph with clear points.

Learning-Oriented Assessment

Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA henceforth) is defined as assessment where a primary focus is on the potential to develop productive student learning processes (Carless, 2015, p.964). Wyner (2014) defines LOA as a form of classroom-based assessment, which is a unique form of assessment concerned with the nature of the classroom itself and all its agents in the development of learning. Accordingly, LOA is seamlessly embedded into classroom activities not only for the learner to receive continuous feedback, but to be able to digest it, apply it, and gain autonomy over own learning.

According to Carless (2007), in LOA, learning comes first, both in the way the term is literally constructed, and as a matter of the principle of emphasizing the learning aspects of assessment. A

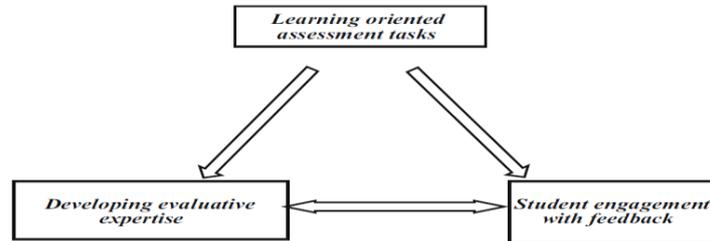


potential strength of LOA is that it can be applied to formative or summative tasks, particularly when the latter are designed in terms of 'assessment tasks as learning tasks' (Carless, 2007. p.65). He suggests that when assessment is functioning efficiently, there is substantial overlap between the two main purposes of assessment (i.e. the certification element which focuses principally on evaluating student achievement and the learning element).

Carless (2009) proposes that LOA is based on three principles: (1) assessment tasks should be designed to stimulate productive learning practices amongst students; (2) assessment should involve students actively in engaging with criteria, quality, their own and/or peers' performance; and (3) feedback should be timely and forward-looking so as to support current and future student learning.

Carless (2015) proposed a model of three simple but powerful interlocking principles of LOA predicated on the development of student learning processes (see figure 1). The apex of the model is represented by the assessment tasks which students are undertaking. Evaluative expertise on the left of the figure represents the evolving ability of students to engage with quality criteria, develop their self-evaluative capacities and make informed judgments about their own work, and that of others. The feedback strand of the learning-oriented assessment model places emphasis on student engagement with feedback highlighting that the key purpose of feedback is to support students in developing their self-regulative capacities.

Figure (1): Model of LOA



LOA represents an attempt to reconcile formative and summative assessment and focus all assessment on the development of productive student learning



(Carless, 2009). According to Carless (2009), LOA comprises three interlocking dimensions: assessment tasks as learning tasks; student involvement in assessment; and the closing of feedback loops.

Assessment tasks

Task design is a key factor impacting on the kind of learning required of students. In LOA, as suggested by Carless (2007), when assessment tasks embody the desired learning outcomes, students are primed for deep learning experiences by progressing towards these outcomes. Carless (2007) sets two conditions for assessment tasks as learning tasks. First, the tasks should promote the kind of learning dispositions required of graduates and should mirror real-world applications of the subject matter. Second, the tasks should aim to spread attention across a period of study, not lead to short-term bursts of sustained study for an end of module assignment; or in the case of examinations the memorizing of material which is soon forgotten.

Student involvement

The second component of LOA is student involvement in assessment. Turner & Purpura (2015) states that ‘an LOA approach to assessment assumes that while curriculum, instruction, and assessment impact L2 processing and learning success, other factors (e.g., learner engagement) also play an important role in the assessment process of L2 learning’ (p. 265). This component is essential for students to develop a better understanding of learning goals and engage more actively with criteria and standards (Carless, 2007). The ability to self-evaluate is one of the most important skills that can be fostered in students to maximize their active involvement in assessment. Carless (2009) highlights that students need to be able to self-evaluate for the purpose of current assignments whilst also developing this skill for future use in the workplace.

Feedback

The third dimension of LOA is student engagement with feedback or the closing of feedback loops. Carless (2007) points out that for



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



assessment to promote learning, students need to receive appropriate feedback which they can use to ‘feedforward’ into future work. LOA is formative because it allows for the provision of feedback. Wyner (2014) proposes that ‘language learning is not simply about content and formulas that can be memorized, but is also predicated on properly applied feedback that can guide learners toward further learning and promote learner autonomy.’ (p. 38).

Carless (2009) points out that information provided to students is not feedback unless it leads to some current or future student actions which enhance learning. Much of what is viewed as feedback does not qualify as feedback because it is information which is not used, in other words, the feedback loop is not closed. By closing the feedback loop, feedback should be acted upon by the student to enhance their learning and the giver of feedback is able to identify the extent to which the recipient has acted on it.

It is worth noting that the three dimensions of LOA are intended to be seen as a unified whole, rather than composed of discrete elements. For example, assessment tasks are most effectively focused on learning when they incorporate student involvement and how feedback loops can be closed; feedback is likely to be more effective when students are cognizant of criteria and are monitoring their progress towards the stated standards.

In action, LOA proceeds in the following seven steps (Ali, 2013; Hamilton 2013):

- 1- Identifying learning objectives that are linked to both learner needs and external requirements (e.g. frame of reference and/or external exams)
- 2- Selecting assessment tasks which should reflect the content covered.
- 3- Establishing appropriate scoring rules which can be used for appraisal purposes.
- 4- Giving learners a task to do.
- 5- Appraising which involves the actual scoring and grading the task

٥٠٤

تصدرها كلية التربية جامعة المنيا

gamel_abdo59@yahoo.com

<http://ms.minia.edu.eg/edu/journal.aspx>



- performance by the teacher, the learner, or peers.
- 6- Interpreting and valuing scores by interpreting grades and valuing them against the potential standards.
 - 7- Giving feedback which should support and guide the learners and indicate strengths and weakness and provide them with information on how to improve future performance.

Ali (2013) suggests that LOA can be successfully implemented by involving students through continuous, peer- and self – assessments, and training students and teachers in using them as well as involving students in preparing assessment criteria and standards.

Context

The LOA framework with the steps listed above was implemented in two EFL classrooms while I was giving a BULATS preparation course to university students. The course was part of a project funded by a skills development program (Pathways to Higher Education) in Egypt in association with ESOL, Cambridge University through which the BULATS test (after the completion of the course) was administered. The course was held at Minia University, a third partner. All instructors in the program were given a 90-hour-course to deliver blended learning BULATS preparation courses. The teacher training was held at the British council in Cairo before the beginning of the training program to students in the current study.

Questions

The study aims to answer the following two questions:

- 1- What is the impact of the BULATS course on enhancing university students' employability skills?
- 2- What is the impact of the BULATS course on improving the students' BULATS test scores?

Methodology

The descriptive analytical methodology is used to analyze quantitative and qualitative data obtained by the instruments of the study. This methodology is appropriate to the aims of the research to describe and

• • •

تصدرها كلية التربية جامعة المنيا

gamel_abdo59@yahoo.com

<http://ms.minia.edu.eg/edu/journal.aspx>



analyze the impact of the BULATS course on enhancing the students' employability skills and test scores.

Sample

Data were collected from 30 university students enrolled in two classes, 15 in each class. Most of the students were non-majors of English from the faculties at Minia University. Most of the students selected for the course were motivated and their levels of language were suitable to proceed in the course. The report issued by Cambridge English Language Assessment (Khalifa et.al.2013) determined the proficiency level selection criterion for students to be enrolled in the BULATS course as within the A1 (beginner level) to B1 (lower intermediate level) range of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This level was determined based on the performance in Cambridge placement test which the students took before they started the course. The aim is to have a high proportion of students graduate from the course at B2 level (upper intermediate) or higher so that they are able to function independently in the workplace as far as language proficiency is concerned. It is worth noting that the CEFR identified six levels of language proficiency. These levels are: A1 (beginner level for the range of scores between 10 and 19 out of 100), A2 (elementary level for the range of scores between 20 and 39 out of 100), B1 (lower intermediate level for the range of scores between 40 and 59 out of 100), B2 (upper intermediate level for the range of scores between 60 and 74 out of 100), C1 (advanced level for the range of scores between 75 and 89 out of 100), and C2 (very advanced level for the range of scores between 90 and 100 out of 100). Students at B2 level (the target level for the students joining the BULATS course) can use the telephone with good understanding; understand most reports and non-routine letters, with dictionary help; deal with clients and resolve most problems in their own field; and write more complex messages and non-routine factual letters, if work is checked.

Instruments

Three methods of data collection were used in the current study: the online



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



BULATS test, the learning outcomes questionnaire and student self-reports. BULATS Online is a suite of computer-based tests of business language skills. It is designed to test the language of employees or students who need to use a foreign language in a wide range of business contexts and is suitable for candidates at all levels of language ability. BULATS Online has three modules which can be taken separately or collectively: Reading and Listening, Writing, and Speaking.

The BULATS test was administered immediately after taking the course and the students' scores were reported in the findings section to provide evidence of the impact of training on enhancing the students' test scores. The second instrument was a learning outcomes questionnaire developed by the researcher to find out the students' views regarding the impact of the course in improving their knowledge and skills. The questionnaire consisted of twenty items related to employability skills that were highlighted in previous literature and validated by three TEFL experts. In addition, the participants were asked to write an essay reporting on how the course was useful to them in terms of preparing them for future jobs. The self-reports were analyzed qualitatively and selected quotations were presented and commented on in the section of self-report findings. The use of three methods served as a triangulation technique to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the reported findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative findings are displayed in this section. Quantitative findings resulting from the BULATS test and the learning outcomes questionnaire are presented first. They are followed by qualitative findings revealed by the students' self-reports.

Students' test scores in the BULATS test

Twenty three students took the BULATS Online test. Table (1) presents the students' scores in the BULATS test in the four skills.



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



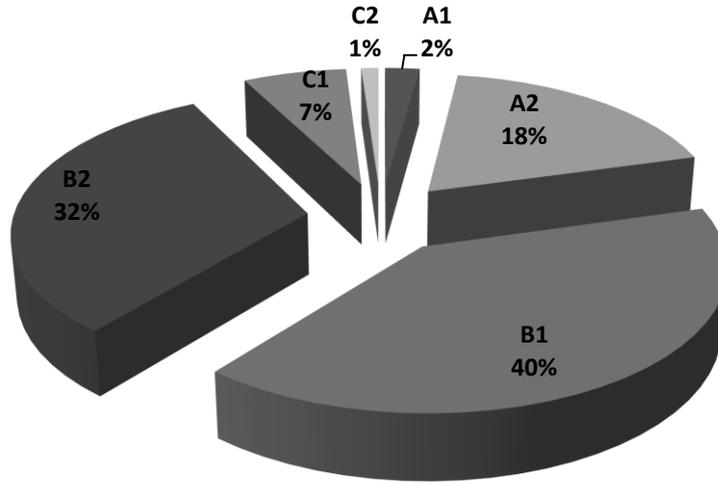
Table (1): Test scores of students in the BULATS test.

Student no.	Reading Score	Listening Score	Writing score	Speaking score
1	B2	A2	B1	B2
2	B2	B1	B1	B1
3	A2	A2	B1	B1
4	A2	B2	B2	B2
5	B2	C2	B2	B2
6	B1	B1	A2	B1
7	A2	A2	B1	B1
8	B1	B1	B1	B1
9	B2	C1	C1	C1
10	A2	A2	B2	B1
11	B2	B2	B2	B2
12	B2	B2	B2	B2
13	B1	B2	C1	B1
14	B2	B2	B2	C1
15	B2	B2	B1	B2
16	B1	B1	B1	B2
17	B1	A2	A2	B1
18	A1	A1	A2	A2
19	A2	A2	B1	B1
20	A2	B1	B1	B1
21	B1	B1	B1	B1
22	A2	B1	B1	B1
23	B1	B2	C1	B2

The results show that, on average, the majority of the students' performances on all four skills are at B1 and B2 levels. Figure (1) shows the distribution of students across various levels of the CEFR.

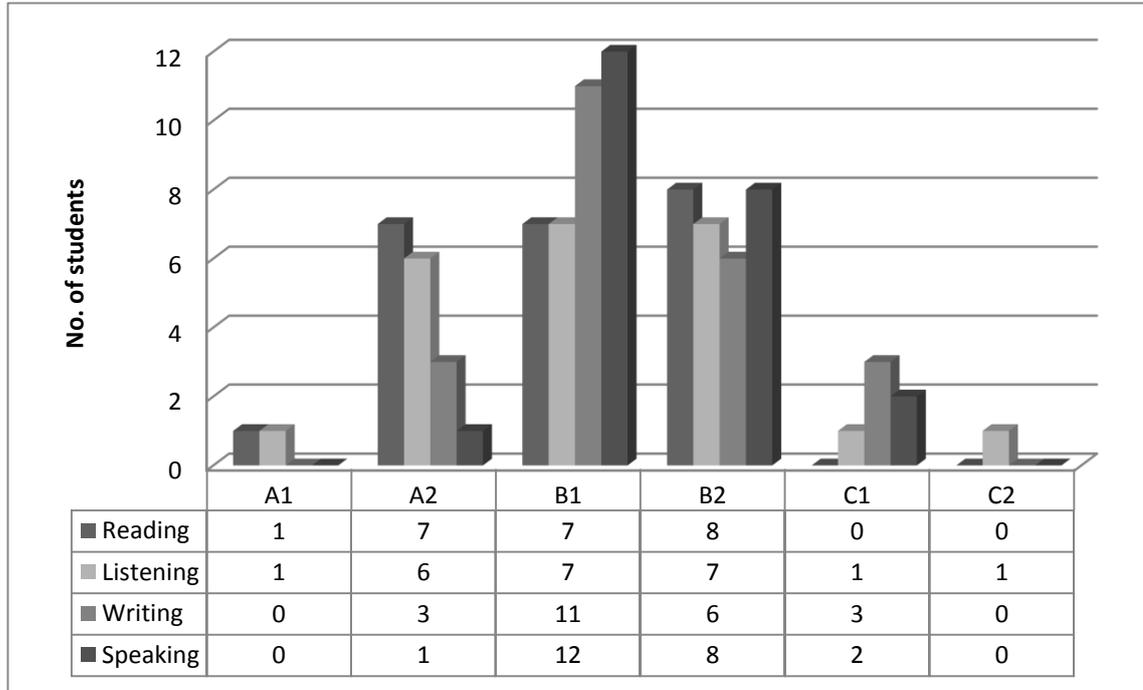


Figure (1) Distribution of test scores



Results show that the majority of the students (80%) moved from either A1 (beginner level) or A2 (elementary level) to higher levels (lower intermediate, upper intermediate, advanced and upper advanced) with 40% of the students hitting the target of the B2 level or higher and moved to an upper CEFR band level. It is worth noting that students who score below A1 in any of the four skills are not issued with a certificate, which was not the case for the students who took the test. Certificated BULATS students are approved for immigration purposes by the United Kingdom Border Agency. Figure (2) shows the distribution of students' scores across various levels and skills.

Figure (2): Distribution of students' scores across various levels and skills



The mode of each skill is at B1 or B2 levels, suggesting that students' performances on different skills are, on average, at these two levels. The students' speaking performances appear to be the strongest. This could be attributed to the focus on interactive learning and teaching strategies following while teaching the course and providing the students with ample opportunities to express themselves. This last finding was supported by quantitative and anecdotal evidence from the questionnaire and student self-reports. It is worth noting here that the speaking tasks were communicative in nature and engaging to all students. These tasks included: (1) interview – students answer questions about themselves; (2) reading aloud – students read sentences aloud; (3) presentation – students are given a work-related topic to talk about for one minute; (4) presentation with graphic – students are given one or more graphics with a business focus to talk about for one minute; and (5) communication activity – students give their opinions on



five questions related to one scenario (e.g. planning a conference).

The questionnaire findings

According to quantitative evidence collected from the students (N=27) through the learning outcomes questionnaire, the LOA-oriented BULATS preparation course did not only help students to prepare for the test, but also helped them develop a variety of skills. The vast majority of students agreed on a list of skills that they developed as a result of joining the course. These skills included: monitoring learning progress, devising own learning strategies, achieving better, keeping motivated, learning from mistakes, setting own goals for learning, learning cooperatively, self-regulating and reflecting on learning, identifying own learning needs and strategies, and transferring learning to other situations and contexts.

Table (2) shows the findings related to learning outcomes of the questionnaire completed by the students.

No.	Item	always	usually	Sometimes	rarely	never	Total score
1	Applying teacher advice	81.5%	11.1%	7.4%	0%	0%	128
2	Checking progress	63%	25.9%	11.1%	0%	0%	122
3	Devising own learning strategies	59.3%	25.9%	14.8%	0%	0%	120
4	Achieving better	65.4%	26.9%	7.7%	0%	0%	119
5	Increased Motivation	53.8%	38.5%	3.8%	3.8%	0%	115
6	Increased class participation	48.1%	25.9%	22.2%	3.7%	0%	113
7	Developing learner autonomy	37%	40.7%	22.2%	0%	0%	112
8	Using self-assessment	53.8%	34.6%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	112
9	Learning from mistakes	56%	28%	16%	0%	0%	110
10	Setting own goals for learning	40.7%	22.2%	37%	0%	0%	109
11	Learning cooperatively	38.5%	38.5%	19.2%	3.8%	0%	107
12	Self-regulation and reflection	40.7%	29.6%	18.5%	7.4%	3.7%	107
13	Identifying own level of improvement	46.2%	26.9%	19.2%	7.7%	0%	107
14	Expressing own learning needs	22.2%	48.1%	29.6%	0%	0%	106
15	Lifelong Learning	30.8%	42.3%	26.9%	0%	0%	105
16	Predicting own future achievement	30.8%	30.8%	38.5%	0%	0%	102
17	Identifying own learning needs	20%	64%	16%	0%	0%	101
18	Planning own future learning	14.8%	51.9%	25.9%	7.4%	0%	101
19	Identifying own learning strategies	18.5%	44.4%	29.6%	7.4%	0%	101
20	Transferring Learning	30.8%	23.1%	38.5%	3.8%	3.8%	97



The findings in table (2) indicate that vast majority of students practiced all the above-mentioned skills in the learning outcomes questionnaire. This finding reveals the positive impact of the course in improving the students' skills. It can also be noted that the dimensions of the LOA approach are clearly represented. For instance, applying teacher advice, which came on top of the table (2) with all the students in favor of it, is an example of student engagement with feedback and closing the feedback loops. Another example is skill no. 8 in table (2); using self-assessment, which is an example of students developing evaluative expertise, another dimension of LOA. Boud & Falchikov (2006) highlighted the significance of developing self-evaluative capacities as students need for lifelong learning. The findings in table (2) also reveal evidence that suggests that the students developed employability skills. Skills that the students were in favor of such as increased class participation, increased motivation, learning from mistakes, planning own future learning, learning cooperatively, self-regulation and reflection, identifying own level of improvement, lifelong learning, identifying learning needs, and setting goals were all highlighted in previous literature as necessary employability skills (Young & Chapman, 2010).

Students' self-reports

The course proved to be a very good chance for students to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes towards learning in general and business English in particular. Below are some of the responses of the students' regarding what they learned from the course, the skills they developed and how they felt about it. According to one of the students:

Taking the BULATS preparation course has given me a lot of information that I had no idea about before. It also helped me to develop some skills that I did not have before. These skills are not only going to help me pass the test, but also they will help me in my life.
(Student 1)



Team work skills were also highlighted as a result of taking the course. One student reported:

The course showed me the meaning of team work and how there is no I in a group. (Student 2)

Another student reported communication and presentations skills as a learning outcome of the course. He stated:

My communication skills are now better and my presentation skills are still in need of a lot of work, but I am on the right track. (Student 3)

It is evident from the quotation above that the student also developed the metacognitive skill of self-evaluation of learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) highlight that learners can only assess themselves when they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain. It is obvious that the student collected information from the course to feedback his skills that need improvement. Carless (2009) argues that 'for students to be able to make use of feedback, they need to be actively self-regulating their performance' (p.86). In addition, Carless (2009) argues that 'good feedback provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance' (p.86). According to Ali (2013), LOA feedback serves a metacognitive function by providing learners with essential information about themselves in a way that can help them understand themselves better and become aware of their learning. Similar self-reports by other students included:

The course opens a new gate for me to be better in the future. (Student 4)

Because of the course, I can make a presentation without being shy. Also, I am able now to manage my time and make use of every single second. I am also capable of working in a team. (Student 5)

Carless (2009) suggests the use of pre-emptive formative assessment, defined as teacher actions which attempt to clarify student understandings before misconceptions have resulted in ineffective



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



learning outcomes and/or loss of marks in assignments or examinations. Carless (2009) argues that this kind of pre-emptive intervention is designed to counter the problem that much feedback arises too late for students to act upon it. It is stated that ‘anticipatory feedback and troubleshooting is more effective at closing the loop than “traditional” post-hoc feedback’ (Carless, 2009, p.88).

The students’ self-reports also revealed the impact of the course in improving the students’ employability skills. The students were asked some follow-up questions to investigate the long-term influence of the course on their professional life. They were asked about the way they found the BULATS course useful in improving their lifelong learning and employability skills. The students’ responses were positive in this regard. Student 3 stated:

The BULATS course helped me in discovering a new possibility for me in the business related fields and taught me a lot about the methods of test taking. It also provided me with the means that I deem necessary to work in a business-related environment. It helped me in landing on a job that improved my career a lot as I managed to hunt a job at an international school and cultivated the skills I need to kick off my career the right way.

It is worth noting that these are the actual words of the student testimonial. This statement by the student exemplifies a high level of English language in terms of writing style, grammar and choice of words. It is evident that the student has developed written communicative ability in using English language to articulate his ideas and express himself. The same student reported additional long-term effects of the course including connecting with colleagues and learning about teaching skills. He stated:

The impact that I still hold to this very moment is the relationship I had between me and my course colleagues who later on became friends that I value.



Student 3 added:

The instructors showed us an untraditional way of teaching which affects me to this very day.

Evidence of the improvement of teaching skills was also reported by another student who stated:

I learned how to be a good trainer from my trainers and their strategies in training and managing the class. Also I learned how to make a presentation successfully and present it starting by breaking the ice (Student 6).

The course was a chance to become ready for the competitive market place that values the significance of having a well-recognized certificate. This is underscored by of student 6 who reported:

Having a certificate from Cambridge University is a great credential that could help me find a job.

Time management was reported as one of the skills developed as a result of taking the BULATS course. As stated by one student:

I learned time management, as the trainers were making an evaluation related to time management, and the test itself taught me to manage my time in the answer.

Other students reported business-related skills that were developed as a result of taking the course. These skills included presentation skills, team work skills and C.V. writing among other skills. According to student self-reports:

The BULATS course was very useful as it improved my skills in business English, making presentations in English, C.V. writing and self- confidence (Student 7).

The BULATUS course gave me a lot of expressions related to business. My skills improved because of the course. Examples of these skills are cooperative work, presentation techniques, self-confidence and time management. The course also provided me with



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



supplementary material I found useful such as listening practice online. Moreover, the course gave me the chance to take and pass the BULATS test (Student 8).

Discussion

The current study aimed at finding out whether LOA through the BULATS course could improve the students' employability skills and test scores. The findings revealed a positive impact of the course in doing so. The LOA approach adopted in the current study did not only help students enhance knowledge and skills of language, but also led the learners ultimately to become effective through the process of test preparation. Test preparation should not be seen as beneficial merely because of the improved test results but for the development of learning (Dann, 2002). Likewise, Carless (2015) argues that effective assessment practice should focus on enhancing student learning processes, but needs to be informed by the awareness that assessments do double duty; i.e. certification and equipping students for lifelong learning. The content of the BULATS test suggested the pathways taken during this process because highly effective people tend to begin with the end in mind. The test was a good example of a language test that can support effective learning. It helps find out quickly and accurately all language knowledge and skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) people have and need to be able to successfully communicate in a business context. The test is designed around realistic situations. Carless (2009) asserts that the design of assessment tasks is clearly critical to the development of productive student learning suggesting that learning tasks which are most likely to develop employability skills are portfolios, projects and other integrated tasks.

The authenticity of the BULATS course supported students to learn effectively. The students found themselves using English more easily and more effectively to communicate with other people (speaking and writing) and understanding more easily and accurately what they read or heard. During the course, knowledge of grammar



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



and vocabulary was tested while understanding and producing language. Therefore, students learned effectively while preparing for the test by being active with the language (i.e. using it to speak and write, analyzing what they read or hear, and finding out how particular words and grammar points were used). The course included a wide range of question types and tasks, which entail, while preparing for the test, to use a combination of activities such as class discussion, talking in pairs or small groups, reading aloud, presenting work to others, communicating ideas and opinions, writing emails, letters, messages, reports...etc. Thus, students learned actively and cooperatively while preparing for the test.

The course supported students to learn effectively and had a positive impact on conceptualizing learning, teaching and assessment. Accordingly, learning is not about memorization and cramming for a test. It is about applying knowledge in real life contexts and revisiting knowledge, skills and ideas in order to check for comprehension and understanding. Teaching is also affected. Linking test preparation practices with a framework based on active and constructive learning implies that teachers are able to mediate the influences around them with their own practice. They can operate even in a test situation recognizing that it is their own actions and practice that will create the contexts for learning, so that the pressures of the test do not adversely affect the processes of teaching and learning. The concept of assessment is also affected. It shifts from a paradigm of assessment of learning to a paradigm of assessment for learning. Thus it becomes an inquiry rather than measurement. Assessment can be an exploratory and sensitive venture, with no clear end-points except a heightened awareness of current development (Hargreaves, 2005). With the provision of feedback concurrent with the process of preparing for the BULATS test, assessment supported effective learning by promoting deeper understanding, moving learning forward, developing learning strategies, causing the learner to think, motivating and inspiring learning, engaging learners actively and encouraging them to



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس

كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا

كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



construct and co-construct their own language knowledge and skills.

According to the self-report findings of the current study, the students reported that the course supported them in enhancing their employability skills including communication, lifelong learning, teamwork, using computers, critical thinking, self-management, and personal attributes such as self-confidence and motivation. Having employability skills such as successful communication facilitates the daunting experience of a job interview and could help the applicant get the job. It is expected that job applicants should demonstrate what they termed as a ‘personal brand’. They highlighted that: ‘Applicants are expected to project a profile of confident, articulate people, able to translate academic learning to job-related realities and to leave a memorable impression on the prospective employer through language proficiency, body language and attitude’ (p.9).

Thomas *et. al.* (2016) maintains that contemporary provision of English language services within Higher Education Institutions cannot ignore the demands from employers for graduates that have not only technical knowledge related to their degree fields but other employability skills to deal with colleagues and clients to further organizational aims. They argue that English language training in higher education programs needs to move from purely linguistic and degree-related content areas to a broader remit of English for communication purposes that covers both specialized discourse fields and broader generic employability skills and competencies (Thomas *et. al.*, 2016). The provision of the BULATS course to all university students would help achieve this role of higher education and support graduates to become work-ready in the 21st century economy.

There is a need to embrace the LOA model in higher education as it proved to be useful not just for supporting students to learn the material, but helping them become ready for the workplace. However, a paradigm shift in assessment is not an easy task.

Staff and student perspectives on assessment constitute part of contextual influences impinging on the assessment process. For



example, tutors' capacity to implement LOA may be constrained by their own limited experience of different assessment formats. Students may be initially reluctant to accept innovative assessment methods unless their rationale and potential advantages to them are clear. There is inherent conservatism in staff and student views of assessment formats which results in examinations and essays remaining the dominant forms of assessment. Carless (2007) states:

A major challenge to a learning-oriented perspective on assessment is the dominance of viewpoints which simply equate assessment with grading or measurement. Formative approaches to assessment risk being drowned by the power of summative assessment. Potential ways forward appear to be developing productive synergies between formative and summative assessment; and developing the kinds of summative assessment that fulfill the characteristics of assessment tasks as learning tasks (p.62).

Recommendations and suggestions

The findings of the current research revealed the positive impact of the learning-oriented approach to assessment through tasks that serve two purposes: learning from formative assessment while preparing for the BULATS test and certification based on performance in the summative assessment. The LOA approach also supported students develop evaluative expertise and engagement in the learning process. Based on the findings of the current research, it is recommended that this form of assessment represents a major component in assessment reform endeavors in both university and pre-university levels especially the general certificate of secondary education. The current system in practice for assessing students at the final year of general secondary education is an example of high stake exams that put students and their families under great pressure. It also exemplifies the dichotomy between learning and assessment. This system is need of urgent reform, and LOA should have a role in the reform process. It is



مجلة البحث في التربية وعلم النفس
كلية التربية – جامعة المنيا
كلية مُعتمدة من الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم



hoped the Ministry of Education adopts reform approaches similar to LOA to bridge the gap between how students should learn and be evaluated. It is also recommended that employability skills should be incorporated in the curricula of all educational stages. These skills complement specialized knowledge of subject matter and maximize the learners' potential. They have also become a must in the 21st century economy. The findings of the current study highlight the need to carry out more finely grained research to identify the nature and scope of the English language workplace employability skills required by employers or potential employers of graduates.



References

- Abdelhafez, A. (2011). An Investigation into professional practical knowledge of EFL experienced teachers in Egypt: implications for pre-service and in-service teacher learning. PhD Dissertation, Graduate School of Education, Exeter, UK.
- Ali, H. (2013). In search for implementing learning-oriented assessment in an EFL Setting. *World Journal of English Language*, 3(4), 11-18.
- Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the black box. London: King's College.
- Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. (2006). Aligning assessment with long-term learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31(4), 399-414.
- British Council. (2013). Graduate employability in the Middle East and North Africa: post-Arab Spring. Last Retrieved January 16, 2014, from British Council: http://www.britishcouncil.org/employability_report.pdf
- Carless, D. (2007). 'Learning-oriented assessment: conceptual bases and practical implications'. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 44/1:57-66.
- Carless, D. (2009). Learning-oriented assessment: Principles, practice and a project. In L. H. Meyer, S. Davidson, H. Anderson, R. Fletcher, P.M. Johnston, & M. Rees (Eds.), *Tertiary Assessment & Higher Education Student Outcomes: Policy, Practice & Research* (pp.79-90). Wellington, New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa
- Carless, D. (2015). Exploring learning-oriented assessment processes. *High Education*, (69).pp.963–976
- Cohen, L.; Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). Research methods in education. London: Routledge
- Colby-Kelly, C. & Turner, C. (2007). AFL research in the L2 classroom and evidence of usefulness: Taking formative assessment to the next level. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 64(1): 9–37.
- Dann, R. (2002). Promoting assessment as learning: improving the learning process. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Deeley, S. (2014). Summative co-assessment: A deep learning



- approach to enhancing employability skills and attributes. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 15 (1): 39– 51
- Gahin, G. (2001). An investigation into EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in Egypt. Unpublished PhD, University of Exeter, Exeter.
- Hamilton, M. (2013). 'How can assessment support learning: a learning oriented approach?' (Last Retrieved 07 June 2014 from www.cambridgeenglish.org/loa).
- Hargreaves, E. (2005). Assessment for learning? Thinking outside the (black) box. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, pp. 213–24.
- Kelly, A. (2004). The curriculum: Theory and practice. Fifth edition. Sage publications: London.
- Khalifa, H.; Khabbazbashi, N.; Bell, C. (2013). *Cambridge English Language Assessment: Progress Report 2*. Cairo University: Center for Advancement of Post Graduate Studies.
- Knight, P. (2006). Assessing complex achievements. In I. McNay (Ed.), *Beyond mass higher education: Building on experience* (pp.96-104). Maidenhead, UK: The Society for Research in Higher Education and the Open University Press.
- Thomas, A., Piquette, C & McMaster, D. (2016). English communication skills for employability: the perspectives of employers in Bahrain. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, 13 (1): 1-17
- Turner, C. E., & Purpura, J. E. (2015). Learning-oriented assessment in second and foreign language classrooms. In D. Tsagari & J. Banerjee (Eds.). *Handbook of second language assessment*. Berlin: DeGruyter, Inc.
- Wyner, L. (2014). Learning-Oriented Assessment: An Introduction. Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 38-40
- Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2003). Learning, curriculum and employability in higher education. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Young, J. & Chapman, E. (2010). Generic competency frameworks: A brief historical overview. *Education Research and Perspectives*, 37 (1): 1-24