In the Name of God

the Compassionate the Merciful

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M.A. Thesis

A needs analysis of ESP courses for the students of Arabic Language in Iran: Professors ' perspectives in focus

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Abstract

The present study intends to provide a profile of the ESP needs of the students of Arabic language at three levels of BA, MA and PhD, along with the ideas of Arabic language professors in this regard. 77 BA, 35 MA, 8 PhD students and 7 Arabic instructors participated in this study. They were all given questionnaires but some of them were interviewed as well on the degree and form of the needs of Arabic language students in the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As expected the needs of Arabic language students of students differed greatly passing from undergraduate level to post graduate one especially at PhD level. Contrary to PhD students, BA ones did not have a clear and realistic view of their ESP needs; it was determined that BA students believed more or less in a blend of all four skills to be focused on in their ESP courses. The majority MA students did not regard any of the four skills as the most vital for their major; PhD students regarded listening and reading as the two most important skills for them. The results of both questionnaires and interviews indicated that the only area which Arabic professors in majority regarded as important was reading; and the students more or less at all levels may face situations where a least knowledge of Reading skill may be of a great help to them.

Keywords: ESP, Needs analysis, BA, MA, PhD.

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List of abbreviations

ESP	English for Specific Purposes
SPSS	Statistical Package for social sciences
Q	Question
N	Number
SD	Standard Deviation
RQ	Research Question
CAN	Communicative Needs Analysis
LSA	Learning Situation Analysis
MA	Means Analysis
NA	Needs Analysis
EBP	English for Business Purpose
EV	English for Vocational Purpose
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
EGP	English for General Purposes
EST	English for Science and Technology
EOP	English for Occupational Purpose
EAP	English for Academic Purpose
EGP	English for General Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
PSA	Present Situation Analysis
TSA	Target Situation Analysis
LN	Learning Needs
ELT	English Language Teaching

Chapter One:
Introduction

1.1. Overview

This chapter comprises several sections as follows: overview, ESP, essential characteristics of ESP, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study and implications, purpose of the study, definition of key terms, and an outline and organization of the study.

1.2. Theoretical framework

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that "all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reasons for learning"(p.19). They believe that ESP courses should not be merely based on the target objectives without taking the learning situation into account. They say that the target situation does not solve any problem, if we do not focus on the conditions under which the students are learning the language, such as the learners' knowledge, skills, strategies, and also their motivation for learning. Thus, it seems that the best

existing framework to base the present work on is the one proposed by these scholars known as 'learning-centered approach'.

1.3. ESP

Several events gave rise to the emergence and development of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) as a key to the future success of all practitioners in different fields of knowledge and also as one of the major areas of research in English Language Teaching/Learning.

The shift of interest in linguistics from a highly abstract view to the one which considers language as a socio-contextual and communicative activity is one of them. (e.g. Hymes, 1967; Allen and Widdowson, 1974; Halliday, 1978).Further, the new view to education and humanistic psychology put more emphasis on the learner ' s attitudes and motivation as significant and highly influential in the learning process. Such drastic changes in major branches of Humanities lead to the formation of ESP as a lively and dynamic area of ELT with many helpful sub branches as , EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes),critical ESP etc.

According to Dudley-Evans (2001) the absolute characteristics of ESP are:

- ESP is designed to meet the specific needs of the learners.
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the specialism it serves.
- It is centered not only on the language (grammar, lexis, register), but also the skills, discourses and genres appropriate to those activities.

For Dudley-Evans (2001) the defining characteristic of ESP is that teaching and materials are based on the results of a needs analysis. The key questions are:

- What do students need to do with English?
- Which of the skills do they need to master and how well?
- Which genres do they need to master either for comprehension or production purposes?

ESP has become increasingly important as:

- There has been an increase in vocational training and learning throughout the world.
- With the spread of globalization has come the increasing use of English as the language of international communication. More and more people are using English in a growing number of occupational contexts.
- Students are starting to learn and therefore master general English at a younger age and so move on to ESP at an earlier age.

1.4. Essential characteristics of ESP

According to Robinson (1991) ESP courses have to have some characteristics in order to be distinguished from other English courses, although one may find ESP courses which do not adopt these criteria.

First, such courses are goal- oriented (p.2) which means they are learned not because of an interest in language or culture but for some study or work purposes. This in turn affects the process and content of an ESP class to be distinguished from others; the material to be included and introduced, the topics, types of activities, and even the way evaluation is performed, all will be at the service of an established goal.

The second and more important characteristic of ESP courses is the axial role of needs analysis. This one is at the service of the first one, that is, an ESP course in order to be goal-oriented has to be based on a close analysis of the future needs. According to Robinson, such needs nowadays include more than target needs; they also should focus on the students' immediate needs as learning needs.(p. 3).

Robinson then goes through some other features as less essential which may or may not appear in an ESP course, such as a clearly specified time period; that the participants are adults rather than children; and that the class is homogeneous, which means the participants have the same kind of work or specialist studies.

1.5. Statement of the problem

No one could ignore the importance of English as an international language and as being highly influential in today's global village, where any type of communication including scientific one demands a least knowledge of English language. This, in turn emphasizes the necessity of ESP courses for different fields of study; in order for the students to be able to share their knowledge and have mutual and constant communication with all people in their field around the world. Thus, ESP is nowadays one of the most dynamic and research-sensitive areas of ELT with sound theoretical foundations.

According to Robinson (1991): " it (ESP) is an enterprise involving education, training and practice, and drawing upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy, and the students' practitioners' specialist areas of interest."(p.1) As Ken Hyland (2006) argues in his introduction to English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book, in recent decades EAP has turned into a major force in English language teaching and has grown into a significant area of academic research.

On the other hand, Arabic is a language spoken by about 280 million people as a first language, most of whom live in the Middle East and North Africa, and by 250 million more as a second language (available at http://holybiblefoundation.org/home/arabic-smith-vandyke-version). Thus, it can be referred to as a semi-lingua Franca in different parts of the world and the language of commerce and business. The geographical location of Iran, on the one hand, as a country surrounded by Arab countries on west and south border lines and the constitution of Iran which have integrated Arabic language into the curriculums for religious reasons, on the other, has highlighted the need to learn this language and this, in turn, well-justifies its integration into educational curriculum of Iranian ministry of education.

ESP courses in universities of Iran, as in other academic places around the world, are included in the curricula as a major course and Arabic language majors make no exception. It is introduced for BA students, usually in the form

of a four credit course which is taught after the students have passed their general English course.

However, informal observations and interviews show that the majority of BA students and professors regard this major, Arabic language, as independent and self-sufficient, and that unlike the other fields of study such as chemistry, physics, engineering, etc, this major does not need a second language for communicating the information in the field. That is, those who are to talk about different topics as syntax and inflection, Arabic literature, rhetoric etc are supposed to have a least knowledge of Arabic for communication and this in turn satisfies the need to know a second language for communication.

On the other hand, some PhD students of Arabic language seem to have a totally different view as to the degree of importance of English in their academic studies. They believe that despite the fact that Arabic is nowadays one of the liveliest languages, still nearly all new researches on this language and its literature are done and introduced in English and the needs of the students in this major is not less than other fields, if not more. Thus, it seems that there is an urgent need to evaluate the 'why' and 'how' of ESP courses in this field of study.

1.6. Research questions

This study was designed to address the following questions:

RQ1: What are the ESP needs of students of Arabic language at the three levels of BA, MA, and PhD? Do their needs and perspectives vary with regard to their levels?

RQ2: What are the attitudes of Arabic Language Professors towards this issue?

1.7. Significance of the study

Although much research has been done in the area of ESP, and the related issues such as methodology, syllabus design, evaluation etc. for different fields of study, Arabic seems to be ignored by the researchers in this regard. Moreover, the present study adopts a rather new perspective to the issue, as it intends to collect and analyze the opinions of different levels of Arabic students, i.e. BA, MA. and PhD, students along with those of Arabic instructors ; as to know to what extent they see English necessary for their major and how this need is realized in practice, i.e. running a needs analysis.

English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching involves teaching English with particular attention to a certain area, for example, business, tourism, medicine, the law or engineering. Almost every field has its own "jargon" or specialized words and phrases used in the course of everyday work. For certain fields, however, such as business, medicine, and various scientific and technical fields, this jargon can be both much more complicated and complex as well as extremely important for clarity and sometimes even safety. In international business, clear and effective communication can be the key to obtaining and retaining important clients or vendors, and because English is so widespread, it is becoming more and more important for business people and others to learn English in order to compete in the global market.

1.8. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a needs analysis for Iranian students of Arabic language and thus determine the type and degree of these students' needs- specifically the four macro skills, i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing-at three levels of BA, MA, and PhD, along with the opinions and perspectives of the Arabic Language Professors in this regard.

1.9. Definition of key terms

English for specific purposes (ESP): An approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reasons for learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Needs analysis (NA): needs assessment process can be used as the basis for developing curricula and classroom practices that are responsive to these (Badre, 2005). Richards, Platt J., and Platt H. (1992, pp. 242 & 243) state that NA is 'the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities.'

Present situation analysis (PSA): concerns about the starting point in the ESP process which cares about what the students know and can do with language in the beginning of the course. It is the well known Munby's influential approach and model which focuses on the learner's needs at the end of the course and target level performance. (Jordan, 1997: 23)

Target situation analysis (TSA): Richterich and Chancerel (1980) propose a PSA which focuses on the learners' competence concerning skills and language at the beginning of the course. (Jordan, 1997: 24)

Learning needs (LN): The demands of the target situation where students are supposed to have specific skills and which form a basis for teaching. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

1.10. Outline and organization of the study

This thesis is organized in five chapters:

Chapter one: Introduction which includes theoretical framework, research questions, significance of the study and definition of key terms.

Chapter two: Literature review where the definitions and different classifications of ESP are presented.

Chapter three: Methods and design of this study, providing information on participants, instruments used and procedures adopted in collecting data.