ESP Teachers' Pedagogical Agenda vs. University Students' Educational Ambitions: A Needs Analysis Project

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers and students' attitude toward learning needs and teaching activities. Mismatch between teachers and students' expectations from ESP courses can result in undesired outcomes. In this study, the attitudes of 6 teachers and 60 students of Software Engineering toward ESP learning needs were surveyed by a questionnaire. The relationship between the ideas of these two groups was investigated through t-test analysis. The results show that ESP teachers and students think more alike about textbooks, and the incorporation of information processed through discourse and genre analysis, while recognizable differences can be observed in their view toward teaching activities, the place of language skills and components, and critical thinking. It is discussed that pedagogical mechanisms for applying the relevant principles of 'rights analysis' and 'strategic planning' in English classrooms need to be devised and appropriately applied in ESP programs.

1- Introduction

English course books, both for general and specific purposes, are required in most of the universities of Iran. However, what is presented in most of the universities is neither based on the students' needs nor constraints of the social context in which the students, in their future professional life, should act. English teachers working in academic organizations and ESP researchers need to be more sensitive to what is happening in their field of expertise [1]. ESP materials used and adopted in universities are not an exception. There are many questions which should be taken in by a big population of those who are involved in designing, applying and using the current ESP materials, particularly, teachers of English for specific purposes.

Are these materials properly designed and conveniently administered? Is there any logical relationship between the form and content of these textbooks? Are the findings of various research projects carried out on material development and course design applied in ESP classes? How teachers and students are interacting with these materials? This study aims to pave the way for investigating such issues.

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1-2 Statement of the Problem

English course books, both for general and specific purposes, are required in most of the universities of Iran. Although, we have a variety of these sources in our universities, what is presented in most of them is neither based on the students' needs, nor constraints of the social context in which the students, in their future professional life, may face. Most of these materials cannot meet students' needs in the future stages of their education. Ignoring a sound needs analysis during the process of material design may lead to lack of enough compatibility between developed materials and the realistic needs of the students. These deficiencies need to be detected through accurate evaluation of the current materials, students and teachers' beliefs, and the way these materials are being utilized. The current study has investigated the teachers and students' attitude towards the learning needs in ESP classes.

- Is there any significant difference between teachers and students' attitude towards the ESP books for the students of Software Engineering?
- Is there any significant difference between teachers and students' attitude towards the role of the teacher in ESP classes for the students of Software Engineering?
- Is there any significant difference between teachers and students' attitude towards the place of language skills and components in ESP classes for the students of Software Engineering?

- Is there any significant difference between teachers and students' attitude towards the application of critical thinking skills in ESP classes for the students of Software Engineering?
- Is there any significant difference between teachers and students' attitude towards the use of discourse and genre analysis in ESP classes for the students of Software Engineering?

The main concerns of ESP have always been, and remain, with needs analysis, text analysis, and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the task prescribed by their study or work situation [2]. It seems that most of the ESP course books in Iran are not appropriately designed and conveniently used in classrooms. To the knowledge of the researcher, not enough research has been conducted on the appropriacy of the materials used in ESP classes held for the students of Software Engineering. Due to the importance of English language in this field and the critical needs of the students to make sense of the current materials and articles existing in different journals and magazines, decisive and effective actions should be taken to provide the students of this field and other engineering fields with ESP materials which can boost their knowledge in a systematic and controlled fashion. Therefore, what, in the first step, should be taken into account is to provide the students with appropriate materials through conducting a logical needs analysis project and course evaluation program [3].

ESP pedagogy should be viewed at present as developing in three overlapping directions: the socio-discoursal, socio-cultural, and sociopolitical [4]. This view is different from the traditional view towards ESP which never looked at social criterion as we do today. There are different but related approaches to needs analysis through which needs are spotted. Moreover, what should be of our concern in dealing with needs analysis in ESP material developments is that we should not consider these approaches distinct and isolated categories which are a black and white issue; we see them as different angles of a rectangle which makes the whole shape.

Munby's approach focuses on the students' needs at the end of a language course, and the target level performance. In his model the core is the 'communication Needs Analysis' (CNP) in which account is taken of 'the variables that affect communication need by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relation to each other'. After operating Munby's model, the end product is a profile of the students' language needs. The needs profile is then converted into a 'communicative competence specification', from which a sequenced syllabus can be drawn up [5].

A different approach is provided; in which they propose a present-situation analysis (PSA) [6]. The PSA ascertains the students' state of language development at the beginning of the language course. The learner is at the center of the system, which includes the surrounding society and culture. The methods of collection of data are surveys, questionnaires and interviews.

The other approach to needs analysis is taken by who advocate a learning-centered approach [6]. They draw a distinction between learner-centered and learning-centered. Learner-centered concludes that 'learning is totally determined by the learner' (and thus probably does not truly exist); whereas learning centered involves learning as a 'process of negotiation between individuals and society' (which includes teaching, syllabus, methods, materials, etc.). The 'target needs with' (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) with 'learning needs' (what the learner needs to do in order to learn) are compared [6].

Before preparing the right materials for our EAP courses, we should first set our goals and know which role is going to carry these materials in those particular courses. Four reasons have been mentioned for using materials which seem significant in the ESP context and are as follows:

1) As a linguistic source (in some situations, where English is a foreign not a second language)
2) As a learning supplement
3) As a motivating factor
4) As a reference (self-study and reference time)

Based on the above designed roles assigned to ESP learning materials, we can understand that in ESP courses, providing the materials is dependent on both teachers and students because the teachers are not in the position of being the 'primary knower' of the carrier content of the material [2].

The notion of 'learning contract' is a key issue in AE (adult education) [7: 12]). It specifies a particular form of educational encounter negotiated between:

(a) The organizer, sponsor or providing agency that provides assumptions not only about the degree of subject-specificity and purpose of the program, but also specifies eligibility requirements of student participants.

(b) The teacher, who provides initial expectations of the program, bringing in exterior experience from similar programs and is essentially responsible for 'translating' the sponsor's aims into tangible teaching material and integrating the specified objectives with student participants' abilities.

(c) The student participants, who provide, and are critically reflective on, their own existing knowledge as well as anticipations about the

course and whose previous experience and adulthood-oriented considerations are a deciding factor for the program's 'success.'

Different ESP programmers have different orientations (e.g. development of communicative abilities, enrichment of subject-specific knowledge, improvement of technical or professional qualifications). While such orientations delineate the ESP 'territory', it is expected that an explicit learning contract agreed between the three parties earlier will be set forth [7: 14]:

1) A proper co-operation between the ESP 'teacher' and the ESP 'student/participant' (to be shown on the negotiated syllabus and adult learners' motivation levels).

2) That the learning process forms a complete cycle: learners should be left with a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction that they have learnt something worthwhile.

3) That the learning process is sequential and cumulative, built on adult learners' existing knowledge and expectations.

4) That the learning process is voluntary and purposeful: the ESP learner has to be made fully aware of the methodological principles and the learning objectives underlying the actual teaching process; active involvement of the student participant in the planning process enhances motivation and commitment.

Traditional needs analysis explores the context for literacy acquisition by examining the target. Genre studies overlap with needs analysis through their attempt to describe target texts [8]. This sort of analysis was more a Contrastive Rhetoric. Contrastive Rhetoric is a misnomer, because Contrastive Rhetoric has in fact never really been involved in a rhetorical analysis focusing on persuasion and so encompasses an analysis of audience [8]. The analysis considering rhetorical factors is more sensitive to the context and to shifting contexts. Therefore, it is beyond the simplicities and the static nature of comparing one set of textual patterns to another, which terms contrastive poetics [8].

In GE courses we are free enough to prepare our materials, since there are varieties of materials in the market which is suitable to meet the requirements of the students and materials and course designers can work on myriad of areas of interests. On the other hand, in contrast to GE material development, a large amount of the ESP teacher's time is spent in writing and preparing materials [6]. Therefore, materials development in EAP courses is a tedious job considering both students' needs and teachers' ability and familiarity at the same time.

In preparing materials in an EAP program, what we should be careful of is how the text or other materials are intelligible for the learners.

Widdowson has distinguished between simplified version and a simple account of the original text [9]:

Simplified version: passages that are derived from genuine instances of discourse by a process of lexical and syntactic substitution, and hence are regarded as alternative texualizations of a given authentic discourse.

Simple accounts: are genuine instances of discourse designed to meet a communicative purpose, and do not represent alternative texualizations. They are genuine instances of discourse in their own right.

ESP materials can be a genuine instance of discourse but will not necessarily represent the same genre as the original [6]. On the other hand, simplification of an original text may have negative repercussions for a number of applied situations [9]. Therefore, he introduced the notion of easification as an alternative for simplification. It attempts to make the text more accessible to the learner by using a variety of what he calls easification devices, the purpose of which is to guide the learner through the text without making any drastic changes to the content or linguistic form of the text.

"English for Academic Purposes" refers to language research and instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts. It means grounding instruction in an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of specific academic disciplines. This takes practitioners beyond preparing learners for study in English to developing new kinds of literacy: equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts" [10]. However, most of the materials are either for commercial purposes without considering ideological basis of the teachers and students. In addition, there is no in-service training course to prepare teachers for their coming teaching programs.

In EAP course designs and material developments we should be aware of ideological impact of the materials we choose. There are many materials for EAP courses which are not prestigious and they do not meet the needs of the student in that particular field of the study [10]. In analyzing student needs, what is of importance is evaluating the social distribution of valued literacies.

Since the dominant ideologies are always mediated through culture, material developers and course designers, in EAP material development, should take into account that the text they are preparing should be appropriate in that specific culture and context of use [10].

Most of the materials are designed in a way that either they are not based on specific needs of the students or they are not appealing both to the teacher and students at the same time.

Unfortunately, most of the EAP course books are not specified for a particular discourse community [11]. Before specifying the problems of EAP course books in terms of whether they meet the needs of a specific discourse community, we should clarify what a discourse community is. People have different degrees of community membership or they may simultaneously belong to different communities [5].

Discourse community is a creation, primarily by the members of that community and secondarily by outsiders, which its members are distinguished based on a range of generalized behavior patterns and they have a cognitive network of norms, beliefs, and events [12]. Although, members of different communities may overlap in different degrees, but the ESP or EAP textbooks needs to address the intersecting modes of professional discourse which operate in a given specific ESP context [13].

Tracing the students' academic experiences in ESP courses, we can acknowledge that most of the students cannot follow their interest in their academic course books. Some students consciously ignored or changed instructions to pursue ''their own best interests, placing them above the professors' requirements in importance'' [14]. They may, sometimes, believe that what they do is more logical and meet their needs in a more appropriate way that through such beliefs the class may lose its harmony and both the book and the teacher are considered as a system of dictatorship imposed on poor students who cannot find any gateway to escape from it and this may develop a sense of pessimism towards teacher and its role in the classroom.

Moreover; they negotiate with their instructors to make assignments more manageable. A traditional needs analysis would have led to the students being offered extra work on, perhaps, listening comprehension or vocabulary. In the critical needs analysis, it is the economic and political context, not the students, that is the problem [14].

Students give different responses to assignments and it points to the inadequacy of academic genres [14]. In preparing sound and appropriate materials for the students, rights analysis and needs analysis are distinguished [14]. While needs analysis deals with course requirements based on some predetermined principles and assumes students agreement with course requirements, rights analysis deals with how power is exercised and theorizes EAP students as potentially active participants rather than obedient subjects. Rights are not a set of pre-existing demands but a blueprint through which some questions are asked about authority and control, such as: what are students permitted to do in a particular setting? How do they respond to rules and regulations? How are decisions about control and resistance made? Rights analysis does not assume that students are decreed upon certain rights [14].

The acquisition of English literacy is not a neutral undertaking. While education by its very nature will lead to change, all change brought about by education doesn't suit everyone with different social and political standing. What works here may not work somewhere else [8].

2- Method

The present research is a type of survey. The data collected by questionnaire was tested and statistically analyzed to investigate the research hypotheses. In this section the researchers elaborate on participants, instrumentation, procedure, and data analysis.

Participants of this study were 6 male ESP teachers and 60 male ESP students all of which have been participating in ESP classes in the mentioned discipline. The participants were informed about the evaluative purpose of the study and were assured that the information gathered about them would remain confidential. All of the participants were pursuing their Associate Degree in Azad University of Lahidjan. From the 6 ESP teachers among the participants, 4 of them had graduated in TEFL and 2 of them were subject matter instructors who were employed as an ESP teacher because they were proficient in Egnlish.

The main instrument of this study is a researcher-made attitude questionnaire, which has been developed through using other related textbook evaluation checklists and questionnaires. The questionnaire includes 30 items that are allocated to different parts in the following order:

1) Textbook features: 7 items
2) Teacher activities: 8 items
3) Language skills and components: 7 items
4) Critical thinking: 4 items
5) Discourse and genre analysis: 4 items

The questionnaire uses Likert scale and each item is answered by choosing one of the numbers from 1 to 7 which shows the extent to which the participants disagree or agree with each statement (1: totally disagree; 7: totally agree). Each part of the questionnaire was meant to investigate one of the research questions through eliciting participants' attitudes and opinions toward different aspects of their ESP classes. The title of each section is rooted in the related literature and the items are either adopted or created by the researchers.

The questionnaire was distributed among participants including teachers and students in different times and different places while they were supported with any technical or non-technical information they demanded. It should be mentioned since the average English proficiency of the students

did not suffice to understand and respond to the questionnaire in its original language (English), the researchers had it translated into Persian so that students could thoroughly perceive the items and reflect on them. To keep all the conditions equal for all participants, the teachers answered to the translated version too. The researchers provided the participants with required information about the research and the security actions about the confidentiality of the research.

The collected data was imported to SPSS software and the convenient statistical analyses were chosen to be applied. Due to the numerical nature of the choices for each items of the questionnaire and in order to deal with more clarified statistical procedures, the nominal data obtained from the questionnaire were quantified and converted into numerical data. Each number shows the extent to which the attitude of teachers or students matches the concepts stated through 30 items of the questionnaire. For example, in the first section of the questionnaire (including 7 items) related to textbook features, each item, based on the answer given by the participants, will be allocated a number and the mean of the numbers in each section works as an index to show participants' opinion in that area.

3- Results and Discussion

Based on the information in Table 1, one can argue that teachers and learners' attitude toward different aspects of ESP classes held for the students of Software Engineering have different patterns of relationship. Having calculated the score for each group's attitudes in different sections of the questionnaire, the researchers looked at the degree of difference between the opinions of these groups to detect the patterns of relationship for each section. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 1 The results of t-test analysis

Description	t	Level of Significance
Textbook features	1.79	0.20
Teacher activities	5.02	0.00
Language skills and components	9.36	0.00
Critical thinking	5.18	0.00
Genre and discourse analysis	0.19	0.85

The degree of difference between teachers and learners' attitude in each of the sections is the basis upon which 5 hypotheses of the study can be tested. Each section will be discussed separately.

The null hypotheses of the study state that there is no significant difference between the teachers and

learners' attitude toward the ESP materials and duties of an ESP teacher. The results show that hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 5 from the five null hypotheses of the study are not rejected. Based on t-test analysis, there is no significant difference between the teachers and students' attitude in two sections namely textbook features and discourse and genre analysis. But the other three null hypotheses of the study are strongly rejected i.e. there is a significant difference between the teachers and learners' attitude on three areas namely teacher activities, language skills and components, and critical thinking.

The results of this study show that our ESP teachers are more inclined to organize their teaching activities following traditional patterns where students' requirements and subjective needs do not play any significant role in defining and regulating the teaching activities. This finding is in accordance with the result found by [15]. The teachers' answers to the items related to teaching activities show that from their perspective, ESP courses in Iran should not be learner-centered or learning-centered. As we know, several criticisms have already been leveled toward this teaching attitude based on ESP and EAP research (cf. [6; 14]).

The ESP teachers think that more teaching time should be allocated to grammar, reading, and vocabulary. In contrast, ESP students prefer to spend more time on listening and speaking. It seems that the learning contracts need serious modifications in this area [7]. Most of the Iranian ESP teachers think they are in the position of being the 'primary knower' in the class; students' ideas show that they do not consider such intellectual authority for the teacher, at least based on what they have experienced so far [2].

The answers given to two items in the 'critical thinking' section of the questionnaire show that teacher's idea about the necessity of discussing social and political aspects of the lessons are quite different from what students think in this regard. Following more conservative patterns of thought, ESP teachers like to avoid any controversial issue that may lead to serious discussion about social and political matters. In contrast, the students being naturally less conservative and more eager to discuss controversial matters, prefer to get involved in intellectual challenges that are relevant to their future occupation and their position in the society; such issues are considered totally irrelevant by their teachers. Therefore, in two of the directions in ESP pedagogy mentioned by, teachers or students or both seem to be disoriented [4].

It is worth mentioning that although significant differences were not found between teachers and students' attitude in the other two sections i.e. 'textbook features' and 'genre and discourse

analysis', one cannot claim that there are no problems in these areas. The point is that the need to modify teaching activities in the other three areas is more urgent and needs consideration. An individual limited research project is not sufficient; more research is needed to locate all the problematic areas in ESP courses.

4- Conclusions

If we are really determined to promote the quality of our ESP courses, it is necessary to fill the chasm between teachers and students' ideas about 'teacher activities', 'language skills and components', and 'critical thinking'. Neither teachers nor students can be correct in all the points of controversy. Objective language learning needs can only be appropriately recognized if both teachers' valuable experiences and students' reasonable subjective wants are taken into account.

'Rights analysis' offers numerous opportunities to ESP teachers and students to promote the social aspects of the process of language learning [14]. Many of the factors that distort the desired relationship between ESP teachers and students are either directly or indirectly associated with the rights that both parties assume for themselves. In EAP courses, academic standards entail certain rights for all the groups involved in educational processes. As more research in ESP directs us towards learning-centered teaching, our conception of students' learning rights and the roles assigned to them will change meaningfully. Teachers' teaching rights can also be redefined if their place in the society's power structures, in general, and in universities' administrational hierarchy, in particular, is realistically recognized. If the teachers are given more freedom in selecting or producing their teaching materials, in turn they can help the learners better to enhance their learning space and reach a desirable state of autonomy and self-development. Competent ESP teachers can show the right path to the students if their hands are not tied up by the dominant structures of power.

ESP teachers can improve the quality of the English courses held for the students of universities by refreshing their relationship with ESP researchers and theoreticians. There are many research projects done in the areas of discourse analysis, genre analysis, rights analysis, etc. that can contribute significantly to ESP classrooms. Teaching English is a demanding task; teaching English in universities includes complexities that may not be observed anywhere else. Dealing with such unique circumstances, EAP teachers need to be careful about the content and form of their classes, and the way they deal with their students.

ESP learning contracts have to be devised and applied with utmost care, and should be maintained through constant evaluation and assessment [16]. Needs analysis is not just a temporary phase that happens at the beginning of ESP courses; it is rather an ongoing and innovative mechanism that is necessary for strategic planning in ESP programs [17]. Planning for a better future is impossible if we are not aware of our present situation and its problems.

The findings of this research may work as a springboard for more in-depth analysis in each of the areas investigated here, particularly those in which opinions of teachers and students do not match. Undoubtedly, any effort to improve the situation in ESP classes would not be desirably successful if teachers and students do not work with each other as a team; and that would be impossible if they hold totally different ideas and attitudes toward the role of the teacher, focus of an ESP class, and aspects related to critical thinking and logical reasoning.

We have evaluated our ESP textbook in some occasions (nationwide); we have made claims about the role of an ESP teacher based on the research findings in other countries; we have always encouraged students to stay critical; we usually hope that areas such as discourse and genre analysis be used practically in textbook development and course design; but none of these would work if teachers and students do not understand each other. The first step to reach such a mutual understanding is to know how each group looks at the ESP class and its features. Both students and teachers need to be informed about the material, their role in the classroom and the possible positive changes that could be made. Then they should be encouraged to work cooperatively to make those changes happen.

The results of this study can be also used as a starting point for a committee of researches and academic supervisors who aim to promote the quality of ESP courses held in universities of Iran. Strategic planning needs powerful assessment mechanisms and systematic programming. 'Learning needs analysis' and 'rights analysis' are two efficient mechanisms for locating linguistic, socio-cultural, socio-discoursal and sociopolitical problems inherent in ESP courses.

ESP teachers should be able to modify the students' educational ambitions and guarantee their success with their pedagogical agenda. This is possible only when the teachers update their relationship with both students and ESP researchers.

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