

6 | English for Academic Purposes National Curriculum: Teaching and Learning English in the Teacher Training Colleges in Israel

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately ten years ago, a committee was formed to write a curriculum for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses at all the teacher training colleges (TTCs) in Israel. The committee was headed by Blossom Weisen (Oranim College), and the members of the committee were Susan Holzman (Levinsky College), Mike Garmise (Zinnman College) and Jonathan Ferrara (Givat Washington College). The heads of the EFL departments at the TTCs had been meeting monthly since 1992 under the auspices of a forum sponsored by the MOFET institute, a consortium of the TTCs in the country, initially organized and sponsored by the Ministry of Education (MOE) (MOFET Institute, n.d.). Workshops and study days were organized and discussions were held on pedagogical issues, but no less important were the dialogues on issues of placement of students in courses, the number of hours of each course, the number of levels offered by the institutions, placement examinations, exit levels and mutual recognition of the fulfillment of the language requirement by other colleges for students transferring colleges.

Most of the colleges at this time had undergone 'academization,' a process of transformation from institutions that granted their students a teaching certificate into colleges that granted a bachelors degree. Courses in research methods and statistics and advanced seminars had been added to the course offerings. In many cases, however, English had fallen through the cracks and had not been reformed to meet the needs of the new program. Advanced seminars required library research and extensive reading, often in English, and yet the students were, for the most part, not reading at a level that allowed them to do this work. This was the impetus that motivated the writing of the curriculum.

According to Richards (2001), the differentiation between syllabus and curriculum is in its scope. A syllabus is the specification of the content of a particular course, while “Curriculum development focuses on determining what knowledge, skills, and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring the expected outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools can be planned, measured, and evaluated” (Richards, 2001, p. 2).

This curriculum was meant to set national standards for the EFL departments and upgrade the level of English in the teacher training colleges (TTCs). The curriculum was written, published (*English for academic purposes national curriculum*, 1999) and presented at an international conference (Holzman & Horovitz, 2000).

The background provided below sets the stage for the writing of this curriculum. In order to understand the forces that shaped this curriculum, it is necessary to have some background information about language in Israel, higher education in Israel, TTCs in Israel and how English fits into each of these themes.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE

The multilingualism of Israel is a complex evolving collage. Over two thousand years ago, in the geographical area of present day Israel, the Jewish people used Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew, each for different daily functions. This tradition of plurilingualism continued for the Jewish people during the Diaspora, the languages varying according to location (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999). For example, Jews living in Poland might have known Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew. Jews living in Greece might have used Greek, Judezmo and Hebrew. The first language was used for contact with the authorities; the second was a Jewish language used within the community and the third, Hebrew, was used for religious activities, prayer and study.

As the Jews began to return from the Diaspora in the late nineteenth century to what is now the modern day State of Israel, the language of the authorities was Turkish, but the local population spoke Arabic, Yiddish and Judezmo. The returning Jews made a conscious effort to revive Hebrew as a spoken language and the success of their efforts is legendary.

At the end of World War I, the British were awarded a mandate over the land and in this capacity, the British recognized three languages as official: English, Arabic and Hebrew. Government was conducted in English, but schooling was left to the individual communities. The tradition of Hebrew

language instruction for Jewish children and Arab language instruction for Arab children was initiated (Spolsky, 1997). During this period, the first two institutions of higher learning were established in the area by the Jewish community, the Technion in Haifa in 1924 and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925, both using Hebrew as the language of instruction.

On November 29th, 1947, the United Nations passed Resolution 181, which partitioned the area of the British Mandate into two states: one Jewish and one Arab. The Mandate ended on May 14, 1948, and on that day, the Jewish People's Council declared the establishment of the State of Israel. The local populations, the immigrants and the revival of Hebrew have created an intriguing language combination. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) describe the languages that make up Israel's collage of multilingualism. In addition to Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic, there are languages such as Judeo-Moroccan Arabic (spoken by Jewish immigrants from Morocco), Rumanian, Russian, Amharic, and Yiddish to name a few.

ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE IN ISRAEL

The part of the collage that is English is complex and interesting. After the culmination of the British Mandate and the establishment of the state of Israel, English ceased to be an official language, but numerous factors increased its visibility and its viability. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) outline the effects of immigration, emigration, tourism (in-coming and out-going), military needs and diplomatic contacts. The introduction of television and the fact that TV programs were not dubbed, but carried sub-titles also had a significant effect. Shohamy (2006) states: "While English is not declared anywhere as an official language, the reality is that it has very high and unique status in Israel. It is the main language of the academy, commerce, business and the public space" (p. 72).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As stated previously, two institutions of higher learning were established by the Jewish community during the Mandatory period. The Technion in Haifa adopted Hebrew as the language of instruction (over German) after a long and arduous debate while the name of the Hebrew University makes its language policy clear and unambiguous. Today there are eight public

universities (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education, n.d.), as well as numerous regional colleges, city and vocational colleges and some private colleges. These are all under the authority of the Council for Higher Education which sets academic standards and accredits these institutions. (Council for Higher Education, n.d.). In addition, there are approximately 25 teacher education colleges (Israel Science and Technology, n.d.).

ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There is great uniformity in the status of English at Israeli Universities and in the EFL programs offered by the universities. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) claim that “English has become the *de facto* second language of academic life” (p. 165). Kheimets (2006), however, calls the language situation at universities diglossic. Although university faculty members must keep up with professional literature mainly in English, publish in English, participate in conferences in English and conduct professional dialogue in English, classes at all the universities are taught in Hebrew and all student work is produced in Hebrew. There are a few programs taught in English at various universities and colleges. For example, there is an MA program at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzelia. With the exceptions of these programs, English is not the language of instruction in any Israeli institution of higher learning nor is a general or communicative knowledge of English taught or required at the tertiary level.

As far as English knowledge of the students is concerned, the focus of Israeli institutions of higher learning is the students’ ability to read academic texts in English. Nadal and Fishman reported in 1977 that 76% of the books and periodicals in university libraries in Israel were in English. In the 30 years since that figure was published, there has been a great deal of publication in the Hebrew language, but with the proliferation of knowledge on the Internet and the availability of data bases and electronic journals, the necessity of reading English for academic purposes has in all probability increased rather than lessened.

Applicants to universities and colleges take The Inter-University Psychometric Entrance Test (National Institute for Testing and Evaluation, n.d.). A sub-section of the exam assesses the test-takers’ proficiency in *English reading comprehension* for the purposes of placement in remedial English language courses or exemption from such courses. At the Hebrew

university, for example, students wishing to enter the medical and science departments must either achieve an exemption from English courses or be placed in a level 1 course in order to be accepted into these departments (Hebrew University, n.d.). Students who place into levels 2 and 3 may be accepted into other departments but they must complete the English courses during the first year of studies.

These courses are fairly uniform at all the universities. Their focus is on reading comprehension and aim to “provide students with the skills and strategies needed to meet their English reading requirements for their academic courses” (Spector-Cohen, Kirschner & Wexler, 2001, pp. 385-386). The EFL department heads from all the universities meet periodically to discuss practical issues of placement, accommodating dyslexic students, exit level exams, etc. Although there is a unified focus, there is no unified curriculum. In fact, teaching and assessment practices vary greatly among the universities. On the other hand, students transferring from one university to another have their English studies recognized according to the agreement made by the department heads. Their organization, University Teachers of English Language in Israel (UTELI), also holds an annual study day which focuses on the specific needs of the EFL departments in Israel.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES

School teachers in Israel often have vastly different educational backgrounds depending on the level they prepared to teach. High school teachers in Israel (grades 10-12) usually complete a university degree in their preferred discipline (English, history, and mathematics) and then take a one year teacher training program in the university education department to receive teacher certification (Ariav, Kfir, & Feigin, 1993). Over the course of that year, the trainee takes some methodology courses and might spend 10 to 15 days in practical work in a school. Teachers for early childhood, elementary school, junior high and special education usually study in four year academic TTCs, receiving teacher certification and a B.Ed. (bachelors of education) upon completion of their studies. The graduate of a teacher training college will have experienced four years of pedagogical studies and four times more practical school experience than his counterpart who completed his teacher training at the university.

Ariav et al. (1993) describes a tension between two philosophical and

ideological emphases in teacher education in Israel. *Academization* emphasizes strength in disciplinary studies and a scientific knowledge base for teaching. *Humanization*, on the other hand, places the emphasis on nurturing pedagogy and classroom experience. This tension results from an absolute division that had existed between universities (under the authority of The Council for Higher Education) and the TTCs (under the authority of the MOE) before the academization process began in 1981. In the TTCs, there had been no encouragement or incentive for the teaching staff to do research nor was there encouragement or incentive for the teaching staff to study for advanced degrees. Students entering a TTC chose a field of specialization (special education, early childhood education, etc) and studied in “homeroom classes by cohorts” (Ariav et al., 1993, p. 155) with a “fixed-schedule curriculum by homeroom classes” (Ariav et al., 1993, p. 155). School observations, practicum, and methodology were the core of the program. The colleges at this time required three years of study and granted teacher certification for candidates that successfully completed the course of study.

In 1981, as the result of a report issued by a government commission, the Council for Higher Education and the MOE proposed a plan for transforming the teacher training seminars into academic colleges that would award a bachelors degree in education (B.Ed.).

The curricular changes are specified in the Guidelines for Academization (1981) and include, for example, the distribution of courses into pedagogy, foundations and the subject areas, and the inclusion of two seminars, statistics and research methodology. The Guidelines also call for a mastery of English, as well as specific requirements in Hebrew language and physical education. (Ariav et al., 1993, p. 153)

However, Ariav et al. (1993) note that “a hidden belief in the Guidelines is that the theoretical and practical aspects of pedagogy studies should maintain their unique nurturing character and *not* be changed in the Academization process” (p. 153).

The academic colleges today award a B.Ed. degree. They have remained under the auspices of the MOE, although there have been some efforts in recent years to change this situation (Vitela Arzi, personal communication, August 15, 2007). Students study statistics and research methods and write seminar papers. However, in many cases, they continue to study in a

fixed-schedule curriculum by homeroom classes. Instructors in the colleges are now expected to have advanced degrees but there is little real encouragement to do research or be involved in academic pursuits. (For example, the teaching load of an instructor in a teaching training college is 16 frontal hours, leaving little time for activities other than teaching.)

ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES

In general, it cannot be said that English has the same status at the TTCs as at the universities. Tenure and promotion for the teaching faculty do not depend upon research and publication in refereed journals. There is little (and in some colleges no) funding for attendance at professional conferences. Nevertheless, the goals of the English courses at the TTCs have imitated those of the universities, having reading comprehension as their primary focus. However, unlike the universities, at the time of the writing of the curriculum (1997-1998), there was little uniformity in the courses. In some colleges, students were not divided by levels of knowledge of English. They studied a fixed number of hours of English as part of their set program. In others, the students might be divided by levels, but the placement exams were often homemade and unprofessional. In some colleges, English was seen as not part of the students' 'real' program and was tacked on at the end of the day. The problems were myriad and varied.

One of the first changes that the committee members of the FORUM of the coordinators of the college EFL departments did was to change the name of their departments to English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Changing the name fit the goals of academization of the colleges and most institutions adopted this new title. However, within the committee discussions and particularly in the writing of the English for Academic Purposes National Curriculum (1999), the tension between the goals of disciplinary excellence and nurturing pedagogy continued. In the introduction to the National Curriculum (NC) (*English for academic purposes national curriculum*, 1999), the problems faced by the coordinators are listed as shown below.

1. Should our courses transcend the narrow confines of reading comprehension courses?
2. How could our language aims and objectives reflect the values of

humanistic education?

3. How could we expand the educational horizons of our students?
4. Which approaches might be adopted to suit these objectives?
5. Which skills, strategies and techniques are basic to responding to these aims and objectives?
6. What standards and approaches can be applied across the board in all colleges? What exit and entrance standards should be set?
7. Should the NC provide flexibility to allow for the diversity of colleges (national religious, ultra-religious, Arab, secular, and kibbutz institutions)?
8. How can a national program provide standards and yet permit diversity at the same time?
9. How can we establish common standards so as to assist students wishing to transfer from one institution to another?
10. How do we provide for students with learning difficulties including dyslexia?
11. How can computers be efficiently integrated into EAP classes?
12. How can the EAP program prepare students for M. Ed or MA studies?
(pp. 3-4)

Questions 1-5 dealt with the “knowledge, skills, and values” (Richards, 2001, p. 2) of the EAP classes. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 dealt with measurement and evaluation (Richards, 2001) while questions 10 and 11 dealt with the current realities of classroom teaching. The curriculum answered each of these questions and offered guidelines for the colleges to shape their English programs.

Knowledge, Skills and Values: Questions 1 – 5

It is interesting to note that questions 1, 2, and 3 do not deal with the particularities of teaching EAP reading, but rather look beyond the specific goal. Although the goal of the EAP courses in the colleges is “to read authentic texts relevant to their professional objectives..., oral and written English assignments and activities are integrated into daily classroom activities and student assignments” (NC, 1999, p. 8). In other words, in the college English class, all skills are practiced. Although accuracy in production is never emphasized, students write and speak in the courses and teachers, of course, conduct the lessons in English. The NC (1999) further states: “The EAP program aims to transcend the narrow confines of reading comprehension and encompass the professional and human needs of the students who will occupy teaching positions in the twenty-first

century” (NC, 1999, p. 9). This statement refers to the content of the materials that were used in the colleges. It was thought that reading classes provided an ideal opportunity to introduce current issues, general knowledge, and ethical values in addition to texts on subjects related to education. EAP courses presented an unusual opportunity to bring a wide range of ideas and topics into the classroom, expanding the students’ general knowledge and giving them opportunities to engage with issues which they did not touch in their focused content courses.

Questions 4 and 5 raise classroom issues of material selection, teaching approaches and specific content of the syllabi. For example, Krashen’s Input theory (1982) is cited as the foundation for material selection. The texts used for reading in the various levels of classes were meant to be challenging and above the current level of reading of the students, allowing for “understanding on the one hand, but knowledge increase on the other” (NC, 1999, p. 31). Whole language (Freeman & Freeman, 1992) is the suggested teaching approach. The application of this approach results in text-based learning. The content of the courses includes awareness of theoretical aspects of reading, such as schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980); the understanding of reading as an interactive skill, involving both top down and bottom up processing (Silberstein, 1994); and reading as a sociocognitive event (Bernhardt, 1991) which implies that reading is not only concerned with linguistic characteristics, but also social characteristics: pragmatics, intentions, content and topic. The NC (1999) set the framework for the structure of the EAP courses in the TTCs. In general, class work centers around the reading of challenging academic texts. At the advanced level, these should be unabridged and authentic. Reading strategies are taught and practiced and all aspects of the texts, linguistic and social content, are analyzed and discussed

Measurement and Evaluation: Questions 6-9 & 12

The problem of uniformity of standards is a function of several factors. Before the implementation of the NC, the number of course levels and the placement of students in those levels varied greatly among the TTCs. All entering students should have a passing high school matriculation grade in English which would indicate the bottom rung of the ladder. This rung could be called ‘intermediate’ level, and should allow the students to begin reading easy authentic academic tests. However, some students enter below that assumed point. However, in fact, there are new students in the colleges who are below the intermediate level. There are teachers in the field who

completed their education years before the teacher training institutions granted Bachelors degrees who are returning to the colleges to complete their degrees; there are new immigrants; and there are other exceptions and special cases that require pre-intermediate lessons. The NC provides for the levels indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Levels of Courses Suggested by the NC

Level	Courses Suggested
Basic/beginners	For special cases
Intermediate I	120 hours, 4 hours a week for one year.
Intermediate II	(usually 2 60 hours courses)
Advanced I	120 hours, 4 hours a week for one year.
Advanced II	(usually 2 60 hours courses)
Exemption Level	Score of 134 on the Psychometric exam or successful completion of Advanced II course

Note: Adapted from *English for Academic Purposes NC*, 1999, p. 11.

Before the implementation of the NC, placement of students was done by local examination. The writers of the NC wanted the TTC to use the same Inter-University Psychometric Entrance Test as the universities for exemption or placement into the courses offered by the colleges. However, at the time of writing, most students entering the colleges took a special entrance exam specifically for entrance to the TTCs which did not have an English placement sub-section. The MOE rejected the use of the Inter-University Psychometric Exam and authorized the EAP FORUM to write a sub-section for the Teacher Training College Entrance Exam. The test was written, piloted, approved and used for placement from 1999 until 2005.

In 2005 a decision was made in the MOE that achieved what the writers of the NC had hoped for. There was the feeling that the special TTC entrance exam was at a lower level than the University Psychometric Exam and that in order to raise the level of students entering the TTCs, the entrance requirements (testing according to the same standards as the Universities) should be standardized (personal communication, Debbie Lifshitz & Yitchak Issak). With this decision, students were placed (or exempted) in the EAP courses in the TTCs according to their scores on the Inter-University Psychometric Entrance test. Today, exemption and placement in the EAP courses at the TTCs mirror the standards of the university EFL departments.

The lack of national unified exit testing at the tertiary level such as exists in China, where all college students take College English Test 4 (Wen & Hu, 2007), is the third problem of standards. The NC specifies the

following criteria for text length for exit level examinations.

TABLE 2
Length of Text for Exit Exams

Level	Exit Assessment
Basic/beginners	Text length 500-600 words
Intermediate I	Text length 600-700 words
Intermediate II	Text length 600-700 words
Advanced I	Text length 1200-1300 words
Advanced II	Text length 1300 words +

The texts at the advanced levels should be based on authentic academic tests which may have been abridged, but not simplified. Questions should be both global and local, and include varied question types (multiple choice, True/False, translation, short and long completions, etc.) (NC, 1999, p. 24). Nevertheless, exit level text difficulty varies and this results in programs not being similar in their course outcomes.

In addition, students are expected to do projects and/or presentations, some extensive reading, homework assignments, and quizzes. The Curriculum recommends that 60% of the final grade be based on this classroom work while 40% of the grade be based on the departmental reading comprehension exam. Of course, these aspects of the course work are left to the individual colleges. It might be said that the framework of the programs are standardized, but the content and final results of the courses are not.

The question of diversity is raised but not really answered in the NC. The Curriculum was written to set standards but the individual colleges, whatever the distinctiveness of their student population (national religious, ultra-religious, Arab, secular, or kibbutz institutions), were left to fit their particularity to the standards. In recent years, for example, Beit Berl Academic College, decided to give a time extension on final examinations to all students for whom English was a third language; this includes immigrants but mainly serves as an accommodation for the large population of the college whose L1 is Arabic and L2 is Hebrew.

All of these issues of assessment and measurement culminate in the question of mutual recognition. This problem arises when students transfer from one college to another or when students wish to complete the English requirement at a college other than the one they are registered at. Because EAP reading proficiency is a requirement that does not necessarily result in taking courses (students can demonstrate proficiency by receiving a high grade on the sub-test of the psychometric exam), the college courses in the

students' schedule are often offered at inconvenient times, late in the day. To alleviate this problem, many of the TTCs have opened intensive summer courses, allowing for students to complete part of the English requirements during the vacation. Some students choose to take the summer courses at colleges other than the one they are registered at. Either their college does not offer summer courses, or there is a college closer to their home offering a summer course which they wish to take. The members of the EAP FORUM have agreed to recognize the courses of the other colleges that adhere to the number of levels and the number of course hours specified in the NC. At the present time, of the 27 academic colleges, 25 have adopted the NC.

The question of preparation for advanced degrees (Question 12) is also a question of mutual recognition of standards. As important as English reading is for undergraduate studies, it is even more important for graduate work. At the graduate level, independent study necessitates independent reading of the most recent professional literature, literature which most likely has been published in English. Students fulfilling their course requirements should be able to read the necessary material. However, many students going on to advanced degrees study at the universities and not at the TTCs. (Some of TTCs offer Masters in Education, but the programs are limited.) The Council for Higher Education has initiated contacts between the TTC EAP FORUM and UTELI in order to encourage the universities to accept the courses and language requirements of the TTCs. The universities have not been forthcoming in cooperating with the request of the Council. As a result, students continuing their studies at the universities are tested, reclassified and often required to take additional coursework in English.

Realities of the Classroom Today: Questions 10 & 11

The question of Learning Disabilities (LD) raises a number of issues for the EAP program, particularly for students with dyslexia. First, there is the question of who is authorized to diagnosis dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Secondly, what can be done to help dyslexic students process the English texts they need to complete the EAP courses and their reading for their advanced classes? Many of the colleges have support centers for LD students and some have specific help for these students in their EAP classes. One recent solution for dyslexic students is the program Text Aloud (<http://www.nextup.com>). The NC does not answer the question of how to deal with LD students; nevertheless, it continues to be dealt with as the FORUM continues to meet.

The NC also does not deal specifically with the integration of computers into EAP programs. This is also a topic of continuing discussion. The Text Aloud Program is an example of a recent development that combines the use of computers in the classroom for teaching, individual work and for testing.

CONCLUSION

Curricula can be set by schools for all the school's classes, by school districts for all the district's schools, and so on. It is not unreasonable to assume that the greater the distance between the curriculum-writing committee and the syllabus-producing teacher, the more discrepancies that will appear in the carrying out of that curriculum. The NC was written by department heads of the various colleges, but the measurement of the outcome is not carried out by obligatory national assessment procedures. When assessment is done locally, national curricula might be considered wish-lists that do not come true when local agendas and budgetary limitations come into play in the final manifestation of the curriculum.

On the whole, however, there is no doubt that in the writing of the NC, the status of English rose at the TTCs. Courses were added and programs were expanded. With the recent implementation of student placement according to the Inter-University Psychometric Entrance Exam, it would seem that the stage has been set for true upgrade of English at the TTCs. The latest decisions made at the MOE might mar this picture of the future. There is a new program to reform the TTCs. The plan is to equate the TTC's program with that of the university, "with a stronger emphasis on the study of academic disciplines and a diminished emphasis on professional training" (Genser, 2007). Another result of this program will reduce the number of required hours for students from 120 to 90, leaving fewer hours available for English, which is not part of professional training or disciplinary studies.

With these implementation reforms, the implementation of the standards and goals of the NC is uncertain. At the present time there are more questions than answers. The questions come from all of us about the future of education in our country and then authorities in government committees and in the MOE meet and discuss, plan and decide. When these decisions come, it will be time to reassess and reorganize and perhaps begin the cycle of renewal, innovation and implementation again.

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APPENDIX

Internet Sources of Information about Israeli Education

The Council for Higher Education	Body that grants accreditation to Israeli colleges and universities	http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Education/Higher+Education.htm
The Hebrew University		http://info.huji.ac.il/ShowPage.asp?cat=358
Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education: Higher Education.	Information about Israeli universities	http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Education/EDUCATION--Higher+Education.htm
Israel Science and Technology-- Education: Colleges in Israel	List of Teacher Training Colleges in Israel	http://www.science.co.il/Colleges.asp

The MOFET Institute	Organization that sponsored and supported the writing and publication of the curriculum	http://www.mofet.macam.ac.il/english/about.asp http://www.mofet.macam.ac.il/english/
National Institute for Testing and Evaluation	Information about the University Entrance Examination	What is the psychometric entrance test? http://www.nite.org.il/scripts/english/txt.asp?pc=232075941&selFol=776228773
National Institute for Testing and Evaluation. English Proficiency Test (AMIR)	Information about the University Placement Examination for English	http://www.nite.org.il/scripts/english/txt.asp?pc=944635450&selFol=783016747