English for B. Sc. Students of Physical Education in Iran: A Study of Perception of English Needs and Effectiveness of ESP Textbooks

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Abstract

EAP/ESP plays an important role in countries where English is used mainly for academic purposes. However, EAP/ESP programs have been developed without conducting a systematic needs analysis from both the students' and instructors' perspective. The purpose of the present study is to shed more light on the perception that Iranian undergraduate students and the faculty of Physical Education have of the English language needs of the students and the shortcomings of the commonly used textbook in EAP/ESP courses at universities. A total number of 112 students of P.E (47 male and 65 female) participated in the needs analysis procedure of the present study. They ranged from 21 to 27 years of age and were all undergraduates studying at the Physical Education Faculty, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Four P.E. faculty members, all holding Ph.D. were also interviewed. Results of the present study indicate that English is perceived as important by Iranian P. E. students and the faculty, and show discrepancy between the perceptions of the learners and instructors. The study has implications for curriculum design and instructional delivery of ESP/EAP courses for undergraduate P.E. students.

1. Introduction

English language is part of educational curriculum from the second year of junior high school in Iran utilizing mostly a grammar-translation method that, according to Richards and Rodgers (2002), requires quantitative repetitions and substitutions to master grammatical structures that are taught deductively. Little attention is paid to the oral form of the language limited to the presentation of phonetic symbols and the different skills the students require. Apparently these courses are not effective enough and the students who leave the public school system in Iran suffer poor English language proficiency.

English is a required course for the university students in Iran which emphasises reading literature. All B.A and B.Sc. students, except English majors, pass a course of three credits in general English, which according to Ghonsooly and Pishghadam (2007), do not seem to be o much useful and interesting for students, and a two-credit ESP course.

Unfortunately, many of the students relying only on English courses presented at the universities, are not well-prepared for the specific English courses in their field of study and do not develop the ability to communicate

effectively in English. Those who decide to continue their studies and take the M.A. or M.Sc. entrance exams are nearly unable to take the English part of the test, based on the current English courses presented in the universities.

One of the majors that suffer these shortcomings is Physical Education. As a result, the students of this major face many problems dealing with reading and understanding English texts and professional articles of their field of study. Many M.Sc. students of physical education face problems trying to attend seminars and conferences held in other countries or publishing their articles in foreign journals due to language problems.

1.1 Needs analysis

Belcher (2006) states that ESP specialists assume that there are problems that education can improve and that these problems being unique to specific learners in specific contexts should be addressed carefully with tailored-to-fit instructions. Therefore, first the ESP specialists usually assess the learners' needs and then design and implement specialised curricula in response to the identified needs. It is due to this emphasis on the concept of needs that the dividing lines between the curriculum designers, material developers and teachers are usually blurred.

According to Dudley-Evans and John (1998) needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP and makes the course purposeful. There are many classifications of needs, objective and subjective, perceived and felt and process oriented and product oriented, to name a few. Dudley-Evans and John (1998) accept that needs analysis is the first step before a course, but at the same time he admits that different situations may alter the way in which needs analysis is actually conducted.

Jordan (1997) states that there are other terms, such as necessities, demands, lacks, likes and deficiencies also proposed for the concept of "needs". According to him, for an EAP needs analysis factors such as the subject of the study, necessary language, study situation and the related study skills, should be considered.

The results of the studies conducted by Eslami-Rasekh (2010), Ferris and Tagg (1996), and Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) stress the importance of examining the precise needs of students in different academic fields in order to prepare them most effectively for the tasks and expectations that lie ahead of them.

Holmes and Celani (2006) maintain the importance of considering the 'need' in relation to the unique characteristics of the educational context in which the study takes place. The students' needs in different contexts are diverse and the analysis of needs can be effective if the academic language needs are accurately defined and seek utmost specificity within the specific target use (Deutch, 2003). It is based on this assertion and the lack of officially conducted needs analysis for the students of P.E (to the authors' best knowledge) that the present study aims at describing the perception that university students and faculty of the Physical Education have of the English language needs of the students and the shortcomings of the commonly used textbook in ESP courses at universities.

1.2 Iranian context

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978, there has been a systematic move supervised by the then Ministry of Higher Education to establish uniform discipline-based EAP programs for universities that has led to the designing several ESP textbooks for students of medicine, engineering, science, social sciences, humanities and other academic fields. As Eslami-Rasekh (2010) mentions the purpose of these programs is to enhance the students' motivation and interest through providing EAP courses that are more related to the learners' needs in special fields of study. However, as Eslami-Rasekh (2010) claims these courses were not designed based on any systematic needs analysis so the program designer's goals do not seem to have been fulfilled.

The EAP curriculum for all Iranian university students includes one to three EAP courses which are either taught by English or content area instructors. These courses are three credit courses and taught three hours per week. The first course is called 'General English' and the other two courses (three credit hours each) are ESP courses that are increasingly more discipline-specific. The main purpose of EAP teaching is to develop the academic English level of students and enable them to read discipline-specific texts in English, be present at conferences, and/or translate the English texts into Persian (Eslami-Rasekh, 2010). Moreover, an important section of the graduate entrance exam is to assess the students` competence level in their related EAP field.

As far as the structure, organization, and subsections are concerned, most of the EAP textbooks are highly uniform, and there is a noticeable emphasis on developing reading skills. In spite of this uniformity Eslami-Rasekh (2010) cites different researchers and claims that EAP practice is mainly ad hoc, lacking in course design, systematic needs analysis, teacher education, proper evaluation and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs. She then asserts the importance of a careful examination of the attitudes and perceptions of learners and instructors in determining the success of EAP programs.

Therefore this study was carried out in order to broaden the scope of studies undertaken so far in this field and to shed more light on the perception that Iranian undergraduate students and Faculty of Physical Education have of the English language needs of the students and the shortcomings of the commonly used textbook in ESP courses at universities.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Both students and instructors participated in this study. Due to practical limitations (Farhady, 1388), the availability sampling was used to select the student population for this study. A number of 112 students of P.E (47 male and 65 female) participated in the needs analysis procedure of the present study. They ranged from 21 to 27 years in age and were all undergraduates studying at the Physical Education Faculty of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

The instructors' sample included 4 instructors who taught EAP courses at the Physical Education Department of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Their experience in teaching English at university level ranged from three to 30 years. All the instructors were Ph.D. holders.

2.2 Instrumentation

The instrumentation of the study included designing and distributing a questionnaire and oral interviews. As for the former, a questionnaire was designed, based on the interviews done and other similar questionnaires (Eslami-Rasekh-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004; Chia, et al., 1999; Holme, Chalauisaeng, 2006) to see whether the present ESP text book is in line with the students' needs. To ensure the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items, three specialists were consulted. To make sure that students understand the items in the questionnaire, students' native language (Persian) was used. The questionnaire was piloted with 6 students, representative of the actual participants of the study. Based on the results and the students' comments, the questionnaire was modified and finalized for the large-scale data collection. The internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was measured with the Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimate.

The questionnaire consisted of 34 items and was divided into three parts. The first part of the questionnaire contained items asking about participants' demographic information. The second part contained 22 Likert scale items ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree" which asked the participants to evaluate their ESP textbook and to express their attitudes towards the importance of English language in their studies and occupational future. The third part addressed the students' perception of the importance of language skills, their perceived language problems and needs and suggestions for improving the ESP textbook.

As for the interviews, four faculty members and 15 student participants in the study were interviewed orally in order to elicit their attitudes towards the P.E. ESP course and textbook, their suggestions for improvements, and their perception of the students' language problems and needs.

2.3 Data collection

First, 2 ESP classes were observed. Then four ESP teachers and 15 undergraduate P.E. students from the target participants were interviewed and based on the results a questionnaire was designed. Approved by the Dean for Academic Affairs at the Physical Education Faculty, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, the questionnaires were distributed for the administration. The needs analysis was conducted by one of the researchers available there to answer any question regarding the questionnaire.

2.4 Data analysis

Having collected the needs analysis questionnaires, the SPSS software (version 17) was used to validate the questionnaire and estimate its reliability. Then the descriptive statistics were used to analyse the results gained from the questionnaires.

To validate the questionnaire, EFA was used. First, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) extracted the underlying factors by calculating the eigenvalues of the matrix greater than 1.0. The Scree test was utilized in order to decide about the number of factors to retain for rotation. For conducting factor rotation, Varimax (orthogonal rotation) with Kaiser Criterion was employed. The result was a rotated component matrix and a transformation matrix. The rotated component matrix indicated the variables loaded on each factor so that the researcher could come up with the new factors.

The internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was measured with the Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimate. Moreover, using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability of each factor constructing the validated questionnaire was also examined.

3. Results

3.1 Reliability

To make sure that the tests used were truly reliable, the researchers used Cronbach's Alpha to calculate the reliability of the tests that were used in this study. The SPSS output for the reliability of the needs analysis questionnaire is presented in Table 1. As this table indicates, the questionnaire shows the reliability of .81 which is actually a very strong reliability coefficient.

Table 2 shows the reliability of each factor of the questionnaire. As stated before, Cronbach's Alpha estimated the reliability of the whole items as 0.81. All the four factors yielded good reliability estimates ranging from 43 to 85.

3.2 Construct validation

In the first phase of the study, the researcher intended to substantiate the construct validity of the needs analysis questionnaire by using EFA. To validate the questionnaire, first PCA extracted the underlying factors by calculating the eigenvalues of the matrix greater than 1.0. The Scree test was used in order to decide about the number of factors to retain for rotation. For conducting factor rotation, Varimax (orthogonal rotation) with Kaiser Criterion was used. The result was a rotated component matrix and a transformation matrix. The rotated component matrix indicated the variables loaded on each factor so that the researcher could come up with the new factors.

The factorability of the intercorrelation matrix was measured by two tests: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results obtained from the two tests revealed that the factor model was appropriate. Table 3 summarizes the results.

The construct validity of the questionnaire was examined through EFA. PCA extracted 7 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The results obtained from the Scree Test indicated that a four-factor solution might provide a more suitable grouping of the items in the questionnaire (Figure 1).

Then the orthogonal rotation was inspected. The result of Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was a rotated component matrix. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

The results indicated that the first factor consisted of 11 items, the second factor included 5 items, and factors 3 and 4 consisted of 3 items each. The total number of factors was 22.

Finally, the items comprising each factor were analyzed and named as *Content, Appearance, Perceived importance of English language,* and *Perceived Effect.* Items representing each factor are displayed in Table 4.5, and the validated questionnaire is given in the Appendix.

3.3 Results of the needs analysis questionnaire

A number of 112 undergraduate students of P.E (47 male and 65 female), aged between 21 and 27, participated in the needs analysis procedure. 37.5 % reported they had taken extracurricular English language classes. 76.8% of the participants had studied the book published by SAMT in their ESP classes.

4. Discussion

4.1 The construct validation

The first phase of this study sought to determine the validity of the needs analysis questionnaire, using EFA. The results of this analysis were used to determine each factor. The factors were labelled as follows: *Content, Appearance, Perceived importance of English language,* and *Perceived effect.*

Content is the label for the first factor which consists of 11 items. As shown in te Appendix, items 2 and 3 measure the students perception of the book being update and applicable to them. Item 4 refers to the variety of the texts. Item 6 deals with the number of exercises. Item 11 is concerned with the cultural appropriateness of the textbook. Items 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19 deal with the different skills that a good course book should develop. Item 14 deals with vocabulary learning, item 15 with reading comprehension skills, item 16 with answering the comprehension questions, item 17 with scanning skill, and item 19 with the skill of utilising key words.

The second factor, *Appearance,* deals with the appearance and format of the textbook. This factor consists of 5 items. Item 7 deals with the font size, item 8 with the pictures and illustrations, item 9 with the colors, item 10 with page lay-out and item 12 with the volume of the book.

The third factor, known as *Perceived importance of English*, consists of 3 items. Item 20 measures the importance of English language in the current academic studies of the students. Items 21 and 22 deal with the importance of English in the students' future studies and in their occupational future, respectively.

The fourth factor, *Perceived effect*, consists of 3 items. Item 1 measures the effectiveness of the text book in the

students' English language learning. Item 5 and 13 deal with the level of the students' liking and being content with the textbook respectively.

4.2 Results of the needs analysis questionnaire

As regards the effect and joy of the EAP book, Table 6 indicates that less than one thirds of the participants (26.8%) stated they liked their ESP book and 35.7% mentioned it as up-to-date and only half of the students (53.5%) assumed the book as being practical. Not many participants were satisfied with the appearance of the book, only 19.7% were satisfied with the illustrations and pictures of the book, 16.1% liked the colors, just 8.9% thought the page layout was appropriate and 24.2% agreed that the font size was too small.

As for language skills, considerable number of the participants thought high of the language related techniques and skills content of the book. However, it was contradictory to the opinions of the instructors and the observations of the researchers. One possible reason for this contradiction might be the students' unfamiliarity with the questioned technique or skill.

As table 7 shows, reading comprehension is chosen as the most important language skill by the students. It is then followed by listening, speaking and writing. Although the instructors also agreed on reading comprehension as being the most important language skill, they held different viewpoints regarding the importance of other skills. Three instructors stated that writing was the second most important language skill followed by listening and speaking, while one mentioned listening at the second place followed by writing and speaking.

Regarding the importance of English Language, nearly all the students agreed on the importance of English language in their present studies (83.9%), in continuing their studies (94.7%) and in occupational future (92.9%). This confirms the results of Eslami-Rasekh (2010). On the other hand, all the instructors participated in this study also confirmed the importance of English language to their students' studies and occupation.

Finally, as perceived language problems are concerned and as Table 8 indicates, more than half of the students (66.1%) stated limited vocabulary and difficulty in speaking as their language problems. problems with grammar was mentioned by 57.1% of the students and listening and comprehension problems by 48.2% and 41.1% of the learners respectively. Slow reading and difficulty in writing were also counted as language problems by 32.1% and 30.4% of the participants respectively. However the instructors assumed the language problems of their students to be difficulty in reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar and writing. One of the instructors in his interview stated that the only language related problem and need of the students was reading comprehension that included limited vocabulary and weak grammatical expertise. Only one of the instructors requested teaching of speaking in ESP classes, while the others mentioned teaching of speaking and listening in the ESP classes as impractical and not unbeneficial due to and low language proficiency level of the students and the limitations of time.

5. Conclusion

As Benesch (1996, pp. 736) claims, needs analysis is a political and subjective process. Critical needs analysis assumes that institutions are hierarchical and those at the bottom are often entitled to more power than they have. According to this ideology, learners, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy in top-down educational systems such as Iran, should be given more power and their voices should be heard in order to facilitate change. Faculty members need to become aware of what their students *need,* versus what the institutions think of as being necessary and take action accordingly.

Since needs analysis is by definition context-specific (Ferris, 1998, pp. 314), it is hoped that the present study has shed light on the language needs of Iranian undergraduate P.E. students and problems in the commonly used EAP textbook.

Results of the present study indicate that English is perceived as important by Iranian P.E. students and faculty, for the students' academic studies and future work. Therefore there is the need for a sound curriculum design and improvement in EAP teaching.

According to the findings of the present study, the ESP textbook used for P.E. undergraduate students seems to be uninteresting, and of little benefit for the students. The present research has tried to find out the language needs of the Iranian undergraduate P.E. students and to shed more light on some of the weaknesses of the textbooks used in EAP/ ESP courses. It is hoped that the results be useful in designing ESP textbooks in line with the students' needs, interests and expectations; to help them develop the beneficial language skills for their academic studies and familiarize them with the genre of the P.E. academic studies which may facilitate the P.E. students' academic contributions to the field through publishing articles in English and taking part in conferences where English language is used. The findings of the present study may also be of use to the Physical Education ESP instructors in developing a better academic relationship with their students.

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Table 1. Reliability of the needs analysis questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.814	22

Table 2. Reliability of Each Factor of the questionnaire

Factors	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1	11	.564
Factor 2	5	.434
Factor 3	3	.852
Factor 4	3	.562

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.623
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1047.706
	Df	231
	Sig.	.000

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
	2=.649 3=.846 4=.435 6=.498 11=.345 14=.674 15=.857 16=.797 17=.420 18=.510 19=.812	7=.554 8=.678 9=.609 10=.793 12=.459	20=.47221=.950 22=928	1=.656 5=.452 13=.378

Table 5. Four Factors of the Test

# areas	Items	N of items	Percentage
Content	2,3,4,6,11,14,15,16,17,18,19	11	50
Appearance	7,8,9,10,12	5	22.7
The perceived importance of English language	20,21,22	3	13.6
Perceived Effect	1,5,13	3	13.6
	Total	22	100

Table 6. Results of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Question number	Totally agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Totally disagree
Q1	7.1	26.8	42.9	8.9	1.8
Q2	3.6	32.1	23.2	28.6	7.1
Q3	7.1	46.4	23.5	12.5	3.6
Q4	3.6	25	35.7	26.8	1.8
Q5	12.5	14.3	33.9	30.4	1.8
Q6	5.4	17.9	44.6	19.6	3.6
Q7	3.6	25	37.5	19.6	3.6
Q8	1.8	17.9	37.5	19.6	10.7
Q9	----	16.1	33.9	30.4	7.1
Q10	----	8.9	41.1	37.5	----
Q11	1.8	21.4	35.7	25	36
Q12	5.4	28.6	12.5	39.3	3.6
Q13	5.4	23.2	21.4	33.9	3.6
Q14	5.4	19.6	26.8	32.1	5.4
Q15	1.8	26	26	25	7.1
Q16	1.8	21	33	23	7.1
Q17	----	5.4	35.5	37.5	10.7
Q18	----	10.7	28.6	37.5	10.7
Q19	3.6	21.4	33.9	19.6	8.9
Q20	46.4	37.5	8.9	7.1	----
Q21	67.9	26.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Q22	64.3	28.6	3.6	1.8	1.8

Table 7. Students' ranking of the importance of language skills (1 is the most and 4 the least important)

Language skill	1	2	3	4
Reading comprehension	46.4%	21.4%	19.6%	8.9%
Writing	3.6%	28.6%	17.9%	48.2%
Listening	17.9%	30.4%	28.6%	21.4%
Speaking	26.8%	23.2%	30.4%	19.6%

Table 8. The students' perceived language problems

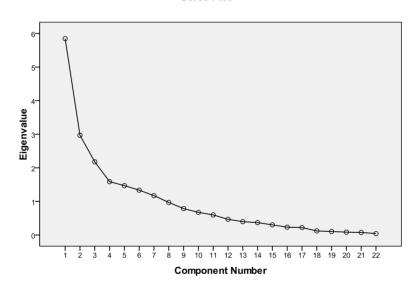| Language problems	% of positive answers
Limited vocabulary	66.1
Difficulty in speaking	66.1
Problems with Grammar	57.1
Difficulty in listening	48.2
Difficulty in reading comprehension	41.1
Slow reading	32.1
Difficulty in writing	30.4
I don't know	5.4
Other	3.6

Figure 1. The Scree Test

Appendix : A sample of the survey

Part one:

Gender: female male

Age:

General English mark: ESP mark:

Have you ever participated in any other complementary English classes?

Yes (how long?)……. No

Was SAMT textbook used in your ESP class?

Yes No (please name the book)

Part two:

Statement	Completely agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Completely disagree
1. The EPS textbook has been very effective in my English language learning.					
2. The EPS textbook is up-to-date.					
3. The ESP textbook book is practical.					
4. There is not enough variety in the texts of the ESP textbook.					
5. I am interested in my ESP textbook.					
6.Ther are not enough exercises					
7. The used font is too small.					
8. The pictures and illustrations of the book are suitable.					
9. The color of the book is suitable.					
10. The book's layout is suitable					
11. The book is culturally appropriate					
12. The textbook is too thick					
13. I am content with my ESP textbook.					
14. The vocabulary learning techniques are taught or improved in this book.					
15. The reading comprehension techniques are taught or improved in this book.					
16. The techniques of answering the reading comprehension questions at the end of the book are taught or improved in this book.					
17. The techniques of fast reading (skimming and scanning) are taught or improved in this book.					
18. Useful grammatical points that help understand the text are taught or improved in this book.					
19. The techniques of using key words to understand each paragraph are taught or improved in this book.					
20. Knowing English language is important in my current academic studies.					
21. Knowing English is important in continuing my education.					
22. Knowing English language is important in my future occupation.					

Part three:

23. Number the mentioned language skills according to their importance to you, from the most to the least important. (1 is the most, and 4 is the least important)

Reading comprehension   Writing   Speaking   Listening

24. Which of the following problems do you think have in your English that has a negative effect in your studies? (You can mark as many as you want)

limited knowledge in vocabulary   difficulties in grammar

difficulties in comprehension   difficulties in writing

difficulties in listening   difficulties in speaking

low pace in reading   I don't know

other (Please note)   …………………………………………………

25. Please mention any other language needs that you feel are important in your academic studies.

26. Please mention any other language skills that you think should be to be developed in the ESP textbook.

27. Please mention any other ideas that you have for improving the ESP textbook.

Thank you very much.