English Language Curicculum for Student Teachers Training to Perform in Cultirally Diversified Settings

Nataliia Avsheniuk[1], Nataliya Seminikhyna[2], Olena Lutsenko[3]

[1] Foreign Systems of Pedagogical and Adult Education Department, Ivan Ziaziun Institute of Pedagogical and Adult Education of the NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv;
National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (Ukraine)
navsheniuk@naqa.gov.ua

[2] Department of Foreign languages, Faculty of Economics, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

[3] Department of Foreign Languages for Natural Sciences Faculties, Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

ABSTRACT

As Ukraine continues to move toward Europe and the rest of the world, it is crucial that teachers improve their English language competence. Teachers' language proficiency corresponds with their capacity to provide effective quality education for diverse classrooms to reach global competence. Cultural diversity in the school population is becoming the norm rather than the exception in Ukraine. The recent rise in immigration is accountable for the rapid and significant demographic changes in Ukraine's school-aged population. The study's primary objective is to assess student teachers' perspectives on the objective, content, teaching and learning process, and assessment and evaluation elements of the importance and sufficiency of the English proficiency curriculum implemented at Ukraine's faculty of education to meet the needs of the culturally diverse school population. The case study design was used as one of the research methods. The study's participants were 14 student teachers from four different faculties of education at Ukrainian universities. Participants were chosen using a criterion sampling model. The data was collected using an open-ended question form designed by the authors during the spring semester of the 2020–2021 academic year. The data collected was analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that participants' attitudes about the objective aspect of the student teachers' English language curriculum were generally good. On the other side, it was determined that the curriculum was insufficiently tailored to students' needs, interests, and degrees of English language competence. Furthermore, participants identified insufficient time for activities, a limited selection of classroom activities (case study, collaborative work,

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discussion), and short course hours as unfavourable features. The implications of the results might help improve the English proficiency curriculum and equip student teachers to work successfully with school children who have a diversity of language and learning difficulties.

Keywords: case study design, cultural diversity, English language competence, English language curriculum, student teachers, Ukraine

Introduction

One of the eight key competencies that serve as the benchmark for how the EU Member States should incorporate lifelong learning into their strategies and infrastructure is "cultural awareness and expression". Cultural awareness affects our capacity to develop social, civic, and intercultural competencies and our feeling about initiative and entrepreneurship. In the lives of the twenty-first century, these competencies are undoubtedly closely connected and interdependent. People must continuously improve their skills, abilities, and attitudes in order to meet society's evolving requirements. One of the most critical competencies is the ability to convey one's culture. It takes more than just acquiring a particular knowledge base and skill set to strengthen a key competence. Applying the appropriate skills and expertise to fulfil challenging needs is crucial.

Culturally competent teachers should recognize each student's full potential, regardless of cultural background, and give the challenges necessary for them to accomplish their significant potential. They must be knowledgeable of their students' primary languages, backgrounds, and cultures to provide curriculum that is relevant to their students' lives. They must modify their curriculum to integrate their pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds in order to provide them with a more meaningful and collaborative educational experience. Building on students' culture and heritage not only enhances their academic success but also empowers them as persons. Teachers should involve their pupils in team-building activities in the classroom so that they may learn about and appreciate different cultures. Making cultural awareness and expression a reality in the classroom will thus require the establishment of suitable reference contexts, research into learning settings, good practices, and empirical methods (Education, 2016).

Ukraine has made significant progress in creating a modern educational system for the twenty-first century. The future of education in Ukraine must strongly emphasize equity and inclusion. As people's requirements for language learning have grown due to globalization, language learning and instruction have assumed critical significance (Ger & Bahar, 2018). In order to successfully educate students in a varied educational environment and promote their development of the necessary communication skills, future teachers must acquire English language proficiency at an appropriate level for engagement in contemporary worldwide society. All teachers must employ linguistically and culturally

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inclusive teaching methods to encourage students to engage in class activities. These methods might include scaffolding, fostering the use of foreign languages, and teaching, learning, and assessment. Understanding the cultural complexity of their school communities and how they affect the classroom is crucial for teachers. Teachers should broaden their sociocultural knowledge and offer inclusive, flexible, and relevant teaching and learning opportunities to enhance the learning process and outcomes for all students.

During language study and practice, considering the multicultural aspect of a student teacher entails improving one's proficiency in the target language and recognizing one's cultural circumstances and the ways in which they influence communication. Moreover, due to the close influence of culture, it is crucial to comprehend how crucial it is to create language curricula in a multicultural setting. To put it another way, language course curricula and syllabuses should be designed for the multicultural nature of students, their race and linguistic background.

The teacher training curriculum is a crucial component of the pedagogical education system since it illustrates how future teachers may acquire the essential competencies. Researchers argue that with the ever-changing world, a teacher training curriculum should be based on what is needed to keep the overall knowledge, skills and dispositions of practicing teachers solidly based, up-to-date and effective (Dembélé & Schwille, 2006). Therefore, the teacher education curriculum should include the subject content and the teaching method of the content. Trainee teachers should possess the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed to perform their duties effectively in the classroom and school. Teacher education programs should prepare teachers to develop students who can function effectively in the socioeconomic and political environment of the 21st century. This includes preparing people to recognize, accept and appreciate differences in attitudes, lifestyles, languages, religions, races, cultures or genders. Schools around the world are very concerned about embracing diversity as a whole with tolerance.

Due to changing classroom demographics, teachers must be equipped to recognize and work with students from cultures different than their own. In the meantime, teachers are being asked to teach populations they know very little about. On the other hand, there has been much theoretical debate concerning teachers' assigned responsibilities and the need for cultural diversity management training (González & Darling-Hammond, 1997). In its contemporary history and concerning migration, Ukraine has been mainly a sending rather than a receiving country. Approximately 400,000 foreigners have resided permanently or temporarily in Ukraine since the beginning of 2019. This migration has changed the composition of the student population in Ukraine. In the year 2018–2019, for example, the percentage of migrant children comprised 2.1% of the total student population (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2019). It should be highlighted that cultural diversity is not just tied to the issue of migration. It exists, but

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acountry's educational system mostly neglects it. However, most academics and researchers in multicultural education believe that for it to be implemented successfully, institutional adjustments must be undertaken, including modifications in the curriculum, teaching materials, and teaching and learning methods (Buxton & Lee, 2007). Despite the fact that every language is a part of a culture, it serves and reflects different cultural perspectives. Nonetheless, there are regions where populations have a similar cultural orientation but speak languages that are not only mutually unintelligible but also structurally dissimilar. This is especially true when we have a class of pupils learning and speaking English from various ethnic backgrounds.

A well-defined curriculum involving teaching goals and particular objectives was one of the important elements for offering effective and high-quality language training. As a result, developing a high-quality curriculum is critical to achieving high-quality language education. The English language training program for student teachers at the university where this study is being conducted has particular aims. First, it aims to provide students with a broad awareness of the English language and cultural diversity. Second, it educates and improves students' English communicative skills in typical social and professional situations to a somewhat proficient level. It ensures that they will obtain the professional qualifications required to perform effectively in culturally diverse school classrooms. The curriculum, in particular, provides student teachers with appropriate study skills for higher education while enhancing language competence.

Moreover, the goal of the curriculum is to develop students' perceptions and research ability for language and cultural concerns. Furthermore, master's students can acquire the B2 level of English language competency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

However, almost nothing is investigated regarding Ukrainian institutions' English language curriculums for education majors, and it is unknown what the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses are. It is debatable whether students are satisfied with the curriculum, which approaches teachers employ most frequently in class, if the resources are adequate to satisfy the educational objectives, and whether the assessment processes are favourable for teaching. The current study seeks to provide solutions to these issues. Evaluating the English language curriculum in Ukrainian universities from the perspectives of student teachers training to work in diverse contexts is central to the research. It is expected that the study findings will contribute to modifying and improving the English language curriculum at education faculties at the university and enhancing the cross-cultural quality at the tertiary level in the future. These questions will help spot whether the curriculum can train student teachers to work in a diversified environment:

1. What are student teachers' views about the objectives of the English language curriculum?

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2. What are student teachers' views about the content element of the English language curriculum?
3. What are student teachers' views about the English language curriculum's teaching and learning process element?
4. What are student teachers' views about the assessment and evaluation element of the English language curriculum?

Methodology

Study Design

One of the qualitative research methodologies used in this study was a case study. Case studies analyses an event in its current and real context, provide extensive descriptions and explanations, and aims to conduct an in-depth investigation of a system with defined limits (Merriam, 2010). The current study aimed to examine in-depth student teachers' views on the elements of the English language curriculum. A criteria sampling strategy was used to choose participants. A review of the literature on curriculum and its components was undertaken, and studies on the subject were explored to establish the participants' questions.

Study group

This study included 14 student teachers from four different faculties of education at Ukrainian universities, ranging in age from 21 to 25. A criteria sampling model, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to choose participants. As a result, studying in faculties of education at Ukrainian universities as a student teacher was used as a factor for selecting participants. Because of research ethics, the names of the individuals were not included. Instead, students that took part were assigned the codes S1, S2, … S14. It is emphasized that received information would only be exploited for scientific purposes.

Data Collection Process

The qualitative data were collected by open-ended questionnaires distributed to university students. The survey form was distributed to the student teachers using "Google Forms", and the students responded via "Google Forms". Consequently, 14 student teachers who were reachable and answered all questions were included as research participants. Data collection was undertaken during the spring semester of 2020–2021.

Data analysis

The data collected was analysed using content analysis. Before the questionnaires were sent to the 14 student participants, detailed instructions were

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given to ensure the reliability of their replies. To guarantee the validity, the data used included only direct quotes from the students, so as to accurately reflect their opinions. The data was collected in Ukrainian and translated into English without changing opinions expressed. The coding reliability was evaluated using the Miles–Huberman formula while obtaining the codes after the content analysis. The reliability percentage is obtained from the formula (Reliability Percentage = Agreement / (Total Agreement + Disagreement)), and at least 70% reliability is expected to be obtained (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Professor Avsheniuk conceived the study and was in charge of overall direction and planning. Seminikhyna and Lutsenko aided in developing the theoretical framework, collecting and interpreting the results and worked on the manuscript. All authors contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

Results

Findings related to the opinions of students on the objectives of the English language curriculum

The first question of the study was aimed to determine the opinions of student teachers on the objectives of the English language curriculum for education majors. It was seen that students' opinions were grouped under two topics as "strengths" and "weaknesses." The obtained topics, codes and the frequencies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' opinions on the objectives of the curriculum

Topics	Codes	Frequency (f)	Coder reliability %
Strengths	Concise and accurate	f 11	76
	Satisfy future student's needs	f 9	64
	Based on student-centred approach	f 10	71
	Applicable in workplace	f 8	57
	Providing intercultural value to students in preservice training and in-service context	f 7	50
	Measurable	f 6	42
	Teach students to perform skills they will perform on the job after the study.	f 6	42
Weaknesses	Including misleading concepts	f 5	36
	Insufficient to develop student autonomy	F 7	50
	Insufficient to work in a diversified setting	f 8	57

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As seen in Table 1, some opinions were grouped under the topic of "strengths". Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were: "concise and accurate" ($f = 9$); "satisfy future student's needs" ($f = 7$); "applicable in the workplace" ($f = 8$); "based on student-centred approach" ($f = 7$) and "teach students to perform skills they will perform on the job after the study" ($f = 6$). On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions about the curriculum's objectives under the theme of "weaknesses". Under this topic, the most frequently expressed codes were: "including misleading concepts" ($f = 5$), "insufficient to develop student autonomy" ($f = 7$) and "insufficient to work in a diversified setting" ($f = 5$). Direct quotations from the participants on these topics and codes are given below.

> ... *In my opinion, determined objectives in the curriculum are concise and accurate. In other words, the sentences are comprehensible to students ...* (student 4).

> ... *It is possible to state that the objectives were organized to teach students to perform skills they will perform on the job after the study ...* (student 6).

> *They are insufficient to work in a diversified setting. In a way, it seems complicated, but it is critical to creating an open and inclusive workplace environment, so all team members feel empowered to contribute* (student 5).

> *To my mind the objectives do not develop student autonomy. Instead, I mean that it is critical for the 21st-century knowledge society that the educational system cultivates autonomous, life-long learners capable of independently constructing intercultural knowledge and developing relevant skills to effectively adapt to a challenging global environment* (student 7).

Findings related to the opinions of student teachers on the content element of the English language curriculum

The second research question of the study aimed to determine student teachers' opinions on the content of the English language curriculum at the faculties of education.

According to Table 2, it was seen that some opinions were grouped under the topic of "appropriate for students". Under this topic, the most frequently expressed codes were as: "Self-sufficient in learning" ($f = 9$), "Matches the aim of the curriculum" ($f = 8$); "Suitable to the learners' present state of learning" ($f = 5$); "Appropriate organization of the content" ($f = 4$) and "Provides awareness of individual's and other's culture" ($f = 11$).

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Table 2. Students' opinions on the content of the curriculum

Topic	Codes	Frequency (f)	Coder reliability %
Appropriate to work in a diversified setting	Self-sufficient in diversified learning	f 10	71
	Matches the aim of the curriculum.	f 8	57
	Encouraging active participation of students	f 10	71
	Suitable to the learners' present state of learning	f 5	36
	Relates to the authenticity of the content selected	f 8	57
	Provides awareness of individual's and other's culture	f 11	76
	Appropriate for different methods and techniques	f 4	29
	Appropriate organisation of the content	f 5	36
Inappropriate to work in a diversified setting	Irrelevant to the language level of the student	f 8	57
	Not interesting	f 4	29
	Unable to integrate the four language skills	f 8	57
	Including too much grammar	f 7	50
	Irrelevant topics	f 9	64
	Not authentic	f 7	50
	Learning experience doesn't cater to the needs of different types of learners by providing different types of experiences	f 5	36

On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions under the topic of "Inappropriate for students", including the codes such as "Irrelevant to the language level of the students" ($f = 8$); "Irrelevant topics" ($f = 7$); "Including too much grammar" (f = 7); "Unable to integrate the four language skills" ($f = 8$); "Inappropriate for developmental levels of students" ($f = 7$) and "Learning experience doesn't cater to the needs of different types of learners by providing different types of experiences" ($f = 6$). The following excerpts are related to the topic and codes above.

> *It can be said that the content self-sufficient in learning. I mean the content equips students with skills and knowledge that can help them accomplish tasks on their own ...* (student 2).

> *... the content is interesting and uncomplicated encourages the active participation of students ...* (student 6).

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I found out that the content was with irrelevant topics. While learning, it made me bored and demotivated (student 3).

The most prominent negative aspect of the content is that it does not integrate the four language skills. Especially, activities based on listening and writing skills are limited or not present at a level student can comprehend (student 2).

Findings related to teachers' opinions on the English language curriculum's teaching and learning process element.

The third research question of the study aimed to determine student teachers' opinions on the teaching and learning process element of the English language curriculum at the faculties of education. It was seen that students' opinions were grouped under two themes "Disadvantages" of the learning process" and "Advantages of the learning process". The obtained themes, codes and frequencies are presented in Table 3.

According to Table 3, it was seen that some opinions were grouped under the topic of "Advantages of the learning process". These opinions reflected participants' negative attitudes toward the teaching and learning process element. Under this topic, the most frequently expressed codes were as: "Insufficient time for activities" ($f = 9$); "Unable to meet students' interests" ($f = 9$); "Insufficient course hours" ($f = 8$) and "Inappropriate for students' different language levels" ($f = 6$).

Table 3. Students' opinions on the teaching and learning process of the curriculum

Topic	Codes	Frequency (f)	Coder reliability %
Advantages of learning process	Consistency of methods and techniques with the objectives and the content	f 8	57
	Learning activities are in relation to real life situations	f 5	36
	Promotes team work	f 7	50
	Promotes intercultural communicative competence	f 7	50
	Immediate feedback from peers, teachers	f 5	36
	Able to reveal personal differences	f 4	29
Disadvantages of learning process	Insufficient time for activities	f 9	64
	Unable to meet students' interests in intercultural collaboration	f 8	57
	Insufficient course hours	f 8	57
	Unable to promote authentic environment	f 6	42
	Inappropriate for students' different language levels	f 9	64

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The participants expressed their positive opinions under the topic of "advantages of the learning process". Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as: "Consistency of methods and techniques with the objectives and the content" ($f = 8$) and "Promotes teamwork" ($f = 4$);" Immediate feedback from peers, teachers ($f = 4$).

In this regard, the participants' opinions are reflected in the following comments:

> ... there is limited time for activities. This is a demotivating factor ... (student 7).

> Frankly speaking, more course hours are needed to meet different student's linguistic levels ... (student 10).

> What I like is immediate constructive feedback from my teacher. It motivates me to learn more (student 13).

> Some of the activities help students engage in the teamwork willingly and helps to develop our speaking skills ... (student 14).

Findings related to students' opinions on the assessment and evaluation element of the English language curriculum.

The fourth research question of the study aimed to determine teachers' opinions on the assessment and evaluation element of the English language curriculum. It was seen that teachers' opinions were grouped under two themes as "Variety of assessment techniques" and "Deficiencies in assessment and evaluation process". The obtained topics, codes and frequencies are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' opinions on the assessment and evaluation element of the English language curriculum

Topic	Codes	Frequency (f)	Coder reliability %
Variety of assessment methods	Project assessment	f 9	64
	Test assessment	f 10	71
	Individual assessment	f 10	71
	Peer feedback	f 4	29
Deficiencies in Assessment Process	Presentation assessment	f 4	29
	Limited time for individual evaluation	f 9	64
	Lack of sufficient resources about assessment and evaluation	f 7	50
	Lack of peer review	f 6	42
	Unable to measure speaking skills	f 10	71

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According to Table 4, it was seen that the participants stated the assessment techniques they used. These were grouped under the topic of "providing different assessment techniques". Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as: "Project assessment" ($f = 11$), "Test assessment" ($f = 10$) and "Teacher assessment" ($f = 10$). On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions related to assessment and evaluation elements under the topic of "Deficiencies in assessment and evaluation process", including the codes such as "Limited time for individual evaluation" ($f = 10$); "Ineffective assessment and evaluation because of overcrowded classes" ($f = 9$); "Lack of sufficient resources about assessment and evaluation" ($f = 7$) and "unable to measure speaking skills" ($f = 7$). Direct quotations from the participants on these themes and codes are given below.

> *... In my opinion, there is limited time to evaluate students individually. I consider this as an obstacle in terms of conducting an effective assessment process ...* (student 1).

> *To my mind, the curriculum lacks fair peer reviewing, which increases motivation ...* (student 7).

> *... I think that if there are evaluation guidelines in assessment and evaluation part of speaking in the course book, we can manage the process under these rules. These deficiencies should be fulfilled* (student 11).

Discussions

The study's findings indicate that master's students in education faculties were relatively satisfied with the English language curriculum. According to the student questionnaires, students were positive about the curriculum's objectives, content, and evaluation but negative about teaching process.

Students' reflections on the curriculum received high scores for the first element of the curriculum. Most students stated that the objectives were student-centred, concise, and accurate. However, participants indicated that the objectives were insufficient to foster learner autonomy. This finding is supported by research done by Benson (2012), which indicated that institutional and policy restrictions are one of the constraints in the English language curriculum that prevent students from acquiring language learner autonomy. According to Benson, there are four constraints when implementing language learner autonomy: institutional constraints, policy constraints, conceptions of language and language teaching.

The second research question explored student teachers' opinions about the content of the English language curriculum. Most participants claimed that the curriculum's content encourages students' active participation, is self-sufficient in

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learning and relates to the authenticity of the materials. Project-based learning was named a favourable component of the curriculum that demonstrated positive affective benefits in content knowledge and helped build relationships and collaboration between groups, communication and reflection within real-world diversified settings. Siwatu (2007) also listed knowledge about linguistic and cultural diversity as essential. It provides culture-awareness of individual's and other's cultures. It corroborates with studies showing that cultural awareness needs to be integrated into teacher education (Byram, 2012), and curriculum and coursebook designs need to be done accordingly (Birckbichler, 2015). These findings suggest that the content helps students learn a foreign language. However, most student teachers expressed neutral views regarding the study's materials and that the experience they gained did not adapt to the demands of diverse classes of learners with different types of experiences.

Furthermore, most student teachers stated that the materials were inappropriate and that they could not incorporate the four language skills. These observations contradict Widdowson's (1978) research, which advocated combining the four language skills in instruction to increase learners' proficiency levels and enable advanced language acquisition. Widdowson emphasizes that almost all language functions are included in the approach for integrated and communicative language training in general and in English for specific purposes. Widdowson study highlights that practically all language functions are part of sociolinguistic contexts and different types of discourses. He even points out that separate teaching of language skills is not highly recommended from the communicative point of view.

Regarding the teaching and learning process types, the study results showed parallel perceptions, which show that it promotes teamwork that develops intercultural communicative competence. This type of contact helps pupils improve their communication skills. On the other hand, students reported dissatisfaction with the limited time for activities and pointed out that the English language curriculum was inappropriate for the students' various language levels.

Finally, participants reported that the critical assessment methods for the curriculum were project assessment, exam, and individual assessment, all of which were highly ranked. It backs up the argument that providing helpful feedback on various assessment tasks may improve learners' performance (Sambell et al., 2017). This finding is corroborated by Gibson and Shaw's (2011) research, which revealed that typical summative assessment techniques include unit tests and final presentations or projects. However, student teachers pointed out that the assessment techniques were inadequate to evaluate speaking skills and highlighted concerns about limited time for individual evaluation and a lack of appropriate resources to ensure transparency in the assessment and evaluation process. The scoring method was seen as relatively fair because there was a significant

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disparity across various faculty members. These findings contradict Rogler (Rogler, 2014), who argued that transparency in assessment involves students in the evaluation process. They are also assisted in comprehending the exam style and determining how to rate their answers or performance. Another requirement for a meaningful evaluation is reliability.

Overall, positive student reflections on the capacity of the English language curriculum to equip future teachers to function in diverse classrooms included factual accuracy, student-based approach to objectives, self-sufficiency in learning, and promotion of students' engagement.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings have crucial implications for tailoring the English language curriculum for university teacher majors. The data demonstrate that most students had good opinions regarding the curriculum's objectives, content, and assessment, which they rated highly. However, most students were dissatisfied with the teaching-learning process, indicating that it could be improved. The university should survey to research students' professional interests and the topics they intend to take so that the program may enhance its objectives and subjects that fulfil their expectations. To resolve the problem of course materials, lecturers might survey students' expectations of that topic and then use several credible sources to compile the core course book rather than relying on a single course book. Another important practical implication is that the program's educational objectives for English language majors should become more flexible, with the goal of assisting learners not only in achieving a certain level of language proficiency but also in obtaining the necessary knowledge to work in a multicultural environment. In terms of evaluation, the findings from this study show that the university should provide university lecturers with consistent, detailed grading criteria. Furthermore, the university should review the evaluation form of specific disciplines and fine-tune the grading score technique.

In conclusion, the current study aimed to contribute by investigating future teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English language curriculum. The study has reinforced the notion that the viewpoints of students who play significant roles in the curriculum implementation process are critical in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the existing curriculum. Based on the data, it is possible to claim that the curriculum has certain flaws and should be altered. More research is needed to examine the causes of the difficulties identified in this study. Although the study met its objectives, there were some inherent flaws.

This evaluation study is based solely on students' evaluations of the English language curriculum at a few Ukrainian institutions, which cannot have identified all of the English language program's strengths and shortcomings. Second,

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the study was done with a limited number of participants, only 14 students, which may have impacted the study's generalization. Furthermore, the data was gathered primarily from current students rather than graduates of the program, which may have been analysed to see whether or not the program satisfied students' requirements as its initial clearly defined objectives. Finally, the study's broad scope is a significant limitation. This study has raised several concerns in need of further investigation. First, more objective data should be acquired to avoid subjective data. Second, it may be possible to study a bigger group of participants to collect more data in future studies. As a result, more research should be carried out utilizing alternative universes and samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings achieved in this study and compare the findings.

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