

Past, Status Quo, and Future of the Department of English

Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh
Department of English
University of Jordan, Amman Jordan
(On leave at Arab Open University)

Abstract:

This study offers an account and a critique of the undergraduate syllabus of the English department in Jordan. The aim is to explore its evolvement and dynamism and suggest what it should look like in the days ahead. It starts by taking note of a little-known but historic conference on the subject hosted by the University of Jordan (UJ) in 1982, which triggered much of the discourse on the subject and whose major premises are extremely relevant today. It then moves to discuss the English department's emergence and development, focusing on what the study sees as its three main phases: the colonial, the national/postcolonial, and the global/postmodern. While the discussion and the conclusions pertain to the English department in both Jordan and the Arab World, the specific examples are given on the basis of the experience of the English Department at UJ, the oldest and most influential in the country. Throughout, attention is paid to the three major components of the department syllabus: language, literature, and linguistics. The study confirms that a major preoccupation of the department should be with language and communication skills. Nevertheless, it needs to pay ample attention to other crucial skills, such as critical, analytical, aesthetic, and cultural skills – most of which can best be served through the literature component. In order for the department to continue to thrive, it has to deal with emerging challenges and societal pressures, including the zealous push for “language” per se or ESP programs, without fragmenting its own structure and compromising its sense of mission and coherence.

Keywords: English Department, English literature, English language, linguistics, English in Arab World