

KAU Undergraduate Student Body English Language Needs Assessment Project

Research for a Better Foundation Program

Project Proposal

PRIMARY GOALS OF THIS RESEARCH

1. Assess students' current use of the English language by
 - a. Language Skill (Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening).
 - b. Academic Department (e.g., Chemistry, Economics and Management, Medicine, etc.).
 - c. Academic Year (2nd, 3rd, and 4th Year Students).
 - d. Academic Purpose (e.g., report writing, note taking, examination, classroom discussion, laboratory work)
 - e. Extra-curricular activities such as sports, language and drama clubs, and travel.
2. Assess students' post-Foundation Program English language studies
 - a. Formal university training (e.g., English Language Department)
 - b. Attendance at private language schools such as the Wall Street Institute and use of private tutors.
3. Assess KAU pre-matriculation English language background
 - a. Primary and secondary school training.
 - i. Public school training
 - ii. Private school training
 - b. Supplementary private school training
 - c. Overseas training
 - d. Daily interaction with native English language speakers, Arabic speakers of English, and non-Arabic speakers of English.
4. Assess the usefulness of the English Language Foundation Program in students' undergraduate studies.
5. Assess students' individual characteristics such as age and grade point average.

Research Design

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Obtain an anonymous list of 2nd, 3rd, and returning 4th year undergraduate students, draw a random sample from this population that is sufficiently large to provide an accurate and reliable assessment of undergraduate student needs and use of the English language, obtain contact information for these randomly selected individuals, and administer a survey upon their return to school in the fall of 2011.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

During the course of the summer prepare a questionnaire in English that addresses the topics outlined under *Primary Goals of This Research* above. Translate this questionnaire into Arabic and administer it to a randomly selected group of students attending the 2011 summer session. Analyze the results of this preliminary survey, and interview a group of those surveyed in an effort to understand the effective of the questionnaire in obtaining the sought after information. Redesign the questionnaire accordingly.

Sampling

In order to perform a comprehensive analysis that would provide the information necessary to build a solid Foundation Year English Language Program it would be unwise to simply sample the entire undergraduate student body. The reasons for this are two:

1. As the English Language Foundation Program in its current form has only been in existence for two years 4th year undergraduate students needs and uses of the English language are likely to be different from those of 2nd and 3rd year students. With adequate sample sizes of each academic year we could compare students who have been through the foundation year with those who have not.
2. Students in different departments and faculties are likely to have different needs and uses for the English language. Thus, treating everyone the same would result in a program that would benefit some students more than others and would likely be burdensome to many. As the idea is to improve motivation, it would be unwise to ignore these differences.

STRATIFIED RANDOM SAMPLING

In order to take into account the aforementioned differences in student needs a stratified random sample by academic year and area of study is recommended. In order to perform accurate and reliable comparisons between these groups of a larger sample than that required for only the undergraduate study body would be required.

Minimum Sample Sizes for Selected Small Populations

POPULATION SIZE	95% LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE			99% LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE		
	ACCURACY (PLUS OR MINUS)			ACCURACY (PLUS OR MINUS)		
	3%	5%	10%	3%	5%	10%
500	250	218	81	250	250	125
1,000	500	278	88	500	399	143
1,500	624	306	91	750	460	150
2,000	696	323	92	959	498	154
3,000	788	341	94	1,142	544	158
5,000	880	357	95	1,347	586	161

Pilot Study

PURPOSE

The purpose of the pilot study is two-fold: one, it would provide an opportunity to determine whether the questions asked in the survey instrument are able to evoke answers appropriate to the survey's assessment objectives; two, it would provide an opportunity to change the nature of the sample frame to account for additional research questions that might arise during the course of the pilot study.

REQUIREMENTS

As the pilot study would be conducted only on those students attending the summer session, a much smaller sample-size would be required.

SAMPLE FRAME

As students attending the summer session are mostly Foundation Program repeaters, many of the questions related to undergraduate needs and use could not be properly addressed. As a result a different student population would have to be drawn from in order to make the pilot study truly worthwhile. For this reason it may be necessary to conduct the pilot study in the fall of 2011 and the full survey in the spring of 2012.

The Questionnaire

Depending on the length of the questionnaire a variety of question formats should be introduced including the use of videos and sound tracks in order to maintain student interest and attention, and thus secure a complete and thorough response to each question.

General Requirements

Good surveys take good preparation and analysis to achieve their goals. Some of the more requirements for this survey include:

- Direct or indirect access to the university's undergraduate student data base.
- Direct or indirect access to the external examination office in order to secure ample and appropriate space and materials for the administration of the questionnaire.
- Cooperation on the part of the university's IT department or English Language Institute for the purpose of preparing and scoring the answer sheets for the questionnaire and pilot study.
- Endorsement from the university at large in order to secure good participation from the undergraduate student body and the appropriate survey results.
- Access to the appropriate statistical software for the purpose of analysis.
- Ample space, personnel, and time to create, test, and administer the survey, as well as analyze and report the survey's results.