



Kharazmi University

Department of English Language & Literature

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for M.A.

Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Title:

**Assessment of Academic English
Needs of Iranian Post-Graduate
Psychology Students**

Supervisor: Dr. Atai

Advisor: Dr. Babai

By: S. Yahya Hejazi

September 2013



بیجا

تاریخ:
کتابخانه:
پیداکننده:
واحد:

صورت جلسه دفاع از پایان نامه

با یاری خدای متعال جلسه دفاع از پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد آقای سید یحیی حجازی (۸۹۳۳۵۲۶۰۲) در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی تحت عنوان:
"ارزیابی نیازهای انگلیسی دانشجویان روانشناسی تحصیلات تکمیلی ایران"
عنوان انگلیسی:

Assessment of Academic English Needs of Iranian Post graduate Psychology Students.

باحضور هیات داوران در ساعت ۱۳:۰۰ مورخه ۱۳۹۲/۷/۶ در دانشگاه خوارزمی تشکیل شد. پس از ایراد خطابه دانشجو و پاسخگویی به سوال های حاضران، هیئت داوران با توجه به کیفیت و کمیت تحقیق و نحوه ارائه کتبی و شفاهی؛ «پایان نامه» نامبرده را با نمره ۱۹:۰۰ (نوزده تمام) و با درجه عالی پذیرفت.

۱- استاد راهنما: دکتر محمود رضا طائی

۲- استاد مشاور: دکتر عصمت بابایی

استادان داور:

۳- مدعو:

۴: داخلی: دکتر محمد نبی کریمی

مدیر گروه آموزشی

To my University Professors

&

School Teachers

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Atai who introduced me to the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In addition, I should thank him for both his meticulous care in reading my drafts and insightful comments on my thesis.

Moreover, I am extremely grateful to Dr. Babai for her constructive comments both during writing this M.A. thesis and in the “Seminar” course where she guided me in the right academic research route.

Besides, I would like to thank all Psychology post-graduate students, and EASP and content teachers from various universities who actively and eagerly participated in this study.

List of Abbreviations

BA: Bachelor of Arts

BSc: Bachelor of Science

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference

CNP: Communicative Needs Processor

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EGAP: English for General Specific Purposes

EIB: English for International Business

ELT: English Language Teaching

EOP: English for Occupational Purposes

ESAP: English for Specific Academic Purposes

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

GE: General English

GEP: General English Proficiency

MA: Master of Arts

MSc: Master of Science

NA: Needs Analysis

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

PSA: Present Situation Analysis

SAMT: (Persian Abbreviation for) Center for Studying and Compiling University Books in Humanities

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TSA: Target Situation Analysis

Table of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements	II
List of Abbreviations	III
List of Tables	VII
List of Figures.....	IX
Abstract.....	XI
Chapter One:.....	1
1.1. Statement of the Problem	3
1.2. Significance of the Study	5
1.3. Research Questions.....	6
1.4. Limitations and Delimitations.....	7
1.5. Definition of Key Terms	8
Chapter Two:	11
2.1. Overview	12
2.2. ESP Definitions.....	12
2.2.1. ESP Classifications.....	14
2.3. The origins of ESP	15
2.3.1. Politics	15
2.3.2. Linguistics	16
2.3.3. Learner.....	16
2.4. Different Approaches to ESP	17
2.4.1. Register Analysis.....	17
2.4.2. Discourse Analysis	18
2.4.3. Genre Analysis	19
2.4.4. Target Situation Analysis	19
2.4.5. Strategies Approach.....	21
2.4.6. Learning-Centered Approach.....	21
2.5. Needs Analysis.....	22
2.5.1. The Origins	23
2.5.2. Levels of Needs Analysis.....	23
2.5.3. Definitions of Needs	23
2.5.4. Sources of Needs Analysis Data	24
2.5.5. Types of Needs.....	25

2.5.5.1. Target Needs and Learning Needs.....	25
2.5.5.2. Objective and Subjective Needs.....	25
2.5.5.3. Felt Needs and Perceived Needs.....	26
2.6. Approaches to Needs Analysis	26
2.6.1. Target Situation Analysis (TSA).....	26
2.6.2. Present Situation Analysis (PSA).....	27
2.6.3. Strategy Analysis.....	27
2.6.4. Learning-Centered Approaches	27
2.6.5. Deficiency Analysis	28
2.6.6. Means Analysis.....	28
2.7. Methodology of Needs Analysis	29
2.7.1. Questionnaires.....	30
2.7.2. Interviews.....	30
2.7.3. Observation	31
2.7.4. Tests.....	31
2.7.5. Self-Assessment	31
2.7.6. Case Studies.....	32
2.7.7. Learners' Diaries/Journals.....	32
2.8. Steps in Conducting a Needs Analysis Project	32
2.9. ESP in Iran	34
2.10. Review of Empirical Research on Needs Analysis	35
2.10.1. Needs Analysis Studies Conducted Overseas	35
2.10.2. Needs Analysis in Iran	52
Chapter Three:.....	60
Methodology	60
3.1. Overview	61
3.2. Participants.....	61
3.3. Instrumentation.....	63
3.3.1. Questionnaire Design.....	63
3.3.1.1. Questionnaire for Post-Graduate Students	65
3.3.1.2. Questionnaire for ESAP Teachers.....	65
3.3.1.3. Questionnaire for Content Teachers	66
3.3.1.4. Pilot Study and Reliability	66
3.3.1.5. Validity.....	67
3.3.1.5.1. Factor Analysis.....	67
3.3.2. Interview Development.....	70

3.3.3. Non-Participant Observation.....	71
3.3.4. GEP Self-Assessment	71
3.4. Procedure.....	72
3.5. Design and Data Analysis.....	72
Chapter Four:.....	74
4.1. Overview	75
4.2. Restatement of the Problem	75
4.3. Questionnaire Results	76
4.3.1. Results of the Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire	76
4.3.2. Results of the ESAP Teachers' Questionnaire	90
4.3.3. Results of the Content Teachers' Questionnaire.....	105
4.4. Interview	110
5.4. Observation	116
4.6. Results of Kruskal Wallis Test for Research Question 3	117
4.7. Results of Mann-Whitney for Research Question 4.....	118
4.8. Results of the Chi-Square Test for Research Question 5	119
4.9. Discussion.....	121
Chapter Five:.....	129
5.1. Overview	130
5.2. Summary of Major Findings and Conclusions.....	130
5.3. Pedagogical Implications.....	132
5.4. Suggestions for Further Research	134
References.....	136
Appendices.....	148
Appendix A: Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire	149
Appendix B: ESAP Teachers' Questionnaire.....	156
Appendix C: Content Teachers' Questionnaire	163
Appendix D: Further Statistical Information for the 2 nd Part of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire	167
Appendix E: Further Statistical Information for the 4 th Part of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire	169
Appendix F: ESAP and Content Teachers' Semi-Structured Interview	171
Appendix H: Mean Ranks for Some Items in the 4 th section of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire	173

List of Tables

Table 3.1: A Profile of Post-Graduate Students	62
Table 3.2: A Profile of ESAP Teachers.....	62
Table 3.3: A Complete Profile of Content Teachers.....	63
Table 3.4: KMO and Bartlett's Test for the 2 nd Part of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire.....	68
Table 3.5: Rotated Component Matrix for the 2 nd Section of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire.....	68
Table 3.6: KMO and Bartlett's Test for the 2 nd part of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire.....	69
Table 3.7: Rotated Component Matrix for the 4 th Section of Post-Graduate Students' Questionnaire.....	70
Table 4.1: Results of the Post-Graduate Students' Perceptions about the Importance of Different Sub-Skills of the Four Major Language Skills.....	76
Table 4.2: Post-Graduate Students' Perceptions about Various GE- and ESP-Related Issues.....	81
Table 4.3: Students' Perceptions about Priorities in ESP Courses.....	83
Table 4.4: Results of the Post-Graduate Students' Perceptions about their Abilities in Performing Different Sub-Skills of the Four Major Language Skills.....	84
Table 4.5: Post-Graduate Students' Perceptions of their GEP Based on CEFR Levels.....	88
Table 4.6: Results of the ESAP teachers' Perceptions about the Importance of Different Sub-Skills of the Four Major Language Skills.....	90
Table 4.7: ESAP Teachers' Perceptions about Various GE- and ESP-Related Issues.....	95
Table 4.8: ESAP Teachers' Perceptions about Priorities in ESP Courses.....	97
Table 4.9: Results of the ESAP Teachers' Perceptions about Post-Graduate Students' Abilities in Performing Different Sub-Skills of the Four Major Language Skills.....	98
Table 4.10: ESAP Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' GEP Based on CEFR Levels.....	104
Table 4.11: Results of the Content Teachers' Perceptions about the Importance of Different Sub-Skills of the Four Major Language skills.....	105
Table 4.12: Content Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' GEP Based on CEFR Levels.....	110
Table 4.13: Results of Kruskal Wallis Test for Differences among Post-graduate Students', ESAP and Content Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' Target Academic English Needs: Ranks.....	118

Table 4.14: Results of Kruskal Wallis Test for Differences among Post-graduate Students', SAP and Content Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' Target Academic English Nee: Test Statistics^{ab}.....118

Table 4.15: Results of Mann-Whitney Test for Differences between Post-Graduate Students and ESAP Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' Present Level of Abilities: Ranks.....119

Table 4.16: Results of Mann-Whitney Test for Differences between Post-Graduate Students and ESAP Teachers' Perceptions of Post-Graduate Students' Present Level of Abilities: Test Statistics^a.....119

Table 4.17: Results of Chi-Square Test for Differences among Post-Graduates' Self-Assessment of their GEP, and ESAP and Content Teachers' Assessment: CEFR Level * Group Name Crosstabulation.....120

Table 4.18: Results of Chi-Square Test for Differences among Post-Graduates' Self-Assessment of their GEP, and ESAP and Content Teachers' Assessment: Chi-Square Tests.....121

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Types of ESP.....	15
-------------------------------	----

Abstract

Needs analysis, as an important phase in curriculum development and materials design, has not received considerable attention in current Iranian English for Academic Purposes (EAP) education system. As a result, most English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses have been designed based on intuitions (Atai & Shoja, 2011). To the knowledge of the present researcher, no systematic empirical study has been conducted to examine the EAP status in post-graduate degrees of Psychology in Iran. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the target academic English needs of post-graduate Psychology students, their abilities in performing different EAP tasks, their general English (GE) proficiency, and some other GE- and ESP-related issues from the perspectives of 343 post-graduate Psychology students studying in different branches of the field (selected through cluster sampling), and 13 ESP and 22 content teachers of the field (selected through convenience sampling) from 7 major Iranian universities. To this end, three versions of a researcher-made questionnaire (including a part for GE proficiency self-assessment), semi-structured interviews, and observations were used to triangulate data collected from different sources and by various methods. The results of descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and inferential statistics including Kruskal Wallis, Mann-Whitney, and Chi-Square tests indicated that all stakeholders believed different sub-skills of “writing”, “speaking”, “listening”, “reading”, “word meaning and dictionary use”, “grammar and vocabulary”, “research and presentation”, and “translation” are of paramount importance for students. In addition, most students, compared to their instructors, overestimated their abilities in most “writing”, “speaking”, and “reading and translation” and all “listening” and “dictionary use” sub-skills. However, students and ESP teachers shared the same perception that most students are fairly proficient in all “grammar and vocabulary” and most “reading and translation” sub-skills. Furthermore, GE self-assessments revealed most students are at “beginner”, “elementary”, and “intermediate”

levels, which is in line with ESAP and content teachers' judgments. Moreover, participants' views about the amount of ESP instruction at post-graduate levels, effectiveness of GE and ESP courses at BA, the ESP teacher, priorities in ESP courses, the language of important academic sources in Psychology, and major challenges of teaching and learning ESP in Iran were elicited. Finally, several major pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are presented.

Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an entirely practical field due to its especial interest in needs assessment, materials development, and planning suitable teaching methodologies (Dudley Evans, Foreword in Benesch, 2001). ESP prioritizes learners' prospective academic or professional future by developing relevant materials. As a result, ESP courses have proved to be more economic, in terms of time and money, than General English (GE) courses.

There is much consensus among second and foreign language researchers that learners have different needs based upon which they learn a language for different purposes (e.g., Hutchinson & Waters, 1993; Johns, 1991; Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Robinson, 1980; Strevens, 1977). Therefore, the practice of language teaching should be meticulously geared to students' needs and purposes (Brindley, 1989; Hutchinson & Waters, 1980; Widdowson, 1984). Strevens (1977) believes ESP should be employed where the context requires specific teaching for particular jobs, subjects, or purposes. As a result, ESP courses should be carefully tailored to the specific needs of the learners (McDonough, 1984; Widdowson, 1984).

Strevens (1977) advocates the significance of considering students' needs in course development. In addition, he thinks students' future success is highly dependent upon the relevance of courses to their needs. Hence, in curriculum development, meticulous care should be exercised to conduct needs analysis without which the whole process would be misleading and solely based on intuitions and perceptions. Holmes and Celani (2006) consider context-specific needs analysis of high importance since learner needs vary according to the target situation.

As a branch of ESP, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) mainly aims to teach English in order to enhance students' study skills and make them better researchers via English (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Hamp-Lyons (2001) maintains that EAP is an eclectic and pragmatic discipline because it is informed by a wide range of issues including classroom language, teaching methodology, teacher education, language assessment, needs analysis, materials development and evaluation, discourse analysis, acquisition studies in EAP contexts, etc. Carkin (2005) thinks "needs assessment of diverse learners in EAP underlies syllabus design, materials development, text selection, learning goals and tasks, and, ultimately, evaluation of students and course or program success" (p. 87). Needs analysis should be an ongoing process conducted both a priori and during the language courses (Robinson, 1991). Over their development, needs analysis studies have become far more sophisticated and to-the-point; in addition, they have employed different approaches as well as data collection methods (Hamp-Lyons, 2011).

It is noteworthy to point out EAP is a part of university curriculum in Iran (Atai, 2000). However, curriculum developers have entirely abandoned needs analysis and developed courses based on their own intuitions (Atai, 2002). There is dearth of research on academic English language needs of students in the Iranian context (Atai & Shoja, 2011), and as far as the present researcher is concerned, no serious study has been undertaken to assess academic English language needs of post-graduate Psychology students.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There are several steps in developing a curriculum among which needs analysis is very fundamental. In fact, needs analysis is the cornerstone for 'curriculum development', 'text design', and 'materials development' (Benesch, 1996; Benesch, 2001; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Johns, 1991; Johns & Dudley Evans, 1991; Long & Crookes, 1992). Johns (1991) emphasizes the importance of needs analysis by stating that it helps teachers to equip their

learners with necessary language for their present education and future jobs. Additionally, if needs analysis is not conducted, teachers as well as curriculum and materials developers would plan everything based on their intuitions (Benesch, 1996). Moreover, Jordan (1997) considers needs analysis as the “starting point for devising syllabuses, courses, materials, and the kind of teaching and learning which takes place”(p. 22).

Needs analysis is so important that it should be considered as the first step in developing a curriculum. It is very clear that whenever it is neglected, the result would be a mismatch between students’ and curriculum developers’ perceptions regarding students’ real needs. A curriculum designed based upon the needs and interests of the learners can establish a strong foundation for instruction (Berwick, 1989 as cited in Kaewept, 2009)

EAP is experiencing its growth in the context of Iran, and its related courses have been incorporated to university curricula for all academic disciplines (Atai, 2000). In addition, all students should take one to three EAP courses (Atai and Tahririan, 2003). However, English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) has been generally developed based on intuition in the Iranian context (Atai & Shoja, 2011) without any systematic and coherent curriculum planning (Atai, 2002). Atai (ibid) believes that EAP instruction in Iran has been experiencing its third movement since 1994. He describes the whole situation as intuitively determined to train autonomous readers who will be able to use different textbooks and journals related to their fields of study (ibid). In the same article, he also maintains that no coherent systematic needs assessment has been conducted in the current Iranian EAP field. Atai and Tahririan (2003) believe that the main objective of the current EAP programs in Iran is “to bridge the gap between the learners’ general English reading competence and their ability to read their discipline-based texts” (p. 269).

In one hand, goals seem too broad and more investigation is required to identify real academic needs of ESP courses in Iran's higher education system (Atai, 2002). In the other hand, the goals that have been stated by educational authorities in Iran have not been met in current ESP programs (ibid).

The available literature regarding the present state of EAP programs in Iran shows the educational system has failed to improve students' language abilities (Atai, 2000; Atai and Tahririan, 2003). "Given the significance of EAP programs in Iran as a major part of English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum with noticeable educational and financial investments" (Atai and Nazari, 2011, p. 32), much more attention should be paid to needs analysis so as to design more to-the-point courses.

Since "every academic situation presents a different set of hierarchical and sometimes contradictory needs" (Benesch, 1996, p. 726), language needs as well as wants of students in a particular field should be different at BA, MA, and PhD levels. For instance, in the field of Psychology, while BA students can survive with basic reading skills, MA and PhD students are required to read more extensively and sometimes write in English as well. Since, as far as the present researcher searched, no graded textbooks for these three major levels are available in Iran, the issue gets more complicated. On one hand, most Psychology students are not fully aware of their language needs both for their present degree and for their higher level studies; on the other hand, there are apparently not enough informed, up-to-date, and comprehensive textbooks for them.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Since EAP is becoming increasingly preoccupied with syllabus design, materials development, and pedagogy (Benesch, 2001), more attention should be drawn to the

particular context in which learners will be using EAP. In other words, mere superficial attention to vocabulary and genres could not be considered adequate.

According to Brown (1995), more specific and attainable goals can be determined when the needs of learners are specified. The obtained information from needs analyses can be used to identify pedagogic purposes and design materials, teaching activities, and tests. In order to establish a fruitful educational setting, identifying learners' needs through needs analyses and designing the curricula accordingly is highly important.

Considering all the aforementioned points and reviewing nearly all the available ESP books for Psychology in the Iranian market, the researcher found no suitable versatile ESP book covering all four language skills in the field; almost all of them lack actual academic writing exercises/tasks as well as audio parts. Moreover, for post-graduate Psychology degrees in Iran, there has been a paucity of research in identifying students' the English language needs of the students. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the needs of post-graduate Psychology students in the Iranian context by taking into account students', ESAP as well as content teachers' perceptions. In addition, the present status of post-graduate students' abilities will be explored.

Finally, by undertaking this needs assessment, valuable and detailed guidance will be provided to inform policy makers, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, teachers, and students.

1.3. Research Questions

The present study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1- What are the academic English language needs of post-graduate Psychology students from the perspective of the ESAP and content teachers as well as the students themselves?