INVESTIGATING EAP OF TOURISM IN IRAN: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract
The study was conducted to investigate the present needs of MA students of Tourism Planning and Management who presented their preferences for the target proficiency needs, their present level of proficiency, and their attitude towards the role of English in their careers. The findings of data analysis revealed that homogeneity was the most important obstacle in monitoring the course: neither the level of proficiency nor their attitude was found to enjoy any acceptable degree of homogeneity. It is suggested that giving greater significance to the TEFL section of the entrance exam and setting up proficiency requirements, modifications including choice of self-study reading materials, limited use of L1, and choosing easy to do tasks for the weak majority are suggested.

Key words: *EAP, Present situation analysis, Target level needs, Attitude, Homogeneity, Tourism planning*

Introduction

The number of people communicating in English as a lingua franca of science is about four times larger than those who write as native English writers (Kachru, 1989). A good majority of research works are published in English which has become an accepted lingua franca of science in our today's world[1]. The teaching of English for the students' needs has developed in diverse directions and has become increasingly international in scope (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991; Sysoyev, 2000, Bloor, 1998; Flowerdew, 1990). Munby (1978) was among the first who introduced, in his introduction of communicative syllabus design, the importance of analyzing students' needs to increase their level of motivation. Present needs and Target needs are to be evaluated in subsequence before decisions on syllabus specification stage. In addition, the objective needs are either identified by what the students themselves like to gain from the language course, called wants or desires, in contrast, lacks are what the students do not know estimated by the needs analyst. Berwick (1989) defines needs as a measurable gap between the existing conditions and the desired future state. Given the significance of the academic use of language, needs analysis in EAP has been considered as a pragmatic activity that is applied to highly localized contexts of target language use (Tarone & Yule, 1989, Jordan , 1997).

Research into the EAP needs has shown that EAP courses are primarily learner centered. According to Bridnley (1989) the main source of the ambiguity is the distinction between necessities estimated by the needs analyst and the learners' wants which might be different; it is upon the teacher to arrange for methods of bridging the gap between these two. Similarly, Students' needs in different contexts are diverse and the analysis of needs can be effective if the academic language needs are accurately defined with both students' perceptions and the course planners' being served (Deutch, 2003; Brown, 2001; Nunan, 1988; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Chia, Johnson, Chia, & Olive, 1999; Ferris & Tagg,1996). EAP begins with the learner and the situation, while General English begins with the how

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of the language learning processes without any concerns for generic or specific functions as criteria in mind for material development (Hamp-Lyons 2001).

Countries like Iran, where English is mainly used for academic purposes, academic English plays a highly important role. There have been efforts for at least three decades to teach a variety of English which aims at enabling research students to make use of English resources which are available internationally; a version which is separate from the dominant culture attached to it. Currently it forms a considerable part of the curricula for all academic fields at Iranian universities (Zughoul, M. R., & Hussein, 1985; Maher,1986)..

EAP courses are planned as an obligatory part of curriculum for university students in Iran for which a central system of planning, syllabus specification, and publishing materials has taken the responsibilities. In the curriculum of instruction in Iranian universities which follow the central instructions coming from the Supreme Council of Planning, an organization which acts under the supervision of the Ministry of Science and Technology, there is emphasis on teaching English for scientific purposes. A considerable amount of expenditure is served for the ability of undergraduate and postgraduate students to cope with the target study needs. In the MA curriculum a) Geography and Tourism Planning (with two obligatory units of EAP) and b) Management of Tourism (with six obligatory EAP units), there are eight units of EAP instruction; this indicates that a student needs to attend about a hundred and twenty hours of compulsory English instruction. University students who should attend the obligatory EAP courses have already passed university level, general and semi-especial English courses which amount to four courses of instruction equal to eight units indicating a time period of instruction more than a hundred and twenty hours. University students usually have already passed general English courses for three years in each of their guidance and high school curriculums: a yearly period of seventy two hours in guidance school and a number of hundred and twenty hours a year in their high school curriculum; and this excludes a major proportion of the students who have already attended private English institutes for various numbers of terms on a voluntary basis. Taking into consideration the number of majors of study, levels of undergraduate, master, and PhD, and the number of universities as well as colleges including state, distance, and private universities, a statistical presentation demonstrates how considerable the expenses attributed to English instruction in Iran are (table 1).

Table 1: The number of English courses (general, semi-special, and special) MA students have usually passed.

Guidance School	High School	University BA: general, semi special and special English	MA Management of Tourism
36 weeks X 2 hours X 3 years = 216 hours of English Instruction	36 weeks X 3 hours X 3 years = 324 hours of English Instruction	4 courses X 16 weeks X 2 hours = 128 hours of English Instruction	3 courses X 16 weeks X 2 hours = 96 hours of English Instruction

Total number of class hours: 764

Research in Iran has indicated that despite tremendous expenses, students cannot properly function in EAP contexts. Furthermore, few research attempts have been made in Iran to tackle the issue (Eslami Rasek et al 2010, Atai, 2000; Gooniband, 1988; and Khajeie, 1993; Dehnad, et al 2010). The challenges will necessarily involve developing true specific-purpose teaching programs based on learners' study needs which would provide the appropriate context for adequate teaching plans. Students' viewpoints on effective teaching programs through the use of textbooks published locally could provide the required information for the aim of enhancing the outcome; such efforts, however, have been few in the three decades of the era after the Islamic Revolution, though SAMT (The Organization of Study and Preparation of Textbooks) publishing company has made efforts in holding local EAP conferences in recent years. However, before the Islamic Revolution, EAP practice started in the early 1960s with joint projects between Iranian universities and Western academic centers (Cowan, 1974; Bates 1978; Robinson 1995; West 1994; Chambers, 1980) with a focus on teaching

English for university students. In addition to efforts made by researchers in Tabriz University (Dudly Evans 1970's Nucleus Series cited in Robinson, 1995), one of the major ESP events on record in Iran was the Second Regional ESP Conference held in Esfahan in 1979 (Ziahhosseiny & Mountford, 1979; Eslami-Rasekh , Simin, and Jafarzade, 2011).

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), the period of EAP instruction can be divided into two clear phases. For almost a decade the dominant belief was that English was not essential to be of utmost priority; therefore, the number of hours was reduced and some institutions eliminated such courses which were deemed as harmful to the young students. This period witnesses a backward movement and sent back the quality of instruction to earlier states of quality. The second phase witnessed a shift of attention promoting the significance of English for scientific purposes. The attitude changed in favor of the status of English. Since then, there has been a systematic move towards English instruction supervised by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) to establish uniform discipline-based EAP programs for universities. The publishing organization SAMT was established whose primary goal was to publish and distribute semi-specific as well as specific teaching materials for university students majoring in various branches of science. The textbooks prepared were not designed based on any systematic needs analysis; the only criterion for materials selection was the material developers' intuitions without bearing in mind present situation analysis. The main problem is that ESP courses are unique requiring two types of analysis of needs; however, the EAP textbooks prepared by SAMT lack the input taken from the present situation analysis which is never done for the courses. In the current needs analysis research views regarding the relevance of topics, degree of difficulty, usefulness of materials selected are elicited from the teachers with little attention commonly paid to the learners as a major source of information.

The study presented here aims to investigate the views of MA students of Tourism Planning and Management about their needs and attitude in a socio-culturally different teaching context from previous studies. The question addressed is what the students' needs are regarding a) the attitude towards the practice of EAP, b) the preferred instructional practices, c) problematic areas to promote, d) skills and levels of language viewed as target needs, e) preferences regarding various aspects of EAP practice, f) instructional preferences, g) self-expressed assessment of present level of proficiency, and i) primary problematic areas in their assessments. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: How comparable is the EAP students' self-expressed assessment of their English aptitude, attitude, and preferences as well as the teaching practices in EAP courses? Discovering degrees of homogeneity in various aspects of the students' viewpoints is a major step in making efforts to promote the quality of the courses administered. Among course components, skill of the administrators in designing the course, students' attitude, level of proficiency, beliefs about the importance of EAP, are attributed to the success or failure of EAP courses.

Methodology

Participants

A non-probability sample design (Cohen & Manion, 1994) was used to select the student population : quota sampling, which is the non-probability equivalent of stratified sampling (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1981). And since specific academic disciplines are shown to affect the needs of the students (Ferris & Tagg ,1996), student's field of study was used as an important criterion for sampling, in our case students of Tourism Management and Planning. There were sixty male and female participants in the sample selected based on the above procedures, all MA postgraduates of Geography, Tourism Planning, and Tourism Management who were enrolled in the EAP courses in the academic year of 2010-2011. The sample was taken from Azad University, Najafabad Branch, Iran. Their biographical background, preferences, and characteristic qualities were made constant through a set of questions they responded to; gender was not a variable, therefore, the participants made a mixed gender population.

Instruments

The questionnaire used contained various modified questions taken from previous Needs Analysis projects as well as those made by the researchers suitable for the specific context of the project. The target situation of needs is assumed to have been discovered by the material developers, but the present state of needs is an important part of the syllabus design which is ignored by the current EAP practice. The questions included various aspects of not only attitudes, but also lacks, wants, and needs. In addition to some demographic information, students' rank ordering of the importance of different language skills to their academic and professional goals, the preferred instructional activities in classes, and their perceived importance of different problematic areas in current EAP courses were included in the questionnaire[2]. Classroom observations were conducted and a general discussion was held in three EAP classes which were administrated by content teachers who were the selected practitioners. The questionnaire was piloted with fifteen students who had already passed the courses 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 frequency of scores selected out of ten, and the percentage of students who selected each score in the scale of one to ten were estimated. In all cases, the measurement of disparity (standard deviation), mean comparison of the individual scores for each one of the sections was carried out for demonstrating the extense of differences among the students' views. Furthermore, for the complete list of questions, the measurements including mean, percentage, and SD were calculated to enable the researchers to discover degrees of homogeneity present.

Data Analysis

The statistical software was used for data analysis in the sense that information from the survey was coded for statistical analysis, downloaded into the database, and analyzed. Statistical procedures employed include descriptive statistics for various items on the survey to examine overall percentages, means, and standard deviations used to examine the degree of disparity. Mean differences as well as graphs would indicate responses upon which agreement was observed in viewpoints in contrast with those for which there was insignificant agreement.

Results and Discussion

As a step in doing present situation analysis, the issue of concern was self-expressed judgments regarding students' ability to communicate with a foreign tourist who knows nothing about Iran. How efficient they feel they are in achieving this communicative goal. The responses which were given based on a scale of least to most ability are introduced below. The descriptive statistical measures of the mean score and the standard deviation (hereafter SD) are cited in Table two. The relevant graph is a representation of the responses in terms of frequency of each of the one to ten scores, useful for viewers who wish to examine the degree of cohesiveness among responses given. The numbers on the vertical column present the frequency of the scores and those on the horizontal present the scores given by the students.

Table 2. Self assessed oral English proficiency: Encountering a situation which requires giving information to a tourist.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
goroh1	59	1.00	10.00	5.3458	2.21046
Valid N (listwise	59				

The Persian version was used for collecting data; the questionnaires are not included in the appendix; however, a number of items are mentioned when discussing responses by students.

The most frequent score has been either two or four. Under ideal circumstances, a skewed distribution would be desirable; however, the distribution of responses is an indication that the majority believe they lack the minimum level of proficiency required of a postgraduate candidate whose future job will involve use of oral English for tourism purposes. Twenty one participants scored either five or six out of the maximum score of ten. The examination of the graph indicates the variable number of the students who have very little, little, or a fair degree of ability in expressing the topics of the conversations. Only sixteen out of the population of fifty nine students gave themselves a score of eight or higher. The degree of disparity shown by the calculated SD is 2.21 which is considerable for this size of population. Graph two below shows how distribution of scores is not suitable for a teaching plan.

Table three presents the statistical measurements for the second section of the questionnaire. The students gave their assessments regarding their English proficiency for especial functions of English they need for academic study goals. Their present situation is described in the relevant graph below. Four proficiency questions (in order of level of aptitude marked as B1-B4 in the tabulations below) are offered for which a score from 1 to 10 is chosen to describe the present situation.

Statistics

		B1	B2	B3	B4
N	Valid	48	51	47	42
	Missing	11	8	12	17
Mean		5.4792	5.2745	4.1064	2.4762
Std. Deviation		3.29403	2.63878	2.65587	2.47167

Table 3. Self- assessed information regarding especial English aptitude.

Nine students find themselves better than described while another group of nine indicate their inability. The difference is so considerable that one may doubt any possible solution can be decided for monitoring the course content to the present situation of proficiency. The rest of the students are evenly distributed across various scores as is clear from the graph. Lack of the required cohesiveness is indicated clearly; the teacher who faces with this level of variety has to seek for measures to lessen the disruptive effects.

A representation of students' aptitude with a higher level of target proficiency. As is observed, thirty out of forty two respondents scored two or below. This level of proficiency is too high for all of them except for three who scored nine and ten. The distribution of the responses agrees with graphs which demonstrated students' proficiency level for lower target levels. As is obvious, the target level analysis has to be considered as complement to a present situation analysis; this is assumed to cause the problem for decisions to be made for designing the course.

Table four presents the results of students' ability in terms of criteria set by IELTS test batteries. The students assessed their proficiency level as described by the established test battery known to be valid as well as reliable. The students were asked to choose a number in a scale of one to nine to present their current English proficiency. The results as tabulated below show that the most observable fact is the lack of cohesion required.

Statistics

		D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
N	Valid	54	53	51	56	52	52	51	51	51
	Missing	5	6	8	3	7	7	8	8	8
Mean		4.0000	5.1132	5.4902	5.0714	4.5577	3.5962	3.2157	3.0980	2.7451
Std. Deviation		2.61346	2.62136	2.51692	2.47795	2.52372	2.49124	2.33507	2.44340	2.45636

Table 4. Descriptive representation of proficiency levels based on definitions of IELTS (based on a translated version used).

18% scored minimum proficiency, 24% scored two out of nine, 5% scored three, 13% four, and 15% got themselves a score of five. And 23% got a score of 7 to nine. A distribution with this degree of disparity certainly calls for some especial course design to be variable in terms of proficiency levels. In the final section of the article, some solutions will be introduced as for lessening the disturbing effect of the disparity present.

One relevant question for every needs analysis focusing on present situation in Iranian universities is students' English learning background. The TEFL, as mentioned earlier, is a popular business in Iran; numerous private teaching English institutes are working in every city and town. Their business depends on thorough course evaluation as is clear their survival can last if the clients are satisfied with their success. They offer courses not only for general purposes, but also for study related goals such as ability to score high in standard tests of proficiency such as TEFL and IELTS. The heads of such institutes are keen to find energetic young teachers who have a proper command on oral as well as reading comprehension skills. The teacher's task would be to imitate the method deemed as desirable by the institute which is taught to them by a number of observations through auditing and the materials used are among those published by authorized international publishing companies such as Cambridge. Below, information is gathered from students as for degrees of English learning which have occurred in various institutes.

Table five is an interesting representation of efficiency of our university English instructional programs. As the mean scores reveal, the least amount of learning occurs in university English courses, compared with other teaching institutions mentioned. The next least learning level is high school while the most learning is attributed to private institutes. The main point made here is that, generally, in our state owned English teaching institutions, serious administration problems exist. In contrast, private institutes have a greater share of English learning among students. This gap shows how state institutes can potentially lose the dynamism required for achieving results proportionate with the input invested in them.

Statistics

		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5
N	Valid	44	45	47	41	22
	Missing	15	14	12	18	37
Mean		4.6364	5.3333	5.2553	5.3415	3.2273
Std. Deviation		2.99683	2.71360	2.58312	3.74573	2.32854

Table 5: Which one of the institutes mentioned you have learnt English most? H1: Guidance school, H2: high school, H3: university, H4: private institutes, H5: other

As the table indicates, the mean scores vary in the sense that the least amount of learning occurs in university courses, the second least belongs to guidance school, and private institutes gain the highest score among the five institutes of TEFL. As a part of needs analysis, one would agree that students' preferred learning strategies are to be discovered for planning a course. Below, questions are raised aiming at discovering which teaching as well as learning strategies are viewed as more desirable for

the students. The outcome would be a guideline for designing the course content and activities in classes.

Table 6: Which course activities and which learning strategies work for you best? I1: available translation of passages, I2: English grammar tasks are most preferred, I3: Oral practice in class both individually and in groups, I4: use of Audio visual aids such as video, tape recorders, and overhead projectors in class, I5: English Lab is the best activity, I6: Oral drills in class, I7: Reading out-loud, reciting and translating scientific texts by the teacher, I8: Having the L1 version of materials available in all sections of every unit.

Statistics

		I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8
N	Valid	50	49	50	47	44	50	48	48
	Missing	9	10	9	12	15	9	11	11
Mean		5.9000	4.3673	4.9600	5.1702	4.1818	5.5400	5.2292	4.8333
Std. Deviation		3.03886	2.55517	2.59481	2.82319	3.22975	2.88706	2.96963	2.77783

As table six presents, students learn best if communicative tasks given to them involve use of their L1. The overall belief is, for students at this stage, use of L1is inevitable if there is to be learning. This view point has been caused by adult students' feeling of hopelessness that one day they would reach a level of proficiency in which they don't need the help of their L1. The incompetence shown is created through their constant fear of failure to learn. The use of L1 is viewed as a solution to their long lasting failure. English lab is the least preferred method which may be due to their experience sitting in the dark while listening to oral materials which hardly make sense to them; in this situation, anxiety caused by being left unassisted in an isolated compartment bothers the student. Overall, the information illustrated in table six shows how students suffer from lack of confidence or the hope of being able to solve their proficiency problems.

Motivation is a major explanation for learning in the most recent psycholinguistic approach to English teaching. In the arguments for the English courses with a communicative language teaching approach, the analysis of needs is essential since the practitioner is to make sure the wants, desires, and the target needs of the students are served in the course. The analysis of needs offers insight for the teacher to motivate students by involving them in activities and task types which are desirable, necessary, and useful. Below, questions concerning motivators are raised to gain insight for what materials and activities are viewed as needed from the point of view of the students.

Occupational needs, grades, accessing new advances in science, comprehending movies in English, communicating with Native English speakers, advancing to PhD education, being accepted to an overseas university, working overseas, cultural and private preferences, and reasons beyond those mentioned included as motivators for students. Among all, the most effective motivator for English learning is surprisingly skill of English for using the internet (graph 10). However, although some students demonstrated their tendency towards each one of them, no considerable degree of homogeneity was observed among their perceptions of their preferences. It seems students wish to be aware of the world events more than they are inclined to reach the educational goals vital for their future educational and academic careers.

Students' willingness to become proficient for the purpose of being able to communicate with foreign speakers of English through various channels. As the graph shows, there is a noticeable degree of unity among the majority of the responses. Continuing studies in an overseas university could be an incentive for fifty percent of the students.

Statistics

		J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	J6	J7	J8	J9	J10	J11
N	Valid	48	50	52	55	52	51	53	49	46	53	31
	Missing	11	9	7	4	7	8	6	10	13	6	28
Mean		5.8958	6.4400	6.7308	7.0909	6.1346	6.5686	6.3208	6.3265	5.6957	6.4340	5.3226
Std. Deviation		3.16389	2.56475	2.72329	2.68240	2.86308	3.15122	3.24496	3.70466	3.78811	3.12256	2.91418

Table 7: Motivators for learning English: J1: Occupational needs, J2: grades, J3: accessing new advances in science, J4: using internet, J5: comprehending movies in English, J6: communicating with native English speakers, J7: advancing to PhD education, J8: being accepted to an overseas university, J9: working overseas, J10, cultural and private preferences, and J11: reasons beyond those mentioned.

Statistics

		K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9
N	Valid	49	47	47	47	47	53	52	53	50
	Missing	10	12	12	12	12	6	7	6	9
Mean		7.5918	7.3404	7.0000	6.3191	7.3617	7.8113	7.1154	6.7358	6.4400
Std. Deviation		2.72273	2.58992	2.77410	2.70351	3.08873	2.66066	2.73434	2.75368	2.66619

Table 8: Aims of an EAP course: K1: oral proficiency for conversing, K2: being able to understand spoken English, K3: skill in reading comprehension of written texts in tourism, K4: ability to write for academic purposes, K5: familiarity with technical and semi-technical key terms of tourism, K6: preference of general purpose English over scientific, K7: conversing about general issues of life, K8: understanding written materials for enjoyment, and K9: writing for general life purposes, e.g. letters to pen friends.

In response to causes of failure, students gave their views of how effective shortages have been in causing the problems of EAP administration in university level; the causes mentioned are as follows: M1: Inadequate EAP materials used, M2: teacher's management of class activities and command in interpreting materials, M3: problems with teachers' shortages such as weak English knowledge, M4: students' weaknesses and the gap of proficiency level required for the start of the course, M5: heterogeneity existing among students' proficiency and attitude, and M6: the large population of the EAP class, M7: general lack of motivation irrelevant of the course components, M8: reasons other than the above-mentioned.

Statistics

		M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
N	Valid	50	50	51	54	49	48	28	1
	Missing	9	9	8	5	10	11	31	58
Mean		5.9000	6.4400	6.5294	7.4444	6.0816	5.2500	5.3929	7.0000
Std. Deviation		3.13798	2.58851	2.85904	2.98845	3.14799	3.06316	2.85889	

Table 9. Causes of failure in courses of English (eight reasons indicated as M1 to M8 are shown as causes of the failure). M1: Inadequate EAP materials used, M2: teacher's management of class activities and command in mediation, M3: problems with teachers' weak English knowledge, M4: students' gap of present level proficiency level required for the start of the course M5: heterogeneity existing among students' proficiency and attitude, and M6: the large population of the EAP class, M7: general lack of motivation irrelevant of the course components, M8: reasons other than the above-mentioned (timing of the sessions, inability to do preparations required as homework, insufficient spare time for out of class study, lack of quizzes to be used as instrumental motivators, etc).

The most significant problem pointed out is the students' gap of proficiency assumed to be required for being ready for the course (the mean score of 7.44 out of 10), and second, the reasons which included students' no out of class study due to various reasons. The third most significant shortage

has been teachers' English knowledge and pedagogical efficiency for mediating the course activities. In addition to the problems causing the inefficiency, the mean scores show another important difficulty: the heterogeneity we have been discussing as a major obstacle for promoting the course outcome. The large population of students in class has not been mentioned as a major problem as much as other problems have been. This indicates students' unawareness of the importance of pair-group activities in class and shows how their perception of a good class is one in which the teacher is the sole speaker and is most active in giving lectures. This trend has been a major one in most classes in university level teaching, and the unfortunate outcome has been for the students to think passively about their role in class. The creativity which has to be initiated as a result of activities in classes never gets the chance of growth in the students (mean of 5.25 out of 10). Students' belief that the teacher should be a good lecturer has resulted in their false judgment about the teacher's commitment in class: that the teacher who leaves all the work to the students is not a good one and is criticized as indifferent or inefficient.

Statistics

		N31	N32	N33	N34	N35
N	Valid	50	46	45	46	22
	Missing	9	13	14	13	37
Mean		7.2600	6.3696	7.0667	6.5217	4.7273
Std. Deviation		2.94029	3.03578	2.66629	3.41070	2.72872

Table10: The mean scores showing the preferences for listening skill: N31: general conversations, N32: listening to presentations at seminars, N33: comprehending oral media, N34: comprehending movies, N35: other purposes for listening skill.

The distribution of views regarding one most preferred among a list of oral activities (mentioned in table 10) is another issue. As table 10 shows, the oral skill most preferred is ability to converse about general life issues. The second most preferred was found to be the ability to understand oral media such as news, serials, interviews, etc. Oral proficiency for comprehending movies has gained a score of 6.52 which shows students fondness for understanding movies. The outcome of this comparison indicates, in addition to knowing the majority's views, how students are various in terms of their preferences. This has been the by-product of the needs analysis based on data collected through students' participation.

As an important part of present situation analysis, we asked students abut their views regarding the priority of vocabulary for EAP. The views indicate there is a fair degree of perception of which type of vocabulary is to be preferred. The technical type was most preferred, and the general was the second most preferred. However, as graph 16 shows, absence of a proper shared perception of the importance of types of vocabulary.

Statistics

		N51	N52	N53	N54	N55
N	Valid	46	43	46	44	19
	Missing	13	16	13	15	40
Mean		6.8696	5.9767	6.4130	5.4545	3.6316
Std. Deviation		3.02294	2.55872	2.81722	2.80742	2.58651

Table11: Priority of vocabulary: N51: technical terms used in scientific articles, N52: Semi-technical vocabulary used in all branches of science, N53: general vocabulary for life purposes, N54: idiomatic combinations including collocations, N55: other if there is any.

Concerning students' perceptions of the importance of tasks and pair work activities, the highest mean score revealed that they have difficulty in managing tasks they are asked to play a part in. The indication is that tasks which are most essential should be chosen in agreement with students' limited

ability to cope with them. The easiest tasks are found to be the most efficient for the class to be of learning outcome. The teacher has to decide between the course requirements assigned by the supreme council of planning and the existing reality. The choice has to consider the difficulty of students' ability in coping with learning activities which are too hard for them to participate.

Statistics

		O1	O2	O3	O4
N	Valid	50	50	49	48
	Missing	9	9	10	11
Mean		4.9400	5.1000	4.9796	3.6667
Std. Deviation		3.06667	2.44323	2.47899	2.95594

Table 14: Students' preferences for participating in pair-work tasks in mixed gender classes: O1: Unable to cope with the activity, O2: I can participate to a very limited extent, O3: I have some limited skill for easy tasks, O4: I guess I am competent in taking part in pair-group work.

Conclusion, explanations, and suggestions:

The work reported in this article has been a response to the call for enhancement of EAP courses administered in Iranian universities. Needs Analysis data presenting present situation analysis were gathered from university students who reported not only their attitude but also their perceptions of needs, preferences, and desires concerning all aspects of the courses. The goal was to conduct present situation analysis to decide upon materials, teaching methodology, and syllabus adequate for effective teaching outcome; however, the data collected revealed a fact which was a primary deciding characteristic of the population who would be to attend the course. The views and perceptions collected lacked the homogeneity needed for decisions to be made for the course design in several major sections. Although in some respects students' perception of needs and attitude enjoyed a fair degree of homogeneity, the overall finding was that the students did not share a common level of proficiency neither did they displayed a common perception and shared attitude in a major sense. The problem is the students who are accepted to do the postgraduate course are admitted based on several merits, including English proficiency as one among several in the entrance exam. There are always a good number of students who compensate their low score in the English section of the postgraduate entrance exam by scoring high in other subjects; and since the English score decides test takers' success in the entrance exam with a proportion of about ten percent effect, these students enter the postgraduate program without possessing the required proficiency needed at the start of the EAP courses.

To our knowledge, although some studies pointed to the contextual constraints contributing to the failure of EAP instruction, mentioning the over-populated classes, unskilled practitioners, and lack of creativity in syllabus and materials designed in a centralized system of course planning, heterogeneity is the most basic obstacle for efforts made to enhance the quality of the EAP in universities; the negligence has been caused by lack of attention to present situation analysis. After having done the present situation analysis, the practitioners' endeavor could be devoted to changes aiming at reducing the differences prior to the start of postgraduate program which could include the following measures: a) giving greater significance to proficiency tests to a proportion of effect at least fifty percent of the total score, b) or alternatively requiring the already admitted students to bring an acceptable score from standard placement tests such as TEFL or IELTS before the start of the major of study, and c) administering a certain number of preliminary semi-EAP courses obligatory for the weak students in compliance with the extent of their present level proficiency. Another set of changes could be made to the design of the EAP courses which may include a) choosing trained content teachers in collaboration with TEFL teachers to arrange for a team teaching program, b) choice of self-study materials with a standard level of difficulty required of the course while the communicative tasks designed for classes agree with the weak majority to regain their hope of learning, c) while basing evaluation of the course on the standards set by the course planners, limited use of L1 in class and in teaching materials; guidance for out of class activities to compensate for the students' gap of English knowledge are

among measures proposed. The teacher's mediation in class will then have to be monitored to the needs of the weaker majority of students with designing easy to achieve tasks. Pair and group-work activities with levels of difficulty lower than the level expected from the course planners will at least result in students' encouragement and hope for a future time when they are able to reach advanced levels of proficiency.

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