

***IN THE NAME OF GOD***



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We certify that the thesis entitled “**analysis of reading comprehension needs of students** ” by Ogholgol Nazari is accepted as partial fulfillment of MA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

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**Department of Foreign Languages**

**Analysis of Reading Comprehension Needs of  
the Students of Paramedical Studies:  
the Case of the Students of Health  
Information Management (HIM)**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for MA Degree in Teaching English as  
a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

**Supervisor: Dr. M. Atai**

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*Dedicated to My*

*Parents*

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## **Abstract**

This study attempted to analyze reading comprehension needs in ESAP courses for the students of HIM. It explored the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding both the students' level of mastery of reading comprehension sub-skills and strategies. In other words, the underlying reasons for students' poor reading comprehension performance (Atai & Tahririan, 2003) were investigated.

To this aim, a triangulation of sources and methods were used. Sources of the study included not only content and language teachers, but also graduate and undergraduate students majoring in Health Information Management (HIM). They were chosen through cluster sampling from three universities in Tehran including the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, and Iran University. Moreover, qualitative and quantitative approaches were triangulated against each other. To do so, different instruments including 4 questionnaires, GEP test, self assessment, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were applied. The results of the study showed that "scanning the texts, skimming the texts", and "understanding the relationships between charts, tables, and texts", "drawing conclusions and getting implied ideas of the texts", "reading articles related to HIM" were important to all the participants. The students' GEP was low, and they had difficulty in "setting purpose for reading", "previewing text before reading", "predicting or guessing text meaning", "critically evaluating what is read", "taking notes while reading", "skimming the texts", "scanning the texts", "general vocabulary knowledge", "familiarity with different genres like books and articles", "understanding the relationships between texts, charts, tables, and pictures", "understanding main ideas of sentences", "drawing conclusions and understanding implied ideas", "understanding the relationships between ideas like cause and effect", "understanding the relationships between ideas using cohesive devices like however and moreover ", "reading medical documents including patients' histories", and "reading hospitals' forms including physicians' order, anesthesia forms, and operation record forms ". The results would be useful for different stakeholders such as materials developers, language and content teachers, course designers, and the learners.

## **Key Terms**

ESAP, Reading Comprehension, Strategies, Triangulation, Target Situation Analysis, Present Situation Analysis, and learning Needs.

## **1.1. Introduction**

Richards (2001) defined English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as an attempt which not only is aimed at developing language courses and materials for teaching different registers, but it also is focused on the purposes for which learners need a language. The latter aim of ESP resulted in the emergence of needs analysis as a basic process of curriculum development. Anthony (1997) identified analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication as a key determining feature of ESP courses (in Gatehouse, 2001).

Robinson (1991) and Jordan (1997) divided ESP into main areas: English for Occupational/operational/Vocational Purposes (EOP/EPP/EVP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP in turn is divided into two categories including English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). Strevens (1977) states that EAP not only emphasizes practical command of language over the literature and culture of English speakers, but it also emphasizes that teaching of English should be matched to the needs and purposes of the language learners (cited in Carter & Nunan, 2001). EAP is divided into two branches including English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) which refers to the teaching of skills that are common to all disciplines and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) which refers to the teaching of the features that distinguish one discipline from others. It integrates the skills worked on in EGAP courses in students' actual subject tasks (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

Needs analysis has been the cornerstone of ESP in determining what to include in ESP/ English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curricula, providing descriptions of academic skills and genres non-native speaker students may encounter in future courses or that they will encounter in particular courses (Benesch, 1999). Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) define needs analysis as an ongoing process of establishing what and how of a course. It "shows the gap between what is and what should be" (Breindley, 1989, P. 56). Needs analysis is the most principal and critical step in course design and curriculum planning (Richards, 1990; Nunan, 1991; Graves, 1996; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Richards, 2001; Hyland, 2006).

Different needs analysis (NA) projects have been carried out to date in different ESP/English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)/English for Business Purposes (

EBP) contexts in different countries, some of which are presented as empirical studies in the review of the related literature. Likewise, some NAs have been set out in different Iranian universities the results of which emphasize reading comprehension as the most significant skill for the university students (Shahini & Riazi, 2001; Atai, 2002; Isfahani, 2005; Rasekhi, 2006; Mohammadzadeh, 2007). The most inclusive statement about the needs of Iranian ESAP situations is made by Atai (2000). The main objective of the EAP programs, as Atai and Tahririan (2003) argue is to fill the gap between the students' general English competence and their ability to read authentic discipline-specific texts. However, these courses do not improve the learners' reading comprehension, in other words, they proved to be ineffective in that they did not contribute to the improvement of the learners' reading comprehension abilities (ibid). However, the learners' reading difficulties in ESAP courses have not been studied.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem and Significance of the study**

Needs analysis is an inseparable part of any course design and curriculum planning (Richards, 1990; Nunan, 1991; Graves, 1996; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Richards, 2001; Hyland, 2006). Although needs of students of different departments such as humanities, sciences, and medical studies have been analyzed, no study up to date has explored the needs of the students of Paramedical studies.

The needs analysis projects have been carried out in Iranian ESAP context all aimed at identifying general needs of the university students of different majors. It is worth mentioning that they all identified reading comprehension as the necessary skill for the learners (Shahini & Riazi, 2001; Atai, 2002; Isfahani, 2005; Rasekhi, 2006; Mohammadzadeh, 2007). Moreover, as it was mentioned above, the results of NA projects show that EAP courses in Iran do not meet their objectives i.e. improving the learners' reading comprehension abilities (Atai & Tahririan, 2003). However, none of them, to the best of the present researcher's knowledge, has addressed the students' reading comprehension needs and its related problems in detail. This study will attempt to find both students' and teachers' perceptions of required reading comprehension sub-skills and their perception of students' reading comprehension difficulties as well as their perception of necessary reading comprehension strategies.



This study was carried out using triangulation of sources and methods. In other words, both teachers and students took part in this project. Both qualitative and quantitative methods including participant observation were applied in this study. Inadequacy of outsiders' intuition and the value of insiders' perspective in NA have been emphasized by researchers (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999). This study also applied an insiders' perspective on the needs of the learners through participant observation as the researcher attended the classes as a student, not a researcher.

### **1.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In the light of the aforementioned justifications, the following research questions were set forth:

1. What are the target and learning needs of Iranian students of HIM regarding their reading comprehension?
2. Is there any significant difference between students' and ESAP teachers' perceptions of present reading comprehension abilities of the students majoring in HIM?
3. Is there any significant difference between students' and ESAP teachers' perceptions of HIM students' reading comprehension problems?
4. Is there any significant difference between graduate students' and undergraduate students', ESAP teachers' and content teachers' perceptions of the HIM students' target reading comprehension needs?
5. Is there any significant difference between the graduate students and ESAP teachers regarding the students' level of reading comprehension?
6. Is there any significant difference between the graduate students and ESAP teachers regarding the students' required level of reading comprehension?

Due to the fact that there was no hint on directionality of these questions, the following null hypotheses are stated for research questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

1. There is not any significant difference between students' and ESAP teachers' perceptions regarding HIM students' present reading comprehension needs.
2. There is not any significant difference between students' and ESAP teachers' perceptions of HIM students' reading comprehension problems.
3. There is not any significant difference between graduate students', undergraduate students', ESAP teachers' and content teachers' perceptions of the HIM students' target reading comprehension needs.
4. There is no significant difference the graduate students and ESAP teachers regarding the students' level of reading comprehension.
5. There is no significant difference between the graduate students and ESAP teachers regarding the students' level of reading comprehension.

#### **1.4. Limitations of the Study**

Due to practicality reasons, the subjects of the study were chosen only from three universities in Tehran which have this major and students in other universities around the country were not included. Hence, the number of graduate students (15), content teachers (15), and ESAP teachers (10) who took part in the study were limited. It can be argued that only a small proportion of the participants were included in the participant observation. However, in depth and longitudinal study of the included ones enhanced the data obtained qualitatively so that it compensated for the inadequate number.

#### **1.5. Definition of key terms**

##### Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is defined as the “techniques for collecting and assessing information relevant to course design: it is the means of establishing the how and what of a course” (Hyland, 2006, p.73).

## **ESAP**

"While English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) is concerned with teaching of the skills and language that are common to all disciplines; English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) refers to the teaching of the features that distinguish one discipline from others" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 41).

## **Target situation Analysis (TSA)**

An approach to needs analysis which focuses on students' needs at the end of a language course is called target situation analysis (Robinson, 1991). According to Chambers (1980), TSA is an objective needs analysis which provides information about what learners will have to do in English and the skills and language needed (cited in Carter & Nunan, 2001).

## **Present Situation Analysis (PSA)**

PSA identifies strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, and learning experiences (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). It establishes what the students are like at the start of their language course (Robinson, 1991).

## **Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)**

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that LSA seeks to investigate what the learners need to do in order to learn.

## **Triangulation**

It is the systematic comparison of interim findings from two or more sources, methods or combination of both. It attempts to validate the researcher's interim findings by presenting them to the informants, and /or by seeking confirmation or disconfirmation of the current analysis in the data arrived at from the methods and sources (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999).

## **Reading Comprehension**

Grabe (1997, p. 8) defined reading as "purposeful...involves goal setting, incorporates interaction among various levels of cognitive processing, and requires combinations of

strategies". He calls reading flexible in that different strategies are used to read efficiently (Grabe, 1991).

### **Strategies**

O'Malley and Chomat (1990) defined learning strategies as "special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to comprehend, learn, or retain new information"(p. 1). Oxford (2003, p. 1) defined them as "actions, behaviors, steps or techniques students use, often to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the second language".