

Language Needs Analysis of Graduate Students of Humanities and Sciences at Shahid-Bahonar University of Kerman: Lacks and Wants

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the foreign language learning needs of graduate students of humanities and sciences in Shahid-Bahonar University of Kerman. To this end, a mix method approach-qualitative and quantitative- was utilized on the basis of interviews and questionnaires. 252 graduate students (169 females and 83 male) as well as 30 instructors were selected on the basis of convenience sampling to participate in the study. The participated learners and instructors completed the needs analysis questionnaire to reflect on their language learning needs in ESP courses. Then students and instructors were interviewed to elicit their opinions concerning the students' language demands, language needs, attitudes towards language instruction, length of the course as well as the content, syllabus, methodology of the specialized English course. The results of needs analysis revealed major discrepancies between students' and instructors' perceptions of students' language needs. For the students reading, speaking, writing and then listening respectively should be emphasized. But for the instructors, reading, writing speaking, and listening respectively are of more importance. Most of the students believed that respectively, number of students in the classes, content of ESP books and methodology of instructors are the most important factors in ESP courses. This is when that instructors put more focus on the method of evaluation, methodology and content of books in ESP courses. It is hoped that the findings of this study would reveal insight into syllabus design and curriculum development for ESP programs in Iran.

Keywords: Needs Analysis(NA), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Graduate Students

1. Introduction

Today, as science and technology have developed a lot, increasing demands for international communication and exchanging ideas have made English language learning an essential tool that many people around the world and specially university students require. For example, university students have to read many scientific papers and use different websites in order to perform more successfully in their discipline. These needs are closely related to the content matter, skills and strategies that are within English for Specific purpose (ESP) or English for Academic Purpose (EAP).

However, according to researcher's experience, most of the students from different majors who have passed English for general purposes and more specifically, ESP, are not satisfied with the language program and they think that their English language needs are not met and they have to attend English language institutions to meet their needs. As Seferoglu (2001) declares "most foreign language programs do not provide learners opportunities in the classroom to develop the skills that they will need in their target language encounters" (p.3). Regarding students' future profession, the case is that mastering English is of importance for them. Therefore, it's necessary to investigate the needs of students in all majors so they could function effectively in their profession. The purpose of this study is to investigate the foreign language learning needs of Iranian graduate students and their professors' view in this regard to help both students and EFL teachers to take a full benefit considering students' needs.

With the emergence of learner-centered approaches, English language programs need to adapt their curriculum materials to the needs and expectations of students. NA in second language program started with focusing on instruction of ESP programs and up to now most of the needs analyses have been related to the ESP. Graduate student from different majors are dealing with English regarding their future job. Thus, specifying learners' and teachers' perceptions, students' needs, and the way classroom instruction should be to meet the needs, can be regarded as a valuable source of information for teachers and administrators.

lots of researches have been done to signify the importance of conducting needs analysis and data collection to have a more comprehensive view of the learning situation and accordingly pave the way for developing more appropriate ESP courses before courses get underway (Jackson, 2005). In the context of Greek tertiary education in the department of accountancy in Thessaloniki, Chostelidou (2010) conducted a needs analysis project to record the students' language professional needs, skills, and deficiencies and to introduce needs-based course to prepare them as professionals in accountancy business. Participants involved in the study were 395 students of accountancy. A multi-method approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative research methods, was adopted in the needs analysis projects. According to the results the students need and expect to use the target language for oral communication, reading, and comprehending texts, and listening comprehension. The findings of the study revealed that the present situation arrangements are not in concurrent with the identified needs of the target group the learners and there is a need for the advancement of an exceptionally particular ESP language course with a clear emphasize on accountancy.

Kaewpet (2009) examined the communication needs of a group of Thai Civil engineering students. 25 stakeholders were interviewed to gather information about the communication needs of the students. Based on the stakeholders' recommendations, it was determined that three communicative events should be incorporated into the course, namely, taking about daily tasks and duties, reading manuals, and writing periodic/progress reports. The increasing demands for professional English in the engineering field and the degree to which English is required in various situations throughout Thailand are highlighted by these findings. To efficiently satisfy the needs of the students, Kaewpet concluded that, it is crucial to add more professional English courses. The findings of this study also suggest that English is required more for occupational and educational purposes.

Rostami and Zafarghandi (2014) investigated on chemistry students' and instructors' perceptions of the English language needs of these chemistry students. Participants were asked to complete the need-analysis questionnaire. Findings showed that both students and instructors, considered English quite important for "academic studies" in chemistry Discipline and important for "future career" as well. Additionally, students reported they had lower rate of "vocabulary knowledge" as well as low abilities in "listening", also they reported that speaking should be acquired and developed during their English language learning. Furtherer more, students believed in improving general and ESP English courses which can be developed by skillful ESP instructors and English teachers who are familiar with both the subject and English rather than the subject or English language lonely.

Rajabi and Azarpour (2011) explored the academic needs of the business administration students at Malayer Islamic Azad University. Through random sampling, they selected 45 male students majoring in business administration. They utilized both qualitative and quantitative method for eliciting the responses. They reached to the conclusion that developing speaking skills is more felt after graduation while developing reading skill is the key to the students' success during university studies.

This study tries to determine the discrepancy that exists between student's needs and the ESP courses in Iran. It also wants to reduce differences by helping students and teachers in planning English language curriculum. Providing students with what they expect to learn from ESP courses is the focus of this study. The current study will also be significant for teachers, students, and material developers who are interested in identifying the specific needs of students in ESP courses in order to write, evaluate or adapt teaching materials. If EFL teachers appreciate and determine students' needs, they can easily make decisions about what to teach and how best they can implement the educational choices in ESP/EAP contexts. Flowerdew and peacock (2001) state that needs analysis can be a helpful tool in planning of course duration, course intensity (the allocated time to teaching English course in every week) and teaching methodology. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What language skills do graduate students of humanities and sciences need to develop, regarding students' and instructors' perceptions?
2. What factors can influence students' needs and skills in developing their English language proficiency?

2. Method

2.1 design of the study

This study tries to investigate the specific language needs of graduate students of humanities and sciences, studying at Shahi-Bahonar University of Kerman. To this end, the mixed method, including qualitative and quantitative research methods, was used in this study.

2.2. instruments

In investigating the needs of language learners, questionnaires are a long established data gathering method (West, 1994). The main instruments used to assess the language learning needs in this research is questionnaire. Jordan (1997) pointed out that when dealing with large scale data collection, the use of questionnaire is the most practical method. Questionnaires enable the researcher to collect data from a large number of participants in a short period of time. However, their main drawback is that the participants might misinterpret the questions (Nezhad, 2007). Thus it is crucial to pretest questionnaires before the distribution process. Basis of this study was a questionnaire designed by Mazdayasna and Tahriran (2008), because it encompassed a wide range of materials as compared with other questionnaires. But since it was designed for medical students, medical terms were omitted. Moreover, a Persian version of the questionnaire was prepared and then the questionnaire was presented to 30 students for a pilot test. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire and present their comments on the items, any kind of ambiguity in the wordings, the clarity of the statements, and as a whole the face validity of

the instrument. Furthermore, the researcher asked the respondents to tell if any item seemed ambiguous to them which results in misunderstanding. Their feedback resulted in some minor modification in the wordings of the items to make them more meaningful.

Finally, the Chronbach Alpha internal consistency analysis was used for identifying the coefficient value because "it is the most popular method of examining reliability" and it relies on the correlational analysis (Hinton, Brownlow, MCMurry, & Cozens, 2005) which resulted in 0.93 coefficient.

Following six items which dealt with personal information such as name, sex, the department in which the students were studying, and whether they had passed their general English course, the student questionnaire had two sections. The first, which was composed of twenty-one items (items 1-21), was designed to explore the opinions of the students about their expressed needs for English language skills in their academic studies. The second, which consisted of fourteen items (items 22-35), explored the opinions of the students concerning language demands, their language needs, their attitudes towards language instruction, the length of the course, and the content, syllabus, and methodology of the specialized English course. The first section (items 1-21), required respondents to express their opinions about each statement by marking the options on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 6 (to a very great extent) to 1 (not at all). The first seven items of the second section (items 22-29) similarly used a Likert scale, while items 29-35 were in multiple-choice format. At the end students were asked to write any other comments regarding the questionnaire. It also included a question that asked whether the respondents would be willing to participate in an interview with the researcher.

The survey aimed to capture the experiences and views of the graduate students and professors and then compare and explore the same issues for different perspectives.

The instructors' questionnaire comprised three sections. The first section, items 1-37, explored the perspectives of the instructors about the foreign language learning needs of students in using the four macro English skills and general study skills as relates to their academic studies. In the second section, items 38-42, instructors evaluated the English language proficiency of the students by indicating the extent they developed the desired competence and performance after passing the ESP course. The third section of the questionnaire, items 43-47, used the multiple-choice format to explore their opinions concerning the students' attitude towards language instruction, length of the course, the content, syllabus, and methodology used in their ESP course.

Another technique used by the researcher in this study to collect additional data was interview. As Mackey and Gass (2005) expressed that interviews let us probe the learners' unobservable perceptions and attitudes and "another advantage of interview is that they can be used to elicit data from learners who are not comfortable in other modes" (p.173). Interviews were used in this section too find answers to questions related to the needs of the students in ESP classes. The interview was made up of structured sections. Structured interview was employed because its questions were touching the general framework of an ESP course and the answers to these questions were limited. Kajornboon (2005) commented on structured interviews that the researcher has control over the topics and the format of the interview. Students' interview comprises of seven structured questions that were taken from Mazdayasna and Tahirians' (2008) questionnaire, inquiring about ESP courses, the way they were held, the length of the course, the course book, and etc. The professors and students' interview guideline include 5 and 7 structured questions respectively. The questions were related to attitudes towards language instruction, methodology, content and length of the English course. The interview questions which were in English were translated into Persian by the researcher and then 3 Persian native speakers checked them. Then they were back translated into English by 2 Iranian English translation majors. Interviews were carried out in order to provide in-depth and more detailed information about the learners' needs. Interviews complemented and clarified the information obtained through the questionnaire.

2.3. participants

The data was obtained from a range of participants including graduate students and instructors from the faculties of mathematics and computer, physics, humanities and sciences in Shahi-Bahonar University of Kerman to ensure a wide enough sampling of participants. They were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. Convenience or opportunity sampling is the most common type of sampling in L2 studies where the only criterion according to Dorney (2007) is the convenience of the research. The participants comprised two groups, the first group consisted of 252 male and female graduate students studying in the faculties of mathematics and computer, physics, literature and sciences. The participants' age in the first group range from 22 to 30 years old. The study included those students who have passed general English course and were mostly studying or had already passed their ESP courses. The second group consisted of 30 university professors. They were course major's instructors, not the English majors' professors. They were selected from mentioned faculties based on their willingness to take part in the study. Distribution of participants is tabulated in table 2.1.

It should be mentioned that the involvement of graduate students seems significant in this study since undergraduate students during their studies may not have a clear idea for their future needs but graduates may have developed a better understanding of their language needs in real work situations.

Table 2.1 : Distribution of the Participants

Groups	frequency	Frequency percentage	validity	Cumulative frequency
graduates	252	89.4	89.4	89.4
Instructors	30	10.6	10.6	100.
Total	282	100.	100.	

After consulting with the administrative personnel for administrating the questionnaires, obtaining information about the time of the classes and their curricula, and also obtaining permission of each professor, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the students and then the questionnaires were distributed at the end of the class and at the same time the instructors' questionnaire were presented to the professors in the class to be completed at their convenience. It took 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The students were ensured that their responses would not have any effect on their grades and their information would be confidential and that mentioning their names was not mandatory. All of the questionnaires were administrated to those students who were studying their ESP or had already passed their ESP course.

In order to provide in-depth and more detailed information about the needs of the learners and complement and enrich the information obtained by the questionnaires, structured interviews were conducted. selected students and instructors were interviewed throughout the course. Most of the students; who participated in the interview lived at Bahonar dormitory. All the interviews were conducted in Persian language in order to avoid any language barrier and obscurity in communication with the participants. Since answers to the questions were in short sentences, the researcher took notes of interviews with the students and instructors.

3. Results

The questionnaires were filled out by 282 respondents from two groups, that is, graduate students group (252 respondents) and instructors group (30 respondents). The administrated questionnaire was divided into two sections: qualitative section and quantitative one. The questions in the qualitative section were asked by the researcher through conducting interview sessions with the participants. Required data were collected and analyzed through quantitative methods.

This part of the study is divided in two sections: first, students' and instructors' perspective on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of students has been analyzed through testing the four hypotheses derived from the first research question. Secondly, the other research question was answered through use of frequency tables and ranking. In this research, the following research questions were proposed for scrutiny:

1. What language skills do graduate students of humanities and sciences need to develop, regarding students' and instructors' perceptions?
 2. What factors can influence students' needs and skills in developing their English language proficiency?
- With regard to the first research question, the following hypotheses have been developed.

Ho1: There is a significant relationship between students' listening skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Ho2: There is a significant relationship between students' speaking skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Ho3: There is a significant relationship between students' reading skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Ho4: There is a significant relationship between students' writing skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

3.1. Testing the first research question and Hypotheses

What language skills do graduate students of humanities and sciences need to develop, regarding students' and instructors' perceptions?

To examine this question, item 1 to 28 of the questionnaire were analyzed through Friedman test. This test is used to detect differences in the treatments across multiple test attempts. The procedure involves ranking each row together. The results of this question is presented in table and figure below. As demonstrated in table 3.1 from the graduate students' perceptions, reading comprehension following by speaking, writing and listening is of great importance to them.

Table 3.1: Friedman ranking regarding students' perceptions

Skill	Average grade	Rank
Listening	2.13	Fourth
Speaking	2.42	Second
Reading	3.14	First
Writing	2.31	Third

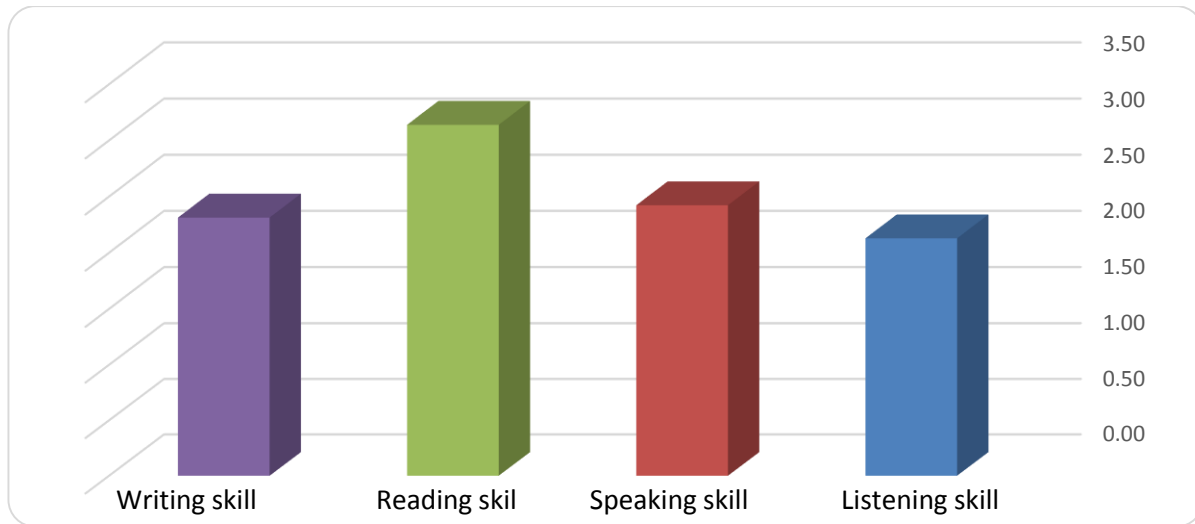


Figure 3.1: Rating Needed Skills Based on the Students' Perceptions.

3.3.1. First Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between students' listening skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Table 3.2: The First Hypothesis Test Results

Group	Skills	T value	FD	SIG	Mean differences	95% Confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
students	Listening	16.41	251	0.00	1.18	1.04	1.33
instructors	Listening	2.01	29	.051	0.42	-0.01	0.85

First hypothesis examines the relationship between listening skills and English language needs of students regarding students' and instructors' perceptions. As it can be seen in the above table, since the significance level for students is lower than .05, so the first hypothesis was confirmed by the students. In other words, with 95% confidence it can be said that there is a significant relationship between listening skills and English language needs of students. It means, listening skills is considered to be important for students. In contrast, the significance level for instructors is more than .05, so based on instructors' perception, there is no significant relationship between listening skills and English language needs of students. In other words, instructors believed that listening skill is of no significance for students in their ESP courses.

3.3.2. Second Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between students' speaking skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Table 3.3: The Second Hypothesis Test Results

Group	Skills	T value	FD	SIG	Mean differences	95% Confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
students	Speaking	14.08	251.00	0.00	1.24	1.07	1.41
instructors	Speaking	3.25	29.00	0.00	0.88	0.33	1.43

Second hypothesis examines the relationship between speaking skills and English language needs of students regarding students' and instructors' perceptions. As it can be seen in table 3.3, since the

significance level for students and instructors is lower than .05, so the second hypothesis was confirmed by both groups. In other words, with 95 percent, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between speaking skills and English language needs of students. It means, speaking skills is considered to be important for both students and instructors.

3.3.3. Third Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between students' reading skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Table 3.4: The Third Hypothesis Test Results

Group	Skills	T value	FD	SIG	Mean differences	95% Confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
students	reading	30.03	251.00	0.00	1.89	1.77	2.01
instructors	reading	7.35	29.00	0.00	1.67	1.20	2.13

Third hypothesis examines the relationship between reading comprehension skills and English language needs of students regarding students' and instructors' perceptions. As it can be seen in table 3.4, since the significance level for students and instructors is lower than .05, so the third hypothesis was confirmed by both groups. In other words, with 95 percent, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between reading comprehension skills and English language needs of students. It means, reading comprehension skills is considered to be important for both students and instructors.

3.3.4. Fourth Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between students' writing skills and their language needs regarding students' and professors' perception of language needs.

Table 3.5: The Fourth Hypothesis Test Results

Group	Skills	T value	FD	SIG	Mean differences	95% Confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
students	Writing	15.59	251.00	0.25	1.21	-1.06	1.36
instructors	Writing	4.08	29.00	0.03	1.10	0.55	1.65

Fourth hypothesis examines the relationship between writing skills and English language needs of students regarding students' and instructors' perceptions. As it can be seen in table 3.5, since the significance level for students is more than .05, so the fourth hypothesis was not confirmed by the students. In other words, so 95 percent, it can be said that regarding students' perception, there is no significant relationship between writing skills and English language needs of students. It means, writing skills was not important for students in ESP courses. In contrast, the significance level for instructors is lower than .05, so based on instructors' perception, there is a significant relationship between writing skills and English language needs of students. In other words, instructors believed that writing skills is of great significance for students in their ESP courses.

3.4. Second Research Questions

Second question: What factors can influence students' needs and skills in developing their English language proficiency?

To investigate the second question, the considered factors that influence the English language needs of the students were assessed. These factors include the number of students in a class, subjects, textbooks, teaching methodology, teacher evaluation methods, current textbooks, teaching foreign culture and the content of the textbooks. Table 3.6 shows the frequency of respondents' answers to this question.

Table 3.6: Respondents Results Regarding Effective Factors in Improving the Needs and Skills of Students

Group	Factors	Number	Mean	SD
Students	Number of students in the class	46	3.65	1.33
	Subject of the lessons	46	3.21	1.34
	Methodology	46	3.19	1.38
	Evaluation method	46	3.11	1.48
	Current textbooks	46	3.10	1.22
	Teaching foreign culture	46	2.79	1.28
	Content of the textbooks	46	3.15	1.33
Instructors	Number of students in the class	30	3.97	1.75
	Subject of the lessons	30	4.23	1.63
	Methodology	30	4.23	1.61
	Evaluation method	30	4.83	1.39
	Current textbooks	30	4.07	1.78
	Teaching foreign culture	30	3.93	1.70
	Content of the textbooks	30	3.77	1.52

It is clear from the above table that from the students' view, the factor "number of students in the class" (mean 3.65), was rated as the most important factor in influencing the needs and skills of students. The item "the amount of foreign culture taught in the class" was the least important factor among above-mentioned factors. Regarding instructors' views, they believed that "the teachers' evaluation methods" should be given the priority in the ESP courses and "the content of the textbooks" was not an important factor in influencing students' needs and skills.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This study was carried out to investigate graduate students' foreign language learning needs through conducting a needs analysis study in Shahid-Bahonar University of Kerman. Various stakeholders including students who enrolled in ESP courses, those who had passed their ESP courses, and instructors helped to complete the assessment of learners' needs.

The first research question investigated the students' and professors' views concerning the type of skills which graduate students of humanities and sciences need to develop in ESP courses. The findings of the assessment revealed instructors' dissatisfaction about students' insufficient proficiency in reading, writing, listening or speaking. So with their level of proficiency, they face difficulties in dealing with the tasks they are supposed to perform in English. A vast majority of students agreed that reading comprehension, followed by speaking, writing, and listening are the most needed skills for their major studies. Whereas, most of the instructors contended that students greatly need to work on their reading skill followed by writing, speaking, and listening skills. Most of the respondents reported that every sub-skill of four skills should be practiced in the ESP content. Moattarian and Tahririan (2014); Atai and Asadi (2013); Rajabi and Azapour (2011); Atai and Nazari, (2011); Tanhaii Motlagh (2010); Rasekhi Kolokdaragh (2006); and Hatami, (2006), came up with the results which are in harmony with the findings of the first research question. They reached the conclusion that students' improvement in reading skill prioritize other skills because this skill affects their success during their studies. On the other hand,

the result of this study is in contrast with what has been echoed in the study of Chia, Johnson, Chia, and Olive (1999) in that listening skill was considered as the most important skill for the medical students, while in this study reading and speaking were perceived as the most important skills.

The second question explore the possible factors that can influence students' needs and skills in developing their English language proficiency. The two groups of participants had uncommon idea about these factors (number of students in the class, the topics include in the text books, the utilized methodology, the teachers' evaluation methods, the present text book, the amount of foreign language in the classroom, and the content of the textbooks). The graduate students thought that "the number of students in the class following "the textbook topics" can help them achieve their goals in learning specialized English. But instructors mentioned that "teachers' evaluation methods", "the text book topics", and "the methodology" respectively, are the most important factors.

As it was mentioned before implementing the needs analysis is essential to identify the needs of the students in any educational situation. So, an ongoing needs analysis is a prerequisite for any course design to help the syllabus designer in providing the appropriate educational input for fostering effective learning. The findings of the study offer the possible following implications for teaching. As the matter of the first implication, because one of the most important needs of the students is reading and speaking, a new method should be utilized to teach reading and speaking strategies and their sub skills. Students should be taught how to practice the main skills of reading such as scanning, skimming, guessing, and etc. Which help the students not to depend on just words to gain the gist of the text but to be able to comprehend it by implementing these strategies.

Finally, the present study suggests some implications for the materials developers and syllabus designers. The outcomes of the study can be used for preparing and selecting more appropriate text books and teaching materials in different majors, or for designing comprehensive syllabus for the present teaching materials for the learners.

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