CURRICULUM REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PREPARATORY PROGRAMME

*Loh Yoke Len, Chua Yong Wei,
Chelster Sherralyn Jeoffrey Pudin, Natalie Ann Gregory,
Priscilla Shak Yee Ping, & Yoon Sook Jhee
*lyl@ums.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In addition to the entry criterion of obtaining the stipulated minimum IELTS band or TOEFL score, an alternative route taken by international students is to participate in a preparatory programme and achieve the required results. Many of these students select the latter option due to their low proficiency level of English. The current research examined a foundation programme for international students in terms of its curriculum via a questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The sample comprised former students of the programme who are currently studying in Universiti Malaysia Sabah, lecturers teaching these students, and deans of schools where these students are studying. Based on the findings, an alternative programme is proposed to overcome the shortcomings of the existing programme.

Keywords: International students, foundation/preparatory programme, English language proficiency, tertiary education

INTRODUCTION

At Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the International Student Foundation Programme (ISFP) was developed as a preparatory programme to equip international students with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) for the Certificate of English Language Competency. It is primarily for candidates who want to continue their undergraduate or post-graduate studies.

This programme consists of two main phases which are conducted over a duration of six months with 800 contact hours. Phase 1 concentrates on modules for English Language Skills (from basic to intermediate for EFL & ESL learners). It consists of five core modules which are:

    i.   Module 1 – Grammar Skills
    ii. Module 2 – Reading Skills
    iii. Module 3 – Writing Skills
    iv. Module 4 – Listening Skills
    v. Module 5 – Speaking Skills

Phase 2 of the programme focuses on Extended Pre-Sessional Modules (from intermediate to high intermediate for EFL & ESL learners) which expose students to a variety of topics from general or current issues to scholarly knowledge. The modules consist of:

    i.   Module 6 - Research Writing in English
    ii. Module 7 - Public Speaking in English
    iii. Module 8 - Malay Language
    iv. Module 9 - Malaysian History & Culture
    v. Module 10 - Malaysian Civilization

The ISFP is designed for students of all language proficiencies, as they are streamed and taught according to their English Language competency which is determined after taking the English Placement Test (EPT).

Problem Statement

Although students obtained the ISFP certificate, some of them still have problems in using the English language as a medium of communication when they embark on their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, particularly when the language of instruction is in English. UMS academic staff from various schools have lamented on the poor academic performance of these students and they pinpoint that their lack of English language proficiency as one of the factors that contribute to their failures in pursuing their basic degree.

In addition, students appear to be over-burdened in the second phase as they have to remember factual information learnt in Malaysian History and Culture, and Malaysian Civilization as well as grammatical, lexical, and syntactic knowledge of a new language, that is Malay language. This is reflected in the substantial number of absentees during these classes and low scores for these modules by students who are proficient in English. Furthermore, they perceive that the two former modules would not enhance their studies in UMS.

The observations mentioned could point to particular weaknesses of the ISFP and measures should be taken to improve the programme. Furthermore, the curriculum for ISFP has not been reviewed since its inception in 2008. Thus, it is timely to conduct a review of the curriculum in 2013 so that the changing needs of students can be addressed. Prior to proposing recommendations for a new programme, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study to gather valid data related to the ISFP curriculum.

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim and objectives of this research project which was conducted over a period of six months are as follows:

a. Aim: To review and improve the existing ISFP curriculum.
b. Objectives:
    i.   To obtain feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the existing syllabuses, assessments and teaching materials of the ten modules taught in ISFP;
    ii. To determine the language and learning needs of international students;
    iii. To identify the aspects of the existing curriculum that need to be modified;
    iv. To make recommendations on how to alter the aspects identified.

Research Questions

i.   What are (a) the strengths and (b) the weaknesses of the existing syllabuses, assessments, and teaching materials of the ten modules taught in ISFP?
ii. What are the language and learning needs of international students?
iii. Which aspects of the existing curriculum need to be modified?
iv. How can the aspects identified be altered to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the international students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum is defined by Tanner and Tanner (1980) as intended learning experiences and outcomes planned and designed systematically to construct knowledge and experience. Curriculum needs to be evaluated and reviewed to ascertain how the implemented curriculum has impacted the students' learning experiences. This is a vital procedure conducted to revise or improvise the curriculum and materials used (UNESCO-IBE, n.d). The review conducted in this programme was based on evaluation principles. Evaluation is defined as a process of collecting information for decision making especially in terms of the deliverance of the desired outcomes (ICAP, 2014). It also provides descriptive information about the strengths of the programme's goals, process, implementation and product. The information elicited is used for decision-making of the current project or future planning. Curriculum evaluation refers to the process of depicting, gathering, and providing information related to the curriculum for future decision making. This decision could help to maintain the existing curriculum, adjust the curriculum or to remove the old curriculum and replace it with a new one (Stufflebeam, 1983).

Curriculum Review

The review of this programme was conducted based on Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model. CIPP model introduced by Stufflebeam (1983) focuses on four components of evaluation, namely context, input, process, and product. Context identifies needs, problems, and opportunities within the targeted environment. Input evaluation defines the strategies, approached, facilities, and financial support involved in delivering or implementing a project. Process evaluation monitors the progress, document the project, and maintain accountability throughout the project. Product evaluation examines the intended and unintended outcomes in order to know how the project has benefited the stakeholders.

This paper focuses on input evaluation of the programme. Input of the programme refers to the intended content to be delivered, materials used for content delivery. Input evaluation of the programe also included the relevance of the content in preparing the students for future studies. Furthermore, it also examined the relevance of the language skills component and general knowledge about the host country. It also examined how the content was applied in their degree programme. This evaluation was crucial to identify the gap of the programme and the needs of the students, if any. It also identified how far the content could be applied in their degree programme.

Curriculum Design

Experts in the field of curriculum design have proposed a variety of models to develop effective curriculums. Among the well-known ones cited by Dagalea (n.d.) are the Tyler Model (1949) by Ralph Tyler, the Taba Model (1962) by Hilda Taba, and the Saylor and Alexander Model (1974) by Galen Saylor and William Alexander. Since then, Mrutyunjaya Mishra (n.d.) has listed other approaches including the developmental approach, the functional approach, the ecological approach, subject/teacher centred design, learner centred curriculum, activity based curriculum, integrated curriculum, core curriculum, hidden curriculum, collateral curriculum, null curriculum, and spiral curriculum. In addition, backward design is a practical approach of identifying the target goal followed by charting the course to guide learners in attaining the goal (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Despite the different labels, all these approaches inherently possess a common goal, which is to develop learners' knowledge and to equip them with the skills that they need in their future endeavour.

Since all these approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, an eclectic approach in harnessing their beneficial aspects is encouraged in designing any curriculum. As an illustration, the initial step could be to pinpoint the target goals as advocated by the backward design. Next, the knowledge and skills that enable learners to achieve the goals may be ascertained. Then, in accordance to the learner centred approach, the learners' needs are taken into consideration when selecting materials and activities to enhance learning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a mixed method research which combined qualitative and quantitative data analyses. The data collection involved focus group discussions with ISFP teachers, UMS lecturers, and students; two surveys using two sets of questionnaires for current and former ISFP students; and face-to-face interviews with administrators and managerial staff. To begin with, the ISFP teachers' feedback was gathered via focus group discussions conducted among those who teach the same module. Similarly, focus group discussions or face-to-face interviews were conducted among identified UMS lecturers to elicit their responses. Next, focus group discussions were held with current and former students after they filled in the survey questionnaires. Data obtained via questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). Finally, the interview sessions with UMS administrators and UMS Link management were recorded and transcribed before analyses were conducted.

Samples

The sample comprised 216 respondents. Those from UMS are the Director of International Student Affairs Centre, deans, lecturers, and former students of ISFP who are in their second or third year of studies in both Kota Kinabalu and Labuan campuses. In addition, those directly involved in ISFP were selected as respondents. They are the managerial staff of UMS Link, former ISFP Academic Coordinator, and Student Affairs Coordinator, ISFP academic staff, and 20th cohort of students who completed the ISFP in April 2013. Refer to Table 1 for the exact number of respondents.

Table 1: Number of Respondents

No.	Sample	Number of Respondents
1	Director of International Affairs Centre	1
2	Deans	3
3	Lecturers	22
4	Former students of ISFP (current UMS students)	80
5	Managerial staff of UMS Link	3
6	Current and former Coordinators of ISFP	2
7	Academic staff of ISFP	10
8	Students of the 20th intake	95
	Total	216

Instruments

The instruments designed for the research included a questionnaire, and three sets of questions for focus group discussion sessions or interviews. The questionnaire for former ISFP students comprises four components, namely demographic details, ranking modules according to degree of usefulness, evaluation of modules using a four-point Likert Scale, and overall opinion of the programme and recommendations. Firstly, focus group discussion questions, which were targeted at former ISFP students, focus on the strengths and weaknesses of ISFP in preparing them for tertiary education in UMS and recommendations on positive changes for the programme. Secondly, focus group discussion or interview questions, which were designed for lecturers, seek their opinions on former ISFP students' ability to undertake academic tasks, the appropriateness of ISFP curriculum in providing the foundation for tertiary education, and their recommendations to enhance the programme. Thirdly, interview questions, which were specifically for deans, include the academic performance of former ISFP students, the appositeness of the programme, and their proposals on how to better equip students for tertiary education in UMS.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

The data collection procedures involved identifying the respondents, and conducting the survey, focus group discussion, and interview sessions. The data obtained via questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) whereas the interview sessions with UMS deans and lecturers were recorded and transcribed before analyses were conducted.

RESULTS

Research Question 1(a):

What are the strengths of the existing syllabuses, assessments, and teaching materials of the ten modules taught in ISFP?

The strengths of these three aspects will be presented from the perspectives of the respondents who are directly involved in the teaching and learning processes, namely ISFP teachers, current and former ISFP students.

The qualitative data from the focus group discussion and interview sessions with ISFP teachers revealed a general agreement that the existing syllabuses, assessments, and teaching materials have their merits. This is evidenced by improvement in students' command of English language, their ability to communicate in basic conversational Malay, as well as their knowledge of the historical and socio-cultural aspects of Malaysia. To a significant extent, the syllabus contents of these modules are useful and helpful to students in gaining knowledge of the English grammatical system, the conventions of research writing and public speeches besides providing practices in reading comprehension, writing simple essays of different genres, and speaking to an audience. The strengths of Public Speaking module are all components are useful to students and they have learnt the conventions of making an individual speech. For example, components of Malay Language module (vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, reading, speaking, and writing) are useful; students with good English language proficiency are able to write using proper sentence structure and identify vocabulary. Similarly, the strengths of Malaysian History and Culture module are suitable topics on comprehension and discussion offer opportunities for active exchange of opinions and reflections; and students showed an increased personal growth, that is accepting other people's ideas, and gaining self-confidence and self-esteem.

Next, assessments and allocation of marks are appropriate for all modules except for the grammar module. In addition, there is a substantial variety of assessments for listening, and speaking modules in particular. For instance, the assessments of the speaking module comprise dialogues, role plays, and sketch presentations, while those of public speaking consist of

impromptu and prepared speeches with PowerPoint to enable students to gain confidence when speaking in public. Majority of the assessments are suitable for students' levels of English proficiency and the allocation of marks for assessments, is fair for reading, speaking, and public speaking, Malay language, Malaysian History and Culture, and Malaysian Civilization modules. Teachers also commented that the teaching materials, which are local and imported textbooks, may be useful as reference materials and they would normally use other supplementary materials to enhance the teaching process and facilitate the learning process. These materials include handouts (notes and worksheets), video clips, PowerPoint slides, and online exercises.

Current and former ISFP students also expressed their views on the strengths of the ten modules via two sets of questionnaires and several focus group discussion sessions. The data show that their feedback was in congruence that learning the English-focused modules has enhanced their command of the language, especially among successful students who obtained good grades for the programme. They highlighted macro and micro language skills on listening, speaking, reading, and writing; rudiments of grammar; and the process involved in research writing and public speaking as the strengths of the modules concerned. Among the different genres of essays in the Writing Skills module, they pinpointed the argumentative essay as the most important because they are required to write in this genre for their assignments at the university.

On the contrary, only a minority of the students viewed the three non-English focused modules positively. Among them, one student commented that the input on conversational Malay language, historical events and cultural diversity of Malaysia was of practical application, informative, and interesting, respectively. They also considered the oral and written modes of assessments as a positive aspect of the modules such as individual interviews, sketch presentations, impromptu speeches, prepared speeches with PowerPoint, watching a movie and answering questions based on the movie; note taking while listening; and project presentations other than the normal pen and paper tests. Finally yet importantly, students generally preferred supplemented teaching materials to the textbooks because these materials are related to more current issues that they can associate with.

Research Question 1(b):

What are the weaknesses of the existing syllabus, assessments, and teaching materials of the ten modules?

Similar to the first research question, ISFP teachers, current and former ISFP students' feedback on the weaknesses of these three aspects will be deliberated. Their opinions were obtained via focus group discussion sessions and questionnaires.

The results indicate that although ISFP teachers generally agreed on the contents of the syllabuses, several of them were of the opinion that the contents for Public Speaking and Research Writing syllabuses were too dense for the duration of 60 contact hours. They have to complete teaching the contents of the modules within the stipulated time with scarcely any opportunities to pause and check students' mastery of what has been taught or guide them individually in their speeches, presentations, and academic essays, especially when the class enrolment exceeds 20. Consequently, weaker students do not have sufficient time to acquire what is being taught. Therefore, it could be observed that a majority of students had difficulties in delivering speeches to an audience and writing academic essays as they are unfamiliar with these skills. In addition, students pointed out that the Writing Skills module did not prepare them adequately for the Research Writing module. Furthermore, a majority of the former ISFP students commented that some of the contents of the Writing Skills module learned were not helpful in their studies in UMS.

The weaknesses in assessments were highlighted by teachers who are teaching the grammar, listening, and writing modules. They highlighted that the allocation of marks for Grammar is not appropriate. Besides that, there is no standardization of class assignments for the grammar and listening modules. In addition, the writing assessments do not measure students' ability, especially those with low proficiency level, because 40% is allocated for assignments comprising four essays whose authenticity remains dubious.

The data also revealed that the textbooks for Grammar, Listening Skills (for Academic Purposes), Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Public Speaking, and Malaysian Civilization were too demanding on students' proficiency level. For example, a teacher stated that the grammar textbook provides detailed aspects of grammar using specialised linguistic terminologies. Students who do not know the basics of grammar, such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs are clearly at a loss when reading these explanatory notes. Even some teachers feel that it is challenging to explain the notes to the students. There is only single page of discrete, mechanical, and not contextualised exercises for each grammatical unit. This does not seem to provide adequate practice for students to master it. As for the textbook for Listening for Academic Purposes, students face difficulties in understanding the spoken texts or the script. Next, the passages or texts in the reading textbook are too lengthy with vocabulary that proves to be beyond the students' level of comprehension. Furthermore, the textbook for Public Speaking caters more for working adults rather than for tertiary students as examples of language usage are related to the workplace. Lastly, students pointed out that the contents of the textbook for Malaysian Civilization are related to concepts and terminologies which are unfamiliar to them.

Research Question 2:

What are the language and learning needs of international students?

Students' responses and teachers' views to the above research question will be presented from two perspectives, namely their language needs, that is why do they need to learn the language, and their learning needs, that is what do they need in order to learn.

The data gathered from students' focus group discussions indicate that the fundamental purpose of these students learning English is for verbal communication in oral and written modes that meet the demands of a tertiary education. There is great necessity for them to be able to understand when listening to lectures and reading academic texts such as reference books and journal articles. In addition, they need to be able to express their opinions as accurately, fluently, and competently as possible when they deliver their presentations and write academic essays as part of their assignments. As highlighted by teachers involved in teaching non-English focused modules, a language barrier between students and them could result in adverse effects on the academic performance of the students who are not motivated to learn because they do not understand the medium of instructions. This could be one of the reasons for these non-focused English modules to be rated as the three 'least motivated to learn' by current ISFP students. The quantitative results in Table 2 show that the lower the mean, the higher the ranking. Besides learning English, students also expressed the usefulness of learning the national language which is Malay for daily transactional or conversational purposes.

Table 2: Ranking of Modules by Former and Current ISFP Students

Module	Former ISFP Students		Current ISFP Students	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
Speaking	1	3.30	3	4.41
Listening	2	3.74	4	4.65
Reading	3	4.04	2	4.35
Writing	4	4.67	1	3.91
Grammar	5	4.89	5	5.13
Public Speaking	6	5.22	6	5.19
Research Writing	7	5.89	7	5.65
Malay Language	8	7.07	8	5.89
Malaysian History and Culture	9	8.00	9	7.80
Malaysian Civilisation	10	8.17	10	8.07

Based on teachers' comments during focus group discussion sessions, students need to be equipped with the macro and micro skills pertaining to

language learning. They agreed that poor reading skills and limited vocabulary knowledge act as a barrier in reading comprehension. Therefore, students need to be taught recognising words to connect with ideas; skimming; scanning; distinguishing opinions from facts; identifying main ideas and supporting details; referencing; inferencing; and drawing conclusions. Furthermore, they felt the dire need to train students in writing grammatically and syntactically correct sentences with appropriate vocabulary. In order for students to achieve all the linguistic abilities mentioned in the preceding paragraph, it is vital for students to learn the rudiments of the grammatical system and lexicology of the English language and be able to apply this knowledge appositely. Teachers also stressed the necessity for students to learn how to listen for specific information; write in-text citations (quotations and paraphrasing, summarising), and end-of-text references for their academic assignments; and to utilise their body language, pronunciation, intonation, and enunciation for effective presentations.

To optimise students' learning capacity, the ISFP Academic and Student Affairs coordinators listed other factors related to students' capability to adapt to a foreign culture, a new environment, a different lifestyle, and a different approach to learning a foreign language. Their ability to adapt to these changes appear to affect their attitudes, behaviour, rate of learning, and ultimately their academic performance. For instance, there is no translation from English to students' native language during lesson time unlike students' learning environment in their home countries. This seems the most difficult hurdle for students with low proficiency in English when they do not comprehend the medium of instruction. To assist students achieve satisfactory results, they need sufficient time for learning to occur, remedial classes, motivational talks, peer teaching, guidance, and counselling.

Research Question 3:

Which aspects of the existing curriculum need to be modified?
The qualitative responses from ISFP teachers, students, UMS lecturers and administrators have helped in pinpointing which aspects of the present curriculum need to be modified namely focus of the programme, duration, modules, teaching materials, pedagogical approach, and assessments.

The paramount aspect highlighted by UMS lecturers and administers as well as former and current ISFP students was the focus of the programme. Nearly a third (30%) of the programme comprises of non-English focused modules namely Malay Language, Malaysian History and Culture, and Malaysian Civilisation. These respondents pointed out that since a substantial number of former ISFP students still lack the proficiency in the target language, the focus of the programme should be reviewed to a higher percentage of marks for English. Students felt burdened having to learn two foreign languages simultaneously. Many students confessed that it was very difficult for them to learn the three non-English focused modules (Malay language, Malaysian

History and Culture, and Malaysian Civilization). All students interviewed seconded that the contents of both the latter modules are too in-depth for foreign students. They also failed to cope with these modules because they were learning English language at the same time. In addition, the academic staff proposed that the duration of the programme should be reviewed because students with low proficiency level in English would require a longer duration to learn the language skills. Teachers also emphasised the need to review the time allocated for research writing and public speaking modules.

Next, a majority of teachers and students preferred the combination of two language skills in one module for more effective learning and application of skills. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the current discreet language skill for each English focused module and its syllabus. For instance, the UMS Link administrators pointed out that the research writing module may be too demanding for students with little or no knowledge of English. Even local students who newly enroll in a university would not know how to do research writing. Hence, it is not fair to grade ISFP students on this module. In fact, this module is not tested in tertiary entrance examinations that are internationally recognised, such as IELTS and TOEFL. If it is only an exposure to students, it would be actually good for their knowledge. Furthermore, teachers noticed that some textbooks have been used since the programme was established ten years ago. For instance, the textbooks for grammar, reading, speaking, and public speaking modules need to be replaced so that students can relate to more current events and issues. Students and administrators suggested that the indoor pedagogical approach be diversified to create interest among learners and to provide opportunities for practical evaluation of skills or knowledge taught. Lastly, teachers advocated that the class assessments for a particular module should be synchronized so that students are given equal treatment.

Research Question 4:

How can these aspects be altered to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the international students?

The students' challenging language and learning needs which are identified in this study should be met so that they can be empowered to surmount the obstacles in their path to a successful tertiary education. The respondents proposed that both academic and non-academic support must be incorporated in the programme such as providing sufficient time for learning to occur, reviewing the current curriculum, as well as setting up facilities and counselling service for students. However, only recommendations pertaining to the research question and aspects mentioned in the fourth research question (that is, focus of the programme, duration, modules, teaching materials, pedagogical approach, and assessments) are deliberated.

The most pertinent issue to be addressed is the focus of the programme. The UMS lecturers and administrators were of the opinion that Malaysian History and Culture, Malaysian Civilization, and Malay Language need not be included as three distinct modules in ISFP. They justified this proposal by pointing out that the sole focus of ISFP should be on English in order to help students master the language more effectively and use the language within an academic context. Instead, the contact hours allocated for these modules would be utilised in reinforcing the English modules taught such as Public Speaking and Research Writing. They advocated that aspects of Malaysian history and culture be integrated within the English language modules by including related materials in English. On the other hand, the ULink management advocated that Malaysian History and Culture, Malaysian Civilization, and Malay Language, should continue to be taught as three individual modules but the grades should not be included in students' overall results. Similarly, they proposed that Research Writing should be taught but excluded from the overall results since international English examinations such as IELTS or TOEFL do not assess these language skills.

Besides altering the focus of the programme, UMS lecturers and deans, as well as ISFP teachers recommended a longer duration of study for students with low proficiency in English. This may be achieved by matching the duration for ISFP with students' English proficiency levels. As an illustration, the coordinators suggested that weaker students should be enrolled into one class and taught for nine months instead of the current six months. This would be more cost and time effective for students as repeating the programme upon failure would mean another six months. Alternatively, the ULink management proposed converting the current two phases into three phases according to three different proficiency levels, namely basic, low intermediate, and high intermediate.

Another aspect that ISFP students proposed changes was the type of modules. They preferred the language skills to be learnt in an integrative mode. For example, the Listening Skills and Speaking skills may be integrated in one module, and grammar into other language skills. The former ISFP students requested for academic writing skills to be included in the programme. In addition, the coordinators advocated incorporating other skills such as grammar and listening to improve reading comprehension. The UMS lecturers recommended the inclusion of pronunciation, presentation, and interpersonal skills, and basic knowledge on students' prospective programmes. Next, teachers and coordinators pointed out that textbooks need to be replaced with current ones and more appropriate for students' level of proficiency, beginning with a lower level textbook and gradually moving towards a higher level. For instance, the coordinators suggested that less complex textbooks should be selected for Grammar and Public Speaking. Several teachers proposed writing their own modules or evaluating textbooks published by other institutions of higher learning.

Finally yet importantly, teachers recommended improvement in the area of assessments. They highlighted the need to review the types of assessments and distribution of marks, taking into consideration students with low level of proficiency. In addition, standardized assignments and allocation of marks should be administered for the same module by introducing a systematic process for all assessment procedures. Teachers who teach listening advocated the use of various types of audio to test Listening for Academic Purposes (LAP). They also proposed the reduction of the passing mark from 70% to 60% which is a more accurate reflection of students' proficiency level. Before examinations are conducted, the ULink management representatives emphasized that students should be made familiar with the examination question format by specifying topics, the type and number of questions students are required to answer, and conducting mock-tests before mid-term and final examinations. Furthermore, the UMS lecturers encouraged the implementation of an exit test as a prerequisite for students to enroll in UMS in order to ascertain their level of proficiency in English.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews conducted provide the justification for a revamp of the ISFP in terms of its name, curriculum, and types of modules. Based on students' learning and language needs identified in the current study and proposals from respondents, a new programme known as 'Intensive English Preparatory Programme' (IEPP) is designed. The word 'Foundation' is replaced by 'Preparatory' because this is not a foundation programme to prepare students for their future programmes or majors in UMS. The word 'English' is included in the name because the primary aim of IEPP is to equip students with the English language proficiency level essential for communicative and academic purposes. In addition, IEPP seeks to prepare students to function effectively as tertiary students in a Malaysian institution of higher learning by providing guidance in terms of study skills and knowledge about Malaysian culture. Certain aspects of the new programme will be discussed namely the duration, types of modules, pedagogical approach, and assessments.

The duration and phases of this programme remain the same, that is six months with two phases. The duration of each phase is three months (12 weeks) with eleven weeks of lessons which include continuous assessments and one week of final examination which is conducted at the end of each phase. If the duration of the programme is shorter than six months, students with low proficiency level may not perform well enough to secure a pass. On the other hand, it would not be cost effective to conduct the programme for more than six months. Although the duration is the same, the language needs of low proficiency students are met by the progressive approach of leading them from

basic to low intermediate and finally, to high intermediate proficiency level.

Since the aim focus of the programme is on improving participants' command of the English language, three of the existing modules, that is Malay Language, Malaysian History and Culture, and Malaysian Civilization, would be deemed as irrelevant in IEPP. There are six modules for each phase as listed in Table 3 and Table 4. These modules are progressive in nature as they are repeated at a higher level in the second phase. For the first phase, the former five modules are retained with a combination of certain skills, such as Listening and Speaking, as well as Reading and Writing. The receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) language skills are integrated in one module as this is a more realistic reflection of language use than learning these skills discretely or as separate and distinctive individual skills. The module on Grammar and Vocabulary comprises grammatical and lexical items taught from simple to complex. The emphasis in grammar is also incorporated in non-grammar modules by raising awareness of mistakes made by students when they speak and write and correcting these mistakes. This reinforces students' knowledge of grammar as well as encourages contextualized learning of grammar and application of this knowledge. Two modules taught in ISFP Phase 2, namely Public Speaking and Research Writing (renamed English for Academic Purposes), are taught in the first phase to allow sufficient time for students to be familiar with the language skills required for tertiary academic assignments. Elements of three modules in ISFP Phase 2, namely FS 0880 Malay Language, FS FS980 Malaysian History and Culture, and FS 1080 Malaysian Civilization, are incorporated into Module 6 and Module 12. Students gain knowledge about Malaysia and its culture as well as the Malay language through experiential learning and real life interaction with Malaysians outside the classroom environment. In addition, these two modules include study skills, soft skills, and co-curricular activities to equip students with skills for academic purposes and communication. It is hoped that this proposed curriculum is able to sustain students' interest and motivation to study.

Table 3: Summary of Contents for Six Phase 1 Modules

No.	Module	Summary of Contents
1	FS 1172 Grammar and Vocabulary 1	Auxiliary verbs, tenses, nouns, pronouns, articles, adjectives, quantifiers, prefixes and suffixes, subject-verb agreement, and modals
2	FS 1275 Listening and Speaking 1	Listening skills for general purposes Speaking skills for social purposes, from monologue to dialogue
3	FS 1372 Reading and Writing 1	Reading skills, dictionary skills Writing skills, from sentence level to paragraph level, and outline of essay to an essay

No.	Module	Summary of Contents
4	FS 1476 Public Speaking 1	Preparation for Public Speaking, ways of overcoming stage fright, and presentation of short speeches without visuals
5	FS 1574 English for Academic Purposes 1	Academic essays – argumentative, discursive, compare & contrast; academic word lists/academic phrases; sourcing information (the Internet, library); in-text citation (quotation and paraphrasing) and end-of-text referencing, summary/paragraph, and essay map
6	FS 1630 Studying in Malaysia 1	Student rules and regulations, ethics/expectations; life managerial skills, study skills; soft skills; basic Malay Language for communication; Malay way of life (culture/customs); and introduction to Malaysian history, geography, and facts about Malaysia

Table 4: Summary of Contents of Six Phase 2 Modules

No.	Module	Summary of Contents
1	FS 1772 Grammar and Vocabulary 2	Sentence types, tenses, adverbs, prepositions, phrasal verbs, conjunctions, clauses, direct and indirect speech, active and passive, and error corrections
2	FS 1875 Listening and Speaking 2	Listening skills for academic purposes Speaking skills for academic purposes, from dialogue
3	FS 1972 Reading and Writing 2	Reading skills, dictionary skills Writing skills, from paragraphs to an essay consisting of 5 paragraphs
4	FS 2076 Public Speaking 2	Presentation of a variety of speeches in public with visual aids, participation in group discussion, and delivering an impromptu speech
5	FS 2174 English for Academic Purposes 2	Academic essays – argumentative, discussion, compare & contrast; academic word lists/academic phrases; sourcing information (the Internet, library); in-text citation (quotation and paraphrasing) and end-of-text referencing, summary/paragraph, and essay map, and 6-paragraph academic essay related to student's field of study
6	FS 2230 Studying in Malaysia 2	Student rules and regulations, ethics/expectations; Malaysian way of life (culture/customs); computer skills, examination skills; soft skills; basic Malay Language for communication; and introduction to multi-ethnicity in Sabah

The assessment approach recommended is outcome-based, that is the skills are tested based on their application and not solely on the skills taught in the module. In other words, the skills are integrated during the assessment. For instance, to test Grammar and Vocabulary 1, students are required to write a paragraph about a picture or a topic. However, marks are awarded based on grammatical and lexical aspects and not writing skills. In this manner, the grammatical knowledge learnt is applied in writing the paragraph. The distribution of marks is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of Marks

Component	Percentage
Course work	70%
e.g.	
Assignments	30%
Project	20%
2 Quizzes	20%
Final examination	30%
Total	100%

Marks attained for ten modules (1 to 5 and 7 to 11) are summed up and the total is divided by ten to obtain the average mark. The passing mark is 70%. Although the course work is allocated 70%, the quizzes, which are similar to individual testing, constitute 20%. Consequently, the testing components (quizzes and final examination) as a whole contribute 50%. Thus, the ratio between testing and non-testing components is 1:1. However, the ratio may vary depending on the nature of the modules concerned. The variation is acceptable on the condition that the ratio between coursework and final examination is 70:30. The passing mark of 70% is less demanding on students compared to ISFP's ratio of 3:2 (60% for testing and 40% for assignments). In addition, it is compulsory for students to fulfill all the requirements of the course work. If they do not complete even one type of course work, they are considered as having failed the whole programme. However, there is no formal assessment in terms of marks and grade for modules 6 and 12. The requirements to pass modules 6 and 12 are 100% attendance and submission of all tasks assigned. Failure in these modules does not have any bearing on students' IEPP results.

The pedagogical approach should include elements of fun in learning and hands-on or practical exercises/assignments/projects. In-class activities, assignments, and projects are implemented via different modes, beginning with pairs, or groups of 3 to 5 students, and finally individuals. This variety provides opportunities for students who are more proficient to peer teach and guide less proficient ones, particularly when they are initially introduced to a new skill. As they gain confidence when they become familiar with that certain skill, they would be able to do their assignments or projects independently. Alternatively, teachers can group the less proficient students together so that they can provide

them with the guidance that they need. In this manner, these students would not become 'passengers' when doing group work. In addition, outside the classroom learning activities could be conducted for students to apply the knowledge gained during lessons and for them to discover the Malaysian culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, positive measures are taken to improve the current ISFP. The proposed Intensive English Preparatory Programme (IEPP) is tailored to meet the language and study needs of prospective international students of UMS. In addition, it provides them with the cultural knowledge and experience for them to adapt to a new environment. To safeguard the best interest of UMS Link Sdn. Bhd., this programme should be piloted on an intake of a smaller group of students that is the intake for the second semester of the academic year.

REFERENCES

ICAP. (2014). Evaluation Toolkit. Retrieved June 13, 2014 from http://www.icap.org /PolicyTools/Toolkits/EvaluationToolkit/2WhatIsEvaluation/tabid/441/Default.aspx

Dagalea, C. R. (n.d.). Curriculum models / types. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from http://www.slideshare.net/CarlRichardDagalea/curriculum-models-and-types?related=1

Mrutyunjaya Mishra. (n.d.). Models of curriculum. Retrieved April 9, 2015 from http://image.slidesharecdn.com/modelsofcurriculum-130905003417-/95/models-of-curriculum-1-638.jpg?cb=1378359351

Saylor, G. & Alexander, W. (1974). Planning Curriculum for Schools. Michigan: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stufflebeam, D. L. (1983). The CIPP model for program evaluation. Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff.

Tanner, D., & Tanner, L. N. (1980). Curriculum development: Theory into practice. New York: Macmillan.

UNESCO-IBE. (2014). Training tools for curriculum development: A resource pack. UNESCO-IBE. Retrieved June 13, 2014, from http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs /Pages_documents/Resource_Packs/TTCD/TTCDhome.html

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by design, 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.