

Teaching English for Specific Purposes:

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Teaching English for Specific Purposes:.

**Investigating ESP courses
administered in Iranian
Universities**

INTRODUCTION

- » A significant aspect of language instruction at a tertiary level is learning English for a given purpose, with the specific aims of getting to know specialized vocabulary, enlarging one's knowledge of the subject matter by reading in English and being able to use the language in the prospective profession or study areas by becoming prepared for some common situations such as carrying out higher level studies, going for an interview or conducting professional correspondence. Finally, students would like to become proficient enough to do research for their B.A./B.S, M.A./M.S and PhD theses, so they must ideally be able to find and evaluate English language sources, read and understand articles and books, translate, examine, and produce. As can be seen, with such a wide array of needs and relatively little amount of language instruction, the teacher must be tactful in choosing contents, materials, methods, and mode of work, to motivate students to work on their own and showing them effective ways of looking for information .

EAP Administration

- In our university administration, needs of EAP students are limited to the ability of various faculty students in conducting research studies in English, taking advantage of computer resources, as well as for discussion in academic encounters. Given the intensive nature of the program of instruction, due to the limited time and budget allocated, oral skills required in presentation and attending conference presentations are not attended to. Writing various genres of language, e.g. preparing resumes, out work-related forms, summary, letter, review etc. are among the skills left almost untouched.
- According to Chambers (1980) early instruments for establishing needs is by investigating the target situation for which learners were being prepared: the language need of the target situation is the goal of the ESP course. Thus needs analysis should be concerned with the establishment of communicative needs and their realizations, resulting from an analysis of the communication in the target situation, what is referred to as "target situation analysis". (Chambers 1980: 25) Having pointed out the significance of three types of knowledge involved in EAP practice, namely language, pedagogy, and content knowledge, we now address them by focusing on the major issue of the how the three can be dealt with for having successful EAP administration.

The objectives of the study

- This study aims at investigating the needs and expectations of the EAP students with regards to the EAP reading comprehension courses offered in universities in Iran. The study attempts to a) reveal the current EAP currently practiced by practitioners at work; and b) students' attitude will be sought whether the courses offered reflect the specific communication needs of the study situations in the university curricula. Questions regarding methodology are also used seeking information for their views about the richness of class activities. Then the results will be used as evidence for the revision of the EAP courses currently practiced in two ways: a) forming a cross-departmental association between the content teachers and the EFL practitioners to initiate the practice of either team teaching or collaborative teaching as implemented currently in the EAP world and b) establishing designs for course methodology and materials preparation programs out of such association to the satisfaction of BA and MA level EAP courses.

Research questions

- The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:
- 1. What are the expectations and needs of the students with regards to their communicative abilities to function efficiently in academic activities in the future? This is where the students' points of view are taken into account on whether the EAP skills developed at tertiary level enabled them to transit confidently from learning to self-study. Students who have completed their training are the main focus because they should, by then, be able to decide on what skills are used most frequently at the academic setting.
- 2. What is the course content of the current administration and how the current administration prepares the students for their future study needs. Are the students exposed to the necessary skills required?
- 3. What solutions can be proposed for the current deficiencies in the EAP practice? The focus will be teaching and materials based on the academic needs of the university students .

Subjects

- Nineteen BA and MA social science students were selected from two different institutions, namely Isfahan University (henceforth IU), and Islamic Azad University of Najaf Abad (IAUNA). Students from both universities had completed levels of general English courses and also at least a course in EAP. In the EAP course, students were introduced to the reading skills needed for the social science discipline. The undergraduate students were required to do two specific English courses; in addition to two EAP undergraduate courses, MA students were required to undergo two EAP courses each of which was regarded as a two credit course; in other words, an MA level graduate has presumably passed a number of 240-260 hours of EAP instruction. The students involved are those who had undergone at least one of the EAP training courses at their faculty departments prior to the time of data collection of this study. These students' views demonstrate EAP practice and are views presented after completing the EAP training. The second group of participants were subject and language teachers from whom data were collected regarding team teaching and cross-departmental collaboration.
- **Two groups of participants : teachers (language + subject) + students (BA/BS + MA/MS + PhD)**

Instrumentation

- The data collection technique used for this study is a set of questionnaire designed to gather information about the courses currently administered and to find out the gap between the students' needs to match with the future study situations and their present EAP training. The questionnaires were submitted to both EAP practitioners from content departments and to the EAP students who had already passed at least one EAP course. The questionnaire consists of three sections: personal details, the current EAP program at the selected higher learning institutions and the students views regarding their needs. The second questionnaire was given to the subject and language teachers to elicit their views for cross-departmental association. The questions asked from the participants include queries regarding a) course content, b) students needs, c) Methodological issues, and d) skills emphasized.

Procedure

- The research project at hand was conducted by, firstly, designing the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Then the subjects for the research were identified and selected from the groups of BA and MA social science students as well as EAP practitioners. A pilot study was conducted among three students in Isfahan University to foresee possible drawbacks of the questions used and to add or omit items wherever necessary. Based on the findings of the pilot study, a revised set of questionnaire was designed and used in the collection of data. The results of the pilot study will not be mentioned here for brevity.

Results and discussion of the findings

Current EAP Program and the students' needs

Table 1 skills offered by the currently practiced syllabus (data collected through unstructured interviewing of seven EAP teachers, members of Geography, Sociology and History departments)

Skills presented	% of responses
Reading Comprehension and Translation	70%
Academically oriented conversations	----
Comprehension of Oral lectures	6%
Formal Structure: Sentence and discourse	9%
Essay Writing	2%
Summary Presentation	----
Sentence Construction	7%
Paraphrasing	2%
Letter Writing	4%
Email-communications	---
The EAP Instruction Adequate?	21%

Needs analysis data

- Needs analysis is regarded as a criterion in ESP and it is a matter of searching the needs for an established group of students in order to match between skills in learning and using what has been learnt. Therefore, a needs analysis is considered primary in this study. The following questions were posed in gathering the data: Which skills are required most for future study needs? What are the expectations of students from their EAP class?

Table 2 Skills needed for EAP students

skills	Percentage
Special vocabulary (the EAP jargon)	98%
Formal structures	90%
Essay writing	70%
Summary writing	84%
Comprehension of EAP written texts	98%
Oral Skills	46%
Email exchanges in newsgroups	83%
Filling out application forms	64%
Writing academic letters	58%

Table 3 Communication Skills offered at the EAP courses

Table 3 Communication Skills offered at the EAP courses

Study-related skills	IU	IAUNA
Tr, En to Per	Yes	Yes
Tr, Persian to English	No	No
Read Comp activities	Yes	No
Formal exercise	No	No
Essay writing	No	No
Summary writing	Yes	No
Rev writing, reading	No	No
Oral activities	No	No
Aca Let writing	No	No

Methodological issues in IAP teaching

- The different ways of how a learner acquires, retains and retrieves information are collectively termed as learning styles or learning preferences. According to Reid (1987) learning styles are internally based characteristics, often not perceived or consciously used by learners, for the intake and comprehension of new information. He states that successful language teaching-learning is dependent upon the willing co-operation of the participants in the interaction as to the goals of the interaction. Co-operation cannot be imposed but must be negotiated. The teachers should find out the students' language learning preferences then only decisions on the types of activities can be made.

Table 4: Learning strategies preferred

Options	ST: Yes %	ST: No %	T: Yes	T: No
(1) listening and speaking	85	15		No
(2) reading comprehension	94	6	Yes	
(3) writing as home practice	60	40		No
(4) taking notes from lectures	77	23	Yes	
(5) taking notes from what is read	60	40	Yes	
(6) making class summaries	42	58		No
(7) translating	60	40	Yes	

Table 5: Vocabulary Learning

Strategies preferred	% St: Ye s	Yes	No
(1) using new words in a sentence	98	Yes	
(2) thinking of relationships between known and new	83		No
(3) saying or writing words several times	75		No
(4) translation	60		No
(5) guessing the unknown	77	yes	
(6) reading without looking up words	85	yes	

Table 6: Learning Activities

Options	Yes %		Yes %	No %
(1) role play	92			No
(2) language simulations	74			No
(4) Oral discourse with other students	72			No
(5) rehearsing memorized dialogues	53			No
(6) getting information from presentations	62			No
(7) reporting from planned visits	58			No
(8) writing a learning diary	57			No
(9) learning about culture	51			No

Table 7: The most adequate team teaching in Iranian context, Language teachers' views:

Team teaching:	Very Helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
Type 1: two teachers present at a time	-----	40%LD	
Type 2: subject-language integration only subject lecturer attends		65% LD	
Type 3: parallel mini-courses, dividing each session into two		80%	
Type 4: cooperation and contact, language teacher attends classes	100% LD.		

Table 8: The most adequate team teaching in Iranian context, Subject Lecturers' views:

Team teaching:	Helpful	Very helpful	Not helpful
Type 1: two teachers present at a time			9/13 SD
Type 2: subject-language integration only subject lecturer attends	10/13 SD		
Type 3: parallel mini-courses, dividing each session into two		11/13	
Type 4: cooperation and contact, language teacher attends classes	10/13		

Implications of the findings

- Based on the findings, though some general skills such as English to Persian translation and to some lesser extent reading comprehension activities are covered in present EAP courses, the responses reflect that students may not have enough exposure to learn more specific language involving tasks. The need for a review of the current EAP syllabus reflects the idea that the language program is insufficient in preparing the students to perform academic tasks at the study functions. However, with the proposed revision of the current syllabus which focus more on study-related communication tasks, then, the mismatch between the courses offered and the actual academic needs will be minimized.
- The purpose of EAP courses is to fulfill the needs of students in preparing them for the study functions to be involved in future study tasks. Attending such courses will aid them to become more competent as researchers in advanced social science areas of study. Revision in the currently administered EAP courses will result in tremendous increase in motivation to learn, interest and participation. The learners are more willing to learn and perform tasks as they can see the significance of learning the skills. In brief, EAP does create a different learning environment for learners and this is important in order to produce capable students.
- As for text book preparation, CBI is an effective method of combining language and content learning. CBI works well in EFL contexts, and I believe its use will increase as teachers continue to design new syllabi in response to student needs and interests. Learner motivation increases when students are learning about something, rather than just studying language. Theme based CBI is particularly appealing in this respect because teachers can use almost any content materials that they feel their students will enjoy. What can be better than seeing our students create something and learn language at the same time?

Summary and conclusions

- Effective language teaching and learning can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learners' needs, capabilities, potentials, and preferences in meeting these needs. We have observed that students' preferences are not satisfied in many instances. The results obtained call for a step forward to the formation of especial cross-discipline departments; towards a co-operation in designing syllabi, doing weekly course planning, and classroom management.