

# Analysis and Evaluation of the Course Objectives and Course Contents of the Intensive English Program at a University in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract**—This research addresses the gap between the course objectives of Intensive English and the course contents (especially the writing parts) of the textbooks prescribed for Arab students of Computer Science, Engineering, Media and Communication, Law, and Business Administration at a university in Saudi Arabia. This study explores the perspectives of Saudi learners about the course Intensive English and the contents of the prescribed textbooks. Both qualitative and quantitative research have been used for this study. For data collection, a questionnaire consisting of ten closed questions was administered to the students. Apart from this, semi-structured interviews were held. The participants in this study were thirty-two Saudi female learners aged 18-19 whose L1 is Arabic. The findings of this study show that because of the vast course contents in the prescribed textbooks, all teachers focus on “teaching to the test/test-driven instruction”. Based on the study’s findings, it is evident that the course objectives of Intensive English need some revision and modification. This goes with the backward design of Mc Tighe and Wiggins (2005), which focuses on not covering a certain amount of content but emphasizes facilitating student learning. Considering the Backward Design of McTighe and Wiggins (2005), the study concludes with some recommendations so that the course objectives and contents of Intensive English can be revised and modified.

**Index Terms**—backward design, course contents, course objectives, modification, teaching to the test

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a strong need at any educational institution to evaluate and monitor whether a curriculum or course is working according to the plan and find out the areas of improvement. Preparing a practical course or curriculum helps a progressive educator with an opportunity to identify the needs of the learners. Sometimes, a course or a program does not work effectively for the learners. There are several reasons, but the most crucial reason is teaching to the test practice of the teachers. Siddiqui (2020) states, “Teaching to the Test or Item Teaching means teaching only the specific items found on the test.” Teaching to the test is controversial because some educators believe, “Even if teaching to the test does improve student scores on specific tests, it could be that it ignores or even substitutes for broader subject matter learning and problem-solving skills” (Holmstrom & Milgrom, 1991).

There are various models of curriculum design, but the researchers have focused on only two models. In the 1940s, Ralph Tyler wrote his ideas about the principles for making a curriculum in the book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. He developed a simple model of curriculum development consisting of four steps:

1. Determine the school’s purposes -what is the need of the students?
2. Identify educational experiences related to purpose – experience must be consistent with the objective.
3. Organize the experience- the teacher has to determine a logical order of experiences for the students.
4. Evaluate the purposes- the teacher assesses the students’ ability to determine whether they have achieved the objectives.

The 'mini- Bible' of Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, written in 1949, is noteworthy because we can grasp the concise steps suggested to plan curriculum as practitioners. Although the Tyler model has its drawbacks, it has been criticized to “be inadequate, naïve, overly lockstep, and technocratic...” It cannot be said that it is not helpful for the new curriculum workers. No matter what the critics have judged about Tyler’s model, it depicts “a rational, logical, and systematic approach to curriculum making” for many.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Tyler's model demonstrated the best principles of curriculum making, which laid out four linear steps, which his colleague Hilda Taba (1962)- the curriculum theorist, a curriculum reformer, and a teacher educator, developed into seven linear steps. Taba (1962) has proposed some steps that a course designer must work through to develop subject matters for the learners. Her list of "curricular processes" includes the following:

- Diagnosis of needs
- Formulation of objectives
- Selection of content
- Organization of content
- Selection of learning experiences
- Organization of learning experiences
- Determination of what to evaluate and the means to evaluate

Considering some of the steps of the Tyler and Taba model of curriculum development, the investigators have attempted to evaluate the textbook and redesign the course they teach at a university in Saudi Arabia. It is well-known that teachers have the experience and continual opportunities to analyze and reconsider their knowledge and beliefs in light of interaction with students in actual classroom situations. Hence, the researchers have drawn on Cunningsworth (1995), who points out three kinds of materials evaluation: (a) pre-use evaluation, (b) in-use evaluation, and (c) post-use evaluation. The author believes more attention needs to be paid to in-use and post-use evaluation. Similarly, McGrath (2013) opines that if there are some weaknesses in the materials, post-use evaluation can lead to constructive revision and adaptation.

#### *Rationale of the Study*

The course Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 are for Computer Science, Engineering, Law, Media and Communication, Architecture, Tourism, and Business Administration students. These students must complete Intensive English Programs 1 and 2, which are Elective courses for them. The students are of upper-intermediate level (B2) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The objectives of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 showed that the main aim is to develop language skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing at level B1 of the CEFR. According to the course description provided by the university, this course follows the communicative/integrated approach to language learning. All four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and the two sub-skills, grammar and vocabulary, are integrated into the course Intensive English Programs 1 and 2. As Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 are compulsory courses, without completing this foundation course, the students enrolled in this course cannot continue their major.

Before coming to Intensive English Program 2, students were taught some selected units from the books *Evolve 1* (units 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 12) and *Evolve 2* (units 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11) by Hendra et al. (2021). These books focused on listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Like the coursebook *Evolve 3*, there were twelve units, and each unit had many exciting topics, activities, and exercises to stimulate the students.

What triggered the researchers' interest in delving into the course objectives of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 is that when the students were asked to free write or do the guided writing tasks from their textbooks *Evolve 1, 2, and 3*, most of them were not able to construct error-free sentences and produce an acceptable artifact. Having gone through the course contents of *Evolve 1* and *Evolve 2*, it was found that the units-3,6,8,10 and 11 from *Evolve 1* and units- 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 from *Evolve 2* had some important grammar and writing items which were omitted in the course specification. This omission of the essential items deprived the learners of acquiring the knowledge that was required of them. The errors that the students made are as follows:

- Not starting a sentence with a capital letter
- Not using punctuation marks in the sentences
- Using wrong verbs/sentence forms
- Confusing past and present tenses
- Using incorrect subject-verb agreement in a sentence
- Not using the past tense and past participle correctly
- Using incorrect adjectives
- Not using correct prepositions
- Spelling mistakes, and so on.

The students' inability to complete the guided writing tasks meaningfully and correctly led to questions about the course objectives and the contents of the course books *Evolve 1, 2, and 3*.

It was also observed that although the students lacked the competence to write in English, all the teachers rushed to cover more than ten writing items for the students.

First, the researchers will focus on the course specification (CS) of Intensive Program 2 because they taught this course in Spring 2024. The CS highlights that this course has been designed to enable the students to write an email, a descriptive paragraph, a narrative paragraph based on personal experience, a blog post, and an opinion paragraph. Probing into the objectives of Intensive Program 1, it was found that the CS mentioned that *students will write a paragraph or an essay at the beginner level by using various writing techniques*. Now, the problem is that not considering what is mentioned in

the course specifications, the teachers of the researchers' department are instructed to teach each writing item (from *Evolve 1, 2, and 3*), which is mentioned below:

TABLE 1  
WRITING TASKS IN *EVOLVE 1, 2 & 3*

<i>Writing Tasks for Intensive Program 1 Units 1,2,4,7,9, 12 (Evolve 1) and Units 2,3,5,7,9, 11 (Evolve 2)</i>	<i>Writing Tasks for Intensive Program 2 Evolve 3</i>
Write a personal or work profile	Write an email to a relative in another country.
Write a profile of a famous person.	Write a paragraph- descriptive/ narrative/ opinion.
Write an email about an apartment to rent.	Write an online advertisement/ An ad for a local product.
Write a description of a neighborhood/place.	Write a brief life story of a person/ A story about a challenging new activity/ A story about learning a lesson.
Write a product/restaurant review.	Write a personal statement for an application.
Write a blog post about some favorite things/ things happening now.	Write an email with an event schedule.
Write a balanced evaluation of a form of transportation.	Write a travel post.
Write an account of a special meal.	Write a post about time management.
Write your opinion about a podcast.	Write a comment reacting to a podcast.
Write posts giving and responding to opinions	Write a Resume.
Write short messages to a company.	Write a movie review.
Write a comment agreeing and disagreeing with an online post.	Write an email to a relative in another country/An email to a friend about a new hobby.

As educators, the researchers find a gap between the course specifications of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 and the course contents of *Evolve 1, 2, and 3* (especially the writing part). Skierso (1991) suggests that the first step in material evaluation is collecting information about students' backgrounds, course syllabi, and learning contexts. The question that would arise in any educator is how many writing items are to be taught to the students of Intensive English Program 1 & 2? Should it be just a couple of items already mentioned in the existing CS, or should it be like all the twelve writing items mentioned in the *Evolve* series? The researchers mainly focus on the writing part because most learners need help writing an error-free paragraph, so teaching them all ten writing items is not realistic. As the objectives of any course are the foundation for curriculum planning and assessment, they should be clear and specific. However, the objectives of the course (mentioned earlier) that the researchers teach are not in line with the course syllabus of the Intensive English Program.

The other problematic aspects of the *Evolve* series are:

#### **Presentation of grammar items in *Evolve 2* and *Evolve 3***

If teaching and learning materials are to be evaluated, Cunningsworth (1995) emphasizes two types of evaluation: external and internal evaluation. He recommends selecting two or more units of a textbook and evaluating them in detail. Based on the recommendation of Cunningsworth (1995), three units were selected by the researchers- one unit from *Evolve 2* and two units from *Evolve 3*- and the shortcomings in those units were shown.

In Unit 11 of *Evolve 2*, the students are introduced to the Present Perfect Tense without showing how sentences can be constructed using it. It is observed that the writers have focused on the inductive approach to teaching grammar. However, this approach is ineffective for low-level learners with a limited knowledge base and difficulty in rule discovery. Although there are some example sentences in the unit, it is felt that sufficient explanations are not there. The students could be asked to choose a person or thing that has done the action, add a helping verb-has or have+ the past participle form of the verb, and then add the rest of the sentence.

Focusing on the grammar parts of *Evolve 3*, it can be seen again that the writers have focused on inductive language learning, where learners are presented with some examples and are asked to generate the rules. It is argued that the inductive approach to teaching grammar can train the learners to notice and understand the grammar rules in the example sentences. However, there are better ways than this method of making the students familiar with the grammar rules because, as our learners are non-native, they need to be given some simple explanations. Then, they can be expected to apply the rules. Two examples are cited below:

In Unit 10 (*Evolve 3*), while introducing the students to Simple present passive and Simple past passive, the authors gave some example sentences of these grammar items, and they expected the non-native students to do an exercise which is as follows:

*Complete a paragraph with the verbs' simple present passive and past passive in parentheses.*

The presentation of passive sentences needs the rules to change active sentences to passive sentences and vice versa.

The same problems are noticed in Unit 11 (*Evolve 3*), where the authors introduce Present and Future Unreal Conditionals without providing an overview of how the rules are to be used.

When talking about the grammar items in units 10 and 11, the writers could have included more explanations (adapting from *Fundamentals of English Grammar (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)*, Azar, 2006) about active, passive, and conditional sentences. For example, clear explanations could be given on the following:

- Forms of the Passive
- The passive forms of the present and past progressive
- Passive modal auxiliaries

- Overview of Basic Verb Forms Used in Conditional Sentences
- Conditional Sentences that express true, factual ideas in the present/future
- Untrue (Contrary to Facts) in the Present or Future
- Using Progressive Verb Forms in Conditional Sentences and
- Using 'Mixed Time' in Conditional Sentences

The lack of sufficient explanations and examples makes it quite challenging for L2 learners to understand these difficult grammar items. Considering this view, the researchers observe in their courses that some grammar items need addition and deletion, focusing on the learners' needs.

The other problematic aspect of the course specifications of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 is the assessment related to the Cambridge activities on the Blackboard. The students of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 are asked to complete the Cambridge activities on the Blackboard from all 12 units of their textbooks for just ten marks. Too many assignments are to be done from the 12 units, so most students are reluctant and demotivated to complete the tasks. Once again, it is observed that asking students (the majority of whom are weak in English) to do assignments from the whole book is unrealistic. Instead of all the 12 units, some units could be selected for 10-mark assignments. The department must ensure that the assignments/activities presented to the students should impact their learning. That is, when the activities attract the students' curiosity, interest, and attention, a noticeable impact on the students will be visible. Tomlinson (1998) states, "Ideally, language learners should have the strong and consistent motivation, and they should also have positive feelings towards the target language...and the materials they are using".

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several theories exist on curriculum design, materials adaptation, materials evaluation, and the role of a teacher in designing a course. Below are a few theories and perspectives of some experts.

According to McTighe and Wiggins (2005), "Backward design is an approach to creating curriculum, subjects, and even single class sessions that treats the goal of teaching as not merely covering a certain amount of content, but also facilitating student learning." They also opine that "Teaching is a means to an end. Having a clear goal helps us as educators to focus our planning and guide purposeful action toward the intended result." Hence, these two curriculum designers advocate that "instead of starting with the content to be covered, the textbook to be used, or the test to be passed, educators should begin with the goals of a course." When teachers rush to cover too much material within a short time, emphasizing coverage at the expense of depth (Houghton, 2004), the learners cannot learn the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills needed for deep learning. They concentrate purely on assessment requirements and memorize facts routinely. Besides, there needs to be more consistency between the competence of the learners and the vast course syllabus prescribed for the learners. Lizzio et al. (2002) found that the perceptions of heavy workload and inappropriate assessment push students to adopt a surface approach to learning.

A good curriculum recognizes learning as an active, constructive, contextual process. It will provide guidance that helps educators enable learners to acquire new knowledge and skills and apply them in various contexts (McKimm & Barrow, 2009). Tyler (2013) almost expresses a similar view: "If students cannot transfer their teachings to their lives outside of school, then education is a failure. What is being taught should be perceived by learners as relevant and useful." Talking about the role of the classroom teacher, Nunan (1988) says that teachers are "in a position to interpret and modify their syllabuses in the process of translating them into action." Mc Donough and Shaw (1993) opine that "different countries have widely differed educational systems and philosophies, resulting in teachers being subject to different expectations and pressures".

Discussing the suitability and effectiveness of a coursebook, Mc Donough and Shaw (1993) opine that "adaptation is a very practical activity carried out mainly by teachers to make their work more relevant to the learners with whom they are in day-to-day contact. It can only be carried out effectively if it develops from understanding the possible design features of syllabuses and materials".

### *Research Gap*

Several textbook and course syllabus evaluation studies at the school and university levels exist. However, this research addresses the gap between the course objectives of Intensive English and the course contents (especially the writing parts) of the textbooks (The Evolve series) prescribed for Arab students of Computer Science, Engineering, Media and Communication, Law, and Business Administration at a university in Saudi Arabia. As the objectives of any course are the foundation for curriculum planning and assessment, they should be clear and specific. However, the objectives of the course the researchers teach are not in line with the course syllabus of the Intensive English Program.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have designed a Mixed-Method Approach for this study. Qualitative research has often been criticized as relativistic, soft, or unscientific compared with quantitative inquiries (Ormston et al., 2014). However, as quantitative data cannot offer insights that qualitative data can, the researchers intended to design the study as a mixed-method study. The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The fundamental aim of qualitative studies is to engage in

research that can produce thorough descriptions and a deep, rich and contextualized understanding of human experience (Polit & Beck, 2010). The strength of qualitative inquiries, defined by the interpretive tradition, is understanding how individuals, through their narratives, perceive and experience their lives, and construct meanings within their social and cultural contexts (Groleau et al., 2009; Mishler, 2000). Quantitative data has also been collected to avoid subjective judgment and researcher bias. Although this method has some drawbacks, it has been chosen for collecting data quickly.

Therefore, the researchers have used a two-phase design (Explanatory Sequential Design). It involved quantitative data collection in the first phase, analysis of the results, and then planning the second phase (qualitative phase) based on the quantitative data results. This design was chosen because the qualitative data would help explain the initial quantitative results in more detail (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

There is a gap between the course objectives of Intensive English and the course contents (especially the writing parts) of the textbooks prescribed for Arab students of Computer Science, Engineering, Media and Communication, Law, and Business Administration at a university in Saudi Arabia, so this study attempts to explore the perspectives of Saudi learners about the course Intensive English and the contents of the prescribed textbooks. This study also focuses on the negative consequences of test-driven instructions, which make the Saudi learners see no practical value in their learning beyond just test outcomes.

Based on the objectives, the researchers formulated the following research questions.

#### *Research Questions*

1. Are the course objectives of Intensive English Program 1 and 2 appropriate and realistic for Arab EFL learners?
2. Are all the contents of the coursebook *Evolve 1, 2, and 3* suitable for the Arab learners of the Intensive English Program?
3. Could the Course Specification of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 focus more on prioritizing the learners' intended learning outcomes instead of the topics to be covered in *Evolve 1, 2, and 3*?

#### *Participants*

The participants in this study were (N=32) Saudi learners (female) aged 18-21 whose L1 is Arabic. The students were from Level 2 (first year, second semester) doing Honors in Engineering, Computer Science, Media and Communication, Architecture, Business Administration, and Law. The sample was selected carefully, and the participants understood the purpose and relevance of the study.

#### *Instruments*

The researchers constructed a valid and reliable questionnaire consisting of 10 closed (Yes/ No) items. Confusing questions were avoided, and the responses were quantified and analyzed manually. The findings were manually categorized into themes/patterns. Narrative explanations of each theme/pattern were composed. The researchers' observation (non-participant observation) and informal student discussions were documented through field notes. The data was collected and analyzed manually. After analyzing the data, semi-structured interviews were held. Interview is a common method of data collection in the social sciences. When interviewing the participants, the researchers had the freedom to decide the format and the content of the questions (open-ended), choose how to word them, and decide in what order the questions needed to be asked based on the responses gathered from the Quantitative phase.

Moreover, the questions could be explained to the respondents, and information could be supplemented. In formulating the questions, simple and everyday language was used, ambiguous questions were not asked, and leading questions were avoided. Each participant's interview lasted 10 minutes. Questions were asked in random order, following a logical order according to the study's objectives.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data was collected in class (after the lecture) manually (on paper). Two types of data were collected. In the first phase, the data was collected through a questionnaire comprising ten closed items. The second type of data was collected through interviews. Data was collected to the point where the researchers reached the saturation point. That is, no new information emerged from the instrument that was used to collect data. The researchers have purposefully selected 'information-rich' respondents who provided the required information. This biased sample is justified in qualitative inquiry. Qualitative data analysis is like a microscope, helping us understand specific details (Dye, 2022), so the popular approaches to qualitative data analysis, such as content analysis and thematic analysis (a part of content analysis), have been used in this study. After collecting the data through the questionnaire and analyzing the responses manually, the researchers coded the responses based on the interview in the second phase. The responses were coded under three dominant themes. Through thematic analysis, the researchers discovered repetitions of the themes that emerged from the interviews. Besides, a narrative analysis has enabled the researchers to sum up the outcomes of the interviews.

Apart from this, the researchers collated and interpreted the questionnaire responses manually. As the number of respondents was small and there were not too many variables, no computer program was used to analyze the data.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

The researchers have maintained the confidentiality of the respondents by keeping their names anonymous. The participants were also assured that they could choose not to answer the questions. Before administering the questionnaire, the research participants were informed about their expected involvement and the interview setting. No incentives were offered to the sample to participate in this study. The questionnaire did not pose any threat to the academic performance of the participants.

## IV. FINDINGS

The questionnaire which was administered to the students and their responses are provided in the table below:

TABLE 2  
STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE *EVOLVE* SERIES

	N	Yes	No	No Response
1. Do you find the books <i>Evolve 1, 2, and 3</i> helpful?	32	28 (87.5%)	3 (9%)	1(3%)
2. Are all your four skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing developed?	32	20 (62.5%)	12 (37.5%)	0%
3. Although your major is not English, do you think it is necessary for you to improve all four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing?	32	21 (65%)	10 (3%)	1(3%)
4. Do you agree that all the writing items presented in the prescribed <i>textbooks</i> are easy to learn?	32	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	0%
5. Do you think some writing items, such as writing an online advertisement/ an ad for a local product, writing a travel post, writing a comment reacting to a podcast, and writing a movie review, should have been omitted from your course?	32	18 (56%)	14 (44%)	0%
6. Should students be given writing topics before the exam so that they can practice at home?	32	21 (65%)	11 (34%)	0%
7. Did you need more practice on writing when you were introduced to the books <i>Evolve 1 &amp; 2</i> ?	32	16 (50%)	15 (47%)	1(3%)
8. Are all the grammar items in the <i>textbooks</i> explained clearly with sufficient examples?	32	24 (75%)	8 (25%)	0%
9. In your speaking test, is speaking on topics in <i>Evolve 3</i> easier than speaking on unseen topics?	32	20 (62.5%)	11 (34%)	1 (3%)
10. Do you agree that you need to do all the Cambridge Activities on the Blackboard from all the 12 units of your textbooks?	32	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	0%

**Phase One:** Going through the responses of the students (variables no. 1 & 10), it can be seen that the majority (87.5% and 50%) of the students expressed that their textbook is important for them but doing all the Cambridge activities from all the 12 units of *Evolve 1, 2 and 3* is not necessary. The response of variable no. 2 shows that more than 62% of the students answered that all their skills were developed, whereas 37.5 % expressed the opposite view. Although the Intensive English Program 2 students were from various departments, in variable no. 3, 65% of the students felt that all four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, needed improvement. Only 3% of the students did not agree with this question. According to variable no. 4, there is a significant disagreement among the students regarding the writing items in their coursebooks. 50% of the students opined that the writing items in their book were easy to learn. However, the same percentage of the students showed that the writing items are not easy to master. In variable numbers 5, 6, and 9, the majority of the students -56%, 65%, and 62.5%, opined that some writing items needed to be excluded from their course because they did not have enough practice on writing in Intensive English Program 1. Therefore, in variable 7, 50% of the students said they needed more practice with writing in Level 1 with *Evolve 1 and 2*. Hence, they preferred to have some topics in the writing exams (and speaking exams) with which they were already familiar. Interpreting the responses, it is clear that 50% of the students find all the writing items quite difficult. In variable no. 8, 75% of the students showed that the grammar items presented in *Evolve 3* were explained clearly, but 25% of the students disagreed with this view.

**Phase Two:** The researchers coded the interview responses. The interview questions were:

1. What do you think of *Evolve 1, 2 & 3*?
2. Which skills do you find to be the most difficult in the books?
3. Is *Evolve 1, 2, or 3* a helpful book?
4. How do you feel about the exercises in the books?
5. What is your overall impression of the *Evolve* series?

The dominant themes that emerged from these responses are summarized below. See Table 3,

TABLE 3  
DOMINANT THEMES BASED ON PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Grammar and Writing items are very difficult.	Much repetition of similar items is there throughout the books.	The <i>Evolve</i> series <i>1, 2, and 3</i> are challenging for learners whose major is not English. Two books, <i>Evolve 1 and 2</i> , should not have been prescribed for Level 1 students.
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Hence, the summary of the participants' responses shows that overall, the students find *Evolve 1, 2, and 3* to be difficult for them since their major is not English. Two books, *Evolve 1 & 2*, should not have been prescribed for the students of Level 1. Even repeating the same activities and exercises does not help them much to improve their proficiency level. Based on the analysis of the responses of the research population, it is evident that the course objectives of Intensive English need some revision and modification, especially regarding the writing items. Referring to research question number 1, it can be said that the course objectives of the Intensive English Programs are not entirely appropriate and realistic for Arab EFL learners because the intended learning outcomes are not achievable for them. The reason is that

the students' prior knowledge and skills were not taken into consideration while the course objectives were formulated. In this context, the arguments of Eisner (1967) are noteworthy, which say that objectives cannot be accurately... used as criteria to measure the outcomes of curriculum and instruction. So much of learning takes place as the curriculum is constructed; the objectives cannot be fully known until the act of instruction has been completed.

In answering research question 2, it can be stated that all the contents (especially the writing items) of the prescribed textbooks are not suitable for the students of the Intensive English Programs due to their low proficiency level.

Referring to research question number 3, it can be said that teachers need to focus on the students' performance more than emphasizing the content to be covered. They must ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved and that the students have attained the desired understanding and proficiency level.

## V. DISCUSSION

Based on the study's findings, it is evident that the course objectives of Intensive English Programs need some revision and modification. This goes with the backward design of Mc Tighe and Wiggins (2005), which focuses on not covering a certain amount of content but emphasizes facilitating student learning. Once the objectives of a course are clearly defined, student progression is enabled.

When half of the participants stated that the writing items in *Evolve 3* were easy to learn, the researchers were doubtful whether their students answered this question truthfully because they had been in close contact with the students for 130 hours this semester (Spring 2024) and found that barely five students' writing skills were acceptable. However, 50% of the participants stated that the writing items were difficult to master. This means that if learners find the learning materials difficult to learn and fail to use them, learning becomes a failure. This is similar to Tyler (2013), who states that "if students are not able to transfer their knowledge outside the classroom, then education is a failure." Moreover, the students also opined that some writing items needed to be excluded from the course as they needed more practice in the previous semester. This is similar to the views of Mc Donough and Shaw (1993), who said that teachers should adapt materials to meet the needs of the learners as they are the ones who interact with the students daily and can understand what is relevant for the learners. A textbook is an important component of the EFL classroom. It is assumed that people who design courses are usually thoroughly familiar with what goes on in classrooms. However, a curriculum that is contrary to the expectations of teachers and learners might pose a great challenge for both of them.

Teachers must be aware that they are materials developers and ultimately responsible for the materials their learners' study. Therefore, considering the contents of *Evolve 1, 2, and 3*, it should be mentioned that in the writing part, the following items are the least important for the students because they will not major in English, and their specialization may not need these topics. *Evolve 1 and 2* mainly focus on writing about online posts or blogs. Here are the least important items in *Evolve 1, 2 and 3*:

- Writing online comments
- Writing online post- There are repetitions of writing online posts and comments.
- Writing an online advertisement/An ad for a local product
- Writing a travel post
- Writing a comment reacting to a podcast
- Writing a movie review

Since English is their L2 for these learners, and most are not proficient in English, these writing items must be omitted. As suggested by Mc Tighe and Wiggins (2005), learning needs to be facilitated more than simply covering the content. Besides, Griffin (2018) opines that "simply assigning more writing does not lead to better student learning or engagement." The researchers are of the view that first, students must acquire the proper knowledge of sentence structure, and then they should have command over writing simple descriptive paragraphs. If anyone can write a good paragraph, s/he can also write a blog or post properly. If they are not taught how to write the prerequisite items, such as simple, complex, and compound sentences, expecting them to write an online advertisement or post (opinion) reacting to a podcast or blog is futile.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of this study, the following are the recommendations:

- The course specification of Intensive English Programs needs to be revised and modified according to the needs of the learners.
- A Curriculum Specialist needs to be consulted for advice and in-service assistance.
- To understand current research in teaching, learning, and the progress of the target students, the university administration should focus on Mc Tighe and Wiggins's (2005) backward design.
- A placement test (not consisting of objective questions only) should be designed for the students who enroll in Intensive English Programs so that their proficiency level can be assessed beforehand.
- Only one textbook, *Evolve 1* (including all 12 units), should be taught to the students in Level 1, not *Evolve 1 and 2*.
- Realistic goals should be set for the students whose major is not English.

- When students (whose major is not English) struggle to write five sentences correctly, they should not be forced to be familiar with innumerable types of writing.
- The objectives of Intensive English Programs should ensure that competent graduates are produced.
- The curriculum of Intensive English Programs should not compel teachers to teach to the test and inhibit students' career development.
- Teachers should have some flexibility in choosing the required items to teach and omitting the repetitive and least important parts in the textbooks according to the learners' needs and level of understanding.
- Experienced and trained educators with the necessary knowledge and skills are to be assigned to teach Intensive English Programs.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The impact of teaching to the test on course design is undeniable. Because of teaching to the test, students can be successful in passing exams. However, their creativity and critical thinking are affected because they cannot apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. A course designer's full responsibility is setting broad, general goals and specifying objectives that are made accessible to all those involved with the program (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986). According to Biggs (1996), aims, learning outcomes or objectives, content, teaching and learning methods, and assessment methods all must be constructively aligned. Teaching to the test has merits and demerits, but teachers can strike the right balance between teaching to the test and preparing students for their long-term careers and life. Schiro (2013) says, "A teacher is a trained observer and diagnostician of individual needs." S/he knows what is best for the learners. Therefore, teaching to the test should be avoided so that learners are not pushed to adopt a surface approach to learning. Burke (2015) suggested that all educators study their classes and students. Therefore, as suggested by Jim Burke, the researchers have studied their classes and learners of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 and arrived at a few speculative remarks about the course objectives and contents. This paper is an invitation to reflect on the course objectives and contents of Intensive English Programs 1 and 2 at a university in Saudi Arabia and modify and revise them appropriately.

The paper has some limitations. First, the researchers found that at the time of data collection, all the students were not present, so everyone's responses could not be accessed. Another pitfall of this research was that not all the students (of different sections of Intensive English Program 1 and 2) and the instructors teaching Intensive English Program 1 and 2 could be interviewed or given a questionnaire to record their responses. If more participants were involved in this research, various perspectives about the course objectives and contents of Intensive English Program 1 and 2 could be highlighted.

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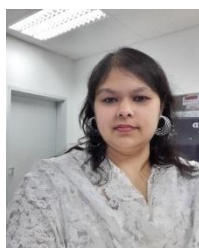
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