

UKJAES

University of Kirkuk Journal
For Administrative
and Economic Science

ISSN:2222-2995 E-ISSN:3079-3521

University of Kirkuk Journal For
Administrative and Economic Science



Mohammed Maqsood Saadi. Strategic Optimization of University Language Centers: A Participant-Driven Analysis of International Partnerships and Delivery Models in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *University of Kirkuk Journal For Administrative and Economic Science* (2025) 15 (4) Part (2):263-278.

Strategic Optimization of University Language Centers: A Participant-Driven Analysis of International Partnerships and Delivery Models in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Abstract: This research paper is an attempt to explore the participant-driven characteristic of strategic optimization of university-based English language centers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The main aim will be to analyze the view of the stakeholders, that is, students, faculty, and administrators about the used international partnership, the desired courses delivery method, and strategies in the functioning of the language centers in the realm of a public university. A survey-based quantitative research design was used to collect data concerning various aspects of perceived effectiveness and levels of satisfaction in several public institutions to find out the entire picture. The results demonstrate that such learning models as hybrid (distributed between online and classroom) learning are preferred highly, as the participants state their versatility and efficiency. Furthermore, the engagement in international affiliations, including associations of well-known international institutions, was seen to contribute greatly to the program credibility, learner motivation and teaching standard. Nonetheless, there are still significant barriers in the form of the technological infrastructure and instructor readiness concerning digital learning. The findings highlight the need to combine the flexible delivery framework and engage international partnerships besides filling the gaps in infrastructural and training baseline to promote sustainable enhancement in English language teaching.

According to the findings, there are limited benefits in involving the international partners, including imperial colleges, which question their contribution to curriculum development, inspiration, and credibility in the eyes of the stakeholders. This study provides a set of actionable recommendations on the part of policy-makers and institutional leaders to restructure the functioning of language centers that should be correlated with the international practice and local contexts.

Keywords: Language centers, international partnerships, Kurdistan Region, Higher education strategy, Digital infrastructure, English language education, University policy optimization.

التحسين الاستراتيجي لمراكز اللغات الجامعية: تحليل قائم على المشاركة للشراكات الدولية
ونماذج التسليم في إقليم كردستان- العراق

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المستخلص: تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف سمة التحسين الاستراتيجي لمراكز اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعية في إقليم كردستان -العراق، والتي تعتمد على مبدأ المشاركة. ويهدف البحث بشكل رئيسي إلى تحليل آراء أصحاب المصلحة، من طلاب وأعضاء هيئة تدريس وإداريين، حول الشراكة الدولية المستخدمة، وطريقة تقديم المقررات الدراسية المفضلة، واستراتيجيات عمل مراكز اللغات في الجامعات الحكومية. وقد استُخدم تصميم بحث كمي قائم على المسح لجمع بيانات حول جوانب مختلفة من الفعالية المُدركة ومستويات الرضا في العديد من المؤسسات الحكومية، وذلك لرسم الصورة الكاملة. وتُظهر النتائج أن نماذج التعلم المختلط (الموزع بين التعلم الإلكتروني والتعلم الصفّي) تحظى بتفضيل كبير، حيث أشار المشاركون إلى تنوعها وكفاءتها. وكذلك، لوحظ أن المشاركة في الانتماءات الدولية، بما في ذلك ارتباطات المؤسسات الدولية المرموقة، تُسهم بشكل كبير في مصداقية البرنامج، وتحفيز المتعلمين، ومستوى التدريس. ومع ذلك، لا تزال هناك عوائق كبيرة تتعلق بالبنية التحتية التكنولوجية وجاهزية المُدرّسين فيما يتعلق بالتعلم الرقمي. تُسلط النتائج الضوء على ضرورة دمج إطار تقديم مرن وإشراك شراكات دولية، إلى جانب سد الثغرات في البنية التحتية والتدريب الأساسي، لتعزيز التطوير المستدام في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. ووفقاً للنتائج، فإن فوائد إشراك الشركاء الدوليين، بما في ذلك الكليات العلمية والإنسانية، محدودة، حيث تُشكّل هذه الكليات في مساهمتها في تطوير المناهج الدراسية، وإلهام الطلاب، ومصداقيتها لدى الجهات المعنية. تُقدّم هذه الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات العملية لصانعي السياسات وقادة المؤسسات لإعادة هيكلة عمل مراكز اللغات، بما يتوافق مع الممارسات الدولية والسياقات المحلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مراكز اللغات، الشراكات الدولية، استراتيجية التعليم العالي؛ البنية التحتية الرقمية؛ تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية؛ تحسين سياسة الجامعة.

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Introduction

In the last several decades, the role played by English language education in developing higher education systems has changed considerably. With English still in the process of becoming a world lingua franca, central to academic exchange, international collaboration and economic competitiveness, non-English-speaking regions of the world universities have reacted to the English language phenomenon by institutionalizing English language programs. One tangible evidence of this change has been the founding and growing popularity of university-based English language centers, which work to develop among their students, faculty members, and administrative staff the linguistic skills needed to become full participant in the international academic community.

This transition is particularly sharp in the Middle East where the level of English language acquisition has largely been perceived as a driving force of upward social and economic mobility, accessibility to global research networks, and the enhancement in educational performance. In this regional setting, Kurdistan Region of Iraq witnessed quite an investment on the proliferation and quality of English language centers in the university framework of the region.

The strategic partnership with globally recognized ones has been one of the critical factors in the promotion of quality within these centers. International partnerships with education providers have brought with them valuable curricular designs, quality assurance guidelines and pedagogical innovation. Such collaborations do not only support educational guidelines, but also increase the trustworthiness and popularity of language courses among local stakeholders. Nevertheless, in spite of these positive and encouraging reports, there is still a lack in evidence base informing operational strategies and best practices of these centers especially in low-resource and transitional education settings.

In a continuously expanding higher education reform program, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Kurdistan Regional Government has established English language proficiency as a mandatory prerequisite for postgraduate studies and academic promotion. In particular, IELTS, now demanded of Master and PhD study in the humanities, requires a minimum of 5.0, as compared with 6.0 at the doctoral level in the natural sciences. The Ministry has taken this policy into consideration, particularly its economic consequences and has chosen to focus in

developing and growing the language learning infrastructure throughout the region in its public universities. In this regard, 14 English language centers are operationalized in the public universities across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. To guarantee the services excellence and successful incorporation of educational technology, the Ministry contracted Imperial English UK which provides the English language teaching services. As official statistics of General Directorate of Research and Development indicate (accessed July 17, 2025), the first course was launched on February 25, 2024. Up to now, the program has an in-class learner participation of 4,865 and an online learner participation of 7,670 in the last three consecutive years of cohorts. On-site and online learners would have gained access to a special online program in order to systematize the Imperial English UK program with the support of local instructors. Participants were divided into four proficiency scale including the Beginner, Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced. The exam that happens at the end of the course is done online. This is the information confirmed by the Directorate of ICTS in the Ministry as of July 17, 2025.

While policy directions and international collaborations have set the base for improvement, many language centers in the Kurdistan Region still operate without healthy mechanisms for evaluating the impact of these partnerships, the effectiveness of different delivery models (e.g., in-person, online, hybrid), or the adequacy of technological infrastructure. Consequently, strategic decisions are often made without practical evidence, limiting both the scalability and sustainability of language education initiatives. The current study attempts to provide a solution to this severe gap by investigating systematically the stakeholder perceptions on the structure, delivery, and strategic orientation of the concept of English language centers in public universities in the Kurdistan Region, and in particular, the public view of the stakeholders known as students, faculty, and administrators.

1st: General Framework and Research Methodology

Describing the studied population and sample of participants, the research discusses both the overall approach and the methods that are concerned as well as the statistical procedures of the hypothesis testing and data analysis as follows:

1- Research Questions

The range of key research questions guiding this investigation is as follows:

- ✓ What is the value of international partnerships in improving the quality, credibility, and motivational impact of university-based English language programs?
- ✓ Which delivery model (in-class, online, or hybrid) is favored by stakeholders and perceived to be most effective for language acquisition?
- ✓ How satisfactory is the technological and instructional infrastructure, and to what extent does it backing effective language instruction?

2- Research Hypothesis

H1: Outsourcing of the international partners (e.g. Imperial College) is a major enhancing factor to the perceived course quality in university language centers.

H2: There is an increase in level of motivation in participants when there is outsourcing of international partners in the language programs.

H3: The availability of international partners boosts the perceived credibility of the language center's programs.

H4: Participants prefer hybrid (online + in-class) delivery over purely online or in-class models.

H5: The perception of learning outcomes varied considerably, considering differences in the mode of course delivery used (online, in-class, hybrid).

H6: There is a positive relationship between technological readiness (awareness and infrastructure) and satisfaction with online language learning.

H7: The participants are confident that the teachers have sufficient qualification to offer online language services based on technological tools.

H8: The current delivery model also makes a major contribution to self-reported enhancement of English proficiency.

H9: Participants who perceive alignment between teaching methods and their learning styles report greater academic preparedness.

3- The Objectives of the Study

- A. To inspect whether the outsourcing of international partners (e.g., Imperial College) improves perceived course quality in university language centers.
- B. To evaluate the influence of international partnerships on participants' motivation to participate in language programs.
- C. To assess the influence of international partners on the perceived credibility of language center programs.
- D. To determine the levels of preference of participants regarding the modes of delivery of the course, particularly hybrid (online + in-class) models.
- E. To study the variations in perceived learning outcomes with reference to the mode of course delivery (online, in-class, hybrid).
- F. To study the correlation between technological readiness and satisfaction with the online language learning.
- G. With the aim of evaluating participants in terms of how participants perceive instructors as adequate in terms of their use of technological tools in teaching online.
- H. To identify the role of the existing model of delivery in the enhancement of self-reported English language improvement of the participants.
- I. To test the relationship between the perceived match in the teaching/learning styles and academic readiness.
- J. To examine the connection between satisfaction of the participants through language center, and their perceptions of strategic optimization of the language center.
- K. To determine whether those, who feel that the center has good strategic qualities, are happier with its overall operations.

4- Significance of the Study

✓ This research is one of the initial researches to provide a data/ participant led assessment of the English language institutes in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The research allows attaining a deep sense of operational strengths, implementation challenges, and opportunity of reform by capturing the perceptions of the overall number of stakeholders, i.e., 14 language centers established in public universities. Findings are important implications to:

- ✓ Policy-makers who want to pursue the internationalization of higher education by investing in strategic language education,
- ✓ University administrators, and academicians who seek to streamline delivery and configuration of their language centers,
- ✓ And international partners and donors dedicated towards capacity-building in developing academic environments.

Finally, this paper adds to the international history of the discourse on the language policy, pedagogical innovation, and institutional planning of the higher education systems that are under transformation.

5- Research Scope

Temporal, spatial, human and cognitive limitations characterized the study as follows:

- **Temporal scope:** The time line within which the study is to gather and analyze information will be June 25, 2025 through August 4, 2025.

- **Place Scope:** The study was conducted by involving (14) language centers at the public Universities within Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

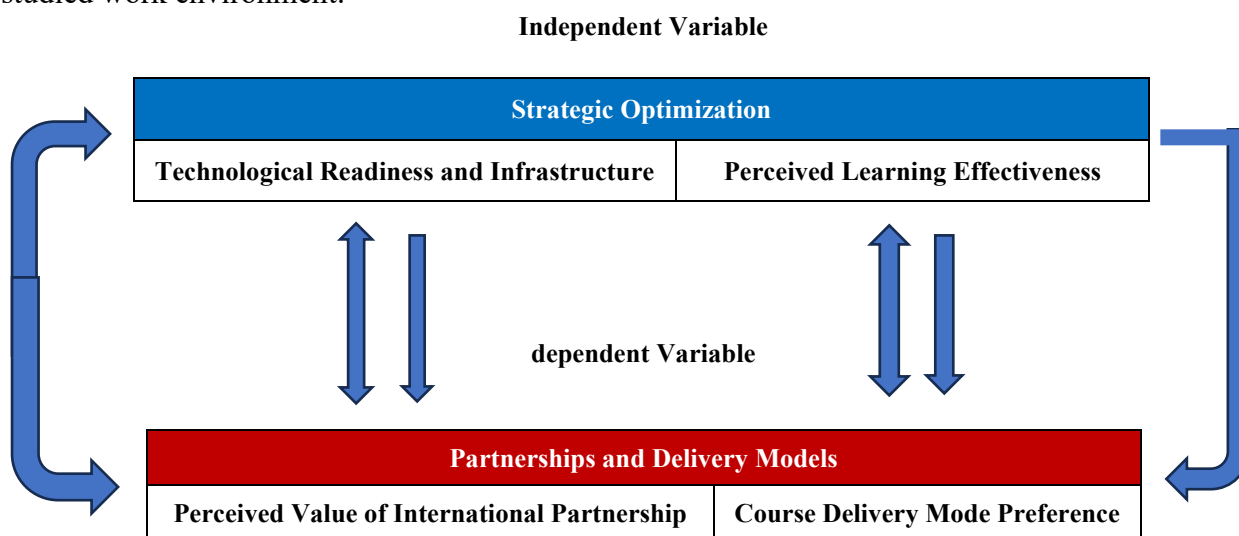
- **Human Scope:** A sample one of Participants (Instructors, Administrators, learners) from public university language centers.
- **Cognitive (objective) scope:** A Participant-Driven Analysis of International Partnerships and Delivery Models within the language centers of the public universities within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

6- Research Methodology

- The study was founded on the descriptive and analytical research approach where data was obtained by means of a questionnaire filled out by targeting a sample of University Language Centers in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq, the data was analyzed using the descriptive and analytical statistical tools in a bid to retrieve the results:
- **Methods Used:** Quantitative and qualitative data analysis using SPSS program to analyze questionnaires and test hypotheses.
- **Data Collection Tools:** Questionnaires, Google Forms, and literature reviews.
- **Research Community:** (14) Language Centers in Public Universities in Kurdistan Region-Iraq.
- **Research sample:** (2999) Participants in public university language centers.

7- Research Model

As shown in Figure No. (1), a hypothetical model has been developed to demonstrate the potential for creating an environment that is appropriate for public university language centers in Kurdistan Region, Iraq, using Strategic Optimization as an independent variable and Partnerships and Delivery Models as a dependent variable. It also demonstrates the degree of influence that these factors have on the research variables and the degree of consistency of these variables with the studied work environment.



Source: Prepared by researcher

2nd: Literature Review

1- Review of Global Best Practices in University-Affiliated English Language Programs

In the last ten years, student-centered pedagogy, internationalization of curriculum, and integration of digitalization in university-affiliated English language programs have become the best practice areas in the field. Within the global arena, the practices are influenced by professional accrediting body standards and research-based frameworks that contribute to structuralizing the institutional language objectives according to the requirements and prerogatives of learners and reality of technology.

Incorporation of accreditation standards in curriculum development is one of the key benchmarks of internal quality assurance. A recent Vietnam study presented the observation that general English

teaching programs in the tertiary institutions when aligned with a framework, in this case, the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), had a better program cohesion, a clearer definition of learning outcomes and more accountability on the part of the institutions (Quach and Nguyen, 2024, p. 67).

This alignment will make programs to be tarted to global standards as well as the local contextual requirements. The other major element of a best practice is continual assessment and feedbacks. Tanner et al. (2020) indicate that such ongoing internal assessment of Intensive English Programs (IEPs) helped to respond to student feedback and inform pedagogical breakthroughs, especially in online and hybrid modes of delivering courses (p. 45).

Such assessments are critical in the optimization of course delivery and in the synergy of programmed objectives with changes in the expectations of the students. The context of the U.S. has long promoted the idea of integrated skills teaching, faculty professional development as well as data driven placement and exit assessment to a greater extent through American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP) and TESOL International (Szasz, 2010, p. 213). These educational out practices have been critical in practicing equity in learner outcomes and in keeping academic quality at diverse demographics of learners.

Even more, it is indicated that coalitions with foreign partners enhance credibility and innovation in the curriculum. As an illustration, university-affiliated programs with more established partners, e.g. Imperial College, or other universities ranked among the leading world universities, have the means of shared teaching practices, access to teaching materials, and two-part certification systems, which stimulates confidence among students and promotes institutional recognition (Quach and Nguyen, 2024, p. 69).

However, the problem of infrastructures still remains. Universities in developing environments tend to have restricted resources when it comes to access to digital avenues, preparedness of instructors and assistive services. Thus, scalable support systems of technology-enhanced learning should also be the part of best practices as mentioned by Baker (2019) in terms of having supporting systems that can accommodate students of different socioeconomic statuses (p. 276).

On the whole, the literature points to a comprehensive view of best practice: i.e., a view that takes account of international standards, combines these with the local situation, generates feedback cycles, and engages in an active technological and pedagogical innovation.

2- Theoretical perspectives on internationalization in higher education.

The Internationalization of higher education (IHE) is a developing process that has taken shape over the years to be a multidimensional activity based on international academic competition international mobility and knowledge diplomacy. The theoretical outline is the crucial part in the discussion of such dynamics and the way in which the institutions must take their strategic response.

Knight Process Model is a prevalent model in IHE research that envisions internationalization as a methodical incorporation of the international, intercultural and the global into the meaning, tasks and delivery of higher education (Ahmadzada, 2025, p. 14). The model is connected to the institutional strategy, curricular reformation, and staff mobility. The typology established by Knight makes the difference between internationalization at home and internationalization abroad and thereby offers a sophisticated recommendation of the basis of the institutional policy-making.

Postcolonial and feminist approaches to internationalization theory provide the critical lens to hallmark the penchant of market-based and Western-centric discourses of internationalization of education. Ahmadzada (2025) argues that these kinds of frameworks draw awareness to unequal movements of knowledge and privilege, specifically how education projects are informed by the international hegemonies (p. 18). The feminist theory has also been used to evaluate the gendered consequences of international programs more particularly its empowering and academic access quota.

The Experiential Learning Theory has proved a fruitful perspective which can be used according to the Kolb to comprehend how faculty and students internalize international experiences. This theory

was utilized by Beer (2025) to explore the links between study abroad programs and the development of internationalization practices in institutions-namely, by showing that careful cycles of reflection and intercultural immersion enables meaningful engagement (p. 27).

In the meantime, epistemic governance theory is popular to check the policy frameworks that support the international education. As it was mentioned by Mattila (2025, p. 31) the argument is that this is a method of examining the work in terms of how actors (e.g. ministry, institutions) apply knowledge, values, and norms in defining which perceptions of international legitimacy and quality exist.

By a capitalist-focused viewpoint, Chen (2025) used the theory of social and cultural capital as suggested by Bourdieu and applied it to the internationalization policies in Japan, where a discrepancy between the symbolic institutional reformations and actual results of faculty development and internationalization were proposed (p. 9).

In her arguments, supplementing the above, Poliakovska (2025) suggests an intercultural competence model due to her belief that IHE success is highly reliant on how stakeholders are able to negotiate and navigate culture differences within both teaching and administrative environment (p. 668). This model focuses on soft skills, empathy and non-adaptive communication, areas that are downplayed in performance-based approaches.

Lastly, transnational theory provides a bigger prism with which institutions can view their involvement with international activities. Explaining his approach, Surwandono et al. (2025) note that this method sees institutions as not only exporting education but as collaborators in creating global identity, diplomacy, with local conditions of religion and culture defining international desires (p. 5).

This diversity of theoretical approach demonstrates the complexity and richness of the processes of internationalization and provides a strong argument as to the necessity of matching the institutional strategies to the global ambitions and local realities.

3- Previous studies on delivery models: online vs. in-class vs. hybrid.

With the face of higher education rapidly changing to deal with aspects of globalization and digitalization, the efficacy of various models of administering English language course delivery i.e., in-class, online, and hybrid have emerged as an important subject of research. All these models possess certain benefits and constraints, which have triggered the comparative research and prompted an understanding of their influence on the learners, their engagement, and pedagogical innovation.

Face-to-face methodology is the most conventional and vastly used one, which is appreciated due to its immediacy, structured setting, and a chance of real-time communication. Yet, as Kajee et al. (2024) point out, face-to-face approaches usually have their inflexibility that just does not meet the needs of modern learners and fail to address various learning styles, which is especially true in a multicultural and multilingual environment (p. 3).

On the contrary, online models are praised due to their flexibility, availability and capacities to self-learn. However, they realize a lack of motivation in the learners, the poor social presence, and difficulties in the formative assessment. Chen (2025) conducted a three-year longitudinal study comparing hybrid and remote learning and its implications and concluded that although the students enjoyed the freedom of online learning, most had problems staying engaged properly without a highly definite plan of in-person interaction (p. 5).

A new model, hybrid or blended learning which incorporates in-class elements and on-line, has been demonstrated to be pedagogically rich providing a means of pulling together the best of both models. According to Kajee et al. (2024), intentional course design is very critical when using digital tools such as VoiceThread or collaborative platforms, as hybrid learning heavily relies on such (p. 6). Taking the example of an American College English course they studied, they discovered that hybrid models produced promising learning outcomes as students were walked through structured online modules that were accompanied by face-to-face interactions (p. 8).

Also, Chen (2025) showed that English learners acquired active participation in learning and vocabulary retention on the significant level thanks to micro lecture-based flipped learning and the use of digital tools during the time between classes. Learners who took hybrid courses where such methods were applied felt more satisfied and had a better comprehension of the concepts than students in the traditional model (p. 7).

However, the success of hybrid learning may not be realized. It also needs trained teachers, advanced digital infrastructure and learner-focused delivery of content. In their absence performative studies can end up repeating the pathologies of each extreme: they can be excessively online, or inflexibly offline in their hybridity.

Taken together, the current sources of the literature indicate that although hybrid delivery model has the highest potential concerning flexibility and the involvement of the learners, its success depends on pedagogical intentionality, technological assistance, and relevant application.

4- Digital readiness and teaching infrastructure in developing regions

The digitalization in the field of education has provided prominent challenges and opportunities to the developing areas since the preparedness and conditions are mostly insufficient with the international standards of efficient online or hybrid learning. These differences are especially obvious in the frameworks of higher education intending to incorporate the application of technology-enhanced learning to the resource-limited settings.

The capacity of institutions, instructors and learners to successfully adopt and make effective use of technology in providing teaching and learning opportunities is known as digital readiness, which is low in many developing regions. In a multi-country study conducted by Kim and Choi (2023), the researchers established a systemic gap in internet bandwidth, device access, faculty, and student digital literacy at universities in low-to-middle-income countries that subsequently discourages the successful delivery of online programs (p. 8).

Theoretically, the lack of sustained professional development and a lack of institutional investment in educational technologies was drastically limiting digital preparedness among the language instructors found in the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with the study conducted by Obeid et al. (2023). According to several teachers, many complained about a lack of readiness to plan online lessons or lead the process of online learning due to technological and pedagogical challenges (p. 17).

Besides, there is disparity in teaching facilities. Key indicators are the use of obsolete computing equipment, limited digital repositories of content, and poor IT services in universities located in rural or conflict regions. Asamoah et al. (2024) show that, before 2022, only about three out of every ten universities in sub-Saharan Africa have scalable Learning Management Systems (LMS), which restricts their abilities in providing blended or asynchronous learning (p. 5).

The COVID-19 crisis also showed the vulnerability of developing world digital environments. Schools without the basic infrastructure had difficulties shifting to online education. Although ERL acted as a working quick-fix in resolving the situation, it effectively highlighted long-term structural inequalities, as well as disparities in access by female learners and marginal groups (Kim and Choi, 2023, p. 9).

The best practices to be identified as a result of successful transitions include how strategic partnerships, specific teacher training, and low-tech tools (e.g., mobile-based learning) can help in bridging infrastructural gap. To this end, Obeid et al. (2023) suggest the phased implementation approach that should commence through the baseline evaluation of digital-readiness and be further continued with the localized capacity-development steps carried out relative to the institutional context and culture (p. 20).

The literature on the whole stresses that it is not just a matter of hardware being upgraded within the developing regions, but needs a systemic investment in policy, training, infrastructure and innovation in pedagogy.

3rd: Data Description and Analysis

This research was based on quantitative methods to determine the extent of growth in the Strategic Optimization of University Language Centers: A Participant-Driven Analysis of International Partnerships and Delivery Models in the 14 language centers of the public universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The chosen random sample that consists of two thousand nine hundred ninety-nine participants was fully completed in terms of the survey by each of the respondents. The cleaning phase resulted in a list of responses left (2999) that could be used in the analysis of the study. The SPSS software offered the platform to assess the perceptions among the participants through the application of the statistical significance that explored the correlation of important variables. The analysis applied in the study was; descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, reliability analysis using Cronbach alpha and correlation analysis using Pearson coefficient and the linear regression analysis. The respondents were asked in five-point Likert format.

1- Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table (1): Descriptive statistics of socio-demographic characteristics of Study Participants (N = 2999)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	1768
	Female	1231
Age	20–29	198
	30–39	1058
	40–49	1524
	50–59	207
	60 and above	12
Education Level	Master degree	2669
	PhD degree	330
Academic Field	Humanities	1481
	Natural and Applied Science	1518
Language Center Participation	Salahaddin University – Erbil	645
	Erbil Polytechnic University	516
	University of Duhok	140
	University of Sulaimani	585
	Clad Centre – Soran University	129
	Akre University for Applied Science	111
	Sulaimani Polytechnic University	358
	Charmo University	119
	University of Halabja	57
	Duhok Polytechnic University	56
	University of Zakho	87
	University of Raparin	57
	University of Garmian	82
	Behar Language Center – Koya University	57
Affiliation	Student	2796
	Faculty Member	156
	Administrator	47
Course Participation Format	In-class courses	896
	Both (online and in-class)	398
	Online courses	1705

Source: Prepared by researcher

Table 1 shows the demographic character of the study participants. Out of a total sample, 59 per cent (n = 1,768) of people were males and 41 per cent (n = 1,231) were females. The highest percentage of the respondents were in the 30 49 age bracket (35 in 30 39 age bracket and 51 in 40 49 age bracket). When it comes to educational attainment, most of them were having a master degree (89 percent) and 11 percent had expanded their education by taking a doctoral degree. The academic areas of the participants were almost equally distributed (49 percent belonged to the humanities and 51 percent belonged to the natural and applied sciences).

They came out of a number of language centers with dominant value of Salahaddin University in Erbil (21.5%), Sulaimani University (19.5%) and Erbil Polytechnic University (17.2%). Students formed the extremely large proportion of the respondents (93 percent), faculty members (5 percent), and administrative staff (2 percent) formed small sub-groups of the sample.

Concerning the form of course participation, over fifty percent of the respondents (57%) said that they had participated in online courses only. On the contrary, 30 percent were taking the traditional in-class courses and 13 percent were actively taking online and in-person courses.

2- Key Study Variables Related to Strategic Optimization and Partnerships

Table (2): Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables Related to Strategic Optimization and Partnerships

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Strategic Optimization	1.00	5.00	3.1289	0.78166
1.1. Technological Readiness and Infrastructure	1.00	5.00	2.8835	0.85286
1.2. Perceived Learning Effectiveness	1.00	5.00	3.3743	0.96068
2. Partnerships and Delivery Models	1.00	5.00	3.0330	0.73528
2.1. Perceived Value of International Partnership	1.00	5.00	2.6408	1.09089
2.2. Course Delivery Mode Preference	1.00	5.00	3.4252	0.69219

Source: Prepared by researcher

The study variables have their descriptive statistics in Table 2. The general average on Strategic Optimization construct is 3.13 with standard deviation (SD) of 0.78. In this construct, the dimension of Technological Readiness and Infrastructure had a value of 2.88 (SD = 0.85) which implied a strong level of agreement between the interviewees. On the other hand, in the Perceived Learning Effectiveness dimension, the mean score was relatively higher (3.37 SD = 0.96), which depicts the positive perception generally.

The average of the partnerships and delivery model is 3.03 (SD = 0.74). In the category, sub dimension Perceived Value of International Partnership had a lower average of 2.64 (SD = 1.09), and Course Delivery Mode Preference averagely was higher with mean of 3.43 (SD = 0.69). The responses to all of the variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, whereby 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree.

3- Summary of One-Sample t-Test Results for Hypotheses on International Partnerships, Course Delivery, and Instructor Training

Table (3): Summary of One-Sample t-Test Results for Hypotheses on International Partnerships, Course Delivery, and Instructor Training

Item Statement	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	Cohen's d
The involvement of Imperial College or other international partners improves the course quality.	2.54	1.34	-18.99	2998	0.001	-0.46	-0.35
I am more motivated to participate when international partners are involved.	2.99	1.39	-0.2	2998	0.844	-0.005	-0.004
International partners bring credibility to the language programs.	2.19	1.28	-34.75	2998	0.001	-0.81	-0.64
Hybrid courses (online + in-class) are the most effective model for language learning.	3.46	1.13	22.48	2998	0	0.46	0.41
Instructors are adequately trained to use technological tools for delivering online courses.	2.81	1.17	-8.71	2998	0.001	-0.19	-0.16
I feel my English skills improved significantly through the current delivery model.	3.13	1.19	6.11	2998	0.001	0.13	0.11

Source: Prepared by researcher

Table 3 demonstrates the perception of the participants in the domains of international partnerships, instructional delivery, and other specific factors. The perceived participation of Imperial College or any other international partners fell close to the neutral mid-point ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.34$) indicating little overall agreement that absence or presence of such partnerships indeed have positive impact on the quality of the courses. Thus, this failed to support the Hypothesis 1 (H1) stating the positive effect of international partnership on the quality of courses. In the same train, the participants were also measured on the degree to which they were motivated to participate in sports programs that encompassed international cooperation; which gave an average score of neutral ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.39$), and certainly provided no justification to Hypothesis 2 (H2).

The perceptions around the credibility contribution made by international partners were significantly below neutral measure ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.28$), thus, indicating that participants did not perceive these affiliations as contributing to credible legitimacy. Therefore, the Hypothesis 3 (H3) could not be demonstrated either.

Conversely, Hypothesis 4 (H4) was confirmed ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.13$) that embraced the hybrid delivery styles- mixtures of online and face-to-face training among the participants.

In terms of instructor preparedness, the participants did not agree with the assertion that an adequate preparation of instructors in using online instructional technologies took place ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.17$), which rejects Hypothesis 7 (H7).

Nevertheless, as it was found out, participants have reported a modest statistically significant increase in their English language skills in the setting of the current instructional model ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.19$), thus, substantiating Hypothesis 8 (H8), though with the small effect size.

The combination of findings points to an overall lack of faith in the usefulness of international partnerships and instructor preparedness among the participants and, at the same time, an indication of preference towards hybrid modality, as well as limited perceived language proficiency improvement.

4- ANOVA and Post-Hoc Tests for Learning Outcomes by Course Delivery Mode:

Table (4): ANOVA and Post-Hoc Tests for Learning Outcomes by Course Delivery Mode

ANOVA Summary			
Source	df	F	p-value
Between Groups	2	8.89	< .001
Within Groups	2996		
Descriptive Statistics			
Delivery Mode	N	Mean Learning Outcome	
In-class courses	896	3.23	
Online courses	1705	3.13	
Both (Hybrid: online + in-class)	398	2.92	
Post Hoc Tukey Pairwise Comparisons			
Comparison	Mean Difference	p-value	Significant?
In-class vs. Hybrid	0.3	< .001	Yes
Hybrid vs. Online	-0.21	0.005	Yes
In-class vs. Online	0.09	0.134	No

Source: Prepared by researcher

The data on the analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the perceived learning outcomes as a result of the course delivery mode are shown in Table 4. According to the results, the impact of the delivery mode on the perceived learning became statistically significant, $F(2, 2996) = 8.89$, $p < .001$, providing the affirmation of Hypothesis 5 (H5).

Tukey HSD post hoc tests showed that subjects who took in-class course during the study reported higher perceived learning outcome than the subjects who took hybrid course (mean difference = 0.30, $p < .001$). Additionally, the results of the hybrid course participants are reports of significantly poorer results than the fully online course results (mean difference = -0.21, $p = .005$). Nonetheless, there was no statistically significant difference between the perceived learning in in-class and online formats ($p = .134$).

These data point to learning outcomes being unequally perceived on the basis of the mode of course delivery, with course in course being the most favorably perceived, followed subsequently by online course and the hybrid course.

5- Pearson Correlation Between Technological Readiness and Satisfaction with Online Language Learning

Table (5): Pearson Correlation Between Technological Readiness and Satisfaction with Online Language Learning

Variables	Technological readiness	satisfaction with online language learning
Technological readiness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.418**
	N	2999
satisfaction with online language learning	Pearson Correlation	.418**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	2999

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Prepared by researcher

The results of Table 5 depict that there is a moderate, positive, and significant shape of the relationship existing between technological readiness and learner satisfaction ($r = .418$, $p < .001$, $N = 2,999$). This observation demonstrates the validity of Hypothesis 6 (H6) which stated that participants who felt themselves more ready technologically were inclined to express the greater level of satisfaction with their experiences of online education. The power and importance of such relationship confirmed the highly crucial role of technological readiness in influencing the perceptions and active participation of the learners in online courses.

6- Pearson Correlation Between Teaching Method Alignment and Academic Preparedness:

Table (6): Pearson Correlation Between Teaching Method Alignment and Academic Preparedness

Variables		Teaching methods suitable for my learning style	Course delivery helped prepare for higher education
Teaching methods suitable for my learning style	Pearson Correlation	1	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	2999	2999
Course delivery helped prepare for higher education	Pearson Correlation	.502**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	2999	2999

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Prepared by researcher

The correlation in Table 6 on the agreement on the teaching methods with individual learning styles and the actual reported learning is strong, positive and found to be significant ($r = .502$; $p < .001$; $N = 2,999$). Such a result confirms Hypothesis 9 (H9), which states that those participants who thought the instructional strategies were more congruent with what they considered to be their preferred learning styles also self-reported more favorable results of the learning process. Such observations point to the significance of theme matching on maximizing educational performance, especially in diverse formats of course delivery.

7- Pearson Correlation Between Satisfaction and Perception of Strategy Quality:

Table (7): Pearson Correlation Between Satisfaction and Perception of Strategy Quality

Variables		Satisfaction with the language center	Belief that the center is using the best possible strategy
Satisfaction with the language center	Pearson Correlation	1	.572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	2999	2999
Belief that the center is using the best possible strategy	Pearson Correlation	.572**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	2999	2999

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Prepared by researcher

Table 7 suggests a good to strong, positive and statistically significant correlation between the satisfaction of participants with the language center and their subjective view on the strategic success of the center ($r = .572$, $p < .001$, $N = 2,999$). The finding indicates the validation of the revised Hypothesis 10 (H10), which implies that the greater the satisfaction with the language center, the more the beliefs that the center has an optimal strategic approach. These results evidence

interdependence of institutional satisfaction and perceptions of strategic alignment within the domain of language education.

8- Correlation Between Perceived Strategic Quality and Overall Satisfaction with the Language Center

Table (8): Correlation Between Perceived Strategic Quality and Overall Satisfaction with the Language Center

Variables		I believe this center is using the best possible strategy to deliver English training.	I am satisfied with how the language center operates overall.
I believe this center is using the best possible strategy to deliver English training.	Pearson Correlation	1	.572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	2999	2999
I am satisfied with how the language center operates overall.	Pearson Correlation	.572**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	2999	2999

Source: Prepared by researcher

Table 8 illustrates that there is moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the perceptions of strategic quality of the center and the overall satisfaction ($r = .572$, $p = .001$). This high correlation of significance (0.01), shows that, the better participants perceive the strategic quality of the language center, the higher their level of overall satisfaction towards the language center itself increases. These results support the hypothesis 11 (H11) with regard to the paramount importance of the perceived strategic quality in defining user satisfaction in educational institutions.

4th: Conclusion and Recommendations

1- Conclusion

This paper provides a reflective, empirical assessment of the English Language Centers run and maintained by universities in the context of the public higher education sector of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the theme of international partnerships and delivery models. Results show a complex situation in which hybrid (both online and in-class) forms of instruction are significantly preferred by stakeholders on the one hand due to the effectiveness and flexibility of the instructional format but with the perceived value of international partnerships, or, rather, with the partners such as Imperial College considered as dubious. Despite the traditional assumption, the interviewees were skeptical about the practicality of these collaborations on the quality of courses and motivation of learners and credibility of programs.

Technological readiness and instructional infrastructure proved to be the key factors in the satisfaction of learners as substantial correlations were observed in the areas of digital preparedness and positive learning experiences. Also, the high correlation with increased academic preparedness was the correlation with the congruency between teaching methodologies and personal learning styles. The research also affirms that stakeholders found the strategy of their language center optimal and expressed more satisfaction with it, thus justifying the priority of transparent, learner-centered strategic planning.

Such findings indicate that, although internationalization may be thought of as an aspirational aim, internal processes of pedagogical alignment, localized infrastructure improvement programs, and more flexible delivery modes are more direct and effective drivers of transitional education systems to embark on enhancing language education outcomes.

2- Recommendations

A. Following Hybrid Learning Models approach

The hybrid model form as a delivery option must be institutionalized by the language centers at public universities. The models fit the preference of the learners well and are scalable in varied academic settings.

B. Technological Infrastructure and Instructor Training Investment

University administrators and ministries must consider giving priority to the implantation of digital ecosystems that have strong connectivity, interactive platforms, and continual programs of professional development of instructors capable of delivering hybrid and online content.

C. Re Evaluating the role of International partners

The future relationship with the international education providers should be able to go beyond symbolic affiliations. Any partnership should have clear guidelines, quality assurance systems, shared responsibility and accountability structures and practices in order to have a tangible pedagogical value.

D. Increase Strategic Transparency and Engagement with the Stakeholders

Feedback-based strategic planning processes ought to be enacted at language centers to make sure that delivery modes and operational models continuously match the changing requirements and needs of students, faculty, and objectives of the institutions.

E. Implement a Data-Based Quality Assurance Mechanisms

An ongoing system of monitoring and evaluation should be set in place to monitor the outcome of the learners, the quality of the instructions being delivered as well as the satisfaction by the stakeholders and this will form the basis of the repeated improvement and the refining of the policy.

F. Present Prerequisite digital literacy courses to Learners

To guarantee equal access and to fully make use of the advantages of hybrid and online learning strategies, students without a basic knowledge of using technological solutions must be urged to undergo a specific curriculum of digital literacy education before signing up to take English classes. Such a preparatory measure will improve the confidence, interest, and instructional success of the learners within digitally mediated contexts.

Guidance of the institutional priorities according to the empirical knowledge and the realities on the ground will enable university language centers within the Kurdistan Region to transform into institutionally optimized linguistic empowerment and academic internationalization facilitators.

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