

The Impact of English Language as a Medium of Instruction Amongst Non-English Major Students in the College of Science and Technology in the University of Human Development

¹Farhad Majeed Hama, ¹Omed Hasan Ahmed and ³Aram Mahmood Ahmed

¹University of Sulaimani, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

²University of Human Development, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

³Kurdistan Institution for Strategic Studies, Sulaimani Polytechnic University, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

Abstract: The language of Iraqi education system before university study is in either Arabic or Kurdish. However, when students come to universities, especially, scientific departments, the language of instructions will become English. This often becomes a great challenge for the students to deal with. Therefore, most of the colleges set an English module as one of the required modules at the first stage. Obtaining views and perceptions from students will be helpful in improving the quality of the module effectively. This research is conducted in the University of Human Development, College of Science and Technology at the end of their first year (2015-2016). The purpose is to obtain views from students in favor of further improving the module. For this, a questionnaire which consists of twelve questions was prepared and carried out amongst hundred and sixty students. The results, show several outcomes. First, students are not so aware of the university system before they join. This is because more than half of them were shocked when they first knew that English is the language of instruction in the college. Secondly, their English has improved and they feel more confident of doing activities in English now. However, they still need more time to study English because more than a quarter of the students are not satisfied with level of their understanding. Finally, according to the class activities, the study presents that students have progressed in speaking and listening skills but still have difficulties in both writing and reading skills.

Key words: Iraqi education system, English module, University of Human Development, carried out amongst, reading skills, Iraq

INTRODUCTION

English is considered to be the main language used in the process of learning and teaching in many educational institutions around the world (Li and Shum, 2008). This is correlated with the idea that states 'English has been viewed as an important foreign language in the last 20 year's (Nguyen, 2008). Using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is often seen as an effective point in terms of teaching and learning in various universities in order to promote the level of learning make learning atmosphere more effective, increase awareness and motivation amongst learners and teachers. The use of EMI is very common amongst eastern and western universities. Several studies have confirmed that EMI has largely used in educational and cultural contexts (Crystal, 2004; Graddol, 1998). More importantly, the use of English is very common in higher education institutions. For example, Ebad found that English is increasingly being

used and well-known in Saudi Arabia universities. These explanations and findings mostly match with the Iraqi EFL university settings. One of the private universities that use EMI in non-English departments and faculties is the University of Human Development particularly in the College of Science and Technology. Online and paper authentic materials were basically used to improve and upgrade the all the language skills. Based on the university visions and missions, English has played important roles for upgrading the level of learning and teaching amongst learners and teachers. There are concrete reasons for using English. It broadens the use of second language, creates cohesiveness amongst college graduates and makes more opportunities for social communications (Graddol, 1998). This statement might not have the same result for some Arabic societies. Iraqi EFL setting might have the same case, since some learners might not have enough knowledge in order to understand all study subjects in English. This could happen due to

lacks of motivation and language interference. In terms of languages, Kurdish and Arabic languages are officially used as the two native languages between learners. English has also been used by learners in different private and public universities. This shows that learners have various understanding and needs towards English. Although, Ministry of Higher Education has continuously worked on reforming the educational system in universities, the result is not met learner's needs to learn and imply English language in Iraqi EFL setting. Thus, the weaknesses, lacks of learning and using EMI should be investigated and considered amongst learners and teachers differently.

This study only focuses on the learners in non-English language colleges. Iraqi EFL learners might have various views and perceptions on the study of English language based on their academic and social needs. Tran (2007) states that students only want to learn English in order to fulfil their external needs. Nevertheless, some others may internally be interested and being pleased in learning English, so as to get excellent marks in the exams (Nguyen, 2008; Ton and Pham, 2010; Nguyen, 2011). This shows that learners have two kinds of motivations when they want to learn a new language (Harmer, 2007). Iraqi EFL learners also have different views on the use and importance of the English language.

Literature review: Due to the importance and use of the English language as a medium of instruction in various educational and cultural institutions, several studies have been conducted around the world. For example, Thai universities have increasingly used the English language since all majors are studied in English. This means that English has adopted its pace as the most dominant language. Another study shows that English is mainly used as the language classroom at different colleges (Al-Jarf, 2008). In addition, in terms of academic and communication achievements, language of instruction has greatly played important roles in order to imply successful and effective communication skills inside the class. The same statement is confirmed by Richards and Renandya (2002) who confirms that learners have opportunities to use and develop the foreign language abilities through speaking practice. However, those who have low proficient in the language classroom might not have good outcomes. At this point, teachers should be careful about the language classroom and consider the learner's needs inside class, so as to adopt and convey the message equally. Another point shows that some teachers could use L1 and L2 owing to the student's lack of proficiency in the use of English language. The same case often occur

amongst Iraqi EFL learners since some learners might not be motivated or have enough knowledge or proficiency in the use of EMI to understand all study subjects. Moreover, another study shows that the use of English is still necessary as the basic means of effective communication to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Al-Seghayer (2012) states that learners should at least learn a new or foreign language in order to make contacts and interact with others. Crystal (2004) also argues that 'one billion of learners are teaching English around the world'. Nevertheless, one study claims that confrontation and nervousness owing to lack of self-assurance and pitiable knowledge of English. Regarding non-English major students, researchers attempted to investigate problems associated with teaching and learning English in various majors (Tammi and Shuib, 2009). Additionally, another study attempted to deal with learner's perceptions on how English major students prefer learning English in their English classes (Noora, 2008). Some other researchers tried to investigate language programs and teacher's ideas on the way English language programs are taught and how the process of learning and teaching English proceed in various universities in Jordan (Abdul-Fattah, 2002; Jouba, 1996). However, Iraqi EFL researchers mostly investigated various issues of learning and teaching English amongst English major students. This study is unlike the previous study, since, it mainly concentrates on the effectiveness of using English as a medium of instruction amongst non-English major students.

Factors behind learning English as a Foreign language:

There are many factors behind using English as a medium of instruction in non-English departments and faculties. State and private universities have their own missions and policies in Iraq and Kurdistan particularly. One of the missions is to teach various subjects in English, since, this language is globally recognized and used as the most dominant language (Crystal, 2004). More particularly, English is now used by more private universities in Kurdistan. This research particularly deals with the use of English as a medium of instruction in the College of Science and Technology in the University of Human Development. The use of English has its own pace and status for multiple purposes and reasons in this college. The reasons can be identified and classified. First, most students feel that English is a valuable and beneficial language because it can be used as the best means of communication globally (Nguyen, 2010). The same situation can be observed amongst non-English major Iraqi EFL students. Nevertheless, some students might

be demotivated in learning English because of underprivileged learning condition and outmoded teaching methods amongst teachers (Tran, 2007). Learning condition and teaching methods might be reasons for the ignorance of learning and using English amongst Iraqi EFL learners. As a result, some students are not ready to learn and practice English language. However, they have studied English language for a long time (Nguyen, 2011). Secondly, Iraqi EFL learners mainly want to study English owing to external needs. This means that they want to learn English for future career and study purposes. Harmer (2007) states that learners want to learn English because they have external motivation and needs. Thirdly, some others are interested in learning English because of academic goals, travelling abroad, technology and financial accesses (Masavisut *et al.*, 1986; Gardner, 1985). These interests match with Iraqi EFL learner's interests, since, they have various needs. Another aim is to practice language skills properly. As known, Iraqi EFL learners study English differently. This means that some learners are willing to practice speaking and listening. Some others are interested in practicing reading and writing activities as mentioned above. Due to the above-mentioned points, University of Human Development continuously works in order to raise awareness of learning and using English as a medium of instruction.

The statement of the problem: Computer Science and IT courses become obsolete, so frequently, therefore, students often need to update their knowledge and knowing English is very vital to do so. Iraqi students who join universities often face the issue of using EMI. This is mainly because they study in their native languages before coming to university. To deal with this issue, universities often set a module at first stage to teach English which includes Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing skills. Obtaining student feedbacks is believed to be one of the most effective techniques in improving this module properly.

The study questions: The current study attempts to find out pedagogical and academic answers for the following questions: To know whether the students are aware of the study language of the university or not, to know how non-English major students are confident with English language skills. To know if their English skills have improved or not, To know their abilities in understating other modules which are taught in English? To know which class activities are useful which are not?

The value of the study: The present study is valuable for the University of Human Development-College of Science and Technology. It helps them to reflect upon the teaching methods of English module.

The scope of the study: The present study is limited to a number of non-English major students in the college of science and technology in the University of Human Development. It is also limited to the investigation of using English language as a medium of instruction during the academic year (2015-2016).

Data collection: In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following procedures are conducted: a questionnaire is constructed under the supervision of English language, academic debate lecturers and some other specialists in the English department who scrutinize validity, reliability of its questions and make comments, suggestions and modifications if required.

Four different non-English major undergraduate students are selected as a sample of study from college of science and technology in the University of Human Development. The students are selected in the Departments of Information Technology and Computer Sciences, since they study all the subjects in English. The questionnaire responses are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers used a descriptive analytical approach to justify and analyze the data achieved from the questionnaire quantitatively and qualitatively. This is correlated with descriptive approach deals with characteristics of research quantitatively and qualitatively (Tavakoli, 2012). This approach suits the investigation aims which present the student's perspectives on using English as a medium of instruction in non-English departments. The data were analyzed descriptively. The pie charts are used to display the achieved data quantitatively. Pie charts are very beneficial graphic aids that can assist readers of study reports understand better comprehend the study outcomes (Riazi, 2016).

The questionnaire: In order to achieve required data from undergraduate students, a questionnaire which consists of open questions was designed. A questionnaire mainly contains open give the study participants a chance to have and add more great and depth answers than closed items (Heigham and Croker, 2009). In addition, close

ended questions were constructed so as to be answered easily. The purpose of close ended questions is to make them answer quickly and easy to complete, devoid of getting into complicated specifics (Lavidas *et al.*, 2014). The questionnaire items were checked by the researchers and some professors in English language and applied linguistics in terms of face validity, content reliability. After checking the questionnaire, some items have been changed and deleted with the purpose of improving questionnaire content and validity.

The study participants: About 80 undergraduate students from college of science and technology in the University of Human Development were randomly selected as a sample of study. Information Technology and Computer Science Departments were chosen, since, students study all the study subjects in English. The instructions are also in English. The participants were male and female. They also study English language and academic debate subjects to upgrade and improve the English language level in their first year. In addition, it is mandatory for all Iraqi EFL and computer science lecturers to teach all subjects in English.

The curriculum: Various authentic online and study resources were used to enrich the study curriculum. The curriculum was to improve listening and speaking, reading and writing. Songs, movies, drama, scenarios and theater videos are mainly used to enrich and improve speaking and listening skills. In addition, online activities and games were selected and used in the computer labs at the weekends with the support of a native English language lecturer. For reading and writing, authentic books and online materials were selected to study different forms of academic reading and writing such as reports, essays, assignments and research study. For this purpose, students practiced writing skills on computers by using word processors in the computer labs. The purpose of using computer labs is to develop the ideas of teaching and learning English with technology amongst teachers and students. The reliable online and study sources are (italk.com), (coach.me/plans/learn to speak), (amazonaws.com/unex-esl) and (academic writing).

The study administration: After preparing and checking the questionnaire, researchers nominated samples of undergraduate students in two different departments amongst four groups of students. First, the researchers explained the aim and importance of the study in English and Iraqi for students. Second, all required instructions were given to the students on how they answer open and

close ended questions. After that, the questionnaires were distributed amongst the students under the invigilation of the researchers and some teachers. All instructions and study ethics were orally explained to the participants in English and Iraqi. The students had forty minutes to answer all questions. This administration was conducted on the 20th of May 2015. This date was nominated because the students finished all the study subjects before this period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting formal administration and collecting data, the students demonstrated their views and perspectives based on various open and closed ended questions on the impact and importance of using English as a medium of instruction for teaching the whole subjects. However, some students might not have proper replies for various questions because they might not have full expertise or required level in teaching all subjects in English. This might relate to the different levels of proficiency and practice of English language amongst the students. On the other hand, many brilliant ideas which represent student's thinking and views were expressed by the study participants. This is associated with "Multiple respondents provide several ideas each and the result is many diverse ideas that represent the richness of thinking" (Jason and Glenwick, 2016). The outcomes of the study were analyzed as the following.

Was it a shock to find out the language of your college is in English? According to the results for this point, 21% of the respondents chose 'NO' while 79% of the study participants selected 'YES'. This shows that most of the study respondents viewed that English language was shock to them due to some reasons. First, they have already studied all the subjects in Arabic or Kurdish in school study. Another reason is that Iraqi students might not have opportunities to practice English language intensively.

Do you think your English has improved at the end of your first stage? Based on the answers achieved from the data collection, 81% of the study participants showed that they have improved their English at their first stage. On the other hand, 19% of the respondents viewed that they have not upgraded their English. This indicates that most of the participants intensively attempted to develop their own language level with instructors.

Do you feel more confident doing activities in English now? 84% of respondents state that they feel more self assured in doing activities in English. Nevertheless, 16% of learners do not have the same feeling. This outcome

shows that doing various activities inside the classroom, particularly in English language and academic subjects assists learners to be more confident with the process of learning English.

To what extent did you understand your lessons in English? Please rate your level. The answers are divided into four different percentages. Each percentage has its own pace. The first result shows that 47% of the participants indicate that they could understand 70% of the study subjects in English. In addition, 31% of the respondents present that they could only comprehend 50% of the study subjects in English. 16% of the participants state that they were able to understand 30% to <20% of the study subjects in English. In total, most of the study participants managed to understand all the subjects in English.

Did you get benefits from (watching English movies)? Please rate. Depending on the answers, 61% of the participants showed that they got benefits from English movies. However, only 39% present that they do not get benefits from English films. This rate present that most of the learners are interested in watching English movies to improve and upgrade the level of English language.

Did you get benefits from (Listening to English songs)? Please rate based on participant's views, 65% of the learners like listening to English songs while 35 of them are doing the same activity. Most participants show that they have interests in listening to English songs in order to develop the level of English language.

Did you get benefits from (Reading Stories)? Please rate regarding this question, 60% of participants stated that they did not get benefits from reading stories. Nevertheless, only 40% showed that they got benefits from reading stories. This indicates that most learners are not satisfied with reading stories.

Did you get benefits from (skimming newspapers)? Please rate skimming is an important technique that can be used for finding specific information. Based on the finding, most participants show that they did not employ this technique while reading newspapers. About 39% only used this technique, so as to find particular information in English newspaper.

Did you get benefits from (presentation skills)? Please rate present skill is often necessary for the university students with the purpose of presenting various topics and developing arguments on different study subjects. About 74% present that they got reimbursements from presentation skills. On the other hand, only 36% show that they did not get benefits from presentation skills. This indicates that most of the students presented presentations and practiced their own presentation skills properly.

Did you get benefits from (classroom discussion)? Please rate university students have academic debate and English language as two obligatory subjects in their first year. For these subjects, students always discuss many topics in English. Thus, 81% of the study respondents indicate that they got benefits from classroom debates. However, 19% of the study participants show that they did not get benefits from the same subject.

Did you get benefits from (essay writing)? Please rate Writing skill is an important activity that should be learnt and practiced by university student, especially in the English language classes. 30% of the respondents show that they got benefits from writing skills through writing reports, assignments and other various activities inside and outside classes. Nevertheless, 70% state that they did not get benefits from the same skill. This result presents that this skill might not be practiced well amongst the students.

Did you get benefits from (report writing)? Please rate report writing is another prominent element that is practiced by learners, so as to learn writing skill or how they write report for different computer subjects. Depending on the finding only, 32% of the respondents state that they got benefits from report writing. The majority of the participants claimed that they did not get benefits from the same activity. This outcome points out that the students were not able to practice and learn writing report.

Based on the findings and pervious authentic studies, the results can be analyzed and discussed. The answer from the first question shows that most of the Iraqi EFL students are not familiar with studying various subjects in English language. This means that English language has not been used as a compulsory language for school subjects. However, English language has obligatory being used by the majority of schools and universities in different countries around the world. For instance in Thai context "the government has long realized the importance of the English language as a major core subject in schools and it has been a compulsory subject at varying levels" (Masavisut *et al.*, 1986). There are also plans, strategies and efforts from the Ministry of Education to change the language of instructions from Arabic and Kurdish to English in Kindergartens, private and state schools for different age groups in the near future for English and non-English language subjects. This often makes Iraqi EFL learners to be more familiar and motivated while studying English at universities. Regarding the second question, most learners believe that they can practice and improve their English language level at the end of the first stage. This presents that learners have practiced and improved with the assistance of their

teachers. However, some learners show that their English has not improved. This relates to the idea that indicates some learners might feel difficulties or embarrassed or they are not ready to learn English properly. Depending on answers from question four, most of Iraqi EFL learners are self-assured with English language and are able to understand various computing subjects in English. This result indicates that the students are really motivated to study and learn English language subjects in different ways. Regarding replies from question five and six, most of the learners are motivated and eager to watch and listen to English songs and movies in order to learn and practice of the English language as a part of their life. This outcome shows that learners have intrinsic motivation and want to promote it through learning English (Harmer, 2007). In terms of answers from questions 7 and 8, most of the study participants present that they did not get benefits from reading and skimming newspapers and stories as a part of their reading activities inside and outside classrooms. However, Hadfield and Hadfield (2008) and Harmer (2007) confirm that learners can activate knowledge, predict from the context and do scanning and skimming for various types of genres. This will be beneficial for learners to be stronger and active in their own discussion and reading skills. On the topics of presentation skills and classroom discussion in question nine and ten these two activities can be seen as great parts of speaking skills, since, there are often more opportunities for learners to express present and discuss more topics inside the class orally. Learners showed that these two activities are highly conducted. Presentation is defined as a highly organizational and effective for communication (Kogon *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the benefits of classroom discussion are to develop critical thinking, provide variety of ideas and tie relations Sandidge. This means that practicing presentation skills and classroom discussion will be more practical and beneficial for the students continuously. These two activities also enrich listening and speaking skills amongst the student because they are mostly oral. This shows that these two activities are complementary and are prominent for students. More particularly, Iraq EFL learners would like to learn more speaking skill. Hadfield and Hadfield (2008) states that “speaking presents the necessity of interaction among people which is not only putting a message together but also the response that the listener can give to the speaker”. This skill seems to be more important for learners to conduct discussion sessions in academic debate classes With regard to writing skills in question eleven and twelve, most of the participants showed that they did not get benefits from

essay and report writing. Learners sometimes have difficulties in writing style and text content (Ur, 1996). This skill is not easy to practice amongst Iraqi EFL learners since it needs more efforts and practices inside and outside the class. Thus, teachers should have techniques and suitable strategies in order to have comments, feedback and correction on various pieces of writing (Ur, 1996).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that students are desperately in need to improve their writing and reading skills. However, the university used authentic materials with the support of native and non-native English language teachers. The university still needs to have a plan to make a difference and take those skills into considerations for the upcoming years. In Addition, the methods used in teaching speaking and listening skills were successful and need to be continued. Despite of their improvements, one module for learning English in their first stage is not sufficient. Therefore, the university needs to have a plan to increase hours of studying English. The results also show that students are not so aware of the university system and knowing the fact that the language of study is fully English was a shock for most of them. This should also push the university to have a to educate new students to be aware of the university rules and curriculums.

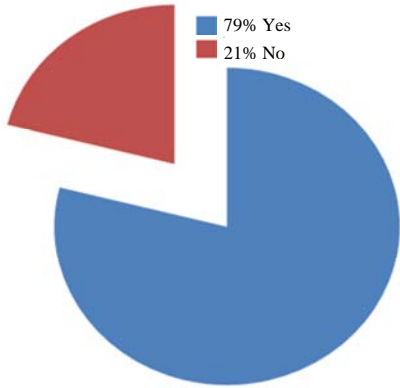
Pedagogical implications: Based on teaching experiences amongst researchers, computer and English language teachers and the research findings, the teachers should have plans to use English as a medium of instruction and convey the message and content of the lectures in English. The teachers should use English simply and communicative language approach techniques and strategies properly in order to sort out the problems of using English and practice all language skills in a collaborative way. Additionally, to improve and practice English language continuously, English language and academic debate lecturers can assist learners properly at the first stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

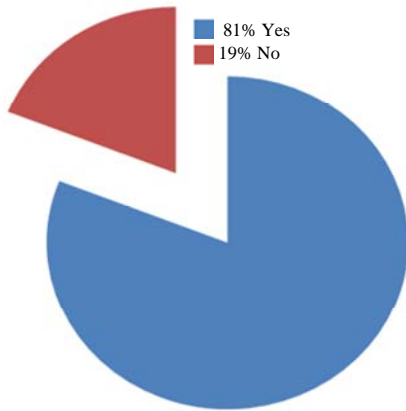
The scope of this research is limited to a number of students in the College of Science and Technology. The research area is only about the use and importance of English language amongst teachers and students. For the future, researchers can conduct studies on how to motivate non-English major students to learn English.

Appendix: A questionnaire:

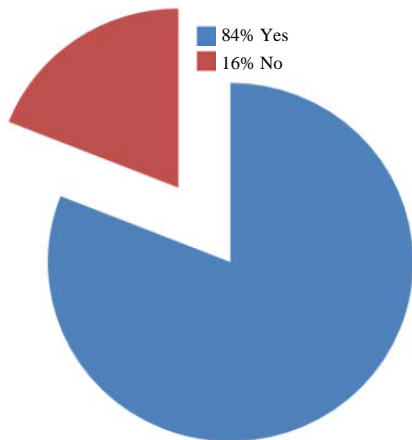
English Language Learner Feedback Form May 2016 College of Science and Technology; Department of Computer Science and Information Technology



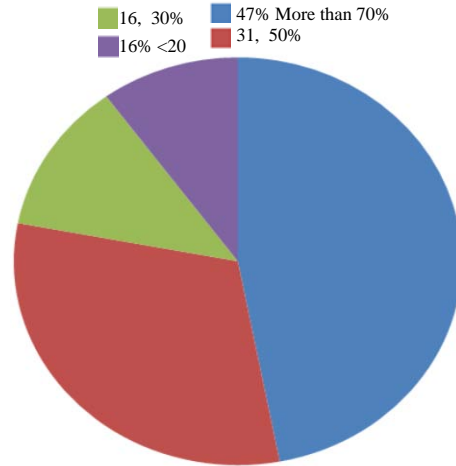
1: Was it a shock to find out the language of your college is in English?



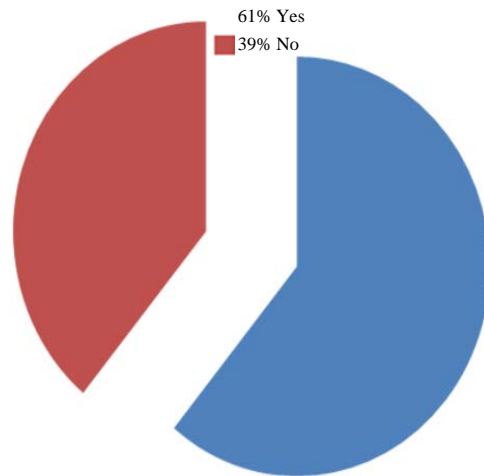
2: Do you think your English has improved at the end of your first stage? Yes, No



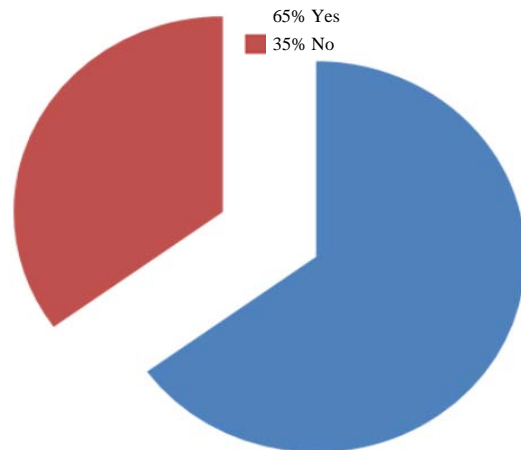
3: Do you feel more confident doing activities in English now? Yes, No <20%



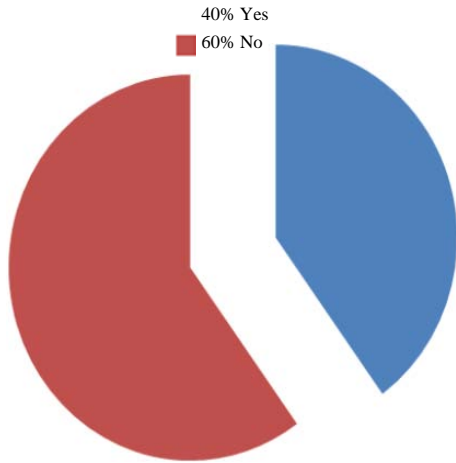
4: To what percentage did you understand your other Modules except English Module? Please rate your level. More than 70, 50, 30%



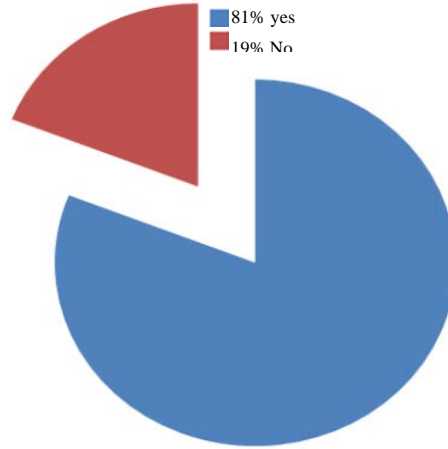
5: Did you get benefits from (watching movies)? Please rate Yes, No



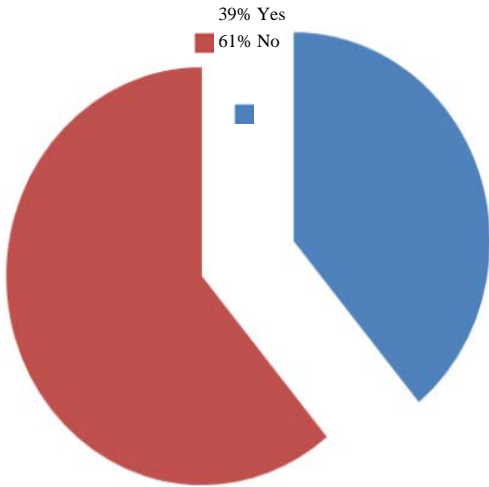
6: Did you get benefits from (Listening to English songs)? Please rate Yes, No



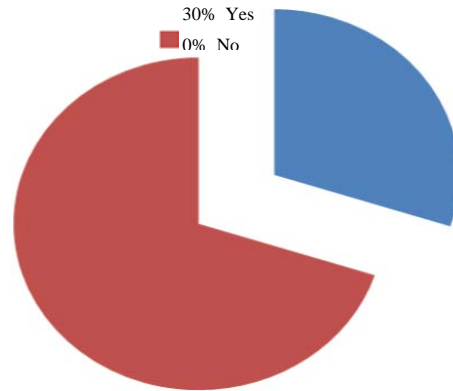
7: Did you get benefits from (Reading stories)? Please rate Yes, No



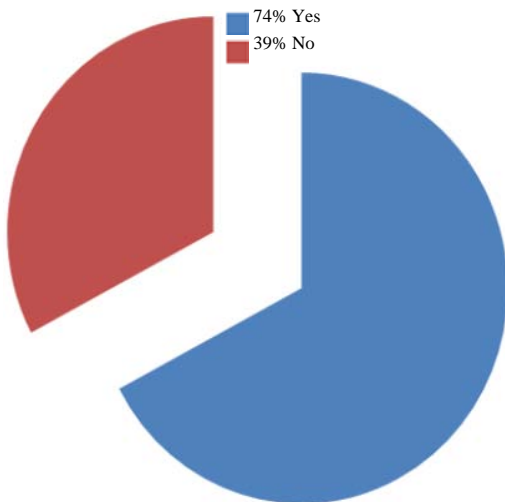
10: Did you get benefits from (Classroom discussion)? Please rate Yes, No



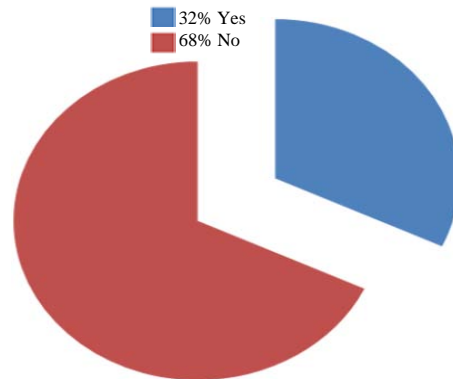
8: Did you get benefits from (Presentation skills)? Please rate Yes, No



11: Did you get benefits from (Essay writing)? Please rate Yes, No



9: Did you get benefits from (Presentation skills)? Please rate Yes, No



12: Did you get benefits from (Report writing)? Please rate Yes, No

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