Developing a Profile of the Learning Needs of Iranian Undergraduate Students of English Language and Literature

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Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the academic learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature from the perspective of 320 stakeholders including undergraduate students (n=252), graduates (n=51), English literature instructors (n=7), and language instructors (n = 10). To this aim, a triangulation of the most important data collection instruments of needs analysis (i.e., questionnaires, class observations, and semistructured interviews) was adopted for data collection at eight different Iranian state universities. The results of data analysis revealed that the above-mentioned students are not adequately equipped with learning and communication strategies during their academic and pre-academic studies. The results of the current study may promise implications for the provision of some extracurricular EFL courses at the tertiary and senior high school levels in order to enhance students' sociocultural and strategic competence based on the shared decision-making process among different stakeholders in the course design community.

Keywords: English Majors, Graduates, Instructors, Learning Needs, Undergraduate Students

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1. Introduction

The diversity of the needs of EFL learners has long been acknowledged throughout the history of needs analysis literature. The recognition of these needs along with the importance of accountability in language education accompanied by the vast spread of information in the present century has 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 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).

The significance of identification of learner needs and the evolving history of needs analysis have led to the development of different approaches to this phenomenon namely, the sociolinguistic model, the systemic approach, the learning-centred approach and the task-based approach. One of these well-supported approaches is the learning-centred approach as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which as its name indicates, focuses on how learners learn the target language or what they require in order to learn it effectively.

According to the learning-centred approaches to language teaching, learners and their needs, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, background knowledge, learning strategies and styles, motivation, perceived difficulties, and expectations towards the target language learning should be taken into consideration in an attempt to develop effective course design and materials development (Kaewpet, 2009). When learners' context-specific needs are determined with great precision, they can inform appropriate teaching materials and methodologies accordingly (Basturkmen, 2006, 2010; Benesch,

2001; Vandermeeren, 2005). In this sense, needs analysis is valuable not only for learners' language instruction but also for language teachers' training (Long, 2005; Lytle, 1988; Vandermeeren, 2005).

Due to the significance of accountability considerations in the field of ELT as well as the desire to specify learner needs in ESP/EAP programs in a precise manner, many researchers have conducted needs analysis studies worldwide in general and in Iran in particular. For instance, Kavaliauskiene and Uzpaliene (2003) explored the academic English needs of Law students in order to adjust the curriculum of ESP courses accordingly. The results of the study revealed that the students primarily needed English for fluent oral communication, personal development, and improving their vocabulary, grammar, listening, and writing. In addition, the students reported their preference for more intensive English classes in which there are opportunities for group activities under the teacher's guidance.

Xiao (2007) explored the learning needs of Chinese English major undergraduates and graduates. The results revealed that while a good majority of the students mainly preferred group work and small discussion groups in their English classes, they held negative attitudes regarding class participation and hence preferred to be silent unless being asked to answer. The reasons that they gave for doing so were their own perceptions of being mentally active in the classroom, being afraid of making mistakes, focusing on accuracy rather than fluency in speaking, accepting teachers' authority, or uninteresting and unchallenging questions raised in their classes. Furthermore, they admitted their preference for student-centred classes, English culture learning as well as an occasional use of the first language (L1) in English literature classes. On the other hand, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the present decontextualized teaching methodologies, their learning styles, few English

speaking opportunities, inadequate linguistic knowledge, and ineffective textbooks for EFL and culture learning, and uncertainties regarding their future occupations which had subsequently led to the decline of their motivation. Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) examined the foreign language learning needs, lacks, and wants of undergraduate Iranian students of Medical Sciences. The results revealed that most of the students attached a great importance to the improvement of their English proficiency skills in general and particularly their four language skills as reading followed by listening, speaking, and writing in order to make them ready for their specialized courses. Furthermore, they expressed their dissatisfaction with a large number of students in ESP classes, inadequate number of ESP courses, inefficient teaching methodologies, and evaluation methods, the limited amount of foreign culture taught in ESP classes as well as ineffective textbooks.

The significance of the current study stems from the concern echoed by Basturkmen (2010) that it is the responsibility of course designers to exactly identify learners' needs in terms of the tasks, skills, language, and behaviours which are required by their present or future target situations.

However, the language needs of English majors at the undergraduate level in nonnative contexts as typical EFL learners 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 these students start their academic studies while they are equipped with fair command of general English knowledge, some other students seriously lack sufficient knowledge to tackle their courses. 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. To further complicate the issue, due to the fact that little

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.

Most importantly, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has been conducted yet to examine the academic learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature as perceived by different stakeholders in different Iranian state universities. In order to fill this serious gap, the current study aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the academic learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature?
2. Is there any significant difference between the views of different stakeholders regarding the learning needs of the above-mentioned students?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Four groups of 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 took part in the questionnaire phase of the current study. On the whole, a good majority of the participants (71.9%, n=230) were females and the remaining 28.1% (n=90) were males. Most of the undergraduate students who participated in the present study were between an age range of 18-22 years (66.1%), 23-27 years (28.6%), and the remaining 5.3% were more than 28 years old. They

included sophomores (44.8%, *n*=113), juniors (26.6%, *n*=67), and senior students (28.6%, *n*=72). Freshmen were excluded from this study since they were obviously incapable of recognizing their academic learning needs (Deutch, 2003). Besides, some graduates of the four previous academic years of 2009-2012 who were between an age range of 23-27 years (*n*=46) and more than 28 years (*n*=5) comprised the participants of this study.

Table 1 offers an overview of the distribution of the participants of this investigation.

Table 1. ***A Profile of the Participants of the Needs Analysis Questionnaires***

University	Undergraduate students	Graduates	English literature instructors	English language instructors	Total
Yazd	123	31	2	4	160
Shahid Beheshti	63	-	1	2	66
Isfahan	43	3	3	1	50
Tehran	21	3	1	2	27
Urmia	2	5	-	1	8
Rafsanjan	-	5	-	-	5
Kerman	-	2	-	-	2
Shiraz	-	2	-	-	2
Total	252	51	7	10	320

With regard to the interview phase of the study, a total number of 58 stakeholders (i.e., 32 undergraduate students, 20 graduate students, three content instructors, and three language instructors) were interviewed at the English Department of Yazd University, Iran.

Table 2 offers a list of the stakeholders who participated in the semistructured interviews.

Table 2.*Distribution of the Participants of the Semistructured Interviews*

University	Status									Total
	Undergraduate students			Graduates				Instructors		
	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	of the year 2012	of the year 2011	of the year 2010	of the year 2009	English literature	English language	
Yazd	13	4	15	2	9	2	4	3	3	54
Shiraz	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
Rafsanjan	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Total	32			20				6		58

2.2. Instrumentation

A triangulation of both research methods and sources was utilized in a carefully sequenced manner in order to obtain more efficient information in terms of both quality and quantity (Long, 2005). Most importantly, the present study utilized both quantitative instruments (i.e., questionnaires) and qualitative measures (i.e., semistructured interviews and class observations) in order to enhance the reliability of the interpretation of its findings.

Based on the results of some exploratory interviews with a group of the representative stakeholders at Yazd University and Shahid Beheshti University, Iran, along with the findings of class observations as well as the literature survey on needs analysis, a needs analysis questionnaire was developed. The resulting questionnaire was piloted on a total number of 13 stakeholders at Yazd University and Shahid Beheshti University, Iran. Subsequently, according to the obtained feedback as well as consultations with some experts in the field of needs analysis along with a content instructor, the number of the items was reduced and the final versions of the questionnaires for undergraduate students, graduates as well as content and language instructors were developed. All versions of the questionnaires (see Appendices

A, B, & C), which were parallel to each other except in demographic information, included two parts. The first section asked for the demographic information such as gender, status, university, and age in the case of undergraduates and graduates. The second section included 12 items on students' learning needs and more specifically their attitudes towards English literature textbooks and courses, participation in content classes, the appropriate time for the onset of content courses, the use of compensation strategies, teachers' authority as well as English culture learning. In addition, the reason behind students' selection of this major and their lack of class participation, their motivation as well as their preferences concerning the number of the credits for literature courses, evaluation methods, and type of class activities along with their expectations of this major were explored. The majority of the items of the questionnaires were based on a five-point Likert scale (i.e., *strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree,* and *strongly disagree*). Some other items were in a multiple-choice format, for which the participants were required to either choose one among the provided options or choose all of them simultaneously.

Correspondingly, based on the literature survey and consultations with the representative stakeholders, three semistructured interviews were designed for the undergraduate students, graduates, and instructors (see appendices D, E, & F, respectively) which sought the stakeholders' opinions regarding students' attitudes towards class participation, their perceptions of being active in class as well as their preference with regard to the type of class activities. In addition, the stakeholders were asked to comment on the students' main academic difficulties, their expectations of learning English literature as well as their motivation in this regard.

2.3. Procedure

Data for the present study were collected throughout the fall and spring semester of the academic year 2012-1013. First, some exploratory interviews regarding the learning needs of the undergraduate students were conducted with a group of the representative stakeholders (i.e., undergraduate students, recent graduates, content instructors, and language instructors) at Yazd University, Iran. In an attempt to conduct class observations for the purpose of the current study, the full consent of the head of the department as well as the instructors whose classes were selected for class observations, was gained beforehand. The instructors were informed that the purpose of the current study was not to evaluate their teaching but to gain some fruitful insights regarding the practice of academic English literature instruction at Iranian universities, learning needs of the students as well as their academic difficulties. For this purpose, 15 classes including 10 content and five English language classes were observed by the researcher (second author) at the English Department of Yazd University, Iran. During these class observations, which lasted for a period of 90 minutes, the researcher took down some observation field notes and asked some questions from the students for clearing ambiguities if any.

In the questionnaire administration phase of the current study, the undergraduate students' and graduates' questionnaires were distributed during their class sessions in order to secure maximum return rates. Some other graduates, who were unavailable in the academic context, filled out their questionnaires in their occupational contexts due to prior appointments with them. The remaining number of the graduates completed their questionnaires via their emails. The instructors filled out their questionnaires during their office hours.

Correspondingly, some semistructured interviews were arranged and conducted with the representative stakeholders at the English Department of Yazd University, Iran. Each interview session lasted for 20-30 minutes; subsequently, the researcher transcribed the interviewees' responses to the intended items.

2.4. Data Analysis

For the purpose of analyzing the items of the questionnaires, the obtained data were transformed into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 17) and analyzed consequently by using descriptive statistics, that is, cross-tabulations and percentages. The field notes, which were taken during the class observations along with the transcribed data obtained through the use of the semistructured interviews were categorized into main themes and topics and consequently analyzed through descriptive content analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

In order to facilitate the interpretation of the questionnaire findings, the nominal categories 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were reduced to 'agree' and 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were reduced to 'disagree'.

Table 3 displays the cross-tabulation results of the four groups of participants' responses to the questionnaire items 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8 that had the same five-point Likert scale.

Table 3. *Cross-tabulation Results for Items 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8*

Item number	Status	Strongly agree %	Agree %	No idea %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Total count	*P* value
1	Undergraduate	4.0	31.6	15.6	40.4	8.4	250	
	students	7.8	25.5	13.7	43.1	9.8	51	.432
	Graduates	.0	14.3	42.9	42.9	.0	7	
	Content instructors	10.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	10.0	10	
	Language instructors							
3	Undergraduate	1.6	14.7	10.8	56.6	16.3	251	
	students	2.0	25.5	7.8	51.0	13.7	51	.656
	Graduates	.0	14.3	14.3	71.4	.0	7	
	Content instructors	.0	10.0	30.0	50.0	10.0	10	
	Language instructors							
5	Undergraduate	3.6	26.7	39.8	21.1	8.8	251	
	students	5.9	37.3	19.6	29.4	7.8	51	.197
	Graduates	.0	28.6	14.3	42.9	14.3	7	
	Content instructors	.0	50.0	20.0	10.0	20.0	10	
	Language instructors							
7	Undergraduate	9.2	54.2	12.4	14.7	9.6	251	
	students	15.7	56.9	2.0	23.5	2.0	51	.089
	Graduates	28.6	42.9	.0	28.6	.0	7	
	Content instructors	.0	70	20	10	.0	10	
	Language instructors							
8	Undergraduate	2.8	25.6	25.6	32.0	14.0	250	
	students	17.6	23.5	21.6	27.5	9.8	51	.002
	Graduates	14.3	71.4	14.3	.0	.0	7	
	Content instructors	.0	40.0	20.0	40.0	.0	10	
	Language instructors							

Regarding the students' attitudes towards literary textbooks and courses, quite a small number of the stakeholders acknowledged that the undergraduates consider their mainstream courses and textbooks as interesting, practical, and effective (cf. questionnaires, item 1). These findings, which are consistent with the content class observation data and the results of the semistructured interviews (cf. items 5, 6), indicate that ineffective classroom activities and teaching methodologies significantly contribute to students' negative attitudes towards target language learning (Kumaravadivelu,

2006). Therefore, it is recommended that students' awareness of their prospective language use situations and the value and effectiveness of knowledge of different aspects of literature (e.g., mythology, history, schools of thought, etc.) should be raised; in addition, effective communicative teaching methodologies along with class activities should be selected in order to develop students' positive attitudes and foster their motivation to learn English literature.

Furthermore, a majority of the stakeholders agreed that students' interest in general English knowledge rather than English literature has stimulated them to select their major since they did not have a clear perception of English literature before they entered the university (cf. questionnaires, item 2; semistructured interviews, item 2). This suggests that the Iranian high school educational system should make an attempt to adequately familiarize the students with the academic majors and facilitate their selection in this regard.

In addition, a solid majority of the stakeholders responded that most of the undergraduate students did not participate in English literature class discussions, although they held positive attitudes towards active class participation (cf. questionnaires, item 3; semistructured interviews, items 3, 4). These results, which are further corroborated by the content class observation data, refer to the fact that students' affective filters (e.g., fear of making mistakes and losing face, high anxiety, self-consciousness, low motivation, and lack of self-confidence) as well as their lack of content information or pre-readings on the required discussion topics before attending classes, can impede them from actively participating in their content classes. In addition, lack of adequate critical thinking abilities on the part of the students, their heavy reliance on the literary web-based materials, and lecture-based teaching methodologies may have contributed to the above-mentioned issues as well (cf.

questionnaires, item 4; semistructured interviews, items 1-3). These findings highlight the fact that during their academic or pre-academic education, undergraduate students have been accustomed to teacher-centred classes; consequently, they have not developed their communication and learning strategies (e.g., risk taking, ambiguity tolerance, cooperation, motivation, and goal setting) which are useful to help them develop their target language proficiency (Brown, 2007). According to the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, cited in Brown, 2007), the Output Hypothesis (Swain 2005, cited in Brown, 2007), the Vygotskyan sociocultural theory as well as the learning-centred pedagogies to language teaching and learning, language learners need to be active participants in the process of language learning, constructing and examining their hypotheses about the language in interaction with their peers in order to successfully learn the target language. Equally important, in line with the claims of the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985, cited in Brown, 2006), instructors should attempt to minimize their students' anxiety and self-consciousness by creating a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere in order to maximize their language learning opportunities and strategic competence accordingly.

As it can be inferred from the questionnaire data (cf. items 1-3), in conjunction with the findings of the semistructured interviews (cf. item 2), an overwhelming number of the undergraduate students possess low or decreasing motivation to study English literature in contrast with their high instrumental motivation to pursue general English academically. This idea is further strengthened by the observation data since the researchers observed that students had more Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in their English classes rather than mainstream classes. Consequently, a substantial number of the undergraduates as well as graduates complained that the density load of their

lessons in English literature, lack of background knowledge of English literature, inadequate use of up-to-date English literature sources and reference materials, lecture-based English literature teaching methodologies as well as memorization of literary terms and texts due to their inadequate learning and metacognitive strategies had decreased their motivation (cf. semistructured interviews, items 2, 5).

Correspondingly, the observation data revealed that students encountered serious problems while participating in class discussions with their instructors and peers, as well as critically analyzing the literary texts or the issues raised in class discussions. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), students should foster their strategic competence and motivation in order to develop their target language proficiency. Hence, the findings of the current study suggest that students should be provided with some effective communicative teaching methodologies as well as Strategic-Based Instruction (SBI) during their pre-academic and academic studies.

In addition, a majority of the content instructors indicated that the number of credits for courses in English literature at the undergraduate level is not adequate to sufficiently equip the students with sound knowledge of English literature (cf. questionnaires, item 5). This refers to the fact that the number of credits for literature courses should be increased in an attempt to equip the students with their required subject-specific knowledge.

Likewise, there was a consistency of opinions among the stakeholders that literature courses should be offered from the third semester for the students at the undergraduate level (cf. questionnaires, item 6). However, some preparatory and extracurricular literary courses should be provided for them from the first semester.

Moreover, a good majority of the stakeholders agreed with the use of L1 as a compensatory strategy to avoid problematic issues in English literature classes (cf. questionnaires, item 7). This finding, which is in accordance with the observation data along with what has been echoed throughout the ELT literature (Cook, 2002; Xia, 2007), indicates that the occasional use of native language in content classes can facilitate students' learning and is beneficial for clearing any ambiguities and misunderstandings in this regard. However, this use can decrease as the students proceed in their academic studies and, subsequently, develop their language skills and communication strategies accordingly.

Likewise, a solid majority of the content instructors acknowledged that their students believe in teachers' authority in English literature classes (cf. questionnaires, item 8). A possible explanation for this assumption is in line with the findings of Xia (2007) who maintains that when students find the courses in contrary to their expectations, their teacher's authority will decrease at least in their minds but not necessarily in their behaviours. On the other hand, their passivity in content classes in practice may have led their instructors to assume that their students have rated their authority very highly.

Furthermore, a good majority of the stakeholders acknowledged that the students hold positive attitudes towards English culture learning (questionnaires; item 9). Since learners' positive attitudes towards the target language culture are crucial for successful target language development (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the finding of the present study indicates that a consistent pedagogical framework including EFL culture learning should be integrated into the current syllabus for Iranian English majors in order to increase their sociocultural competence accordingly.

Also, a vast majority of the stakeholders commented that the undergraduates opt for a combination of final examination scores, assessments during the course along with small-scale projects as suitable evaluation methods for their content courses (cf. questionnaires; item 10). However, during the content class observations, it was noted that there was a limited use of small-scale projects, discussions, and students' oral presentations which can be used for students' evaluative purposes other than the sole final examination performances. Provided that a combination of evaluation measures is applied during the semester, it will foster students' constant learning which will subsequently minimize their anxiety during the final examination. The results of the current study in accordance with the findings of Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) indicate that evaluation methods for ESP/EAP courses should be revised in order to foster students' constant learning.

With respect to the type of class activities in English literature classes, a good majority of the undergraduate students and graduate students expressed their preference for group work; in contrast, a good majority of the instructors recognized their students' preference for working individually (cf. questionnaires, item 11). This is due to the fact that students have not been accustomed to working as a whole or in groups but in individual since the early stages of their school studies. A further possible explanation stems from the findings of the content class observations which revealed that EFL students opt for group work as more protective environments since they suffer from high affective filters. These findings are in congruence with the results of earlier studies on EAP/ESP needs analysis (Kavaliauskiene & Uzpaliene, 2003; Xiao, 2007). Thereby, based on the learning-centred pedagogies to language learning, it is suggested that the provision of language input while students are

involved in meaning-focused pair/group activities will minimize their anxiety and maximize their strategic competence (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Table 4 offers the cross-tabulation results for the questionnaire items 6, 9, 10, and 11, which were in the multiple-choice format.

Table 4. *Cross-tabulation Results for Items 6, 9, 10, and 11*

Item number	Options	Undergraduate students	Graduates	Content instructors	Language instructors	*P* value
6	First semester	17.9	19.6	42.9	33.3	
	Second semester	33.5	31.4	14.3	.0	.373
	Third semester	30.3	35.3	28.6	55.6	
	Fourth semester	18.3	13.7	14.3	11.1	
9	Unrelated to them	32.1	27.5	28.6	33.3	
	New horizons	67.9	72.5	71.4	66.7	.926
10	Final exams' performance	9.0	.0	.0	.0	
	Evaluation during the course	19.3	17.6	.0	.0	
	Short projects	4.1	.0	.0	.0	.079
	All of the above	67.6	82.4	100	100	
11	Pair work	24.8	17.6	14.3	.0	
	Group work	50.4	56.9	.0	20.0	.000
	Individual work	24.8	25.5	85.7	80.0	

With respect to the undergraduate students' expectations from learning English literature, a considerable number of the students indicated that they expect to teach English, continue their postgraduate studies in English literature, and learn different aspects of English literature (e.g., mythology, history, schools of thought, etc.) by the time of their graduation (cf. questionnaires, item 12; semistructured interviews, item 6). Since the students' expectations of their language programs determine their success of learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), these findings refer to the point that students need to be equipped with a good command of different aspects of literature as well as a sound general English knowledge in order that they may cope effectively with the tasks related to their prospective academic or occupational needs. Table 5 provides a summary of the cross-tabulation results for items 1, 4, and 12.

Table 5. *Cross-tabulation Results for Items 1, 4, and 12*

Item number	Status	No %	Yes %	Total count	*P*value
1a	Undergraduate students	39.7	60.3	252	
	Graduates	45.1	54.9	51	.804
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	30.0	70.0	10	
1b	Undergraduate students	54.0	46.0	252	
	Graduates	37.3	62.7	51	.118
	Content instructors	71.4	28.6	7	
	Language instructors	50.0	50.0	10	
1c	Undergraduate students	71.0	29.0	252	
	Graduates	74.5	25.5	51	.334
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	80.0	20.0	10	
1d	Undergraduate students	74.6	25.4	252	
	Graduates	54.9	45.1	51	.006
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	90.0	10.0	10	
4a	Undergraduate students	78.6	21.4	252	
	Graduates	80.4	19.6	51	.105
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	90.0	10.0	10	
4b	Undergraduate students	30.6	69.4	252	
	Graduates	25.5	74.5	51	.913
	Content instructors	28.6	71.4	7	
	Language instructors	30.0	70.0	10	
4c	Undergraduate students	32.9	67.1	252	
	Graduates	17.6	82.4	51	.021
	Content instructors	.0	100.0	7	
	Language instructors	10.0	90.0	10	
4d	Undergraduate students	65.9	34.1	252	
	Graduates	68.6	31.4	51	.743
	Content instructors	57.1	42.9	7	
	Language instructors	80.0	20.0	10	
12a	Undergraduate students	54.4	45.6	252	

	Graduates	33.3	66.7	51	.003
	Content instructors	57.1	42.9	7	
	Language instructors	10.0	90.0	10	
12b	Undergraduate students	47.6	52.4	252	
	Graduates	49.0	51.0	51	.989
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	50.0	50.0	10	
12c	Undergraduate students	63.1	36.9	252	
	Graduates	56.9	43.1	51	.436
	Content instructors	57.1	42.9	7	
	Language instructors	40.0	60.0	10	
12d	Undergraduate students	63.1	36.9	252	
	Graduates	80.4	19.6	51	.006
	Content instructors	42.9	57.1	7	
	Language instructors	30.0	70.0	10	

4. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed at investigating the academic learning needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature as perceived by different stakeholders nationwide through a triangulation of instruments namely, questionnaires, semistructured interviews as well as class observations.

Concerning the learning needs of English major students, the findings of this study as a common picture shared by all of the stakeholders revealed that there is a serious gap in a systematic EFL pedagogical framework at Iranian senior high schools which can adequately equip the students with prerequisite skills, strategies, and abilities which can facilitate their successful target academic performance. Most importantly, the results revealed that the content of the literary courses for English majors in Iran does not include a systematic

pattern for imparting knowledge of English literature based on the students' expectations, difficulties, and their immediate or delayed needs. These gaps stem from the fact that the course design and curriculum development process for Iranian English majors have been based on the intuitions of course designers and curriculum developers regarding students' needs but not empirical research-based evidence derived from systematic needs analysis studies based on the collective views of the corresponding stakeholders.

Since no single method to language teaching can satisfy all of the context-specific needs and expectations of the students, based on the post method approaches to language teaching, English literature instructors are recommended to seek alternatives to methods by synthesizing the strengths of different approaches to language teaching. Most importantly, it is suggested that they should conduct constant action research in an attempt to solve their practical classroom problems (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

As for the implications of the present study, the discrepancies found between the current status of the literary courses for English majors and their learning needs call the attention of the academic course designers and curriculum developers to the importance of revising, refining, and renewing the existing courses based on the shared decision-making and meaningful interaction among different stakeholders in the course design community. In addition, some elective courses in learning and communication strategies as well as EFL culture learning should be provided at university or language institute contexts in order to enable the students to better satisfy their current or future academic and occupational needs.

Furthermore, the results of the current study call the attention of the literary specialists to seriously reconsider the traditional modes of their teacher-centred and examination-oriented methodologies by synthesizing

communicative and learning-centered methodological policies and options. Likewise, they are recommended to adopt appropriate recently published literary genres and materials, different meaningful cooperative learning tasks and activities as well as SBI (Strategic-Based Instruction) in their classes in order to promote their students' learning and motivation via their positive learning experiences.

Given the importance of critical thinking, group performance, as well as learning and communication strategies in the prospective academic success of the students, EFL teachers and course designers at senior high schools, are recommended to utilize strategy training manuals in order to adjust the courses accordingly, and consequently, facilitate successful prospective academic performance of their students. Likewise, there is an urgent need to provide a consistent nationwide EFL pedagogical framework at the pre-university levels which can appropriately inform the students regarding the content of the academic English majors confronting them in order to facilitate their selection accordingly.

Provided that the above-mentioned principles, as well as the results of the present study in terms of the academic learning needs of Iranian English majors, are taken into account to accommodate the courses accordingly, students' learning and learner autonomy will be enhanced and consequently, the need for accountability in ELT for the above-mentioned students will be satisfied in part (Basturkmen, 2010; Long, 2005).

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Appendices

Appendix A. The Undergraduate Students' Questionnaire

Dear participant,

The following questionnaire is a part of a research project which aims at investigating the academic needs of the Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

I. Demographic Information

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Status:

a) Undergraduate student

If yes, second-year student Third-year student Fourth-year student

3. University (*please specify*): ……..

4. Age: 18-22 years old 23- 27 years old + 28 years old

II. Learning needs

The second section of the questionnaire aims at seeking the opinions of undergraduate students and graduates of this major in terms of the learning needs of undergraduate students. Please notify that the italic statement "*more than one answer can be selected*" indicate that there may be more than one possible answer to the intended statement/question. Please read each statement/question and tick (√) the relevant choice according to your opinion.

1. English literature textbooks and courses are very practical, effective, and interesting to me.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

2. I have chosen my major because…… *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) I am very interested in General English knowledge.

b) I am very interested in English literature.

c) It is more known rather than the other English majors (i.e., Translation, Linguistics).

d) Knowing English literature is prestigious.

3. I participate in English Literature class activities and discussions.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

4. What reason(s) do you suggest for your possible lack of participation in English literature classes? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) Some questions do not challenge me enough.

b) I am afraid of making mistakes and loss of face.

c) I do not have enough information.

d) Some topics are not interesting.

5. The number of credits devoted to English literature courses at the undergraduate level is adequate.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

6. The specialized English literature courses should be presented to the students from the …….

a) First-semester b)second-semester c) third-semester d) fourth semester

7. English literature students and instructors should sometimes use the Persian language when they encounter problematic areas in their classes.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

8. I assume that the instructor is the most reliable and the primary source of knowledge in the classroom.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

9. I consider English culture as……..

a) the culture of Americans and British which is unrelated to me.

b) new horizons to other countries' cultures and histories.

10. The evaluation method for English literature courses should be based on……

a) final examination performance b) evaluation during the course

c) short projects d) all of the above

11. I prefer…….. in the English literature classes.

a) pair work b)group work c)individual work

12. What do you expect to do after graduation? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) I expect to teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

b) I expect to continue my M.A. studies in English literature.

c) I expect to continue my M.A. studies in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

d) I do not have clear expectations of my future.

Appendix B. The Graduates' Questionnaire

Dear participant,

The following questionnaire is a part of a research project which aims at investigating the academic needs of the Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

I. Demographic Information

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Status:

Graduate: of the year 2009 of the year 2010 of the year 2011 of the year 2012

3. University (*please specify*):……..

4. Age: 18-22 years old 23- 27 years old + 28 years old

II. Learning needs

The second section of the questionnaire aims at seeking the opinions of undergraduate students and graduates of this major in terms of the learning needs of undergraduate students. Please notify that the italic statement "*more than one answer can be selected*" indicate that there may be more than one possible answer to the intended statement/question. Please read each statement/question and tick (√) the relevant choice according to your opinion.

1. English literature textbooks and courses were very practical, effective, and interesting to me.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

2. I had chosen my major because……. *(more than one answer can be selected)*

e) I was very interested in General English knowledge.

f) I was very interested in English literature.

g) It was more known rather than the other English majors (i.e., Translation, Linguistics).

h) Knowing English literature was prestigious.

3. I participated in English Literature class activities and discussions.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

4. What reason(s) do you suggest for your possible lack of participation in English literature classes? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) Some questions did not challenge me enough.

b) I was afraid of making mistakes and loss of face.

c) I did not have enough information.

d) Some topics were not interesting.

5. The number of credits devoted to English literature courses at the undergraduate level was adequate.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

6. The specialized English literature courses should be presented to the students from the …….

b) First-semester b) second-semester c) third-semester d) fourth semester

7. English literature students and instructors should sometimes use the Persian language when they encounter problematic areas in their classes.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

8. I assumed that the instructor is the most reliable and the primary source of knowledge in the classroom.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

9. I considered English culture as……..

a) the culture of Americans and British which is unrelated to me.

b) new horizons to other countries' cultures and histories.

10. The evaluation method for English literature courses should be based on……

a) final examination performance b) evaluation during the course

c)short projects d) all of the above

11. I preferred…….. in the English literature classes.

a) pair work b)group work c)individual work

12. What did you expect to do after graduation? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) I expected to teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

b) I expected to continue my M.A. studies in English literature.

c) I expected to continue my M.A. studies in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

d) I did not have clear expectations of my future.

Appendix C. The Content and Language Instructors' Questionnaire

Dear participant,

The following questionnaire is a part of a research project which aims at investigating the academic needs of Iranian undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

I. Demographic information

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Status: Instructor of English literature Instructor of English language

3. University (*please specify*): …….

II. Learning needs

The second section of the questionnaire aims at seeking the opinions of English Language and Literature instructors in terms of the learning needs of the undergraduate students. Please notify that the italic statement "*more than one answer can be selected*" indicate that there may be more than one possible answer

to the intended statement/question. Please read each statement/question and tick (√) the relevant choice according to your opinion.

1. English literature textbooks and courses are very practical, effective, and interesting to students of this major.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

2. Students of English Language and Literature have chosen this major because…… *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) They are very interested in general English knowledge.

b) They are very interested in English literature.

c) It is more known rather than the other English majors (i.e., Translation, Linguistics).

d) Knowing English literature is prestigious.

3. The majority of the students participate in English literature class activities and discussions.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

4. What reason(s) do you suggest for students' lack of participation in English literature classes? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) Some questions do not challenge them enough.

b) They are afraid of making mistakes and loss of face.

c) They do not have enough information.

d) Some topics are not interesting.

5. The number of credits devoted to English literature courses at the undergraduate level is adequate.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

6. The specialized English literature courses should be presented to the students from the …….

a) First-semester b)second-semester c) third-semester d) fourth semester

7. English literature students and instructors should sometimes use the Persian language when they encounter problematic areas in their classes.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

8. Students of this major assume that the instructor is the most reliable and the primary source of knowledge in the classroom.

Strongly agree Agree No idea Disagree Strongly disagree

9. Students of this major consider English culture as……..

a) the culture of Americans and British which is unrelated to them.

b) new horizons to other countries' cultures and histories.

10. The evaluation method for English literature courses should be based on……

a) final examination performance b) evaluation during the course

c) short projects d) all of the above

11. Students of this major prefer…….. in their English literature classes.

a) pair work b)group work c)individual work

12. What do the students of this major expect to do after graduation? *(more than one answer can be selected)*

a) They expect to teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

b) They expect to continue their M.A. studies in English literature.

c) They expect to continue their M.A. studies in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

d) They do not have clear expectations of their future.

Appendix D. Undergraduate Students' Semistructured Interview

Please answer the following questions regarding the learning needs of undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

1. What is your attitude towards speaking out in English literature classes? Do you participate in English literature class discussions? (If negative, why?)

2. How was your motivation towards learning English literature at the entry to the university? Did your motivation increase or decrease as you proceeded through the course of your academic studies?
3. What is your perception of being active in English literature classes?
4. Do you prefer student-centered, teacher-centered, or interactive-based English literature classes? Why?
5. What are the main problems and difficulties which you have encountered during your academic studies?
6. What are your expectations of learning English language and literature?

Appendix E. Graduates' Semistructured Interview

Please answer the following questions regarding the learning needs of undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

1. What was your attitude towards speaking out in English literature classes? Did you participate in English literature class discussions? (If negative, why?)
2. How was your motivation towards learning English literature at the entry to the university? Did your motivation increase or decrease as you proceeded through the course of your academic studies?
3. What was your perception of being active in English literature classes?
4. Did you prefer student-centered, teacher-centered, or interactive-based English literature classes? Why?
5. What were the main problems and difficulties which you had encountered during your academic studies?
6. What were your expectations of learning English language and literature?

Appendix F. Instructors' Semistructured Interview

Please answer the following questions regarding the learning needs of undergraduate students of English Language and Literature.

1. What is their attitude towards speaking out in English literature classes? Do the majority of the students participate in English literature class discussions? (If negative, why?)
2. How is their motivation towards learning English literature at the entry to the university? Does their motivation increase or decrease as they proceed through the course of their academic studies?
3. What is their perception of being active in English literature classes?
4. Do they prefer student-centered, teacher-centered, or interactive-based English literature classes? Why?
5. What are the main problems and difficulties which they encounter during their academic studies?
6. What are their expectations of learning English language and literature?