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Report of an Evaluation  
of the  
Intensive English Program for AID Participants  
provided by the  
Yemen American Language Institute (YALI)

Prepared by

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1. Introduction.

The intensive English program for AID participants at the Yemen American Language Institute (YALI) became the responsibility of Oregon State University by contract between OSU and AID signed in August, 1985. The Cooperative Agreement between the parties stipulates provision of a competency-based program geared to bringing participants to a TOEFL 500 level in the shortest possible time. The Agreement further stipulates that a review of the curriculum is to be done annually. Under a purchased services contract with S&T/IT/USAID, an on-site visit to the program was undertaken October 23 to November 7, 1986, for the purposes of evaluating the YALI program. A report of the evaluation with findings and recommendations is hereby submitted.

2. Scope of Work.

The scope of work for this project as set forth in the contract mandates

- a. a review of the Cooperative Agreement between USAID and OSU;
- b. the establishment of a set of criteria against which OSU/YALI can be evaluated with particular reference to
  - 1) the language competencies needed to achieve a score of 500 TOEFL
  - 2) the degree to which the present curriculum supports instruction focussed on the principle objective of TOEFL 500, and
  - 3) participant success in achieving this goal in the OSU/YALI program;
- c. a report of the evaluator's findings and recommendations.

The evaluation criteria were to be developed in consultation with Karl Schwartz, USAID/Sana'a, Jack McCreary, PAO/Sana'a and Karl Drobnic, Director, OSU/YALI. Following agreement on the criteria, data were to be collected through interviews with

key personnel at USAID and YALI, interviews with YALI participants, classroom observations, and review of documents and materials bearing on the operation of the YALI program of instruction.

### 3. Schedule of Work.

- 9/25 - 10/22      Pre-departure activities.
- briefing by Evelyn McLeod, ANE/MENA/Y and John Champagne, ANE/TR, Department of State
  - project discussion with Joan Wolfe, S&T/IT/USAID
  - meeting at AMIDEAST with Doris Johnson and program personnel concerned with YALI students
- 10/22 - 10/24      Travel to Sana'a
- 10/24 - 11/7        On-site activities
- meetings with Karl Schwartz and Jack McCreary
  - interview with Jack Law, CID
  - interview with Royal Brooks, CID
  - meetings and discussions at YALI with Karl Drobnic and Debby Marino
  - develop evaluation criteria and collect data via faculty/student interviews, class visits and review of documents
  - report findings and recommendations to Karl Drobnic, Jack McCreary, Karl Schwartz and others.
- 11/8                Travel to Washington, D. C.
- 11/18                Submit final report to Karl Schwartz with copies to Joan Wolfe.

### 4. Evaluation Methodology

To evaluate the OSU/YALI program, a set of criteria were

established against which different aspects of the program could be measured. The criteria were divided into two groups, the first criteria for determining the overall quality of the program and the second for assessing the degree to which the program meets the specific training objectives contained in the Cooperative Agreement. These were presented to Karl Schwartz and Jack McCreary who approved them without changes. The data needed to complete the evaluation were then collected from a number of sources.

- a. Lengthy interviews were held with the Director and Academic Coordinator.
- b. Several meetings and discussions were held with Ian Palmer, the faculty member especially concerned with testing and evaluation.
- c. Discussions were held with different members of the OSU/YALI faculty.
- d. Visits were scheduled to a variety of different classes at different proficiency levels.
- e. Arrangements were made to meet with students to get their views of the program.
- f. Quarterly reports and numerous other documents pertaining to the language training program were reviewed.

## 5. Program Evaluation.

As noted above, the criteria were divided into two groups, one quite general and the other very specific to the OSU/YALI program.

### 5.1 General Criteria for Evaluating Intensive English Programs.

Overall success of an English teaching program depends largely on the quality of the program. One means to determine this is to measure the different aspects of a program against the minimal standards set by the ESOL

profession for intensive English programs.

#### 5.1.1 Intensive Program.

By definition, a language program must offer at least twenty hours per week of classroom instruction to be considered intensive. The OSU/YALI program offers twenty-five hours per week with five hours of instruction offered each day, five days a week.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.1.2 Class Size.

General consensus in the field is that intensive language classes should have no fewer than 6 nor more than 15 students in any one class. Classes with 5 or fewer students prevent the interaction among class members necessary for good language learning. Classes with more than 15 students become too crowded, making it difficult for each student to receive the amount of individual practice essential for good progress. Lack of staffing or availability of classrooms may sometimes prevent the division of a class which has reached 16 or more students but oversized classes should be avoided wherever possible. In the present term, YALI classes, with the exception of the Low Intermediate class with 17 students, fall within a range of 8 to 15 students, the average class size being 12 students.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.1.3 Class Grouping by Proficiency Level.

For efficient language instruction, students with similar levels of English ability should be grouped together. In the present term, OSU/YALI offers classes at 7 levels.

These are: Low Intermediate, High Intermediate, Pre-Advanced, Advanced, Post Advanced 1, Post Advanced 2 and University. A Beginning and a Basic level have also been offered in past terms when entering students tested into those very low levels so potentially YALI can offer classes at nine different levels of proficiency. Entering students are placed in levels on the basis of their performance on a placement test consisting of the 100 item Michigan English Placement Test and a written composition, graded on a 6-point scale. Although class assignments may be changed if warranted during the first week of class, YALI reports that the number of changes is very small. Continuing students are placed in classes for the succeeding term on the basis of their final evaluations. A small percentage of students remain at the same level for more than one term. OSU/YALI easily meets this requirement.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.1.4 Regular Evaluation.

In order to assess student progress, tests should be given at regular intervals and careful records kept of the results. In addition to classroom quizzes and exercises a minimum of two tests should be given each term, preferably well-constructed tests with known values. OSU/YALI administers an Institutional TOEFL as a program wide final. Individual teachers construct mid-term and final examinations for their own classes. A file of these tests is being compiled for teach reference but no analysis of their effectiveness has been done yet. OSU/YALI meets the minimum requirement specified by this criterion.

Recommendation: In any program it is important to assess the effectiveness of the in-house tests constructed and used in order to improve the general quality of local tests and to increase the validity of the test results. YALI

should begin analyzing the results of its mid-term and final tests to evaluate their effectiveness and to begin building files of good test material which can be drawn on for future testing. It is recommended that all faculty members be encouraged to do basic analyses of their tests.

#### 5.1.5 Curricular Guidelines and Performance Objectives.

The OSU/YALI program has been designed to train Yemeni participants entering at any level in the language skills needed to "pass" TOEFL and study in the U.S. In planning the program, OSU developed statements of the competencies in grammar, listening comprehension and reading comprehension needed to achieve a score of TOEFL 500. Objectives for the different level courses have been produced based on these statements.

Recommendation: At present there are no comparable statements of the competencies required for attaining proficiency in speaking and writing. Specific course objectives have recently been developed by the curriculum review committee for these skills. The general statements, however, should be developed for these skills. For students planning to study in the United States, it is very important for them to have good speaking and writing skills.

#### 5.1.6 Appropriate and Varied Instructional Materials.

Different texts are required for different levels and types of instruction. Selection of those most appropriate for a particular program requires experience and broad knowledge of materials available. A large number of texts are available and OSU/YALI has acquired a wide selection of the better known ones which it is using.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.1.7 Cultural Orientation.

To lessen student anxiety, the program should include a cultural orientation component. Under the present plan, no separate class is designated for this and in fact, it does not appear in the course objectives until the University level. There it is subsumed under reading along with vocabulary development and other things.

Recommendation: By attending YALI, students get some orientation to life in the United States just by the contact they have with their teachers and from their EFL texts. It is recommended, however, that an orientation component be added as a course (1 hour per week?) especially for the Advanced level students. Since some students do not attend the University level before leaving, orientation should not be scheduled only for that level.

#### 5.1.8 Faculty and Director's Qualifications.

The present faculty members of OSU/YALI all meet the minimum qualifications established for professionals in the EFL field. The Director has extensive experience in the field both in the U.S. and overseas.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.1.9 Program Facilities.

The program should provide pleasant, well lit, well-equipped classrooms and other special purpose rooms such as a language lab, a computer lab, etc. Good physical facilities make the instructor's task easier but it must be recognized that excellent instruction is not dependent on well appointed rooms. At YALI the general appearance is good. However, many of the classrooms are too small so that they severely restrict the kinds of class activities that can be conducted.

The lighting is also inadequate.

Recommendation: Since more than one program is using the facilities, changes must be difficult. However, YALI is encouraged to explore possibilities for rearranging its present space and/or acquiring new space. Special attention should be paid to improving the faculty rooms and workspace, especially to provide privacy for advising and counseling.

#### 5.1.10 Summary.

The OSU/YALI intensive English program readily meets the minimum criteria established for evaluating EFL programs. It has a very competent faculty of highly trained teachers and a well functioning administrative organization to support the teaching program.

#### 5.2 Specific Criteria for OSU/YALI.

The OSU/YALI program has specific requirements regarding preparation of AID participants to enable them to attain a score of 500 on TOEFL. The cooperative agreement with AID specifies the development of a competency based program to meet these objectives. Statements of the program objectives which would be required to meet the contract requirements were formulated to enable the investigator to compare OSU/YALI's performance with the stated goals.

- 5.2.1 The program objectives are based on a set of language competencies developed by YALI faculty which are assumed to be essential for success in meeting the TOEFL requirement.

Because TOEFL is a general proficiency test, it is not possible to specify precisely the material which must be

mastered in order to guarantee a particular degree of success on the test. However, by examining what is known about the test including what has been published, it is clear that the reading and listening skills and grammatical problems often tested are focussed generally on "academic" English. OSU/YALI has developed a set of statements of competencies in grammar, reading and listening which it believes are needed to meet the stated TOEFL objective. These have been incorporated in specific course objectives by proficiency level.

Recommendation: It is generally assumed that as overall ability in English increases, so does performance on TOEFL. While in the short run, concentrated study on TOEFL-like material may increase test scores, there is a danger that such gains will be at the expense of the general proficiency needed for success in a U.S. college or university. It is recommended, therefore, that consideration be given to developing a broader standard than the TOEFL 500 to prevent instruction from being too narrowly focussed on test preparation.

- 5.2.2 The curriculum provides for the development of the competencies needed to meet the TOEFL objective and the language requirements for admission to college and university programs in the United States.

A review of the program and class schedule clearly show a strong focus on TOEFL preparation. At all levels classes are provided in reading, listening and grammar. However, vertical coordination of instruction for the different levels appears to be weak, the different classes tending to be offered in isolation from one another. This observation was substantiated by class visits, discussions with teachers and students. However, the productive skills of reading and writing are given

little weight in the present curriculum. Steps should be taken to correct this imbalance.

Recommendation: A mechanism or system for coordinating the class instruction by level should be established. Natural links exist between, say, the Reading Skills Course and the Reading Lab or between the Listening Lab and the writing component of Foundation which could be profitably exploited.

5.2.3 The program provides classroom instruction in the grammar of English using a wide selection of texts commonly used by intensive English programs in the United States.

As noted in 5.2.1, it is not possible to specify exactly the grammatical items which will appear in any given TOEFL test. However, a thorough command of English grammar should enable a participant to succeed on that section of the test. A substantial portion, 50 to 60 percent, of the total teaching program appears to be devoted to grammar. The Azar and Dart texts used are standards in the field used by many intensive programs to prepare students for academic placement. The strong S&WE scores which many participants attain reflect this concentration in grammar as do several comments from U.S. sources which note good preparation in grammar for former YALI students.

Recommendation: Since the grammar section of TOEFL accounts for only one-third of the total score (but only 27% of the test items) the YALI program appears to be heavily weighted toward grammar. It is suggested that the curriculum be reviewed to see whether the amount of total time given to grammar could be reduced, perhaps through better articulation between the Grammar

and Foundation classes. The time gained could be used profitably for more speaking and writing activities.

- 5.2.4 The program provides classroom instruction and materials on the English vocabulary which it assumes will enable participants to do well on the vocabulary part of TOEFL.

It is a truism to say that students everywhere including those studying at YALI equate learning a language with learning words. Consequently, much student effort is spent in learning word lists, especially those reputed to be TOEFL related. At YALI, no separate instruction is listed for vocabulary acquisition but it is naturally a part of most of the courses. The students have, therefore, ample opportunities for acquiring the type of academic vocabulary usually assumed to be necessary for TOEFL. In addition many concentrate on word study in both the Reading and Computer labs.

Recommendation: It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on the various reading strategies needed for academic study and on increasing reading speed. Extensive reading should be encouraged. Vocabulary knowledge increases in direct proportion to increased proficiency in reading.

- 5.2.5 The program provides classroom instruction in the integrated language skills of listening and reading comprehension needed to meet the TOEFL objective.

At the lower levels up to Advanced, the reading skills are developed using standard texts such as Markstein and Hirasawa. A large selection of other material, some emphasizing vocabulary development, is available for individual student use in the Reading Lab. Once a student reaches Post Advanced, however, the Reading Skills Course

has been replaced by the TOEFL courses. Except for the TOEFL specific practice, then, there is no formal instruction in reading at the advanced levels until the University level when reading speed and understanding lectures are emphasized.

On the other hand, listening comprehension is not the subject of regularly scheduled class hours except for the self directed hours spent in the Listening Lab. Many good texts are available to the students in the lab and they are expected to complete a specified amount of work during a term. TOEFL scores appear to reflect the teaching situation. For example, listening scores seem to be slightly lower than expected for students enrolled in intensive programs.

Recommendation: Given the great importance of reading and listening comprehension both for success on TOEFL and in academic studies, the writer strongly recommends that when OSU/YALI conducts its next curriculum review that it seriously address what appears to be an imbalance in the proportion of time spent on the different skills. It is suggested that listening and speaking might be made the subject of one of the Foundation hours, for the lower level courses at least, and that specific objectives be written for these classes. It may be desirable, too, to coordinate Listening Lab assignments with these class activities. Other possible links are with writing which is also assigned to Foundation. Listening activities can often be used as stimuli for writing assignments.

- 5.2.6 An expectancy table has been developed for length of time required for participants to reach TOEFL 500 and participants do attain the required scores in the predicted period of time.

OSU/YALI has recognized the importance of developing such tables and is making a systematic effort to establish a data base. One faculty member has been given a reduced teaching load so that he can work on this important project. In the meantime, YALI's estimate is that students' scores will increase an average of 25 to 35 points per ten-week term; a not atypical score increase for students in intensive programs of this length. YALI students do reach the required TOEFL 500. Of students enrolling in YALI since October, 1985, when OSU assumed management of the program, 12 of 72 (17%) have scored 500 or higher

October 1985	5	(19%)
December 1985	4	(21%)
February 1986	3	(16%)
June 1986	0	

Recommendation: OSU/YALI should continue to collect and analyze TOEFL score data to enable it to make valid predictions about student progress in the program and the length of time required to meet the TOEFL 500 score requirement. However, once the data base is completed, it is strongly recommended that TOEFL not be used as a term final for students below the Pre-advanced level. It is not an appropriate measure of progress, especially for lower level students. Teacher evaluations are more accurate measures of achievement.

5.2.7 Participant TOEFL test profiles reflect a balanced skill development.

As noted in the preceding paragraph, sufficient data are not available at this date to draw a firm conclusion. However, a review of the score profiles so far accumulated suggest an unexpected trend. Early scores show the expected higher score for listening but as students progress through the YALI program, the profile appears to shift toward a

higher score in grammar. This runs counter to reported profiles for Arabic speakers in general and for other Yemeni students. The profile is more similar to that of the Chinese and Japanese whose language studies have traditionally focussed more on "book learning." The following figures are taken from the TOEFL Test and Score Manual, 1981.

All Arab	50	44	44				
Yemeni	49	45	44				
Chinese	50	48	50	YALI	44	45	47 (1 example)
Japanese	50	48	48				

Recommendation: OSU/YALI should make a careful study of student profiles as the data base is being completed. Unexpected patterns reflect emphases in the curriculum which should be reviewed in the interests of keeping a good balance in the skills taught.

- 5.2.8 The collateral program activities, e.g., the computer lab, listening lab, etc., are integrated with the curriculum and directly contribute to the participants' attainment of TOEFL 500.

OSU/YALI has in place a listening lab, a reading lab and a computer lab. Time is designated in the schedule for the first two and two hours per week of Foundation are scheduled for the computer lab. All levels have, at a minimum, seven hours per week of lab work (28% of total instructional time.) The labs are also open for independent work at specified hours and many students take advantage of this additional time. A wide selection of materials are made available and from observation many students select materials which they feel relate directly to TOEFL preparation. It should be noted that the computer lab serves the further function of introducing students to the world of computers which is becoming an essential part of education

in the U.S. As used, the labs support the program's objective of 500 TOEFL.

Recommendation: As noted in 5.2.2, consideration should be given to integrating the lab activities with other parts of the instructional program.

- 5.2.9 The director, staff and faculty are full committed to the objectives of the program and fully supportive of the participants' efforts to reach the stated goal.

One needs to spend very little time at YALI to sense the commitment and support that pervades the atmosphere. The Director's door is always open to students and faculty alike and the advising system, different awards systems and the probation system all attest to the deep concern felt for the students. The success of any program depends in large part on staff esprit. High motivation on the parts of both students and faculty at YALI ensure that learning will take place.

Recommendation: None.

#### 5.2.10 Summary.

To summarize, the OSU/YALI program clearly meets the requirements set forth in the cooperative agreement. Its program provides concentrated instruction focussed narrowly on the skills and knowledge needed to successfully complete TOEFL. As noted in the foregoing paragraphs, some reappor-tionment of time needs to be considered especially for listening and speaking activities and steps need to be taken to improve horizontal and vertical integration of classes. But the program shows every evidence of having the flexibility and adaptability to monitor its program and make changes as need to maintain its vitality.

## 6.0 Other Considerations

Several questions not directly related to the stated scope of work have come to the writer's attention. Three in particular deserve comment because of their importance to the program and its students.

- a. Is the current 10 week term the best length?
- b. Is the participants' overall preparation in English adequate?
- c. Is the TOEFL 500 goal a reasonable goal for the OSU/YALI?

### 6.0.1 The Ten Week Term.

The Director, Karl Drobnic, strongly supports continuing the present schedule of ten week terms. In a year's experience with this schedule, he finds that it fits the instructional program very well, both pedagogically and administratively. It also permits a yearly shift forward to allow the annual leave period to coincide with Ramadan so that no term is interrupted. A shorter term would mean more frequent testing, admission and placement decisions and faculty preparation for new terms. A longer term would not give the same flexibility and would not, in his opinion solve the academic placement problems which so often delay participants' departures. In short, the present schedule of four, 10 week terms appears to be best suited for the present program.

### 6.0.2 Overall Preparation.

Although the principle objective of the OSU/YALI program is stated to be participants attaining TOEFL 500, AID is concerned with overall language ability needed to succeed in a U.S. academic program. Of particular concern is the

development of good writing ability. The general impression given by colleagues is that writing is usually a problem for Yemeni students. Evaluations of two recent YALI graduates in an intensive program in the U.S. indicate very weak writing skills. The danger is, that in concentrating so fiercely on "passing" TOEFL, participants reject or neglect the non-tested skills of speaking and writing, to their detriment. At this time there is a clear danger that this is happening, Some of the recommendations given earlier suggest strengthening the speaking and writing components of the program to prevent this imbalance in language skills.

A question that can be raised legitimately is whether the AID mandated 500 TOEFL is a reasonable goal for Yemeni participants learning English in an in-country program. This level is too low to enable the majority of participants to enter full time academic work on arrival in the United States. Of 17 recent YALI graduates on whom information could be gathered, 15 (88%) required additional English training, 7 part time and 8 full time. On the other hand, if the time needed to reach TOEFL 500 in Yemen is excessively long, then it might be reasonable to lower the standard and bring the participants to the U.S. earlier. Without the distractions and obligations of home and work and with the added support of an all English environment, overall proficiency is likely to increase more quickly. The analysis of data now being undertaken by YALI will be very useful in determining the overall efficiency of the program and may support modifications in the program objectives.

### 6.0.3 TOEFL 500

As a professional in the field of language testing, the writer feels strongly that both AID and OSU/YALI should explore ways to avoid using a TOEFL score of 500 as an absolute cutoff. The barrier metaphor is demoralizing

to many and serves to place too much emphasis on test taking skills. With TOEFL 500 as the principle objective, it is very difficult to maintain a balanced teaching program and refrain from becoming another TOEFL prep mill. That is clearly in neither AID's nor the participants' best interest. One possible solution might be to establish an examining board before which a candidate with scores in the range of TOEFL 490 to 499 might appear for an interview and perhaps for the defense of a paper. The board would have representatives from AID, YALI plus someone external. Eligibility to appear before the board would be determined by YALI. This or a similar system could prevent the situation of obviously eligible candidates stagnating at YALI with scores of 493 and 497. It would have the further advantage of easing the intense pressure for teaching to the test and so make it easier to provide a more balanced curriculum.

#### 7.0 Summary Statement.

From this brief on-site visit, it is apparent that the OSU/YALI program easily fulfills the terms of the cooperative agreement with AID. It is a successful program after only one year. With any new program or with a change in management, the first year must necessarily focus on establishing the curriculum and the necessary support systems. This has been done effectively and the program can now focus its attention on exploring ways to strengthen its curriculum and working on needed research. It has already begun.

Finally, the writer wishes to express his appreciation to Karl Drobnic, Debby Marino, the teachers and students at YALI and to the many other persons who readily gave of their time to answer the questions and explain procedures. This report would have been much harder to complete without their willing assistance.

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