In the name of God

the compassionate

the merciful

To my beloved parents

for

their endless love and support

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Abstract

Even though strong concerns have been voiced for accountability in English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses seem to have been mainly developed based on the intuition of course designers and curriculum developers rather than careful context-specific needs analysis studies. In order to fill this gap, based on the learning-centered approach to needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), the current study aimed at investigating the academic target and learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature nationwide by employing a triangulation of instrumentations namely, questionnaires, class observations, and semistructured interviews. To this end, a total number of 320 stakeholders including undergraduate students (n = 252), graduates (n = 51), English literature instructors (n = 7), and language instructors (n = 10) from eight different Iranian state universities participated in the current study. The results of this study revealed a discrepancy between the target and learning needs of the students and the actual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses they undertake during their academic and pre-academic studies. During pre-academic studies, students are not adequately equipped with critical thinking abilities as well as learning and communication strategies which are required by their prospective academic needs. Likewise, the prevalent lecture-based and examination-oriented teaching methodologies as utilized by Iranian content specialists at the tertiary level, seemed to be ineffective in sufficiently equipping the students with sound literary knowledge, language skills, general English proficiency, professional writing and

reading skills as well as sociocultural and strategic competence. The findings may promise implications for establishing a consistent nationwide pedagogical framework for EFL instruction at the academic and pre-academic levels in Iran by a synthesis of different communicative and learning-centered approaches to language teaching based on a systematic cooperation among different stakeholders.

Key words: Instructors, Learning-Centered Approach, Learning Needs, Target Needs, Undergraduate Students.

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Table of Abbreviations

CBI	Content Based Instruction	L2	Second language
CNP	Communication Needs Processor	MSRT	Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology
EAP	English for academic purposes	PSA	Present Situation Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign language	SBI	Strategic-Based Instruction
EGP	English for General Purposes	SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
ELT	English Language Teaching	TENOR	Teaching English for No Obvious Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes	TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
L1	First language	WTC	Willingness to Communicate

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preliminaries

During recent decades, English has increasingly become a medium of instruction for teaching and learning of academic subjects, especially scientific and technical ones in nonnative contexts. This spread owes its existence to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as an important field of ELT in the 1950s and 1960s due to the vast expansion of science, technology, business, and economy worldwide. In addition, the attempts at internationalization and globalization of the academic world as well as theoretical developments in the fields of linguistics and psychology accelerated this development (Benesch, 2001; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Ruiz-Garrido, Palmer-Silveira, & Fortanet-Gómez, 2010). Subsequently, EAP has evolved rapidly as one of the main branches of ESP since the 1980s due to the interaction of applied linguistics and education as well as a commitment to research findings within the field of language teaching (Benesch, 2001; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hyland, 2006).

Due to their preoccupation with curriculum design, materials development, and pedagogy, ESP and particularly EAP have paid increasing attention not to the linguistic properties of the text or lexical items but to the requirements of teaching and learning in local teaching contexts (Benesch, 2001). It was recognized that language is not a set of phonological, grammatical, and lexical items to be learnt separately but a means of communication. This assumption, which constituted the foundation of ESP and ELT in general, led to the development of language courses which aimed at preparing learners to use English not for its own sake or for general educational purposes but to gain a linguistic communicative ability and competence

in order to perform successfully in their target academic or occupational contexts (Basturkmen, 2006, 2010; Hyland, 2006).

The importance of accountability in language education accompanied by the vast spread of information in the present century as well as the recognition of disciplinary variations in language teaching have seriously questioned the concept of a one-fits-all-approach in language teaching (Hyland, 2006; Long, 2005). Consequently, great demands have been made for careful needs analysis studies as prerequisites for focused and effective course designs in the field of second and foreign language education in an attempt to meet the social, cognitive, and linguistic requirements of changing academic learning situations (Dudley-Evans & St Johns, 1998; Long, 2005).

Since language syllabuses are inevitably selective and learners possess special rights, there should be a criterion for selection and inclusion of the language content in an attempt to gear the content and objectives of the courses to the specific needs of learners. Provided that the syllabus is based on needs analysis, learners will be more interested and motivated to learn as they see the relevance of their education to the particular needs of their target academic or professional contexts and hence their learning opportunities will be increased accordingly (Basturkmen, 2010). Moreover, since most ESP courses are time-restricted (Benesch, 2001; Dudley-Evans & St. Johns, 1998; West, 1994) and practical-oriented, it is the responsibility of course designers to exactly identify learner's needs in terms of the tasks, skills, language, and behaviors which are required by their present or future target situations (Basturkmen, 2010). When these needs are determined, they can be utilized for the development of an effective curriculum along with appropriate teaching materials

and methodologies that best suit learners' needs accordingly (Basturkmen, 2006, 2010; Benesch, 2001; Vandermeeren, 2005). In order to do so, needs analysis can be conducted either before the start of a course for planning purposes or during or after it for evaluation perspectives (Nunan, 1988).

Therefore, it is essential for language teachers and applied linguists to be familiar with the history of needs analysis, the available sources and methods along with their combinations in an attempt to avoid repeating mistakes of the past (West, 1994). In the same way a thorough diagnosis of an ailment is prerequisite for a medical prescription, a thorough analysis of the specific needs of learners is substantial for the design of an effective language course. In this sense, in order to develop an efficient language course which is informed by an understanding of the requirements and constraints of academic contexts, it should be first considered as a course for specific purposes in which the only variation is based on the extent of precision of learner needs. For instance, in most courses for young children, a specific needs analysis is not essential but in the case of courses for academic or vocational purposes for adults, it is substantially required (Long, 2005). Besides, since ESP courses are based on needs analysis, their learning objectives are more easily achievable and thus they lead to more satisfactory learning outcomes (Basturkmen, 2010). Furthermore, needs analysis is not only valuable for learners' language instruction but also precious for language teachers' training (Long, 2005; Lytle, 1988; Vandermeeren, 2005).

The significance of identification of learner needs along with the evolving history of needs analysis have led to the development of different approaches to conducting this phenomenon namely, the sociolinguistic model, the systemic

approach, the learning-centered approach, learner-centered approaches, and the task-based approach. In the beginning years of needs analysis, the focus was primarily on the target situation needs analysis; however, this emphasis was complimented by other approaches in the subsequent years. One of these well-supported approaches is the learning-centered approach as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which as its name indicates, focuses on how learners learn the target language. This approach, which identifies learner needs from two perspectives of target and learning needs, comprises the framework of the current study for the investigation of academic needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Throughout the brief history of needs analysis, various needs of English language learners have been investigated worldwide and in Iran in particular (e.g., Atai & Nazari, 2011; Chostelidou, 2010; Eslami Rasekh, 2010; Kavaliauskiene & Uzpaliene, 2003; Kim, 2006; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008; to cite a few), the results of which have been used in some cases for the design of different teaching and learning materials for the corresponding students. Despite the fact that the needs of non-English majors have been taken into consideration worldwide, the language needs of English majors at the undergraduate level in nonnative contexts are not sufficiently taken into account due to the prevalent preconception that they have to know everything anyway (Kormos, Kontra, & Csolle, 2001).

Although majority of English major students start their academic studies while they are equipped with fair command of general English knowledge, some other students seriously lack in this regard. This fact refers to the inefficiency of the Specialized English University Entrance Examination as a placement test which can select among proficient and nonproficient applicants for English academic studies.

Provided that the future occupational opportunities of English major students are not restricted to any particular profession, the need for improvement of their general English abilities during their academic studies is recognized (Kormos et al., 2001). However, the improvement of these abilities is ignored partly due to the presumption that these students are adequately proficient in terms of general English knowledge when they start their academic studies.

To further complicate the issue, due to the fact that a scant attention has been paid to needs analysis in this context worldwide, it seems that course design and curriculum development in this regard have been based on the intuitions of administrators, course designers, and curriculum developers. Though vast financial and time investments have been devoted to curriculum and course design for these majors as the sole English academic studies in nonnative contexts, their efficiency is subject to question.

More specifically, neither the academic needs of Iranian English majors at the undergraduate level in general, nor those of English Language and Literature students as the most crowded English major at the undergraduate level in the Iranian context in particular have been taken into consideration to date. Given the significance of this major in general and the motivation of the students in particular, the course designers and curriculum developers should pay careful attention to the

needs of the above-mentioned students in order to improve the EAP programs as practiced for them accordingly.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

By adopting the learning-centered approach of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) to needs analysis, the primary objective of the current study is to determine the academic target and learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature as perceived by different stakeholders (i.e., undergraduate students, graduates, content instructors, and language instructors) in different Iranian state universities. These two types of needs as the focus of the present study should be considered as complimentary because target needs can just determine the destination but not the general direction which should be set by learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The secondary concern of this study is to compare the opinions of these four groups of stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the academic target and learning needs of the above-mentioned students to see whether or not they have similar views in this respect.

1.4 Research Questions

In line with the aims of current study, this investigation is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the target needs (i.e., necessities, lacks, and wants) of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature as perceived by different stakeholders (i.e., undergraduate students, recent graduates, content instructors, and language instructors)?

2. What are the learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature as perceived by different stakeholders (i.e., undergraduate students, recent graduates, content instructors, and language instructors)?

3. Is there any significant difference among the four groups of stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the target needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature?

4. Is there any significant difference among the four groups of stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Although some noticeable research has been conducted in the area of EAP needs analysis worldwide, a scant attention has been paid to EAP needs of English majors all over the world. To date, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no investigation has been conducted in the area of needs analysis of Iranian undergraduate students of English majors in general and those of English Language and Literature students in particular. Hence, it seems necessary to conduct needs analysis in this context due to the significance of doing so as a kind of prerequisite for the development of effective and focused course and curriculum design