

149-121 v

W

In the Name of God

100 NV 0



Tarbiat Moalem University

English Department

**An Evaluation of Writing Courses for Iranian
EBP Students**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN TEFL**

۱۳۸۰/۲/۴

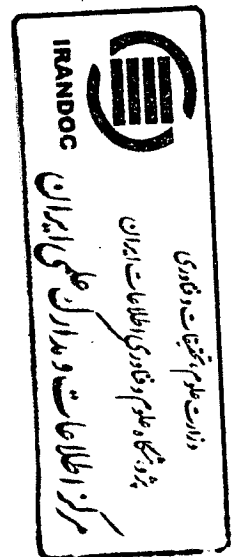
Supervisor: Dr. M. H. Keshavarz

Advisor: Dr. M. R. Atai

By:

Leila Nouri Khabazi

September 2007



۱۵۵۸۷۵

Tarbiat Moalem University

English Department

**We clarify that the thesis entitled "An Evaluation
of Writing Courses for Iranian EBP Students" by
Leila Nouri Khabazi is accepted as partial
fulfillment of M.A. degree in TEFL**

Supervisor: Dr. M. H. Keshavarz

M. H. Keshavarz

Advisor: Dr. M. R. Atai

M. R. Atai

Head of English Department: Dr. M. R. Atai

M. R. Atai

September 2007

Dedicated to:

My mother and father

&

My supportive husband

Acknowledgements

I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude my deepest appreciation and greatest debt to Dr. Keshavarz, my supervisor, for all the help he has devoted to this work and for his invaluable advice and constant sacrifice of time and energy in reading and correcting this work. My heartfelt thanks also go to Dr. Atai for his patience and providing me with his scholarly and invaluable comments, guidelines, and suggestions during all phases of the study without which the completion of this work would not have been possible.

Heartfelt thanks are also expressed to Dr. Babaii and Dr. Annani for their invaluable guidelines and proofreading my thesis.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Hassani, head of the education department of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Marzband, Mr. Soheili, Ms. Bazargan, Mr. Shahin, Mr. Sharifi, Mr. Farahani, and the students of the department of English languages in Iran's Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce who partially helped me with the data collection phase of the study.

Last, but not least, there are my family and my best friends (Elham Kermani, Sahar Farhadi) to whom I am grateful. My heartfelt thanks go to my brother Alireza who helped me in all phases of the data collection procedure.

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to find out the effectiveness of writing courses for business in the English department of Iranian Chamber of Commerce. A further concern of this study was to explore the frequent Target Language Needs of Iranian students who enrolled in writing courses for business purposes in two institutes offered by Iran's Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce.

The subjects participating in this study were 140 Iranian adult students taking part in writing for business courses in two institutes namely, Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce English departments. The instruments applied in this study included a General English Proficiency Test which was applied to investigate the homogeneity of the participants and a teacher-made test of writing was employed at pre-test and post-test phases. The tests were developed based on a systematic needs analysis of the writing samples from the target language based on the interview and Commercial Correspondence books available in the market. A questionnaire was also used in the study aimed at assessing the needs of the students and those needs of the target situation. The questionnaire was answered by 140 participants registered in writing English for Business courses in the English department of Ministry of Commerce (which included many pre-experienced and job-experienced learners and employees of the same ministry), and English department of Iran's Chamber of Commerce in Tehran. The students also answered questions based on their target situation needs on a likert scale from very important to not important at all. From the findings it became evident that some topics like writing 'letters of insurance', 'transportation and shipping', 'agents and agencies', 'enquiry letters', and 'reply letters to enquiries' were perceived to be very important for the participants. 'Mastery in grammar' was perceived not important at all for 56.7% of the students and writing general

official and non-official letters were perceived not important at all for about one-third of the population.

In order to investigate the participants' improvement in writing skill and study the success of the course offered by Iran's Chamber of Commerce, participants were tested twice, both at the beginning and at the end of the courses to examine if there had been any improvements and if yes to what extent.

Comparing the achievement of the participants, it became evident that although the scores indicated some improvements, the improvement was minimal and did not mean that the program was successful in the instruction of writing for business.

Table of Contents

Dedication	II
Acknowledgements	III
Abstract	IV
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Overview	2
1.2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study	3
1.3. Significance and Justification of the Study	4
1.4. Research Questions and Hypothesis	4
1.5. Definition of Key Terms	5
1.6. Limitations of the Study	8
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
2.1. Overview:	10
2.2. English for Specific Purposes:	10
2.2.1. Development of ESP	13
2.2.2. The concept of need – the target situation needs analysis approach	15
2.3. English for Occupational Purposes	17
2.3.1. Writing and EOP	18
2.4. English for Business Purposes	19
2.4.1. Characteristic Features of Business English	20
2.5. Skills and Communicative Events in EBP	22
2.6. Teaching of Writing in Business English	23
2.7. The Role of Needs Analysis in Business English	24
	VI

2.8. ESP Program evaluation	26
2.8.1. What is Evaluation?	26
2.8.2. Approaches to Program Evaluation	27
2.8.3. Formative and summative evaluation	28
2.8.4. Evaluation Instrumentations	29
2.9. ESP in Iran	30
2.10. Empirical Studies of Iranian ESP Program Evaluation	32
2.10.1. Assessment of the Status of ESP in the Iranian Higher Education System	32
2.10.2. Evaluation of Writing Courses for Tour Managers Held by Iran-touring and Tourism Organization	33
2.11. Empirical Studies of International EBP	34
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	39
3.1. Overview	40
3.2. Participants	40
3.3. Pilot Study	41
3.4. Instrumentations	42
3.4.1. Structured Interview	42
3.4.2. The Questionnaire	42
3.4.3. The General English Proficiency Test	43
3.4.4. The Teacher-made Test of writing	44
3.5. Procedure	45
3.6. Design and Data Analysis	45
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	47

4.1. Overview and Restatement of the Questions:	48
4.2. Results of the Questionnaire:	48
4.2.1. Reliability of the questionnaire	50
4.3. Correlation study	50
4.3.1. Correlation Between Experts and English Teachers Opinions on the Questionnaire	50
4.3.2. Inter rater Correlation- Pretest and Posttest	51
4.3.3.GEP Pre-Test Post-Test Correlation	52
4.4.T-test	53
4.5.Results	53
4.5.1. T-test	54
4.5.2. The Questionnaire	54
4.5.3. Observation	57
4.5.4. Interview	59
4.6. Discussion	61
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER	
RESEARCH	65
5.1. Summary and Conclusion	66
5.2. Pedagogical Implications	69
5.3. Suggestions for further research	70
REFERENCES	71
APPENDICES	78
Appendix (1): Structured Interview (Content Teacher)	79
Appendix (2): The EBP Students' Questionnaire	80

Appendix (3): Pretest of Writing	83
Appendix (4): Posttest of Writing	84
Appendix (5): General English Proficiency Test	85
List of Tables	
Table 4.1. Frequency Table for the ESBP Students' Questionnaire	49
Table 4.2. Correlation between Experts' and English Teachers' Opinions on the Questionnaire	50
Table 4.3. Inter-rater Correlation for the Pretest and Posttest	52
Table 4.4. Correlation between Pretest & Posttest and the GEP Test	52
Table 4.5. Paired Sample T-test Results for Pretest and Posttest	53

Chapter I:
Introduction

1.1.Overview

Many students need a foreign language as a medium in their work. According to Dudley Evans and St John (1998), English has become the international language of business. They declare that English for Business Purposes/ Business English (EBP/BE) is nowadays the area of greatest activity and growth in ESP. Recent political and economic changes have meant that more and more company employees or their managers are asking for English courses which directly address their needs. These so-called Business English courses are becoming more and more popular amongst working adults, who often choose them in preference to General English classes offered by the same language school (Donna, 2000). Business English is special because of the opportunity it gives the students to fulfill their immediate needs for English. Therefore, the purpose of a business English course is to fulfill students' work related needs.

It is very important to start the course-developing process with an analysis of the target group of students: many problems in L2 classes are a result of teachers not paying attention to learners' interests and ignoring students as a source of essential information. With the spread of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), much emphasis in second language (L2) methodology has been paid to the learner-oriented instruction. As a result, needs analysis has been given considerable attention in making a particular course serve a particular group's interests (Graves, 1996; Harrison, 1996; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). "However, students can provide much more valuable information for teachers than an expression of their needs, therefore, a better term than needs analysis might be students' analysis." (Sysoyev, 1999, p. 10).

Evaluation procedures comprise an essential component of any curriculum development project and should be used to "inform decisions about language programs" (Lynch, 1996, p. 175). As discussed by Brown (1989), "they provide for assessment of the effectiveness of the

current language program as well as for guiding subsequent improvements” (p. 223). These programs account for the purpose of providing reliable feedback to educational planners, sponsors, and instructors (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

This study is an attempt to identify the effectiveness of the ESP writing courses offered by Iran’s Chamber of Commerce. Through this study it will be investigated if the present program is meeting the students’ workplace and target language needs or not. Furthermore, this study finds out some target situation needs of Iranian ESBP students participated in the English departments of Iran’s Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce during the summer semester of 2007.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Evaluation in ESP is related to the effectiveness and efficiency of learning to achieve the objectives. It is said to be an integral part of a course design (Hutchinson & Waters 1987).

Different courses in English for Specific Business Purposes are conducted in the English language departments of Iran’s Ministry of Commerce (MOC) and Chamber of Commerce (COC). These courses are oriented towards pre-experienced and job-experienced learners. Most of the students enroll in these courses in order to gain familiarity with the language of business since they need to perform the specific language in the workplace and target language. Therefore, the courses are very critical for them since in the case of business they need to learn the target language as much as possible to meet their target needs in the workplace. Furthermore, due to their shortage of time they experience in the quick and fast world of today’s business, they need efficient instructions. The writing courses focus broadly on writing commercial letters.

The students need to perform in the target situation so it is obvious that the students and ESP teachers need to interfere in the course design. This study is set out to evaluate the effectiveness

of ESBP writing courses designed by COC for training special business people to succeed in commercial correspondence in the target situation.

1.3. Significance and Justification of the Study

With regard to the fact that no single systematic research in the area of ESBP in Iran has addressed the ESBP students' needs considering their level of General English Proficiency, ESBP teachers and specialists, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and any businesses which need English for international trades and communications can benefit from the results of this study.

The objectives of these courses as determined through a needs analysis will let us know if the present program met what they were supposed to or not. It will be investigated here that whether the implementation of these courses in the current form is justified or not. Is the course really meeting all the objectives it is designed for? As a program evaluation, the present study helps gain direction for improving the courses and as a matter of fact describing the program in details through observations and surveying the teachers and students view of the Target Language Use.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypothesis

The study will attempt to the following questions:

1. What are the frequent expectations and the writing needs of Iranian ESBP students of Commercial Correspondence to function effectively in job markets in the future?

2. Does the current writing program for the EBP students in Iran's Chamber of Commerce department of English reflect the specific writing needs required at the students' workplace?

Based on the above mentioned questions, the following null hypothesis for the second question is resulted:

H0.- The current writing program for the EBP students does not reflect the specific writing needs required at the workplace.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as defined in Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (1992), is the role of English in a language course or program of instruction in which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners. For example, courses in English for Academic Purposes, English for Science and Technology, and English for Nursing.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is known as a learner-centered approach to teaching English as a foreign or second language. It meets the needs of mostly adult learners who need to learn a foreign language for use in their specific fields, such as science, technology, and medicine.

According to Jordan (1997), ESP involves the teaching of the language and skills associated with a range of disciplines or a discipline. But Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as :

“an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are base on the learners' reason for learning”. (p. 19)

Hutchinson and Waters (ibid) see ESP as an approach rather than product, suggesting that foundation of ESP is the question of 'why these learners need to learn English'.

English for Business Purposes (EBP): a clear definition of what constitutes Business English can be problematic. According to St John (1996) Business English encompasses English for General Business Purposes and English for Specific Business Purposes. Pickett (as cited in St John, 1989, p. 55) defines Business English as a "mediating language" between general English and technical Business English.

According to Donna (2000), Business English has much in common with General EFL, but in many ways is very different since the aim of a course may be quite radically different from those of a General English course. Aims- whether broad or narrow for a particular course will always relate to students' work. So this will mean developing generalized business skills (such as giving presentations), and sometimes it will mean something much more technical or academic (if the students' work is highly specialized, or if the students need to learn how to take notes and participate in meetings or prepare for a training course conducted in English).

Dudley-Evans and Johns (1998) state that EBP can be divided into English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP). English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) courses are usually for pre-experienced learners or those at the very early stages of their business context. They are similar to general EFL courses with the materials set in business contexts. In contrast, English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) courses are for job-experienced learners who bring the business knowledge and skills to the language learning situation.

Evaluation: Wer & Roberts (as cited in Jordan, 1997) define the purpose of evaluation “to collect information systematically in order to indicate the worth or merit of a program or project... and to inform decision makers.” (p. 85)

Brown (as cited in Jordan, 1989) defines evaluation as “the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency as well as the participants’ attitudes within the context of the particular institutions involved.” (p. 223)

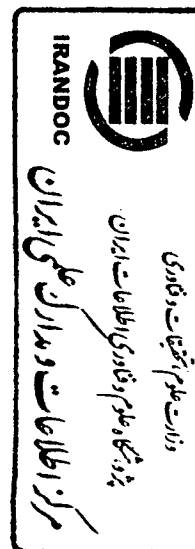
This term is defined in Longman Dictionary of Language and Applied Linguistics (p.130) as: “in general, the systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision making.” Evaluation uses quantitative methods (e.g. tests), qualitative methods (e.g. observations, ratings) and value judgments. In language planning, evaluation frequently involves gathering information on patterns of language use, language ability, and attitudes towards language. In language teaching programs, evaluation is related to decisions to be made about the quality of the programs itself, and decisions about individuals in the programs. The evaluation programs may involve the study of curriculum, objectives materials and tests or grading systems. The evaluation of the individuals involves decisions about entrance to programs, placement progress, and achievement. In evaluating both programs and individuals, tests and other measures are frequently used.

Writing skill: Nunan (1992) defines writing by explaining the approaches to it. “product-oriented” approaches focus on the final product, the coherent, error free text. “process-oriented” approaches, on the other hand, focus on the steps involved in drafting and redrafting a piece of work. Proponents of process writing recognize and accept the reality that there will never be the

perfect text, but that one can get closer to perfection through producing, reflecting on, discussing, and reworking successive drafts of texts.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

- Although both male and female students took part in this study, the majority of them (about 60%) were females, and the sex factor was not of concern.
- The number of subjects was limited because of the nature of the ESBP writing courses in comparison with that of EGP or EAP courses which attract a lot more of the students each semester.
- The subjects of the study were both pre-experienced learners and job-experienced learners and it was not possible to distinguish the two groups and study them separately.
- With regard to participants only students of intermediate level of proficiency were selected for the study.
- Since the aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of ESBP writing courses, most of the authorities refused to cooperate with the researcher and only one institute accepted to cooperate.
- The researcher was the only person who could observe the classes throughout the semester and the results of the observation were investigated based on what the researcher had seen. No one could cooperate to observe at least 10 sessions.



Chapter II:

Review of Literature