

**A STUDY ON THE ACADEMIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TARGET NEEDS OF THE FACULTY OF APPLIED
SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATES AT
AL-AQSA UNIVERSITY**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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AT AL-AQSA UNIVERSITY**

By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU	Al-Aqsa University
CNP	Communicative Needs Processor
CON	Concluding Narrative
DNA	Descriptive Needs Analysis
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
e.g.	exempli gratia
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
ELLI	English Language Lecturer Interview
ENLL	English Language Lecturers' Questionnaire
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
EPP	English for Professional Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EST	English for Science and Technology
et al.	et alii
etc.	etcetera
EVP	English for Vocational Purposes
FAS	Faculty of Applied Science
FS	Faculty of Science
GE	General English
INN	Introductory Narrative

n. d.	year not defined
PSA	Present Situation Analysis
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
SI	Student Interview
SJ	Student Journal
SMI	FAS Staff Member Interview
SMQ	FAS Staff Members' Questionnaire
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SQ	Students' Questionnaire
TSA	Target Situation Analysis
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USA	United States of America
WE	Week Entry
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Alastal, A. & Shuib, M., Accepted. Exploring the academic English language target needs of undergraduates at the Faculty of Applied Science at Al-Aqsa University: FAS Staff Members' perceptions. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities (JSSH)*.
- Alastal, A. & Shuib, M., 2010. Investigating the academic English language needs of EFL Palestinian students: the case of the Faculty of Applied Science undergraduates at Al-Aqsa University. In: S. Abdul Manan, H. Abdul Rahim & S. Kaur, eds. *Millennium realities and innovative practices in Asia: proceeding of the international conference on linguistics, literature and culture*. Penang: School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, pp. 2-5.

**SATU KAJIAN TENTANG KEPERLUAN SASARAN BAHASA INGGERIS
AKADEMIK DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR SARJANA MUDA DI
FAKULTI SAINS GUNAAN, UNIVERSITI AL-AQSA**

ABSTRAK

Mengenal pasti keperluan bahasa pelajar adalah langkah awal yang penting dalam usaha membantu mereka menangani masalah bahasa yang dihadapi semasa belajar. Disebabkan kurangnya perhatian diberikan terhadap kajian tentang analisis keperluan ini dalam konteks Arab, maka kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti keperluan sasaran bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar ijazah pertama di Fakulti Sains Gunaan (Faculty of Applied Science), Universiti Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa University, AU). Bagi mencapai tujuan ini, rangka kerja konsep yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah berdasarkan Teori Konstruktivisme Sosial (Social Constructivism Theory) dan Teori Strukturasi (Structuration Theory). Ia digunakan sebagai tambahan kepada rangka kerja analisis keperluan sasaran Hutchinson dan Waters (1987), yang membahagikan keperluan sasaran pelajar kepada tiga bahagian: 'Keperluan (Necessity)', 'Kekurangan (Lacks)' dan 'Kemahuan (Wants)'. Kajian dijalankan berdasarkan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif, yang diperolehi daripada tiga sumber: pelajar sarjana muda, staf dan pensyarah bahasa Inggeris di FAS. Data kuantitatif dikumpul daripada soal selidik, dan data kualitatif pula diperolehi daripada temu bual separa-struktur dan jurnal pelajar. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan SPSS, dalam bentuk kekerapan, peratusan, min, dan sisihan piawai. Sementara itu, data kualitatif pula dianalisis secara deduktif.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa bahasa Inggeris akademik digunakan secara meluas dalam proses pengajaran / pembelajaran kursus major oleh para pelajar

ijazah pertama di FAS, AU. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa mereka kurang atau lemah dalam empat kemahiran bahasa Inggeris akademik utama, iaitu: pemahaman bacaan, pemahaman pendengaran, penulisan, dan kemahiran bertutur. Di samping itu, ditemui juga beberapa kemahiran lain (sub skills) yang dirasakan sesuai dan perlu. Sebagai contoh, berdasarkan pemahaman bacaan, pelajar sarjana muda, staf dan pensyarah bahasa Inggeris di FAS telah mengenal pasti ‘membaca untuk memahami buku teks’, ‘membaca untuk memahami soalan ujian dan peperiksaan’, dan ‘membaca untuk memahami buku rujukan’ dengan skor min kurang daripada 3.0. Ditemui juga bahawa dalam kalangan pelajar, terdapat kemahuan atau usaha untuk mempertingkatkan kebolehan dalam empat kemahiran bahasa Inggeris, terutamanya pertuturan.

**A STUDY ON THE ACADEMIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE TARGET NEEDS
OF THE FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATES
AT AL-AQSA UNIVERSITY**

ABSTRACT

Identifying the students' language needs is an essential first step to help them cope with the language difficulties they face in their academic study. As little attention has been given to needs analysis in Arabic context, the present study aims to identify the academic English language target needs of the Faculty of Applied Science (FAS) undergraduate students at Al-Aqsa University (AU). To accomplish this aim, the conceptual framework of the study is based on Social Constructivism Theory and Structuration Theory in addition to Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework of target needs analysis in which the learners' target needs are divided into three parts: 'Necessity', 'Lacks' and 'Wants'. The study is based on both quantitative data and qualitative data collected from three sources: the Undergraduate Students, the FAS Staff Members, and the English Language Lecturers. The quantitative data are collected through questionnaires, and the qualitative data are obtained from semi-structured interviews and student journals. With the help of SPSS, the quantitative data are analyzed in the form of frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The qualitative data are deductively analyzed.

The findings reveal that, to a large extent, the academic English language is used in the process of teaching/learning the major courses of the FAS undergraduate students at AU; and that the FAS undergraduate students at AU lack proficiency in the four academic English language skills. The findings also show that the main

academic English language skills which are necessary for the FAS undergraduate students at AU in studying their major courses are reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and writing; and that speaking skill is almost not necessary. Of the necessary academic English language main skills, the results reveal several sub skills which are necessary for the academic study of the FAS undergraduate students at AU. For example, regarding reading comprehension, the Undergraduate Students, the FAS Staff Members and the English Language Lecturers have pointed 'reading textbooks', 'reading to understand test and exam questions', and 'reading reference books' with a mean score of less than 3.0. The findings also indicate that the FAS undergraduate students at AU want to improve their ability in the four English language skills, and the most they desire to improve is speaking, especially how to discuss the materials of the lecture.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a general background to the study. A brief historical background about Palestine is introduced. It includes discussions about education in Palestine, English in Gaza Strip under Israeli occupation and after the Palestinian National Authority, and English in Gaza Strip society. Since the study is on the undergraduate students of the Faculty of Applied Science (FAS hereafter) at Al-Aqsa University (AU hereafter), a detailed description of the university, especially of the FAS and the English language course taught to its undergraduate students, has been presented. This chapter also includes explanation of the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study. Following this, the objectives of the study, the research questions as well as the limitations of the study are stated. Before concluding this chapter, the definitions of the key terms used in this study are given.

1.1 A Brief Historical Background about Palestine

Palestine is an Arab country located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Egypt from the south, Lebanon from the north, Syria from the north-east, Jordan from the east, and the Mediterranean Sea from the west (please see Figure 1.1). In the First World War British forces invaded this country and administrated it for thirty years. This military conquest, the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine mark the first physical appearance of Britain in Palestine since the middle Ages (Hyamson, 1976). In November 1917, the British Government made Balfour Declaration in which the Foreign Minister of the Government promised to help and use best endeavors to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish

National Home in Palestine (ibid; Hadawi, 1990; Cleary, 2002). During the British Mandate for Palestine, this declaration became the charter for Jews to immigrate from all over the world and build their settlements in Palestine. Hadawi (1990) mentions that in 1917 Arabs were constituting 92% and non-Arab only 8% of the total population of Palestine.

The British civil administration of Palestine was established on the 1st of July 1920 (Hyamson, 1976; Hadawi, 1990). By the time the British Mandate was terminated, the Jews Zionist Council announced an independent Jewish state in Palestine, on 14th May 1948 which is the same date of the British Mandate termination, under the name of Israel (Hyamson, 1976; Hadawi, 1990; Biger, 2004). After 15th May 1948, Arab armies entered the remaining territories of Palestine to restore peace and security and to establish law and order. As a result, Gaza Strip became under Egyptian control and the West Bank under Jordanian control (Hadawi, 1990).

On 5th June 1967, Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan and Syria. As a result, the war broke out between Egypt, Syria and Jordan from one side and Israel on the other side. The result of this war was the occupation of the remaining parts of Palestine (Gaza Strip and the West Bank) beside other territories from Arab countries (Hadawi, 1990).

In 1994, Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel signed Oslo Accord. Due to this accord, Palestinian National Authority (PNA hereafter) was established to administrate Palestinian civil affairs in Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Amara,

2003), and Israel withdrew from some Palestinian crowded cities. They agreed that other issues are to be negotiated later on. One of these issues is the boundaries.



Figure 1.1: Map of Palestine

Source: www.countryseek.com/geos/palestine.html

Negotiations on the boundaries are still facing serious difficulties. Biger (2004, p. viii) says:

“The borders of Palestine, and the determination of the borders of the State of Israel, are currently placed in the midst of a public and political discussion. Israel is facing negotiations about the making of its borders in the north-east with Syria, as well as the problematic issue of determining its boundaries with the Palestinian Authority as these lines are being written”.

In 2005, Israel withdrew completely from inside Gaza Strip which is located in the south-west of Palestine (please see Figure 1.1) and continued in controlling its boundaries, sea and airspace. Palestine is still an occupied country (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n. d.).

1.2 Education in Palestine

Education in Palestine passed through different stages. According to Cleary (2002), Palestine was a British colony. During the period of the British Mandate from July 1920 to 14th May 1948, there were a very small number of schools which were only found in the main cities such as Haifa, Yafa and Jerusalem. Students from villages and towns had to travel and stay in the city for the purpose of education. Beside these schools, there was learning in mosques which was basically religious learning. Hyamson (1976) and Amara (2003) state that English, Arabic and Hebrew were the official languages of the country at that time. Whereas English was the main language of the government (Amara, 2003), according to Article 15 of the Mandate each community had the right to maintain its own schools and language for the education of its people (Hyamson, 1976).

After the establishment of Israel in 1948 (Amara, 2003), a very large number of Palestinians were driven away. According to United Nations' records, 354,103 of Palestinian people were forcibly expelled from their homes to Gaza Strip and another 310,268 to the West Bank as a result of the creation of the State of Israel (Hadawi, 1990). These people became refugees. From that time until 1967, Gaza Strip was under the Egyptian authority and education was following the Egyptian education system; at the same time, the West Bank was under the Jordanian control and following the Jordanian education system (Hadawi, 1990; Amara, 2003). However, the education of the refugees has been the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA hereafter).

When Israel occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1967 education in governmental school became the responsibility of Israel until the establishment of PNA, and the education of the refugees remained of the UNRWA responsibility (Alhaee'ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004). At that time, there were three stages of education in the governmental schools. The first stage is the Elementary Stage which is of six years; the second stage is the Preparatory Stage which is of three years; and the third stage is the Secondary Stage which is also of three years. In the UNRWA schools, there are only the Elementary Stage and the Preparatory Stage; therefore, when the UNRWA students complete these two stages they transfer to the Secondary Stage in the governmental schools (ibid; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2004).

Education in Gaza Strip and the West Bank was severely suffering from neglect, lack of understanding the educational situation, and restrictions in the period

of Israeli occupation. “The Israelis perceived education as a source for the growth of national awareness and believed that Palestinian illiteracy would provide their industry with cheap labor” (El Fagawi, 2000, p. 8). Moreover, Chomsky (1983), cited in El Fagawi (2000), points out that the Israeli occupation endeavored to destroy the Arab national character, universities, schools; and that teachers and students were subject to suppression such as closure, imprisonment, confiscating identity cards, expulsion, etc. Furthermore, Al-Masri (1993) states that although all the textbooks in Gaza Strip were decided by the Egyptian Ministry of Education and in the West Bank by the Jordanian Ministry of Education, they were all subject to Israeli censorship and restrictions to make sure that they did not include any reference to the Palestinian national identity.

Education is one of the largest services sections that PNA administers. The total population of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is 3.15 million; about one-third of the populations are students at all levels of education getting educational services (Alhaee’ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2004; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n. d.). It is stated that while the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education is responsible for the governmental schools and supervises the private schools, the UNRWA schools continued to be of the UNRWA responsibility. However, after completing grade 9, the students of the UNRWA schools transfer into governmental schools (Alhaee’ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2004).

Since taking the responsibility of education in August 1994 (Amara, 2003; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n. d.), PNA has been endeavoring to enhance and improve the education system. These endeavors are reflected in the main issues of its contributions. Firstly, the number of kindergarten, in which education at this stage had not been given any kind of interest during Israeli occupation, increased from only 13 with 1389 children in the academic year 1993/1994 into 206 with 24 thousands in the academic year 1998/1999. Secondly, the school educational system changed from being three stages to be of two stages constituting 12 years of study; the first stage is the Basic Stage which starts from grade 1 to 10, and the second stage is the Secondary Stage that is from grade 11 to 12. The Secondary Stage is divided into: (1) Science Section, and (2) Literature Section; whereupon every student must choose one of them. Thirdly, in three academic years, from 1999/2000 to 2001/2002, 151 new schools were built. Moreover, the total number of school teachers in the same three academic years increased 14.0%. Of the newly employed teachers 2961 were employed in governmental schools, and the priority of employment was given to holders of bachelor degree in order to have better staff teachers for schools. It is also noted that every teacher who had been already employed and holding a degree less than bachelor was given a limited time to improve his academic status. Furthermore, a new national Palestinian curriculum was introduced and its application began gradually in the year 2000. In this new curriculum, educational programs and modern educational technology such as computer, projector, telescope, television, video, etc were included. Therefore, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education tried, as the economic conditions allow, supplying schools with the equipments of modern educational technology. In addition, many training courses

were given to the teachers in order to develop their knowledge, skills, interests, and abilities in teaching the new curriculum. Of the most important training courses are those in physics, chemistry, and biology. It deserves to be mentioned that schools' libraries, which Israeli occupation did not give any kind of interest, were activated. It is also observed that the age of admitting students in the Basic school was decreased from being 5 years and 9 months to be 5 years and 8 months (Alhaee'ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004).

During the Palestinian uprising, locally called 'Alaqa Intifada', which broke out on 28th September 2000 and is continuing until now, the whole educational system has been affected so much by Israeli closure of roads, and imposing curfews on teachers, students and schools as well as using some of these schools as a military camps or even as detention camps to hold Palestinian prisoners (Alhaee'ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2005b). The Israeli attacks on Palestinian territories caused loss of security, economic depression, and decline of the average of investment in the private sector of education. This condition, for example, decreased the percentage of children who took education in kindergarten before joining Basic Stage schools from 73.3% in the academic year 1999/2000 to 58.3% in 2000/2001 (Alhaee'ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh, 2004). To sum up, PNA has made clear contributions for developing Palestinian education but could not find solutions to all the problems that existed during the Israeli occupation.

1.2.1 English in Gaza Strip under Israeli Occupation

Gaza Strip, which is situated in the south-west of Palestine, is one of the Palestinian territories. It is 45 kilometers along the Mediterranean Sea and about 8 kilometers wide. In this area of limited resources, there are three main cities, eight refugees' camps, eight towns, and some villages. The three main cities are Gaza, KhanYounis, and Rafah.

English started to be associated with Palestinians in Gaza Strip since the British Mandate (Amara, 2003). But, it should be noted that the influence of the existence of the British was not strong because of the short period of their stay, and because people were so reserved to use the language of their enemy except when it is necessary. However, after the British Mandate termination and Gaza Strip became under the Egyptian control following its educational system, English became part of the school curriculum; even during Israeli occupation, English continued to be so (ibid). Amara (2003) and Mourtaga (2004) state that English is the only foreign language that is taught at Gaza schools; it is also a university requirement, and the language of instruction for sciences and mathematics majors at Palestinian universities.

At the governmental and UNRWA schools, students start taking English classes six periods a week from the Preparatory Stage, with the exception that the students of the UNRWA schools take additional English classes four periods a week in the 5th and 6th grade of the Elementary Stage; and each period lasts for forty five minutes (El Fagawi, 2000). It should also be noted that no student is allowed to transfer from a grade to its next without a pass in English, and that the student must

pass in English in order to be certified as a success in the Secondary Degree which enables him/her to enter the university.

At the university level, English has a greater importance either as a medium of instruction or as a compulsory course. According to Zughoul and Hussein (1985), Zughoul (1999) and Abu-Rizaizah (2005), English is the language of instruction for the vast majority of the courses in the science faculties. Likewise, Amara (2003) points out that English serves as a medium of instruction for sciences and mathematics subjects at Palestinian universities. Furthermore, English is the language of scientific research (Al-Shammari, 1989). The above mentioned amount of time allotted to learning English at schools should be enough to enable students to master the language or at least to communicate effectively, but it is observed that the proficiency of freshmen in Gaza Strip universities is low (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Al-Masri, 1993; El Fagawi, 2000; Mourtaga, 2004).

During the Israeli occupation, there were serious problems in the Palestinian education system in Gaza Strip (Fasheh, 1999). One of these problems was the overcrowded and poorly equipped classes (Al-Masri, 1993). Another serious problem was the insufficient number of schools; building new schools to meet the drastic growth of population was not allowed (Fasheh, 1999). For example, “the UNRWA administration was not allowed to build new schools to replace the 153 pre-1967 double shift schools with classes of over 50 pupils...”(El Fagawi, 2000, p. 9). Moreover, teachers were not motivated because of the low salaries, and they had to work part-time in order to support their large families (Al-Masri, 1993). A further problem was that the syllabus used at that time was ineffective because the Egyptian

textbooks were most often out of date and irrelevant to Palestinian situation (ibid). El Fagawi (2000) mentions that in 1987 the Egyptian Ministry of Education introduced a new curriculum which was applied in the governmental and UNRWA schools. That curriculum consists of three books, entitled '*Welcome to English*' by Martin Bates, emphasizing communicative methodology. Al Fagawi (2000) criticizes that syllabus severely because it is utterly irrelevant to Palestinian learners. An additional problem was the political instability. In the first year of the Palestinian uprising (locally called Intifada), which broke out in 1987, students lost between 35% to 50% of the school days as a result of strikes, curfews, military closure, etc (Al-Masri, 1993). However, this political situation might have caused the Palestinians to look positively at education particularly English education. After losing their land, education has been their last hope for a better future.

1.2.2 English in Gaza Strip after the PNA

The PNA has been attempting to enhance and develop the Palestinian education system in Gaza Strip since receiving its responsibility. The responsible persons have taken real steps to solve the problems in the Palestinian education system, such as low salaries, poor syllabuses, insufficient number of schools, poor equipped schools, crowded classes, the number and qualification of schoolteachers, etc. According to Alhaee'ah Alwatania Liltahleem Liljameeh (2004), in three years, from the academic year 1999/2000 to 2001/2002, 151 new schools were built; this number constitutes 8.6% increase in the number of schools. Consequently, the average number of students in each class of Gaza governmental schools decreased from 42.0 to be 41.1 of the above mentioned years. Moreover, in the same academic years, the government employed 2961 new teachers, and the priority was given to the

holder of bachelor degree; by this number, the percentage of school teachers in Gaza Strip was increased 15.9%. As a result, the percentage of the crowd in the governmental schools of Gaza Strip came down from 31 to 30 students for each teacher of the same above mentioned academic years. In addition, many training courses were given to the teachers to improve their academic knowledge and to enable them teach the new syllabus. Furthermore, many governmental schools were supplied with modern technology. For example, in Gaza Strip of the same above mentioned academic years, 78.7% of the schools were supplied with computers, 67.6% with televisions, and 73.7% with projectors. However, the PNA has not been able to solve all the problems because of the large increase of the number of students, the small area of Gaza Strip, the bad economy of the country, and the instability of the political situation as well as the tremendous inherited problems from the Israeli occupation.

The Egyptian curriculum remained to be used until the year 2000 when the PNA began to replace it gradually by the Palestinian National Syllabus. According to Brown (2001), the PNA has been working to replace the Egyptian and Jordanian textbooks since the early time of its establishment. He states that the textbooks of the first and sixth grade were introduced in 2000, and those of the second and seventh in 2001; other textbooks of other grades are intended to be introduced until the whole textbooks of schools will be replaced. The outcome of the Egyptian English syllabus '*Welcome to English*' which was being used during the Israeli occupation had proven to be unsuccessful for Palestinian students. Students graduated from the secondary school, after studying English for 8 years, with very weak English language skills; they were unable to manipulate the language (Al-Masri, 1993; El Fagawi, 2000).

Therefore, a change was needed not only to cope with the new situation but also to get rid of a syllabus that was under much critical attack. It is observed that the replacement of the old syllabus has been completed. The new Palestinian English syllabus is entitled '*English for Palestine*'. It consists of two books, one is '*Pupil's Book*' and the other is '*Work Book*'.

The new Palestinian English syllabus is for all levels with different materials from one level to another, and it is for all Palestinian schools in Gaza Strip and the West Bank (please see Palestinian Curriculum Development Center, 2005). A look at this new syllabus will show that it has useful activities to develop all language skills, colorful pictures and many interesting tasks for learners to do. Nevertheless, most of the teachers, parents and educationists have complained about the difficulties of this syllabus, and of being much above the level of the students. The researcher has observed this fact through teaching his children. Consequently, the students do not get much benefit from this syllabus and transfer from one grade to its next without mastering the materials of the course of the previous one.

The undoubted role of English as a world language and its importance to Palestinians made the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to reconsider English in the Palestinian education system and, as Amara (2003) points, began an ambitious project of teaching English to Palestinian students from the first grade, at the age of 5 years and 8 months, of the Basic School. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (n. d.), cited in Mourtaga (2004, p. 20), states that:

“English as a second language is to be taught from the first grade rather from the fifth grade as was the case in the old curricula. Pupils will receive twelve years of English instruction instead of eight. This emphasis is to equip high-school graduates with a

higher level of competence in English so as to achieve two aims: greater openness to world culture in which English occupies a prominent position and better competitiveness on the labor market”.

Therefore, Palestinian learners will spend 12 years learning English at school before they reach the university level. English has remained a compulsory subject in which the student can not transfer to the next grade without a pass in it. At grade 12, it is a must for the student to pass the English language subject in order to get the secondary school certificate which enables him to enter the university. Despite this, it is observed that the overall proficiency of the Palestinian freshman university students is low (Mourtaga, 2004).

1.2.3 English in Gaza Strip Society

Among Arabic-speaking countries, Palestine is the most in contact with many different countries all over the world (Amara, 2003). At the present time, English is the main language for international communication; it is the language which serves for access to science, education, business and travel (ibid). English has spread widely as a world language. According to Hasman (2000), the globalization of English language is remarkable in several ways: firstly, through the continuous increasing number of its users; secondly, through its depth of penetration into societies; thirdly, through its wide range of functions. This wide range of functions is reflected in many domains of life such as education, science, technology, business, policy, etc.

In Palestinian society, English language occupies an important place. The status and functions of English language, in Palestinian society, are related to all

aspects of life whether educational or occupational ones. It is stated that, in Palestine, English is used as a neutral language for communication between Arabic and Hebrew speakers and scholars (Cleary, 2002; Amara, 2003). Cleary (2002) adds that English language serves as a medium through which much of Palestinians and Jews cultural traffic and exchange usually pass. Moreover, English language is an integral part of the Palestinian education system as it has been assigned as a compulsory subject at all school levels, and as a compulsory course for the university students or even a language of instruction for most of the subjects of the scientific faculties (Amara, 2003; Mourtaga, 2004). Furthermore, Palestinians use English language as a medium to express their sufferings, problems and ideas to the outside world (Al-Masri, 1993; El Fagawi, 2000). In addition, for Palestinians, English is regarded as a tool for modernization and a prerequisite for finding a job; the more the university graduate is proficient in English the more he has a chance to find a job (Mourtaga, 2004). For the purpose of finding a job, many Palestinian graduate students travel to Arab countries in which, as Zughoul and Omari (1988) point out, competence in the use of English language is indispensable for those seeking higher status jobs.

At the present time, with the increasing dependence on the information technology and internet, the need for English in Palestinian society has greatly heightened. It should be noted that, at this time, every Palestinian whether student or ordinary internet user feels the need of English language. Moreover, many foreigners who come to Palestinian territories as journalists to cover the situations or as visitors for other purposes use only English to communicate with the local people even if those visitors are not native speakers of English (Mourtaga, 2004). Therefore, Palestinians feel more interested to learn more and more English. Consequently,

more pressure has been created on English institutions and English departments to allow the enrollment of more and more students. As a result, English institutions have become a growing business in Gaza Strip to meet the increasing needs of Palestinian learners who are interested to acquire English language. However, according to Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) and Rababah (2003, 2005), in Arab countries, Arab learners learn English in their own cultural context through formal instruction inside the classroom where the language teachers are Arabic-native speakers. They have very little opportunity to learn English in the natural interaction of the target language. Therefore, exposure to English is qualitatively and quantitatively limited for Palestinian learners of English as a foreign language.

1.3 Al-Aqsa University (AU)

According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2005a), for higher education in Palestine, there are 10 traditional universities, one university for open education, 13 university colleges, and 19 community colleges. Three universities of the traditional ones, in which AU is one of them, are situated in Gaza Strip. It should be mentioned that AU is the only governmental one of all the traditional universities (ibid).

AU was announced as a governmental university in 2001; it came as a real development of the College of Education which was established in 1991, which in its turn was a natural extension of the Institute of Teachers that had been found in 1955 (Dallil Al-Jami'ah, 2006). This university follows the credit hours system. At the present time, because of the increasing number of the students and the lack of land, there are two branches of this university, one in Gaza city where the headquarters is,

and another in Khan Younis city. The total number of students is about 13 thousand. This university has five faculties: Faculty of Human Sciences, Faculty of Education, FAS, Faculty of Arts, and Faculty of Mass-Media (Dallil Al-Jami'ah, 2006).

The FAS is considered as the most essential faculty in the university. This is because it offers an effective participation in supplying the society with qualified specialists in applied sciences, and it seeks to offer invaluable services to the society through the experiences and researches of its staff members (Dallil Al-Jami'ah, 2006). However, the FAS comprises six departments which provide bachelor courses in chemistry, physics, biology, technology and applied sciences, mathematics, and computer (ibid). These departments offer services to undergraduate students in both Gaza branch and Khan Younis branch.

The undergraduate students of the FAS at AU can be classified into four levels according to the total credit hours they have accomplished successfully. The classification is as the following: the first level is from 0 credit hours to 32, the second from 33 to 64, the third from 65 to 94, and the fourth from 95 until the student complete his study (ibid). The study in all majors of the FAS lasts until the student succeeds in studying all the courses of the required credit hours and at the end he gets the degree of Bachelor of Science in his specialization.

According to the Deanship of Admission and Registration (2007), in the academic year 2007/2008, the population of the undergraduate students of the FAS at AU is 2331. The calculation of the Staff Members of the six academic departments of the FAS at AU, as mentioned in Dallil Al-Jami'ah (2006), is 73 lecturers; and only

6 English Language Lecturers are found engaged in teaching English language to the undergraduate students of the FAS at AU (for more details, please see Table 1.1 below). All the Undergraduate Students, the FAS Staff Members, and the English Language Lecturers are Palestinian citizens and living in Gaza Strip.

Table 1.1: Population of Undergraduate Students, FAS Staff Members, and English Language Lecturers of the FAS at AU

Department	Undergraduate Students	FAS Staff Members	English Language Lecturers
Mathematics	717	16	6
Chemistry	229	17	
Physics	269	11	
Biology	466	10	
Computer	337	12	
Technology and Applied Sciences	313	7	
Total	2331	73	

Source: Dallil Al-Jami'ah (2006) of Al-Aqsa University, and the Deanship of Admission and Registration (2007) of Al-Aqsa University

According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (1998), Arabic is the official language of instruction at Palestinian universities, but each university has the right to decide teaching some subjects or programs by the use of any other language. Consequently, English is used as a language of instruction for most of the major courses taught in the six academic departments of the FAS at AU (Faculty of Applied Science, 2006).

It should also be noted that before joining the university, Palestinian students study English language for 8 years at schools but they reach the university with low proficiency in this language (Mourtaga, 2004). This low proficiency hinders the undergraduate students of the FAS at AU from understanding the materials of their major courses. According to Cooper (1976), many universities face the problem

of how non-English native speaking students are to overcome the difficulties in acquiring the knowledge from the written sources that are only found in English language. However, for the purpose of improving this low proficiency, all the undergraduate students of all faculties at AU take an English Language course coded as Engl. 1350 as a university requirement that is compulsory and every student must pass in order to obtain his degree. This course is 3 credit hours. Registered undergraduate students of the FAS at AU take 3 hours every week for only one term which is 16 weeks including exams (Dallil Al-Jami'ah, 2006). It is observed that the undergraduate students of the FAS at AU do not take any other English language course to rectify the problem previously mentioned, and to help them keep in contact with the terminology of their field of study.

The decision of designing or choosing the syllabus of the English language course taught to the undergraduate students of the FAS at AU has been left to the English Department at AU. Since 1997, without referring to either the FAS Staff Members or the Undergraduate Students, the English Department has chosen a ready-made textbook entitled '*New Success at First Certificate*' by O'Neill et al. (1997) (English Department, 2006). This book, which is full of colorful pictures, is divided into 20 topic-based units in which each is composed of eight pages. However, the first five units of this book, excluding from them all the listening and speaking parts, had been selected to be taught to the undergraduate students at AU, including those of the FAS (ibid). In 2006, only for the purpose of change, the English Department has chosen to teach the undergraduate students at AU another five units from 10 to 15 of the same book (ibid). Whatever the units, the first five or from 10 to 15, each unit is divided into five focuses. Each of focus 1-3 brings simple

language input and practices that are related to the unit topic. After excluding listening and speaking parts, the focus input in each of focus 1-3 is either about Use of English or about Reading Comprehension. However, each Reading Passage and each Use of English is followed by exercises about one or more of the following: Vocabulary, Language Study, Use of English, and Word Formation.

The focus in each Reading Passage is to improve the learners' reading comprehension skill. Therefore, each Reading Passage is followed with some questions about its content. Questions are either in the form of multiple-choice questions where the student has to decide the correct answer and to refer to the sentence from the passage which shows that his answer is correct or in the form of numbered missing sentences from the passage which are given at the end of the passage and the student has to choose the right sentence for the right place. This kind of questions encourages the student to think about what he/she reads at the time of his/her reading. A few questions about the content come in a traditional way or in the form of given titles on the paragraphs of the passage and the student has to choose the appropriate title for each paragraph.

The focus in the Use of English is on the use of certain simple words in a given passage. This part starts with a passage which includes either spaces for some missing words or using extra simple words. The missing words are given at the end of the passage in the form of multiple-choice words or as a group together. The student has to decide which word is the best answer for each space; in case extra words are used, he has to decide which word is not needed. It is worth mentioning