



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE MA APPLIED LINGUISTICS PROGRAM AT ADEN FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Suaad Awadh Dhaman Bifakeh \*

Department of English, Faculty of Saber, University of Aden, Aden, Yemen.

\*Corresponding author: Suaad Awadh Dhaman Bifakeh ; E-mail: dhmn\_s@yahooo.com

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of MA students regarding the factors that affect the MA Applied Linguistics Program at the Faculty of Education- Aden, University of Aden, Yemen. Specifically, the study focused on the faculty, supervisors, and collaboration between departments of higher education within the country's universities. Data was collected from 30 MA students enrolled in the MA program in Applied Linguistics. The findings revealed that the MA Degree is highly influenced by many factors. Among the factors found are access to digital resources, the internet, and well-equipped libraries. The study provided suggestions and recommendations that could be put forth to the quality assurance and given urgent attention to improve the quality of the program.

**Keywords:** Quality of Faculty, Supervisors, Collaboration.

## Introduction

In Yemen, similar to many other countries worldwide, the majority of research focuses on natural sciences and technical education, rather than languages or humanities. However, in today's knowledge-based economies, there is a growing need for effective research in various fields, including English language and literature. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of MA students regarding the factors that affected the MA Applied Linguistics Degree Program (MALDP), particularly in Faculty of Education, Aden, University of Aden, Yemen.

MA Applied Linguistics is an academic degree awarded to Yemeni students at University of Aden. According to Chris Park (2005), an MA in Applied Linguistics is a research degree awarded for demonstrating ability to carry out academic research and to produce new knowledge. Recent studies have demonstrated that, higher education can play a vital role in accelerating the rate of growth towards a country's productivity potential, particularly in developing countries (Bloom, Canning, and Chan 2006). The Ministry of high education in Yemen recognizes the importance of equipping students to face the challenges brought about by the knowledge and information explosion resulting from globalization. To successfully address these challenges, our educational system must focus on producing students who can think critically and creatively, as well as master the English language, which is now the language of information and communication technology.

## Background of the Study

This study was conducted at Faculty of Education- Aden, University of Aden, Yemen. University of Aden is one of the leading universities in public sector in Yemen, making significant contributions to promoting high quality research in English language. The MA degrees offered by universities in Yemen whether public

or private, are intended to equip the trainee researchers with skills such as observation, critical analysis, problem solving, and designing tools to address local issues.

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of MA programs in MALDP, at University of Aden, while MA programs in English Literature are not offered. The primary reason for this is the lack of available academics in the literature section who can effectively conduct quality research projects. Thus, this study aims to assess the expectations of MALDP candidates, particularly at Faculty of Education- Aden, University of Aden in Yemen.

The respondents for this study were selected from candidates in the Faculty of Education- Aden at University of Aden. The MALDP program was initiated in 1992 at University of Aden. The course duration is two calendar years, with each academic year is divided in two semesters. Students are taught fifteen courses spread over three semesters with five courses per semester. In the fourth semester, students complete thesis consisting approximately 20,000 words, supervised by a member of the MA teaching staff. The study draws on the insights of Applied Linguistics to support the cotemporary theory and practice of English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Translation Studies. As a result, the degree therefore, is designed as MA in Applied Linguistics (MALDP) at the University of Aden (1994).

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The present study aims to examining the perceptions of MA students regarding the factors that affect English Applied Linguistics Degree Program at University of Aden. Specifically, the study aims to explore factors such as quality of faculty, supervisors and collaboration between the departments of higher education. Consequently, this study has developed the following aims and research questions.

### **The objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Explore students' perceptions regarding factors that affect the MA English Applied Linguistics Degree Program at the Faculty of Education, University of Aden.
2. Provide suggestions to ensure excellence in the MA English Applied Linguistics Degree Program at the Faculty of Education, University of Aden.

### **The Study Question**

This study aims to address the following two questions:

1. What are the MA students' perceptions of the factors that affect the MA English Applied Linguistics Degree Program at the Faculty of Education, University of Aden?
2. What suggestions do MA students have for improving the quality of the MA Degree Program at the Faculty of Education in Aden University?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is strongly recognized that there is a need to explore the MA students' perceptions on the Applied Linguistics Degree Program in English at University of Aden. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the practical aspect and the students' perceptions. This research paper also offers contributions that may provide insights of the MALDP program, and how it addresses the new and increasing demands of academic development. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable feedback to policy-makers in the University of Aden enabling them to promote and improve the program in order to positively impact the learning and teaching conditions associated with the development of the MA Applied Linguistics Degree Program.

## Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to MA students enrolled in the English Applied Linguistics Program at University of Aden. The sample consists of graduated students from the English Applied Linguistics Program at University of Aden. Due to the small sample size, the findings may not provide a comprehensive and representative view of the overall program.

## Literature Review

Clearly, the issue of quality assurance in higher education has been frequently discussed at conferences, in newspapers and other public media. Studies on the value of the doctorate and MA programs in the USA indicate the importance of such levels in the workplace. Cude (2001) has placed significant importance emphasis on the importance of the MA and doctoral program. Code also argues that the mentioned programs have become a trap for the candidate and a sinkhole for the intellectual resources. Even in the UK, the fitness for purpose of the doctoral and MA qualification has been questioned. For example, single purpose qualification does no longer fitted the expectations of students and employers for some time (Anon, 2002). Anon argues that Government, funding, bodies and higher education institutions are questioning the nature of the MA programs. According to the author, higher education systems are under great pressure to improve the quality of education they offer. For example, Scott (1988) explains the situation of higher education programs. Scott argues that universities across the globe should redefine their goals and needful steps to make their Mareograms compatible with greater global competitiveness.

In the context of higher education where institutions have broad autonomy to decide on their own visions and missions the notion of quality is hard to define precisely. According to Haward (2001), the definition of quality in higher education refers to the “fitness for purpose” meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards as defined by an institution, quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities.

Realizing the importance and demands of MA applied Linguistics Program in Yemen, specifically, this study provides insights into the issues that affect in applying such program at the Faculty of Education at Aden University. To establish a national system of MA Applied Linguistics Program acceptable to the students as a whole, an effort and attention of those who are responsible of such program may need to be raised. Here comes the role of decision makers in the University of Aden. Decision makers should decide what level of involvement is more effective. Hoy and Mishel (2001) described decision making as a process that guides action effort toward raising attention. The authors admitted that decision making have at least four options of involvement in decisions: deciding alone, seeking participation and input, seeking collaboration, and letting others decide. These approaches are termed autocratic, participative, collaborative, and laissez fair, respectively. Some decisions are much more important and carry significant consequences. This is usually the case for instruction and learning, whether directly or indirectly. For important questions that demand high-quality decisions, collaboration is the best model.

According to Hoy and Miskel (2001), decision making is a process that guides actions. Decisions are based on the beliefs, values and previous experiences of individuals. Today, researchers and theorists know that those at the top cannot accurately gather or predict all alternatives. They know that followers deserve to be involved and that input and collaboration result in better decisions. The first decision is to decide what level of involvement is most effective (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Decision makers in the ministry of high education in Yemen as well as the leaders of Aden University are expected to play a key role to guarantee equity in providing resources, facilities and additional staff development opportunities for raising and supporting high developmental practice in the MA program.

For the last few years, the University of Aden in its efforts to meet challenges of modern educational requirements strives to cover courses in Applied Linguistics and English Literature as a continuation of the

developmental process. The graduate courses in Applied Linguistics and English Literature, stated briefly, are designed to: (1) enhance the University's ability to meet the country's needs for trained personnel (2) provide the country's employment sectors with competently trained graduates. For such professional needs as (a) Teaching English for Academic purposes (EAP) (b) Teaching English for specific purposes (ESP), (c) Teaching English as an International Language, (d) Translating from Arabic into English and vice versa, (e) Enable participants to learn how to learn to meet emerging linguistics challenges in developing societies, (f) Change original thinking and independent achievement so that participants can take on leadership roles in the management of change in linguistic matters. The MA Program in Aden University provided participants with choice of one of three tracks: English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Translation Studies.

In this study, a number of indicators used to measure the quality of the program. They are the performance indicators of teaching quality, student evaluation of the quality of the teaching and the learning environment and student satisfaction as well as the adequacy of the library and its management effectiveness. Quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine whether acceptable standards of education, are being met, maintained and enhanced.

## Methodology

To collect the related data of the current study, the following steps were followed:

### The Subjects of the Study

Thirty students out of 50, from three batches of the MA Applied Linguistics Program, were selected as participants for the study. The selection of subjects was done random, without regard to gender. The subjects were students who had completed the four terms of the program. Currently, these subjects are working as teachers in five Faculties at University of Aden.

### The Instruments of Data Collection

To investigate the issues and problems regarding the quality assurance of the MA programs at the University of Aden in Yemen, a questionnaire was developed and adapted then. The focus was on the perceptions of MA English Applied Linguistics students regarding of the factors affecting the MA Applied Linguistics Program in the department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Aden.

The questionnaire comprised ten items that cover aspects such as compatibility, quality, well-equipped libraries, access to internet, well-equipped facilities, and approved supervisors. The respondents consisted 30 postgraduate students (male and female) enrolled in the MA (Applied Linguistics) program at the department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Aden.

To respond to each statement in the questionnaire, the participants were asked to select one of the following options on a 5- point Likert scale: (1) strongly agree, (2) strongly agree, (3) undecided, (4) disagree (5) strongly disagree). Positive answers were considered when the participants selected "agree" or "strongly agree," while negative answers were considered when they chose "strongly disagree" or "disagree".

The initial version of the questionnaire underwent validation by three experts, whose t justifications and suggestion were incorporated into the questionnaire.

To ensure the reliability, a pilot study involving four students was conducted to to identify any ambiguous or complexities that needed to address before using the questioner in the main study participants. The pilot study helped the researcher determine the time required to answer and provided insight on issues that required clarification.

## Methods of Data Analysis

The study primarily utilized a questionnaire survey to assess students' perceptions. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics and percentiles. The respondents consisted of 30 students from three different cohorts of postgraduate students. This type of data can be analyzed by using statistical package, and the result can be achieved based on is the research objectives. The analysis aimed to determine whether the factors listed in the survey had an impact on the students' perceptions.

## Results and Data Analysis

The data collected from the students of the MA Applied Linguistics Program at the Faculty of Education in Aden University yielded the following results. Table 1 presents the outcomes of the first research question in the study, which focuses on the MA students' perceptions of the factors that affect the MA English Applied Linguistics Degree Program at the Faculty of Education, Aden University. The results for research question one are as follows:

**Table (1):** Results of the Perceptions of the Students Regarding the MA. Applied Linguistics Program in Yemen

No	Issues	SA	A	UD	SD	D
1	MA program is compatible with the international standards	60%	40%		0	0
2	Lack of the role of decision makers during the training in the program	73.3%	26.7%		0	0
3	It offers better skills to access to resources (ITS)	66.6%		0	34%	0
4	It assesses interaction between staff and students	33%	33%	0	34%	0
5	It organizes inter universities collaboration such as training, workshops and seminars	0	0		80%	20%
6	It offers well-equipped libraries	0	20%	0	0	80%
7	It offers free internet facilitates in the faculty	0	0	0	73.3%	23.67%
8	It provides enough approved supervisors	56%	44%	0	0	0
9	Monthly stipend for research scholars is sufficient	34.7%	33.3%	0	8%	%24
10	It develops self confidence in order to carry field research	44%	64%	0	0	0

### 1) MA Applied Linguistics program in English is compatible with international standard

As indicated in the table above, 100% of the subjects expressed their agreement to the item regarding compatibility of the of the MA Applied Linguistics program in English with the international standard. That means the majority of the students seems that they have a positive attitude towards the program.

### 2) Lack of the role of decision makers leads to poor quality in the MA Applied Linguistics program

The majority (100%) of the students reported that a lack of the role of decision makers of the higher education at the University leads to poor quality in the MA applied linguistics program. This is a serious issue, as shortages of decision maker involvement was revealed. These shortages negatively impacted the program. It is very noticeable that students expressed high agreement rates about how decision maker shortages affected the program's quality. Therefore, decision makers at the Ministry of Higher Education and the University of Aden should analyze, discuss and contribute with financial plans and ideas to assist the Yemeni higher education program.

### 3) Offers better skills to access resource

It is very noticeable from the participants' answers that 66% reported that the program offers better skills to access resources. While 34% expressed low disagreement rates about this. However, those who choose to say that the program does not offer better skills to access to resource attributed to fact that there is a shortage of practice in accessing to resources.

#### 4) It assesses interaction between staff and students

The highest observable response 66% of the subjects expressed their satisfaction and agreement to the point regarding the interaction between staff and students. However, 34% of the students expressed their disagreement to this item.

#### 5) Inter universities collaboration

There is strong need for inter universities collaboration to improve the quality of the research work. 100% of the respondents' reports show their disagreement to this view. This result highly indicated that there is a shortage of having inter universities collaboration. It is very noticeable that MA students' attitude towards this point is very negative.

#### 6) It offers well-equipped libraries

Most of the subjects acknowledged the importance of well-equipped libraries in the research pregame work. Due to this point, only 20% of the subjects agreed that libraries are rich with resources. The results also show that 80% of the participants have strongly disagreed the availability of well-equipped libraries. They indicated that having well-equipped libraries are an effective equipment for academic learning and professional development.

#### 7) Offers Free internet facilitates in the faculty

The majority of the students, 100% strongly disagreed this point. This result highly indicated that there is unavailability of free internet which is value to the research work.

#### 8) Limited Number of Applied Linguistics Approved Supervisors

It was found that 56% of the respondents stated that limited number of applied approved supervisors affects MA. Applied Linguistics degree in English whereas 44% of the respondents disagreed that availability of approved supervisors is not a problem.

#### 9) Monthly stipend for MA Applied Linguistics research scholars is insufficient

Most of the respondents 67% strongly agreed to the view that the stipend given to the research scholars is insufficient, while, 27% of the respondents showed their disagreement to this view.

#### 10) It develops self confidence in order to carry field research.

The result of this issue shows that 100% of the respondents have indicated that the program develops self-confidence in order to carry field research. The results of the second research question how can the provided suggestions guarantee excellence in the MA English Applied Linguistics degree program at the faculty of education in Aden University.

With respect to the second research question, the students reported the following suggestions:

**Please provide if there are other suggestions to guarantee high excellence of the applied Linguistics Program besides the items that you responded to above?**

Regarding the second section of the questionnaire, that is, the open-ended question, some of the participants gave some suggestions to guarantee high quality of the MA Applied Linguistics Program. The subjects wrote the following suggestions:

1. Provide suitable learning environment.
2. The use of a common room and interdisciplinary training workshops.
3. Comprehensive libraries, including the Postgraduate Reading Room.

4. Attending interdisciplinary training workshops offered throughout the year by the faculty, on such topics as writing journal articles, research ethics, preparing for an academic career, enterprise skills, and knowledge transfer.

The result shows that MA applied Linguistic programm needs an adequate learning environment that includes a reading room. The university policy maker should provide ongoing workshops and seminars that encourage and prepare students to get cognitive, linguistic and academic growth. Sharing in writing journal articles is not only a desire but also a necessity for them to get valuable development in academic writing research proficiency.

## Discussions

The students emphasized that the in availability of well-equipped libraries, access to the Internet and inter universities collaboration play vital role in improving the standards of the research work. This shows that information and communication technologies can and do play a number of roles in enhancing the quality of education that provides a catalyst for rethinking and teaching practice for improving educational skills that emphasis the students' active involvement in the program (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Using Internet enables the scholars to connect to the worldwide community of scholars and researchers.

The availability of approved supervisors in MA Applied Linguistics in English at Aden Faculty of eructation in Yemen is also of great importance. A shortage in supervisors negatively affects the possible practices of supervising students regarding their academic writing. This study reinforces the point that the MA Applied Linguistics researchers have to strive hard to get access to the internet. Faculty mobility between institutions can be helpful in promoting healthy academic environment that leads to quality research work. In addition, scholarly interaction within the country is of great help to uplift the standards of research in the field of English language and literature.

It was noticed that the MA Applied Linguistics in English in Aden Faculty of Education in Yemen rarely provides sufficient monthly stipend to the research schars. This shows that little critical thinking is implemented. So that more and more talented and critical thinking scholars can be attracted to MA Applied Linguistics in English in Aden Faculty of Education in Yemen.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed that the majority of MA students perceive the MA Applied Linguistics Program at Faculty of education- Aden, University of Aden, as needing effective measures to increase collaboration between local and foreign universities. This would bring the current teaching methodologies and research trends to Yemeni students who would ultimately get benefited from them. Universities should be prioritize funding for research related to English Language Teaching issues. Modern research software and instruments should be made compulsory for students so that their research is more valid and reliable.

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researcher presents the following recommendations:

- 1- To ensure quality research development among MA Applied Linguistic students, effort must be made to develop their research skills by implementing continuous and organized workshops and conferences. It is recommended that students attend a minimum range of seminars and publish their work on an annual basis. This will help them stay up-to-date with the latest research trends and improve the quality of their work.

- 2- To encourage and empower students to find their own voices and go through a process of discovery as researchers, it is important to provide get opportunity for them to work individually and collaboratively. Decision makers and faculty members, including lectures and staff, have an imperative role to play in this regard. They can support students by providing guidance, resources, and mentorship to help them develop their research skills and find their own unique perspectives.
- 3- Language laboratories, digital libraries and training programs are essential in today's educational landscape. Therefore, it is crucial to equip libraries with latest resources that contribute to student' academic proficieny. This includes providing access to computers and offering adequate training programs in ICT.
- 4- To Keep in view the importance and place attached to English in Yemen, it should be given the maximum importance to improve the quality of research in the field of English language.
- 5- A similar study on a wider scope is encouraged to validate the result and investigate other factors that may contribute to develop the program.

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مقالة بحثية

## تصورات الطلاب للعوامل المؤثرة في برنامج الماجستير في اللغويات التطبيقية بكلية التربية

سعاد عوض دحمان بلفقيه\*

قسم اللغة الانجليزية كلية التربية- صبر، جامعة عدن، عدن، اليمن

\* الباحث الممثل: سعاد عوض دحمان بلفقيه؛ البريد الإلكتروني: [dhmn\\_s@yahoo.com](mailto:dhmn_s@yahoo.com)

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### المُلخَص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي بحث العوامل المؤثرة لتدريس برنامج الماجستير في قسم اللغويات التطبيقية بكلية التربية عدن، جامعة عدن من وجهة نظر الطلاب فيما يتعلق بوضع الكلية، المشرفين والتعاون بين أقسام التعليم العالي داخل الجامعات الحكومية في اليمن. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على الطريقة الوصفية للبحث وتم استخدام الاستبانة. ثم تم جمع البيانات من 30 طالب ماجستير من ثلاثة دفعات اكملت البرنامج الدراسي في اللغويات التطبيقية. اظهرت نتائج تحليل الاستبانة التي تم جمعها ان الطلاب المستهدفين يعتبرون أن البرنامج الدراسي في ماجستير اللغة الإنجليزية يتأثر بشدة بعدة عوامل. من بين العوامل التي تم العثور عليها الصعوبات المتعلقة بالوصول إلى الموارد الرقمية، الإنترنت والمكتبات المجهزة جيداً. بعد الاطلاع علي نتائج الدراسة قدمت الدراسة عدد من التوصيات التطويرية لمعالجة الصعوبات لضمان الجودة وإيلاء اهتمام عاجل لتحسين جودة البرنامج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جودة الكلية، اعضاء هيئة التدريس والمشرفين، التعاون.

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