Learners as Partners in Assessing Course Learning Outcomes in an EFL University Context

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Abstract

Learners' achievement of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) seems to be a common challenge in higher education worldwide, including the EFL university context in Yemen. This might be due to the disengagement of learners as partners in setting and assessing the CLOs. Limited research has been done on the engagement of learners in assessing the achievement of EFL CLOs. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes of one particular course, i.e., advanced reading as perceived and achieved by EFL learners at a private university, namely University of Science and Technology, Yemen. The quantitative approach was adopted to gather data from 81 female EFL students at the university through a 5-point Likert scale checklist of the learning outcomes of the advanced reading course and students' overall results of the course. The data were analyzed using SPSS.21. Findings revealed that the achievement of CLOs, as perceived by participants, was average, whereas their actual performance was high. The findings also revealed that there was no correlation between learners' perceived achievement of CLOs and their actual achievement. The study may give insights into higher education institutions about the role of EFL learners in assessing the achievement of CLOs.

Keywords: assessment, English as a foreign language, learner-centered approach, learning outcomes, university level.

إشراك الدارسين في تقييم مخرجات تعلم المقرر في سياق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية

الملخص

على ما يبدو أن تقييم مخرجات تعلم المقرر يمثل تحديا في مختلف الجامعات حول العالم، بما في ذلك الجامعات في اليمن، وقد يُعزى ذلك إلى عدم إشراك الدارسين في وضع مخرجات تعلم المقرر أو تقييمها. وقد أجريت دراسات محدودةُ حول إشراك الدارسين في تقييم مدى تحقق مخرجات تعلم مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ولذلك، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم مدى تحقق مخرجات تعلم أحد مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية (القراءةُ المتقدمة) من وجهة نظر الدارسين في إحدى الجامعات الخاصة، وهي جامعة العلوم والتكنولوجيا في اليمن ومدى انعكاس تلك المخرجات على أدائهم في الاختبارات. ولتحقيق ذلك اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الكمي لجمع البيانات من 81 طالبة من خلال قائمة تدقيق صممت وفق مقياس ليكرت الخماسي، احتوت على مخرجات تعلم مقرر القراءةُ المتقدمة ونتائج تلك الطالبات في المقرر. وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج SPSS.21. وقد أظهرت النتائج بأن تحقق مخرجات تعلم المقرر كان متوسطا من وجهة نظر عينة الدراسة، في حين كان أداء العينة في الاختبارات عاليا. كما أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود علاقة بين تحقق مخرجات التعلم من وجهة نظر أفراد العينة ونتائجهم الفعلية في المقرر. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج قد يكون من المفيد لمؤسسات التعليم العالي أن تأخذ في عين الاعتبار إفساح المجال أمام طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لكي يشاركوا في تقييم مدى تحقق مخرجات تعلم المقررات.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التقييم، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، المنهج المتمركز حول الدارس، مخرجات التعلم، المستوى الجامعي

1. Introduction

The dramatic change in higher education institutions (Coates, 2017) entails continuous improvement and a special focus on the course learning outcomes (CLOs) (Torres et al., 2021) as an approach to ensure the quality of learning (Lawrence et al., 2016). Based on this approach, the focus has been shifted from the traditional way of teaching the contents of the course, by the end of which it is unclear what students should be able to do, to the learner-centered approach, which focuses on what students should be able to do by the end of the course (Kennedy, 2007). This has been stressed by international quality assurance agencies for higher education in many countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Adam, 2004; Gosling & Moon, 2001; Holmes, 2019). In the United Kingdom, for instance, university graduates obtain their award qualifications only when they have achieved the intended learning outcomes of the program (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014).

Learning outcomes are the statements of knowledge that students are expected to gain and the skills they can demonstrate after the completion of learning (Kennedy, 2007). They can also be defined as statements that specify what learners have achieved and should be able to do by the end of a learning activity (Torres et al., 2021). They are perceived as the statements of what learners are expected to know, understand or be able to do at the end of a learning period (Gosling & Moon, 2001). Learning outcomes can, thus, be defined as the statements of what learners have achieved and are able to do at the end of a course.

Focusing on the achievement of the learning outcomes can facilitate a shift from a behaviorist approach to a constructivist approach which stresses the central role of learners in setting and assessing the learning outcomes of the course syllabus as emphasized by the learner-centered approach (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This focus on the engagement of learners in setting and assessing the learning outcomes of course syllabus can lead to the development of learners' experience and future life skills (Holmes, 2019).

Course syllabus in the university setting needs to be designed accurately and systematically to help achieve the goals of the learning and teaching process (Torres et al., 2021). In this, setting appropriate learning outcomes for the course syllabus and assessing those outcomes is an essential stage

in that process (Kennedy, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2016); however, setting effective learning outcomes for a course in higher education institutions should adhere to the standardized quality assurance methods for describing modules and programs (Kennedy, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2016). Effective learning outcomes should be specific (not vague), measurable (can be assessed), achievable (learners can achieve them), relevant (related to the general objective of the program), and timed (when to achieve them is clear and specific) (Beaumont, 2005).

The intended learning outcomes should be aligned with the way they are assessed (Torres et al., 2021). Yet, higher education institutions continue to have challenges relating to the assessment of learning outcomes (Lowe, 2022), particularly when learners, who are viewed as central partners in the learning and teaching process (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012; Sah, 2021), are not effectively engaged in the assessment of that process (Coates, 2018; Holmes, 2019). This may create demotivated learners and hinder the move toward the learner-centered approach (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020), which views students as independent learners who can control their learning (Ahmed et al., 2021). Engaging students in setting and assessing the learning outcomes can make them clear about what they expect to achieve after they finish a particular course or program and motivate them to engage actively in achieving the learning outcomes (Kennedy, 2007).

Assessment of learning outcomes is a crucial component in language education programs. It is perceived as a way of measuring a person's knowledge and skills (Banta & Palomba, 2015). It measures what students know, feel, and are able to do (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014). In this study, assessment is viewed as measuring students' achievement of the CLOs in terms of knowledge and skills.

Assessment (be it deductive or inductive) requires reliable tools for measuring the attainment of the learning outcomes of courses (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018). Deductive assessment may include written tests that can be used to assess students' knowledge and skills (Shavelson et al., 2018), and inductive assessment can be done via learners' perceptions about their achievement of the learning outcomes (Vu, 2019). However, today there has been a shift of focus from whether intended learning outcomes should be assessed to how they should be assessed, i.e., by student self-reports of learning, short multiple-choice tests, or task performance for formative

and summative purposes (Shavelson et al., 2018), which ensures learners' achievement of critical thinking skills after they complete the course syllabus (Selvaratnam, 2021; Shavelson et al., 2018).

Critical thinking skills can be best developed through advanced reading courses offered to university students (Ratanaruamkarn et al., 2023). These skills are necessary for achieving high academic performance (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012). As such, focussing on engaging students in assessing the learning outcomes of the advanced reading course can help them reflect on the critical thinking skills necessary for their study. For this reason, the current study is concerned with the assessment of advanced reading learning outcomes.

Advanced reading is a course in reading for communication purposes offered to EFL students in the Department of English at the University of Science and Technology, Sana'a, Yemen. It is the third and final reading course, preceded by two other courses, i.e., Reading I and Reading II. Advanced reading aims at equipping students with high-level cognitive skills, i.e., analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This pre-requisite course is provided to EFL students before joining their major, either applied linguistics or translation, to help them develop critical thinking and communication skills required for their majors.

In line with the above, focusing on the assessment of learning outcomes is more important than thinking about the topics to be included in the course (Vu, 2019), as it can be beneficial to learners, academics, syllabus designers, and leaders of institutions (Coates, 2018). It assists learners build their knowledge and skills (Alexande, 2018; Holmes, 2019) and develops their learning autonomy when engaged in self-assessment of learning outcomes (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012). It can raise teachers' awareness of the essential role of assessment in evaluating the whole learning-teaching process based on data collected from various sources (e.g., learners, teachers, and employers) (Isik, 2021) and help them make sure whether students have achieved what they were expected to do (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014). It also helps institutions improve the learning-teaching process as it gives feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of students (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012) and shows the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes and which parts of the outcomes need modification or more focus (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019). University instructors and syllabus designers can also make use of the assessment results to pay more attention to students' needs

(Raharjo et al., 2020) which can contribute to their academic success and help them develop autonomously (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012).

Previous studies

Previous studies have examined various issues pertaining to the CLOs in higher education such as the design and assessment of the CLOs. Also, advanced reading skills have been the focus of research.

Learning outcomes

Several studies have investigated the students' learning outcomes in higher education in various areas, including English, in relation to different learning-teaching components. These studies focused on designing learning outcomes (e.g., Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019) and teaching approaches and the achievement of learning outcomes (e.g., Holme, 2019; Spronken-Smith et al., 2012; Vu, 2019; Waluyo, 2020; Yamada, 2018). The findings of the studies revealed ineffective learning outcomes of the course syllabus (i.e., general and more related to the program than to the course) (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019) and discrepancy in the achievement of the learning outcomes due to variation in major (Yamada, 2018); the findings also showed unsuccessful achievement of the learning outcomes which might be attributed to different interests and needs of learners (Holme, 2019), or to the inappropriate way of designing the learning outcomes (Waluyo, 2020). The studies provided evidence of the importance of self-directed learning in achieving learning outcomes (Spronken-Smith et al., 2012) and the importance of the learners' voices in developing their knowledge and skills (Vu, 2019).

Assessment of learning outcomes

Some studies explored the assessment of learning outcomes in higher education institutions (e.g., Coates, 2016; Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012; Shavelson et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2021). For instance, Khonbi and Sadeghi (2012) investigated the effect of assessment type on EFL students' achievement of the CLOs, and findings indicated the development of students' learning autonomy when engaged in self-assessment of learning outcomes. Findings of studies by Coates (2016) and Shavelson et al. (2018) revealed the importance of effective performance assessment of learning outcomes based on fieldwork needs; Torres et al. (2021) found a lack of alignment between learning outcomes and assessment.

Advanced reading skills

Investigating advanced reading skills in the university context was stressed by various previous studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2021; Khojah & Thomas, 2021) as these skills are essential for enhancing students' academic performance (Ahmed, 2021) and developing their learning autonomy (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020). Additionally, advanced reading skills can help university students develop their higher cognitive and critical thinking skills (Selvaratnam, 2021; Shavelson et al., 2018), which can lead to students' high academic performance (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012) and future essential career skills (Ahmed, 2021). However, EFL university students experience difficulty in acquiring those high-level skills (Ahmed, 2021; Waluyo, 2020), which might be due to the disengagement of students in setting and assessing the learning outcomes of such crucial skills (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020; Coates, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

The findings of previous studies revealed a challenge in the attainment of CLOs at the tertiary level (e.g., Holme, 2019; Waluyo, 2020), particularly those related to EFL advanced reading skills (Waluyo, 2020), one of the courses that EFL university students experience problems with (Ahmed, 2021; Waluyo, 2020). This is practically experienced by the researcher as an EFL instructor in a private university in Yemen, which is likely attributed to the disengagement of learners as partners in setting and assessing the learning outcomes of the course syllabus (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020; Coates, 2018). To overcome this challenge, there has been a call for research in higher education on learners' perspectives and experiences in assessing the achievement of the intended learning outcomes (Lowe, 2022; Yamada, 2018) of professional courses (Torres et al., 2021), such as reading skills (Waluyo, 2020), in which the voice of learners (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019), is essential in the assessment process (Vu, 2019). However, little is known about assessing students' achievement of learning outcomes based on their perceptions of what they have achieved and what they actually achieved.

Hence, this study attempted to engage students in the assessment of the learning outcomes by investigating their perceptions of their achievement of the learning outcomes of one particular course, i.e., advanced reading, and comparing their perceptions to their actual achievement of the CLOs. The study, thus, aimed to seek answers to the following questions: (1) To what extent were the intended learning outcomes of the advanced reading course

perceived as achieved by EFL university learners? (2) How well were the intended learning outcomes actually achieved by EFL university learners? (3) Is there a correlation between EFL university students' perceived achievement of the intended learning outcomes and their overall actual achievement of the learning outcomes? Focussing on assessing the achievement of the learning outcomes of advanced reading by students in the university can help improve the learning outcomes of this reading course, which may result in enhancing students' academic performance and lead to the revision of other courses' learning outcomes in the university.

Theoretical Perspective

The engagement of learners in setting and assessing the CLOs is based on the views of the learner-centered approach (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which both focus on the central role of learners as partners in the learning and teaching process. The two theories perceive students as autonomous learners who should be given an opportunity to decide the intended learning outcomes of the program courses they enrolled in. It is argued that this can assist students in developing competence required for continuous learning and future work needs. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy was also used as a framework reference for interpreting the findings of the study. This taxonomy provides a six-level cognitive skills sequence essential for formulating learning outcomes, activities, and assessment of the learning-teaching process (Torres et al., 2021). Bloom's (1956) cognitive skills ascend from lower-order to higher-order, i.e., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; and the modified taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) includes remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Both original and modified taxonomies consider the first three cognitive skills as lower-order thinking skills and the last three as higher-order thinking skills, which are all crucial for a well-designed course syllabus (Torres et al., 2021) though some scholars may perceive application as higher-order cognitive skills (e.g., Wiggins, 2015), the view adopted in the current study.

2. Methods

The main purpose of this study was to investigate EFL learners' assessment of the achievement of advanced reading learning outcomes at the University of Science and Technology, Sana'a, Yemen. The study adopted a quantitative approach that suits the purpose and nature of the study topic (Creswell, 2014).

The University of Science and Technology was chosen as the context for the study as it is the first and biggest private university in Yemen, which has recently made efforts to improve its programs, including the English language (UST Quality Assurance Unit, 2014). Despite these improvement efforts, students in the English department at the University face difficulty in achieving high academic performance, which could be due to their deficiency in language skills. The domination of the teacher-centered approach over the learner-centered approach in the university context in Yemen (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020) creates a challenge for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the courses they study, including advanced reading. This course, which is taught to level two students in the English department at the University, has been the focus of this study because it is perceived as important for developing students' advanced reading skills required for high academic performance in their majors, namely applied linguistics and translation.

Participants

Participants of the study were second-level female EFL students in the Department of English at the university. Their ages range between 22 and 26 years. Out of the 97 students enrolled in the advanced reading course, 81 students participated in the main study, and the rest (16) were excluded as they had participated in the pilot study.

Instruments

Two different quantitative tools (i.e., a learning outcomes checklist and students' formative and summative assessment scores based on coursework and final exam) were employed to collect data for the study. The checklist of the intended learning outcomes of one EFL course, i.e., advanced reading course (see Table 1), provided to students in the English department at the above-mentioned university, was chosen for two reasons. First, EFL learners usually encounter challenges in achieving the learning outcomes of this course (Ahmed, 2021); second, the course instructor was cooperative and showed interest in assisting the researcher during data collection.

The checklist was already developed and reviewed by EFL experts and approved by the quality assurance unit in the private university to ensure its validity. The learning outcomes in the checklist were restructured in the form of statements and then validated by EFL experts. The checklist, developed based on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of cognitive skills (UST Quality Assurance Unit,

2014), was used to collect data from EFL learners about their perceptions of the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes of the advanced reading course by engaging the learners in a self-assessment process (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2012) as they are the best informants about their learning experiences (Liu & Brown, 2019). The overall scores of the learners' coursework (40%) and final exam (60%), obtained from the course teacher, were used to find out the extent to which the learners have actually achieved the CLOs, compared to the perceived achievement of the learning outcomes.

Data collection

At the end of the semester (in week 12), the researcher got permission from the English department at the university to conduct the study. All the 97 students enrolled in the advanced reading course were invited to participate in the study and informed that the collected data would be used for research purposes and that their personal information would remain confidential. To maintain compliance with ethical principles, verbal informed consent from the students, the course teacher and the university was affirmed.

After conducting the pilot study with 16 students, the researcher requested the other 81 students to participate in the main study and respond to the checklist of the intended learning outcomes. The participants were asked to openly determine the extent to which they believed they had achieved each of the intended learning outcomes by putting a circle around the score in the appropriate box against each learning outcome based on a 5-point Likert scale (Very high = 5, High = 4, Average = 3, Low = 2 & Very low = 1).

In addition to the assessment checklist, the overall results of the course (coursework and final exam) for the 81 students were requested from the course teacher after excluding the scores of those who had participated in the pilot study. The aim was to obtain data about the actual achievement of the CLOs that might help to provide a clear idea of the assessment process and contribute to the holistic picture of learners' achievement of the course learning outcomes (i.e., learners' perspectives and their actual performance in the course). The purpose was to find the correlation between learners' perceived and actual achievement of the CLOs.

Data analysis

Statistical analysis for the collected data was done using SPSS 21. All 81 collected checklists were valid for analysis. The internal consistency and

reliability of the six learning outcomes in the checklist, ensured by using Cronbach's Alpha, was estimated to be 0.98, which showed high internal consistency between the learning outcomes. A statistical description of the means and standard deviation of the scores were presented in tables (1) and (2) to show the extent to which learners believed they had achieved the CLOs and how well they achieved them, respectively. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to examine the normality distribution of both learners' perceived achievement and their actual achievement (performance) in the course, and then Person's correlation test was used to examine whether there was a correlation between the perceived and actual achievement of the learners. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy was used as a framework reference in interpreting and discussing the findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

Findings from the analysis of participants' responses to the intended learning outcomes checklist provide the answer to the first research question: To what extent were the intended learning outcomes of the advanced reading course perceived as achieved by EFL university learners? Table (1) presents learners' perceptions of the extent to which they have achieved the CLOs of advanced reading based on the mean scores and standard deviation.

Table 1: Learners' Perceptions of Achieving CLOs of Advanced Reading (N= 81)

No.	Intended learning outcome	Response scores	
		Mean	SD
1	I am able to identify the main and supporting ideas (both stated and implied) of diverse texts.	3.57	0.96
2	I am able to elicit appropriate referents for diverse pronouns in the text.	3.65	1.12
3	I am able to infer information from the text based on evidence and context.	3.06	1.07
4	I am able to organize information effectively for summarizing a text.	3.33	1.16
5	I am able to analyze different texts to gather key information from different sources such as books, journals, and websites for research purposes.	3.16	1.20
6	I am able to compare, contrast and evaluate various ideas in the texts.	3.37	1.12
Total scores		3.36	1.07

Table (1) shows that the overall achievement of the intended learning outcomes of advanced reading as perceived by participants was average, with a mean score of 3.36. This could be due to the difficulties that learners face in acquiring the learning outcomes of the advanced reading course, which are common among university students (Ahmed, 2021). The highest-ranked intended learning outcome perceived as achieved by participants was no. (2), i.e., 'eliciting appropriate referents for diverse pronouns in the text' with a mean score of 3.65, while learning outcome no. (3), i.e., 'inferring information from the text' was ranked the lowest with a mean score of 3.06. This indicates that the second learning outcome was perceived as the easiest for learners to achieve, whereas the third was the most difficult to achieve. This appears to be in congruent with the hierarchy of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy which advocates the ascending complexity of cognitive skills. The second learning outcome seems to satisfy the application level of Bloom's taxonomy, which is a less complex cognitive skill, as learners might use the knowledge they have learned to decide various referents available in the text; that is, they apply what they have learned about referents in context. Additionally, learners appear to have been exposed to enough background information about referents before and during their study of the advanced reading course, which was crucial for helping them link the different parts of the reading text (Awwad, 2017). The third learning outcome matches Bloom's analysis level of cognitive skill, where learners find it crucial to analyze the reading text to be able to infer implied information (Wang, 2017).

The other learning outcomes (1, 6, 4 & 5) were viewed as achieved to various extents with the descending mean scores 3.57, 3.37, 3.33, and 3.16, respectively. The first learning outcome, i.e., 'identifying the main and supporting ideas (both stated and implied) of diverse texts,' was ranked second among other learning outcomes pertaining to the extent of achievement, with a mean score of 3.57. This two-sided learning outcome could probably create confusion for learners to decide the extent of achieving both the clearly stated ideas, which only require comprehension of the text and context to be able to identify them, and the implied ideas, which require the analysis of the text to infer them (Wang, 2017). Some participants might base their decision on the lower-level cognitive skill (comprehension) rather than the higher-level skill (analysis). Thus, this compound learning outcome which seems to match the second and fourth levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, i.e., comprehension and analysis, respectively, might better be split into two separate learning

outcomes to adhere to the criteria of good learning outcomes (Beaumont, 2005): one focuses on the skill of identifying stated ideas and the other on inferring unstated ideas. This can help learners concentrate on one cognitive skill at a time and also assist in avoiding confusion during the evaluation process, as the focus is on one learning outcome at a time (Kennedy, 2007). The sixth learning outcome, i.e., 'comparing, contrasting, and evaluating various ideas in the texts,' was rated third with a mean score of 3.37. This learning outcome, which represents the highest levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, i.e., evaluation and analysis, was expected to be perceived as more challenging for learners to achieve, yet rated by participants as third. This may reveal learners' awareness of how to evaluate texts (Tran, 2020) and their tendency towards evaluation (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009). However, given that the sixth learning outcome is compound, it can be split into two separate outcomes to keep the focus on one learning outcome at a time. The fourth learning outcome, i.e., 'organizing information effectively for summarizing a text,' was rated fourth, based on participants' perceptions, with a mean score of 3.33, which might reveal learners' awareness and experience of cognitive skills that they have developed during the advanced reading course. This learning outcome is consistent with the fifth level of Bloom's taxonomy, i.e., synthesis, one of the higher-level cognitive skills that tertiary EFL learners need to acquire (Ahmed, 2021; Torres et al., 2021). This cognitive skill focuses on the recombination of various points and on the interrelation between these points to provide a unique viewpoint (Wang, 2017).

The fifth learning outcome, i.e., 'analyzing different texts to gather key information from different sources such as books, journals, and websites for research purposes,' was ranked fifth by participants with a mean score of 3.16. This learning outcome is congruent with the fourth level of Bloom's taxonomy, i.e., the analysis required for developing EFL university learners' critical thinking skills and essential for further studies and real-life needs (Shavelson et al., 2018). The analysis skill in the advanced reading course has been emphasized in the first, fifth, and sixth CLOs, while knowing (the first skill in Bloom's taxonomy) was not evident in the CLOs. This shows that emphasis was given to higher-level cognitive skills, which are more crucial for university students (Ahmed, 2021), than to the basic lower-level skills (i.e., knowing and comprehension) which are normally implied in the course (Kennedy, 2007), given that analysis is an important and prerequisite skill for more advanced cognitive skills such as synthesis and evaluation (Horváthová & Naďová, 2021).

Findings from the analysis of the overall results of learners' performance (coursework and final exam) in the advanced reading course give an answer to the second research question: How well were the intended learning outcomes actually achieved by EFL university learners? Table (2) shows learners' actual achievement of the learning outcomes of the advanced reading course.

Table 2: Learners' Actual Achievement of CLOs of Advanced Reading

	The scale of achievement Level					
	Very high (90-100)	High (70-89)	Average (50-69)	Low (40-49)	Very low (0-39)	
N^*	8	33	33	5	2	81
Mean	93.13	79.09	61.33	46.80	36.5	70.20
SD	2.80	5.34	5.17	3.83	0.707	14.27
%	9.9	45.7	35.8	6.2	2.4	100

*N, Number of students; %, Percentage of students

Table (2) shows that learners' overall actual achievement of the learning outcomes was high, with a mean score of 70.20%; yet, there was variation in the level of achievement among students, which could be attributed to students' different learning styles that have affected their performance (Meisuri et al., 2021). Of the 91.4% of students who achieved the CLOs, 9.9% have achieved the CLOs to a very big extent. They scored very high with a mean of 93.13, which was likely due to their mastery of higher-level cognitive skills that they developed during the study of the course (Coskun, 2018). Many students (45.7%) have achieved the learning outcomes to a big extent. They scored high, with a mean of 79.09. Those students seem to have equipped higher-level cognitive skills to a big extent. In addition, 35.8% of students scored average, with a mean of 61.33. Those students appear to have developed a moderate level of cognitive skills which may be attributed to the individual differences that have influenced their performance (Du & Ma, 2021). Moreover, the significant number of students who scored average may indicate shortcomings in the actual performance of those students. This could be due to a lack of focus on learners' needs and their ineffective engagement in the learning-teaching process that might affect their motivation toward high achievement (Khojah & Thomas, 2021). The average performance of students could also be the result of the difficulties that some EFL university students face in acquiring advanced reading skills (Ahmed, 2021). This finding is consistent with Holme's (2019) study, which

showed that students' learning outcomes were not fully achieved as learners may have different individual learning needs and interests, which should be considered while designing the CLOs. On the contrary, the finding is not in line with the findings of Waluyo's (2020) study, which revealed the unsuccessful achievement of learning outcomes pertaining to reading skills. This was likely due to the inappropriate way of designing learning outcomes. Additionally, in this study, very few students (8.6%) scored low and very low (6.2% & 2.4%); their mean scores were 46.80 and 36.5, respectively. The failure of those students to achieve the CLOs shown by their unsatisfactory performance might be due to the difficulties that university students normally face in reading, particularly higher-order thinking skills (Ahmed, 2021) and also to the lack of fulfilling the students' learning needs by engaging them as partners in setting the CLOs (Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020).

To answer the third research question: 'Is there a correlation between EFL university students' perceived achievement of the intended learning outcomes and their overall actual achievement of the course?' One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality distribution of both learners' perceived achievement and their actual achievement (performance) in the course. The results of the analysis showed that both perceived and actual achievement were normally distributed. Given that the data were normally distributed, the Person's correlation test was used to examine whether there was a correlation between the perceived and actual achievement of the learners. The results showed that there is no significant correlation between the perceived and actual achievement of the CLOs (R= 0.15, P= 0.182). This indicates a gap between the level of learners' beliefs about the achievement of expected learning outcomes of the course (i.e., average) and their actual performance (i.e., high); that is, the overall results of their actual performance were higher than their perceived achievement. This gap could be due to participants' high expectations of the CLOs, which may reveal their dissatisfaction with what they believed they had gained from the course. This finding is inconsistent with some previous studies, such as Dray et al. (2019), which showed an alignment between what was believed to be learned and what was actually learned. The inconsistency in the finding is in congruence with the view that high expectations of learners lead to better performance (Hossain et al., 2022).

In line with the point mentioned above, the inconsistency between students' perceived and actual achievement of the course intended learning outcomes could also be due to students' disengagement in deciding the CLOs or

even considering their needs. This might cause students to perceive the CLOs as something imposed on them rather than something that can help them satisfy their learning needs. Besides, lack of exposing students to the CLOs in the beginning of the course might create vagueness about what they expect to achieve by the end of the course. Also, lack of community engagement, while deciding the CLOs, to recognize and understand the community needs could be one reason behind the above gap. Additionally, may be the assessment tools used by the teacher did not reflect the CLOs. In such a context, misunderstanding and misevaluation of perceived learning outcomes are likely to occur. As such, based on the learner-centered approach (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which focus on learners' participation in designing and assessing the intended learning outcomes at different stages of the course, learners should be engaged with their peers and teachers in formulating and evaluating CLOs, and the whole learning-teaching process. This can make them aware of the intended learning outcomes from the beginning of the course and, thus, have realistic perception close to the actual performance.

4. Conclusions

The study findings yielded the following conclusions: First, EFL students in the University of Science and Technology were dissatisfied with the higher-level cognitive skills they had gained from the advanced reading course. Second, there were shortcomings in the performance of some students, which could be attributed to the disengagement of learners in designing the CLOs that demotivated them and affected their performance. Third, there was a gap between learners' perceptions and achievement of the CLOs, which can be reduced by engaging learners as central partners in formulating and evaluating CLOs. Students' participation in setting CLOs based on their needs and according to Blooms' (1956) taxonomy of various cognitive skills or any other modified model, which was not the focus of this study, can help to develop highly motivated and goal-oriented learners, able to achieve the CLOs successfully. This can result in equipping learners with life-purpose skills. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the literature as they revealed the assessment of the CLOs in one particular university context in Yemen, as perceived and achieved by EFL learners. Practically, the findings may raise the awareness of EFL teachers and curriculum developers in the private university and higher education to the importance of engaging learners as central partners in the assessment process of learning. This gives value to

the central role of learners' view in deciding the knowledge and skills they need to acquire. Conducting qualitative research studies to explore learners' views of CLOs in EFL university settings may help in collecting in-depth data for formulating CLOs based on learners' needs and interests. Further studies may also explore the extent of EFL learners' autonomy in their learning.

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