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# CAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS IN BUSINESS CURRICULUM HELP IN AACSB ACCREDITATION?

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## ABSTRACT

*Globalization has had a significant impact on management education and curriculum across the world. To assess and guarantee quality education different accreditation bodies have come into existence. In business education, AACSB International (Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business) is highly popular, with a total of 655 accredited institutions out of which 165 are outside of the United States. Its popularity can be attributed to its emphasis on quality standards pertaining to research, mission oriented strategic planning, faculty and student achievements. Globalization and internationalization of curriculum is also an important component integrated within these accreditation standards. Business schools have responded in a variety of ways to meet this global accreditation requirement, schools have study abroad programs, student and faculty exchange programs, international business as one of the business courses on its curriculum, and integration of international dimensions and issues within its business courses. This paper will examine a business school located outside USA and how one of its mandatory graduation requirement for its business students can be considered as internationalization of curriculum.*

**JEL:** M19

**KEYWORDS:** AACSB, Quality Education, Globalization, Internationalization of Curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has had a significant impact on management education across the world. Globalization has been defined as “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education toward international involvement” (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 290). Globalization has resulted in the emergence of an international higher education industry (Naidoo, 2006). Business schools across the world have been under pressure to improve their curriculum and teaching practices to produce business graduates who are equipped to function in a globalized environment. Quality assurance and continuous improvement policies have become indispensable practices of globalization (Van Damme, 2001). Several accreditation organizations have also emerged over the last few years to improve the quality of education. There are two types of external accreditations: mandatory and voluntary. Mandatory accreditation bodies are usually regulatory organizations like the national or regional governments. While voluntary accreditation are peer driven organizations which are not legally imposed and compulsory. A few of the voluntary accreditation agencies consist of AACSB International (Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business), ACBSP (Accreditation Council of Business Schools and Programs), EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) and AMBA (Association of MBAs). The elements of globalization and internationalization constitute important components of all these accreditation agencies. Internationalization refers to the “evolving awareness and acknowledgement by the manager/organization/country of the impact of non-domestic forces on its economic future and the translation of the latter into new attitudes and behavior regarding the establishment and conduct of transactions with those in, and from other countries” (Task Force, 2011: 7). “Globalization is an activity, [while] internationalization is a mindset” (Cavaliere, Glasscock and Sen,

2014: 162). Like for instance, AACSB promotes the importance of international business and global concerns within the business curriculum (Cavaliere, Glasscock and Sen, 2014). Other examples of internationalization of curriculum include study abroad programs, student exchange programs, integrating an international dimension in the business courses being offered etc. However, an undeniable fact is, majority of the examples generated are appropriate only for US based business schools. This paper will discuss how curriculum could be considered international in a business school located in the West Bank region, also known as Palestine. This paper will contribute in the areas of AACSB accreditation, globalization and internationalization of curriculum. A case study will be presented to exemplify how curriculum could be internationalized within business degree programs. In the conclusion, the author will provide suggestions for further research to improve management education and internationalization of business curriculum.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization, diversity and cross cultural issues have become indispensable elements of the corporate world. Therefore, naturally these factors are also the driving forces for all business schools and management curriculum. AACSB has been emphasizing that all its member schools prepare business graduates who possess skills and knowledge to survive in this new global business environment. "...globalization is a driver of change that cannot be ignored...Business schools that fail to adapt to that reality do so at their own peril" (Task Force, 2011: 3-4). Different institutions have adopted different internationalization strategies to meet these new global requirements. The focus is on "a school's ability to export and operate abroad..." (Bryant, 2013: 159). International business and international management have become an integral component of business curriculums. Business schools have entered, into partnerships, with schools abroad to exchange students and faculty or to allow their students a chance to study abroad over the summer semester. Partnerships have also been entered to share research and other similar initiatives. Efforts have been made to incorporate international dimensions or to enhance the international content in all existing business courses. Others have used instructional technology to combine classes between universities located in different parts of the world. To facilitate student interactions in the form of discussions, shared assignments and research projects. To allow virtual guest lectures from faculty or corporate figures from an international background or organization. Some have used experiential pedagogies like simulations to introduce business students to cross cultural differences and their impact on business corporations. Or have encouraged their students to use various internet resources like wikis, blogs and other information sources to learn about international trends and global scenarios. Business faculty have also involved their local international community in their surrounding counties by inviting them into their classrooms. Students have been given an opportunity to interact with these local small scale entrepreneurs and to listen to their experiences in setting up and in the day-to-day management of their businesses. Students have been encouraged to investigate international aspects, international issues and practices through in-class graded research projects. Students have been shown videos and documentaries which deal with cross cultural practices and diversity issues.

Another aspect of globalization could be familiarity with foreign languages. Unlike European students, it is rare for business students in US to be fluent in two languages. Only 18 percent of the Americans can speak two languages as compared to 53 percent of the Europeans (Altschuler and Skorton, 2012). As part of the internalization of curriculum drive, 71 percent of the deans of AACSB schools have considered making foreign language a business school requirement (Rogers and Aro, 1998). However, in spite of, acceptance of globalization and internationalization of curriculum, English remains the language of the global world and international commerce. English is being increasingly recognized as the "de facto language of the business" (Neely, 2012 as cited in Cavaliere, Glasscock and Sen, 2014: 163). English is the language of international economy. "Its image of modernity, power and internationalism is becoming ever more entrenched and the financial incentives for speaking it ever more firm ..." (Johnson, 2009: 135). English is a language which is being used across cultures and between cultures as well. It allows the

user international image and international understanding. It guarantees corporate survival globally. Students across the world need to show proficiency in English language to get admitted into management programs in USA. TOFEL and ILETS scores are needed to apply for admission to management programs offered by US based schools. This poses interesting challenges for business schools located outside US and to their business curriculum. Business schools in Japan, China and Korea require their business graduates to be fluent in English language. In other words, for foreign universities, preparing their business graduates for the global economy would now also mean them being aware and fluent in English language. Some business schools have even made it a mandatory requirement for degree graduation. However, "...precious little academic...attention has been directed to the rise of English language especially in regionally specific contexts" (Johnson, 2009: 142). There are very few empirical case studies on how this language could be integrated into business curriculums. Also, could integration of English language as a part of business curriculum and its mastery by business students be a demonstration of meeting AACSB globalization and internationalization of curriculum quality standard requirement also remains unanswered? This paper seeks to discuss this perspective using a case study of a business college functioning within the wider umbrella of a university located in West Bank region, also known as Palestine.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Number of business schools are situated in Palestine, also known as the West Bank region of Israel. There are business schools in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jericho, Hebron and Birzeit. All these business schools possess mandatory accreditation provided by the Palestinian Education Ministry. The admission requirements for students to be admitted to the Bachelor degree program in business consists of possessing a certain grade in the high school exam known as Tawjihi. Successful passing of Tawjihi leads to awarding of a high school diploma in Palestine. Majority of the schools in the Palestine region teach in Arabic language with a few exceptions in the form of private schools like the Friends School in Ramallah district. Therefore, most of the high school graduates lack fluency in English language. This did not pose much of an issue earlier for the universities. Majority of the universities in Palestine still use Arabic as a medium of instruction. However, with recent emphasis on business school rankings, quality assurances and assessment procedures. Business schools in Palestine have been forced to reflect on their curriculum and teaching practices. This paper will examine the scenario of a business school affiliated with a leading Palestinian university. The business school has very good rankings in the Arab world. The business school referred to as "college" in this paper draws upon the local Palestinian and Arab population residing in the West Bank. The college is currently the largest within the university with around 2000 students. At the undergraduate level, there are 837 male students and 1161 female students. At the graduate level, the college has 312 students consisting of 155 males and 157 females. The college has six undergraduate programs and two master programs, MBA and Economics, each managed by four departmental heads and one program director. The third master level program, Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) started in Spring 2017. There are five structural divisions under the Dean: Business Administration and Marketing, Finance and Banking, Accounting, Economics and the MBA. The MBA has 210 students and the MA in Economics has 102 students. To meet both local and international competition, the college strives to improve its quality both at the faculty and curriculum levels. In the last few months, the college decided to aim for international accreditation. The dean of the college plans to apply for AACSB accreditation in the next few semesters. The college undertook a comprehensive self-study to review its readiness for AACSB accreditation on the existing fifteen standards.

To meet the challenge of globalization and AACSB accreditation, the college has realized the significance of English language. To allow a wider scope for local businesses, tourism industry and employability as to where their business graduates are concerned, the college decided to make English language an integral part of their business curriculum. The college now operating within the framework of its mission and vision statements, strives to produce business graduates who are able, to communicate fluently in English

language. The faculty of the college is now required to teach in English, textbooks are in English language and all course materials consisting of videos, case studies and other class activities are in English as well. But a major hindrance to changeover to English medium came in the form of students. Students enter the college with English language skills at varying levels. These students are a mixed product of private and public school education systems. While some students are, able to converse fluently in English, others have severe language difficulties.

The college decided to make it mandatory for all business students to first learn and master English language before taking business related courses. Successful completion of these language courses has also become a graduation degree requirement. Students are required to provide their English proficiency levels at the time of their admission to the university. Based on their proficiency levels students are categorized into A0, A1, A2, B1 or B2 levels and are then required to take specific English language courses [see Table 1]. Students enter the college with English language skills at either A0/A1 or A2 level. Some enter at B1 and B2 levels. The college requires all students to register for English language courses and reach the level of C1 before taking any business courses. A0/A1 students need to complete 420 hours of instruction in English language. While A2 level students need to complete 280 hours of English language instruction. Students in B1 level need to finish 280 hours of English language instruction. While students in B2 level need to complete 140 hours of English language instruction. Depending on the student entry level, these English language classes consist of 12 to 4 credit hours of the degree program.

Table 1: English Speaking Requirements

Semester	Student Entry Level			
	A0/A1	A2	B1	B2
1 <sup>st</sup>	ENGC1001	ENGC1201	ENGC2201	ENGC2203
2 <sup>nd</sup>	ENGC1002	ENGC1202	ENGC2202	ENGC2204
3 <sup>rd</sup>	ENGC1201	ENGC2201	ENGC2203	
4 <sup>th</sup>	ENGC1202	ENGC2202	ENGC2204	
5 <sup>th</sup>	ENGC2201			
6 <sup>th</sup>	ENGC2202			
Exit level	B2	B2	C1	C1
Total hours of Instruction	420	280	280	140
Credit hours	12	8	8	4

*Reference: Birzeit University Portal Ritaj. This table shows the English-speaking courses which students need to take depending on their levels of English speaking proficiency. Students with minimal proficiency are categorized as A0/A1 and need to take a maximum of 12 hours while students with high levels of proficiency are categorized under B2 and need to pass 4 hours of language speaking skills.*

Students are exposed to different levels of English communication courses which ensure students master English language [see Table 2 for detailed descriptions of the courses]. ENGC1001 and ENGC1002, English Communication Elementary I and II are the most basic English courses offered to the college’s business students. These courses are the lowest level providing students with basic command of English, ability to understand the basic everyday expressions, interact in a simple manner and start applying grammatical structures. At the next level, A2, ENGC 1201 and ENGC 1202, English Communication Pre-Intermediate I and II exposes students to a more advanced level of English.

Table 2: English Language Course Descriptions

Entry Level (CEFR)	Level	Course Name and No.	Course Description	Total Instruction Hours	Actual Cr. Hrs (Fees Equivalent in Cr.Hrs)
A1	A1.1	ENGC 1001 English Communication: <b>Elementary I</b>	English 1001 and English 1002: non-credit beginners' courses offered to students who are placed in A0 or A1 on entry assessment test; lowest level of generative language use; provides students with basic command of English; integrates the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing; helps students do the following: understand and use familiar everyday expressions and basic phrases; make simple introductions, ask and answer simple questions; interact in a simple way; able to use simple grammatical structures. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC1001: Assessment test (A0/A1 score) Prerequisite for ENGC1002: ENGC1001</b>	Face-to-face 2 hrs session per week Online-3 hrs per week	Zero-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
	A1.2	ENGC1002 English Communication: <b>Elementary II</b>	English 1201 and 1202: Two-credit hour courses that integrate the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing that help students do the following: Understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (basic personal and family information, local geography, employment); communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters; describe background, immediate environment, interests or activities; use simple structures accurately. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC1201: Assessment test (A2 score) or ENGC1002 Pre-requisite for ENGC1202: ENGC1201</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours ((fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
A2	A2.1	ENGC1201 English Communication <b>Pre-Intermediate I</b>	English 1201 and 1202: Two-credit hour courses that integrate the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing that help students do the following: Understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (basic personal and family information, local geography, employment); communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters; describe background, immediate environment, interests or activities; use simple structures accurately. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC1201: Assessment test (A2 score) or ENGC1002 Pre-requisite for ENGC1202: ENGC1201</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours ((fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
	A2.2	ENGC1202 English Communication <b>Pre-Intermediate II</b>	English 2201 and 2202: Two-credit hour courses; integrate the four skills; students can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered; produce a simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest, describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC2201: Assessment test (B1 score) or ENC1202 Pre-requisite for ENGC2202: ENGC2201</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
B1	B1.1	ENGC2201 English Communication <b>Intermediate I</b>	English 2203 and 2204: Two-credit hour courses that focus on effective argument. Students are able to: account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC2203: Assessment test (B2 score) or ENC2202 Prerequisite for ENGC2204: ENGC2203</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
	B1.2	ENGC2202 English Communication <b>Intermediate II</b>	English 2203 and 2204: Two-credit hour courses that focus on effective argument. Students are able to: account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC2203: Assessment test (B2 score) or ENC2202 Prerequisite for ENGC2204: ENGC2203</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
B2	B2.1	ENGC2203 English Communication <b>Upper Intermediate I</b>	English 2203 and 2204: Two-credit hour courses that focus on effective argument. Students are able to: account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC2203: Assessment test (B2 score) or ENC2202 Prerequisite for ENGC2204: ENGC2203</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
	B2.2	ENGC2204 English Communication <b>Upper Intermediate II</b>	English 2203 and 2204: Two-credit hour courses that focus on effective argument. Students are able to: account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. <b>Prerequisite for ENGC2203: Assessment test (B2 score) or ENC2202 Prerequisite for ENGC2204: ENGC2203</b>	Face-to-face-2 hour session per week Online-3 hrs per week	2-credit hours (fees equivalent to 3cr hrs)
C1		ENGL 233 Writing I	Description as before – no change <b>Prerequisite: Assessment Level (C1)</b>		

Reference: Birzeit University Portal Ritaj. This table provides a description of the various English language speaking courses and the total number of hours of instruction.

Students are now able to use English language to express themselves, their views and opinions about their family, themselves, immediate environment and local business practices both orally and in written form. Students at the B1 level have to pass ENGC 2201 and ENGC 2202, English Communication Intermediate I and II which allows students to make connections between their experiences in written text and oral expressions and expand their opinions and plans. While students who enter at the B2 level take ENGC 2203 and ENGC 2204, English Communication Upper Intermediate II courses. Students who complete these two courses are able to orally and in written form express themselves in detail, argue, understand and comment on abstract topics and texts and interact spontaneously with no hesitation or issues. At the most advanced level C1, students have to complete ENGC 233 English Writing 1 which provides them with skills to write business reports and letters.

After successful completion of these mandatory English language courses, students gradually progress towards the business courses. Students now study business courses in English, assimilate information taught in the classrooms and interact with their peers and teachers in English language. In other words, business graduates of the college are prepared for the global economy, to take up studies outside Palestine and seek jobs globally. Therefore, mandatory English communication courses which are also a graduation degree requirement can be interpreted as internationalization of curriculum.

#### Usefulness for other Business Schools

The model discussed in this paper would be useful for business schools in countries such as China, Japan, Korea and parts of Africa where English is still not widely spoken or used, with most of the instruction at the school levels taking place in national languages. The integration of English speaking skills within the business curriculum at a college in Palestine could be successfully applied to other non-US business schools globally. All interested business schools just need to assess their students' proficiency levels to categorize them into different grades requiring them to take pre-determined number of English speaking courses and credit hours. Students English language skills would further be honed with gradual introduction of all subjective instruction in English. They would be able to understand, speak and communicate effectively in English on completion of their bachelor degree programs.

Students thus would no longer need to take English speaking classes before traveling abroad, or applying for further studies to USA or when considering a position outside of their countries. It could be a component of their degree programs. Regardless of their medium of instruction at the school level, all students could now be provided with an opportunity to acquire a global language which could provide them with an advantage in their future careers. Further just as offering foreign languages has become an integral element of business curriculum in US based schools. And has been considered as demonstration of meeting the global and internationalization component of the AACSB accreditation requirements. Similarly requiring business graduates to master English language in non-US schools could be considered as fulfillment of the global and international curriculum element of AACSB standards.

#### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Globalization and internationalization have become integral elements of accreditation standards of business accreditation bodies like AACSB International. Business schools already members or aspiring to be members of AACSB International need to demonstrate evidence of internationalization of their business curriculum and degree programs. Different methodologies have been adopted by different schools. For instance, study-abroad programs, faculty and student exchange programs, integrating international dimension within the business courses or using technology to widen student exposure to different forms of culture. However most of these methods are appropriate for US based schools. There is less literature on how schools outside US can incorporate international dimension into their degree programs.

With advent of globalization, the emphasis on English language has increased. English has been universally accepted as the language of the world and to succeed globally one needs to know it. Knowledge and fluency of English language has been cited as valuable to succeed in today's global economy. This paper has contributed in the areas of internationalization of curriculum by examining how a business school, in Palestine has integrated English communication courses within its business curriculum to churn out business graduates who are globally prepared. The business graduates of the college need to become fluent in English language, acquire business knowledge and skills to be able to graduate. These graduates can now function outside of Palestine and the Arab world. Ability to communicate in an international corporate language gives them the power to be successful and internationally mobile. They are competitive in the world market, flexible with regards to job locations and further education opportunities. Future studies could examine the importance of English language and its integration into the curriculum and daily lives of the business graduates. The usefulness of English language could also be investigated from the viewpoint of business graduates and business students enrolled in AACSB International accredited non-US business schools as well.

Further studies could also focus on how non-US business schools have met the global and internationalization of curriculum aspect of the AACSB International. The focus could be on methods used other than study abroad programs and student and faculty exchange programs.

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