

Changing General to Specific: On the Outcome of Using Special English Materials in University English Courses

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Abstract

Preparing EAP teaching materials for Iranian higher education institutes has been one of the long standing issues of debate among Universities. Unlike EGP courses which enjoy imported quality materials published internationally, EAP courses are administered by universities with the materials prepared by local practitioners in the form of published textbooks. The question has been how to raise the outcome of the English courses. The plan is giving the priority to the specialist EAP written materials. This article aims to investigate the effectiveness of the newly designed EAP textbooks prepared to target the students' future study needs. For this purpose, the EAP textbooks of engineering and behavioral sciences at the University of Isfahan were evaluated in a two phase procedure: a) analyzing the target needs at the start and b) doing evaluation, both formative and summative, at the end of the teaching program. The aim was to discover students' views about the relevance and usefulness of the course materials on the one hand, and their improvement revealed by the final evaluation scores on the other hand. The data gathered through questionnaire and an interview indicated that the outcome of the changes was more satisfactory than in previous semesters. The test scores compared with previous tests and the views expressed in both interview and responses to the questions in the checklist revealed that a significant degree of improvement, both in the degree of motivation and increasing the level of proficiency, was caused by preparing the relevant materials responding to the needs of the students.

Key Words: English for specific/academic purposes, ESP/EAP material development, ESP/EAP courses, Needs Analysis

1. Introduction

On-going globalization has increased the importance of communicating in English at workplaces both within and across national boundaries. ESP practitioners are to consider the degree to which students' career needs are met by the existing language programs so that materials can be adjusted accordingly. The obstacles to the aim of having goal oriented university EAP programs are several and vary according to the context of teaching. The work that is presented in this article investigated one of the difficulties that the EAP practice faces

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in Iranian universities: materials preparation. The Foreign Language Center of University of Isfahan which is responsible for EAP education in the entire university has recently been assigned to carry out research projects which can lead to the improvement of EAP practice which has so far been agreed to be far from successful. Since about five thousand university students register in each year for EAP courses, the importance of projects with this nature is highlighted. In the previous practice, the needs, interests, and wants of the students were not served in agreement with their views; the materials used were almost entirely unrelated to the study and future career of students. No measure would be made to deal with heterogeneity as materials were chosen to serve an intended target level of general proficiency to reach.

The project which was undertaken and is reported here deals with the procedures of creating EAP materials for engineering and behavioral science students according to the a) academic needs, b) confessed wants and interests and c) students' proficiency levels estimated through placement tests. A task-based approach to teaching was employed with the expectation of students' improvements not only in their scores of the ESP final exams but also in their future studies as well as careers as reflected in their views cited in questionnaires.

The problem is that learners with different EFL proficiency levels are accepted to enter university for doing degrees; they all have to pass general English and EAP courses assigned for all as part of the curriculum. It is apparent how placing EFL students with varying proficiency levels in English courses creates problems both for the learners and teachers. EAP classes are almost always full of students who are heterogeneous which is profoundly problematical for effective teaching.

1.1. Purpose of the study

There is a common belief among both learners and practitioners that ESP courses in Iran are not successful (Amirian and Tavakoli, 2009). The textbooks offered to learners of different fields of study fail to account for the learners' future study and career needs. One major reason is said to be materials used. Therefore, this study investigated the outcome of newly designed materials.

1.2. Statement of the problem

To serve this purpose, this study investigated whether the newly designed ESP textbooks match the students' needs, interests and levels of language proficiency. The research question to be considered is as follows:

- 1) To what extent can our new EAP courses with materials fixed for the needs of students, increasing homogeneity and using tasks for groups lead to improvements in the outcome of the courses?

2. Review of Literature

From the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham, and Aston University in the UK) and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English speaking countries. In the past 35 years, ESP has attracted the attention of practitioners in the field of TEFL viewed as a cover term for teaching and learning English for multiple specific purposes: EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) etc. The rationale behind ESP courses is the diversity and specificity of learners' needs for learning English. Considering the diversity and specificity of learners' needs, ESP materials need careful designing since they not only affect the commitment of learners but also can have a great influence in their future study or professional needs.

Among measures taken to make ESP courses rich in terms of outcome, one should inevitably focus on the materials used suitable for the needs and wants of the students. As components contributing to the usefulness of ESP courses, Carter (1983) identified three features common to ESP courses: a) authentic material, b) purpose-related orientation, and c) self-direction. If we revisit Dudley-Evans' (1997) claim that ESP should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level, use of authentic learning materials requires some steps to be taken to choose exclusively the materials which are authentic bearing in mind the target needs of the students as well as the present level of proficiency. In order to reach the target goals while encouraging students to commit to the programs of teaching, courses are to be made purpose-related which refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required of the target setting (Gatehouse, 2001). This can be useful in administering tasks which are relevant to the fields of study and

wants of the students. The ultimate aim intended for the courses to reach, we wish students to be involved in activities which help them develop their skills as much as required to support their self-direction which is being concerned with "turning learners into users" (Carter, 1983, p.134).

In designing the courses with a degree of guaranteed success, one has to be clear about the importance of two concepts referred to as why and what of the students' needs for attending EAP courses. Special language and specialized aim are two entirely different aspects of the EAP teaching design which require a clear distinction (Gatehouse 2001). Only by estimating the two separately we can come up with authentic materials which are produced based on the target situation analysis. Often, confusion arises over these two notions; therefore, a mention of the distinction sounds in order here. (Perren 1974). Mackay and Mountford (1978) stated that "the only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is as a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well-defined context, task or vocation (p.4). The purpose for which learners learn a language as opposed to the nature of the language they learn are to be kept clearly distinct (Mackay & Mountford, 1978). Consequently, the focus of the word 'special' in ESP ought to be on the purpose for which learners learn and not on the specific jargon or register they learn (Gatehouse, 2001). When doing the preparation of materials, what and who are essential to take into consideration to avoid confusion in distinguishing between the genre of speech required to be used as materials, and the purpose the students attend the course and are motivated with which together can create a balance of factors effective in choosing materials for EAP teaching.

2. ESP in Iran

In Iran, the practice of EAP courses has increasingly expanded; at the present time EAP instruction forms a considerable part of curricula for all academic fields for which universities recruit teaching staff and form departments whose responsibility is teaching, if not all EAP courses, semi-EAP and general English courses. The development of ESP in Iran can best be characterized in terms of university EAP programs supervised either by independent English departments, language centers, or a part of the content department whose members choose to teach fully specified EAP courses enjoying the content knowledge required for understanding

EAP texts. In addition to the efforts in content departments regarding preparation of teaching materials, foreign language service centers administer semi-EAP and General English courses almost in all universities in Iran. A publishing company called SAMT has been established for two decades the results of whose efforts have been a number of published semi-EAP textbooks which are used for teaching in most universities (Atai, 2000). Three distinct generations of ESP/EAP instruction are discernible. In the first stage, EAP programs were jointly planned and implemented by Iranian universities and western universities or academic centers. A typical example is the project implemented jointly by Tehran University and University of Illinois in 1974. The essential goal of this project was to contribute to the learners' reading comprehension performance. There are no documents indicating a systematic set of procedures to the preparation of materials and the EAP course design in this era; distinct efforts made in the path of progress in areas such as EAP needs analysis, identifying goals and objectives of the practice, planning materials with a content focusing on different aspects of English including giving a language description, generic choice of materials, choice of a clear method of teaching, and so on. Among the issues raised and discussed in this stage were the Iranian university students' typical low levels of general English proficiency as well as their wrong language learning strategies and low motivation as important syndromes and serious barriers to the success of EAP programs (Dudley-Evans et al., 1979; Lotfipour, 1979).

The second generation of ESP instruction in Iran is associated with the systematic move supervised by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology to establish uniform discipline-based EAP programs for some university disciplines from 1980. The programs were planned with the special fields of study and in so doing, to enhance the students' level of motivation and interest (Atai, 2000). Yet, they apparently failed to do so because the courses did not prove to be much different from their counterpart general English courses in terms of instructional activities and focus of interest (Gooniband, 1988). The emphasis still remained on practicing sentence level analysis of scientific registers with a focus on aspects of reading skills. The reading texts did not closely fit the learners' study fields and work related needs, as the topics chosen were not specific enough for a major of study. The textbooks were called semi-EAP in which the vocabulary and the technical jargon of the field of study were limited

to general and semi-technical words excluding the technical key vocabulary of a particular field of science.

The third phase of ESP growth in Iran has been working towards greater specificity of content in EAP courses in terms of academic disciplines. Despite noticeable improvements over the previous textbooks in terms of content specificity of reading passages, the instructional activities and the exercises do not indicate differences compared with the previous ones (Atai, 2000). The materials produced by university publishing centers included fully specific EAP textbooks for students in a particular field of study. These textbooks were the results of a collaboration between staff of English departments and content departments. Joint publications were produced and very much supported by university administrations. Presently, a number of fully specific textbooks have been prepared by the joint cooperation of English and content departments, the members of teaching staff in each department join in the endeavor which is preparing a textbook used for students of different disciplines in various graduate and postgraduate levels, e.g. geography, tourism, mathematics, etc.

In what follows, a description will be presented of the measures we did in our course design project including what was done to make the materials more motivating and paying attention to students' wants and needs having made classes relatively homogeneous by using the placement tests. Below a brief representation of the activities in the newly designed courses for students of engineering and behavioral sciences is presented.

The new ESP textbooks for engineering and behavioral science students consist of 3 main parts which are introduced briefly below:

I. Pre-reading activity

A pre-reading activity involves students in activities which are helpful in getting them ready and relatively familiar with the topic under question. The title, a picture related to the topic, and some general questions are provided for the teacher to warm up the students and to make the students ready to understand the passage. Then, there is a vocabulary part to practice important new words of the text and make students ready to understand the passage. New words include technical, semi-technical or the general vocabulary items which are required to

learn for the students. The activities in this stage of class included focusing on not only the meaning of the items but only on pronunciation and additional information useful to learn and helpful to understand the reading part better.

II. Reading activity

The passages are about the students' area of study and the content fairly specific in which students learn scientific topics which are not considered conceptually advanced for the students in class. The content of the reading passages includes topics which are fairly specific and chosen from among a list of topics presented to students to choose. The books are designed for the students of behavioral sciences and engineering. Therefore, it covers all related topics to behavioral sciences (such as psychology, physical education, counseling, etc.) and engineering (such as computer, mechanic, electronic, etc.) as per students' preferences shown in the questionnaire used. The reading passages are chosen to absorb students' attention and interest and are followed by some related and assumably interesting pictures and notes. These features were assumed to be among the steps taken to make the textbooks more attractive compared with the previous published EAP books which would be written without any explicit attention to what students' preferences are. The former textbooks did not have any pictures or, if they contained, they were not appealing to the students. Definitions and exemplification of the technical or semi-technical words are given in front of each paragraph to make their learning easy and accessing the meanings more readily. The passages are organized from easy to difficult, with a word limit for each and a degree of readability intended for the students in question. After every four lessons, a quiz was given with the purpose of encouraging students to review the previous ones.

III. Post- reading activity

In the post-reading section, first true-false questions are given which are followed by multiple choice comprehension questions. Oral activity is encouraged by providing an oral activity part in which easy to answer questions related to the passage are given to improve oral skills. This skill was ignored in the previous EAP textbooks and was one of the reasons why commitment was not shown as much as needed by students who are eager to be able to converse in English within domains related to their discipline. Following the above activities, in a small section, one or more reading strategies are introduced to the students which could prove helpful in

making comprehension and learning relatively more convenient. In vocabulary learning section, varieties of exercises are provided such as: cloze which dealt with filling in the empty slots with the suitable word from a list of words, matching synonyms used in the passage, parts of speech activities which require students to identify parts of speech of words in and out of context of use, pair work activities which involve a pair of students in doing tasks and complete a situation or a piece of conversation by using new words of the passage. In the picture talk section or free discussion part, students are motivated to talk out their opinion about the given picture or the questions related to the topic of the passage. Grammar exercises are provided according to our decision on which one of the grammatical points of the passage is more frequent or observable in the passage. The grammar activities were designed differently from previous EAP textbooks, in the sense that only the most relevant and frequent grammar points are listed in the units of the textbook. The major difference in the newly prepared materials is the task-based approach in teaching. Various communicative tasks are provided for each lesson to engage students and create a cooperative atmosphere among them. Additionally, writing activities and translation exercises are provide to complete the variation in the activities of the unit of teaching. Activities with this nature are not fully task-based; however, they are absorbing enough to attract students' attention as they display characteristics of games for the purpose of increasing students' engagement. All the above activities are arranged according to our judgment to move from easy to more and more demanding on the parts of the students; and they are intended to involve students in greater participation as much as possible. After each four lessons, a quiz, which is in fact a summary test on those lessons, is given as a formative assessment. The course practitioners were the researchers as it is likely that a good method of teaching and relevant materials can turn to be useless in case the teacher is not skillful enough to use them in class with a sufficient degree of dominance.

Methodology and Procedures

3.1. Subjects

The aim of this study was to find out if the changes made to the newly prepared EAP materials, the grouping of students according to levels of proficiency, and taking measures in discovering students' wants and desires have been successful in increasing the efficiency of the EAP practice in University of Isfahan. For this purpose, homogenous learners who registered for EAP courses at

the English Center of the University of Isfahan majoring in engineering and behavioral sciences participated in this study. The feedback of the EAP teachers who were the researchers of this project and views from the student participants who participated in the EAP courses were taken into consideration to evaluate the effectiveness of the work. To investigate the effectiveness of the textbooks and the course in entirety, a questionnaire containing questions on not only needs but also students' estimations of effectiveness of the teaching materials was used during and at the end of the semester. The questionnaire data was followed by an interview conducted to gain evaluation data in both formal and informal ways.

3.2. Instrumentation

The data of the study were collected through using a questionnaire, as well as through tests which revealed the results of the teaching period. The questionnaire data revealed that students' views did change towards the better and the scores were more satisfactory than before. The results of comparing the questionnaire data are reported below in the next section to demonstrate the overall attitude of the students towards the content presented to them as the teaching materials and activities. The questions raised in the list of questions given had the intention of collecting data on participating students' views used as feedback for evaluation of textbooks, the effectiveness of type and amount of exercises and passages. The questionnaire data was completed by an interview to let students give their opinions freely and talk about the advantages and disadvantages of the textbooks.

3.3. Procedures

As one measure to ensure a better outcome, before the start of the course the students were asked to pass a placement test. From the very beginning, at the placement stage, different tests were designed for different fields of study. The students of engineering and behavioral sciences were divided into three groups: high-intermediate, intermediate, and elementary. The first group was assigned to two hours of teaching per week, the second group was assigned to three hours and the third group was assigned four hours per week. For elementary groups two kinds of textbooks were designed, a general one which was common for all majors followed by a textbook related to their fields of study. To compare their progress all students majoring in one field of study had to participate a common exam at the end of the semester. The newly designed books were prepared by the practitioners involved based on the results of needs analysis and a task-based approach method of teaching. The content of the books were field

related. Previous published books had a number of weak points: a) unrelated topics to the fields of study of learners for which learners would show no interest; in fact, the topics were either general or included topics that had nothing to do with the learners' fields of study; b) inappropriate exercises which involved learners in learning through doing the exercises and practices which sounded boring; the exercises in the previous published EAP books did not contain communicative or task-based activities. There was no cooperation among the learners and a teacher-centered approach was dominant. c) The focus was only on reading comprehension; the other skills were ignored. While in newly designed books, it was tried to organize the EAP materials with contents related to the fields of study of learners to make them motivating, exercises were intended to create a cooperative atmosphere among learners with the focus on a learner-centered approach and a task based syllabus. Reading comprehension was one of the skills which were practiced in these books.

4. Results

Regarding the question of what language skills and sub-skills are mostly focused on in the newly designed EAP textbooks, most of the students under investigation mentioned speaking skill and the task-based approach of the textbooks as an advantage among the characteristics of the course. The materials focused mainly on communicative tasks and despite the previous EAP textbooks reading comprehension was not at the center. All the four major skills were taught through the exercises constituting the activities of the course. Tables 1 shows, 75.10% of learners agreed that reading comprehension exercises were effective and helpful which indicates, more than the efficiency of the exercises used, their fairly positive attitude towards the programs of activity reflected in their satisfaction and hope they demonstrated through various means. 77.89% agreed on effectiveness of grammar exercises; the views reported how easy, manageable, and relevant the grammar points taught in each unit which can be an indirect indication of their security which ceased to exist before, when EAP was considered a threat for most students whose worries was passing it behind by every means possible. 93.75% gave their positive views on the helpfulness of the vocabulary part; this is almost the entire students' positive view towards learning semi-technical and general new vocabulary items. This indication is important, as in our previous informal evaluations students were worried with the difficulty of the new words and phrases in EAP units. Our experience tells us that, if vocabulary is taught in a proper method with the degree of difficulty fair for students' level of proficiency, the influence on their attitude will turn out to be positive. Regarding

tasks and oral activities involving students' participation, 85.88% agreed on the effective role of tasks and the oral section. The overall positive attitude of the students could clearly be observed in their views which showed that they enjoyed translation activity; as it was limited and fair with regards to difficulty. The majority of 71.83% gave positive views on helpfulness of translation exercises. This observation shows, despite the often observed lack of interest in translation by students, they developed a positive attitude towards it since indirectly they tended to show their pleasure with the changes made to the components of the course. The students further revealed their happiness with the quizzes despite the fact that usually they dislike exams with any nature. This demonstrates their sense of security and success; they knew they would manage to pass the tests given to them; as they had already learnt what they needed to learn. The views of a majority of 75.34% showed that the role of quizzes was good for them to help review the content of the lessons. The overall attitude of the students could be claimed to be positive, since 87.46% gave good views regarding the general effectiveness of all exercise parts and the creativity required for every exercise type. The general nature of the question could tell us that students were happy and hopeful about the course. This is considered to be a rare finding given our experience with students' negative and fearful attitude in former courses they had to pass, in which the difficulty of the teaching materials and the boringness of the activities would make it intolerable for the students to cope with. The positive feeling is demonstrated by 85.50% of students who agreed that the exercises helped them improve their general language abilities. As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of the participants responded to the questions with a positive view; they considered exercises as helpful and effective on their learning.

Table 1. EAP learners' views: The Effectiveness of exercise types

	Exercises	Percentage
1	How effective are reading comprehension exercises?	80.10
2	How effective are grammar exercises?	77.89
3	How effective are vocabulary exercises?	93.75
4	How effective is the role of oral practice and communicative tasks?	85.88
5	How effective are translation exercises?	71.83
6	How effective is the role of quizzes?	78.34
7	How helpful and innovative are the role of exercises?	87.46
8	How is the improvement of language skills by the end of the course?	85.50
	The mean score	

Table 2 represents the EAP teachers' views about the newly changed textbooks; those who had taught the textbooks for a term of study. Twelve EAP practitioners showed they had similar feedback with those of students. The same questionnaire was given to twelve EAP teachers who had taught the course using the materials we fixed to the needs of the students; and as the results of the comparison shows their general view of the teachers was positive, the same as the students who had passed the course. The questionnaire data added to the interview data which was elicited from twelve teachers who were teaching the books reveal that the teachers agreed on the appropriateness of the materials and the exercises in the textbooks.

Table 2. EAP teachers' views: The Effectiveness of exercise types

	Exercises	Percentage
1	How effective are reading comprehension practices?	80.30
2	How effective are grammar exercises?	75.10
3	How effective are vocabulary exercises?	80.20
4	How effective is the role of oral practices and communicative tasks?	80.50
5	How effective are translation exercises?	79.50
6	How effective is the role of quizzes?	81
7	How helpful and innovative are the role of exercises?	90.50
8	How is the improvement of language skills by the end of course?	89.25
	The mean score	

Considering the question of the effectiveness of the project of changes made and the grouping of students according to their language proficiency, the EAP teachers agreed that their efforts were actually not in vain; they could observe some degree of satisfaction expressed by their students who were successful in completing the course. They believed that teaching to homogeneous students was easier and were pleased with such a measure which leads to their feeling of hope that their endeavor in classes would not be doomed to fail. A very few EAP teachers were critical of our grouping of students through the measures described above, they believed that the weak groups of students who formed the elementary members were in a position of disadvantage since they all did not seek to progress further as a result of not having a serious competition coming from other strong classmates. Actually the competition which could be created as a result of some students' greater participation in the activities would not exist in weak group of students. The homogeneity which is necessary for the class to be coherent with regards to learning aptitudes was not believed to be advantageous to the elementary students. In this group, the class was not as active with students' activities as the

other two classes since activities needed some aptitude and some motivation which, in this group of students, both were absent. There was no model or motivation for weak students to try hard and to keep themselves up. They mentioned that heterogonous classes are better than homogeneous classes with elementary students without a sense of competition and a degree of motivation. They argued that in classes which are heterogeneous, we have both strong and weak students in the same class who can help each other out through some kind of interaction. However, the majority of the teachers who took part in the teaching of the materials in this project strongly supported the view of homogeneity by describing how their experience in classes was more pleasing than the time a class was filled with students of various proficiency levels; the teacher would find it very difficult how to monitor his teaching and provide the teaching level according to different levels of understanding. Classes full of heterogeneous students will be boring for advanced students and confusing for weak students. The teacher interview data agreed overally on the homogeneity of classes believing that more fruitful results could be gained only when homogeneity exists.

As illustrated in Table 3, students majoring in engineering and behavioral sciences agreed that the passages given in the text book were effective and helpful for their study and professional needs and that they realized that their language proficiency improved by completing the course. The questions targeted the adequacy of the reading materials and the topics chosen for students. The assumption was that the topics were favorable for the students and the content of each passage had a sufficient degree of readability which was not any threat to the students' feeling of difficulty and challenge. Questions were concerned with the difficulty level of each reading passage, length, sequence of units from easy to difficult, relevance of topics and titles used to the students' wants or needs, desirability viewed by students concerning the content of the passages, general attitude of students about the overall design and the pictures used in every unit of reading, communicative nature of the texts and activities, and students' judgments regarding the entire book and their progress at the end of completing the course. At least eighty to maximum ninety percent of the students showed a positive view towards the book in its entirety. The fact is that when students are satisfied, as our previous experience shows, the feeling will be reflected in all aspects of the inquiry; therefore, the responses cited below imply that students in general were happy with the outcome of the changes and their experience in the EAP course they passes. The important point is that this satisfaction ceased

to exist in previous EAP courses. The students usually displayed a lack of commitment and were frustrated with the course and the requirements of the course.

Table 3. EAP students' views: The effectiveness of the books

		Percentage
1	Appropriateness of the difficulty level of the readings	89
2	Suitability of the length of readings	91.70
3	Effective sequencing of presenting lessons (from easy to difficult)	85
4	Related topics of lessons to the field of study of students	80
5	Interesting topics	91.67
6	Helpful, interesting and motivating pictures and design	80.84
7	A very helpful and communicative EAP book for learning	80
8	Improvement of general language ability by the end of semester	86.10
	The mean score	

Table 4 shows the effectiveness of the newly designed EAP materials as mentioned by EAP teachers who were teaching them. 87% of the teachers agreed that the books were helpful and communicative enough to improve the language ability of learners; also 90.45% agreed that the content of the books were related to the students' fields of study, and 86 % agreed the books were successful materials for improving the major language skills of the students. The views show that the project of changes which we implemented and which were experienced by seven teachers who had already been involved and had already gained experience in teaching EAP for the English Language Center improved the work in general. The majority of the teachers supported the changes and presented views which displayed how the teaching could be improved given materials are relevant and desirable, there is homogeneity, and students' wants and needs are satisfied. The data collected and presented in tables 1 to 4 are the results of responses given by the students in two of the classes taught by two of us; however, the interview data incorporated viewed elicited from seven teachers and a good number of students who wrote down their views in terms of written answers.

Table 4. EAP teachers' views: the effectiveness of the books

		Percentage
1	Appropriateness of the difficulty level of the readings and exercises	90.10
2	Suitability of the length of readings	87.25
3	Effective way of presenting lessons (from easy to difficult)	85.50
4	Related topics of lessons to the field of study of students	90.45
5	Interesting topics	92.10
6	Helpful, interesting and motivating pictures and design	94
7	A very helpful, relevant and communicative EAP book	87

8	Helpful to the improvement of general language ability of students	86
	The mean score	

In sum, both the teachers and the students supported the changes in the design of the newly designed EAP materials, specifically the pictures and the way the books were organized. The task-based approach was new in EAP textbooks and the students were interested in doing the tasks. The general belief was that the textbooks were useful and the teaching project on the whole was successful. The thing is that our findings are agreeable with Fiorito (2005) who claims that individuals learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with the language they wish to learn in an appropriate context of use which they comprehend and find interesting. In this view, EAP courses can be means for such opportunities. Learners acquire English as they work with materials which they find interesting and relevant and which they can use in their professional work or studies. The more learners pay attention to the meaning of the units presented to them, the more they are successful in developing their skills; they need to focus on the linguistic input in the context of use; otherwise, through isolated language structures and out of context drills presented to them in a teacher oriented class, learning will be a less likely achievement and motivation ceases to attract students' commitment in their classes.

The EAP student is expected to focus on the meaning of text units which they find in the context of their use. Most important for efficiency which we are after is the fact that English should be presented not as a subject to be learned in isolation from real use, nor as a mechanical skill or habit to be developed. On the contrary, English should be presented in authentic contexts to make the learners acquainted with the particular ways in which the language is used in functions that they will need to perform in their fields of specialty or jobs (Fiorito 2005). Teaching through using textbooks concentrates more on language in context and less on teaching grammar and language structures. The texts cover varieties of subjects related to the field of study of students and the focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The focus of EAP courses in Iran is mostly on reading comprehension and semi-technical terminology. In the newly designed EAP textbooks, a shift from mere reading comprehension to a more communicative and task-based activities created effectiveness and learning progress. In the past and in the beginning phases of EAP development in Iran, the former textbooks were not successful in producing learning results which they were designed for considering the future needs of learners. This project reports a set of measures we took to improve the outcome of EAP practice in our university. The changes were made to a) relevance of materials to the fields of study, b) readability of passages, c) desirability and wants of the students, d) task based activities designed to get students' participation as much as possible in classes, and e) changing the design and method of activities with the aim of removing previous shortcomings. The project further involved creating homogeneity in EAP classes through grouping learners according to their language proficiency which has been done for the first time by English Center of University of Isfahan in Iran. Therefore, not only needs and interests of learners were taken into account by the need analysis which was carried out at the beginning of the course but also levels of proficiency were considered to group the learners into homogeneous classes to get advantage from the EAP courses. The information gained through needs analysis undertaken (through using a questionnaire and interviews), revealed clearly that exposing learners to reading comprehension passages and some new words without considering the above factors is not enough. Language is made up of four main skills which are all needed to improve each other. For example, for improving speaking skill one cannot suffice to talk, first you need to listen carefully. Also an EAP student whose proficiency is low cannot be exposed to advanced texts which are suitable to the needs of other more proficient students. What the Project did in Language Center of University of Isfahan was an important move in the realm of EAP practice in Iran which is a highly costly one. As two thousand majors of study which are in need of good EAP materials and require a large sum of budgetary expenditure are to be served, works of this nature are considered vital in Iran. More than fifteen different Faculties in University of Isfahan have in them departments. The number of departments of study in different Faculties exceeds a hundred. Three EAP courses are to be offered to each department of study and in three levels of under and post graduate study. It is easy to get to an estimation what a huge project is being undertaken under the umbrella of EAP in Iran. Rather than conducting interviews with specialists in the field, analyzing the language that is required in the professions, or

conducting needs analysis, many ESP teachers have become slaves of the published textbooks available, unable to evaluate their suitability based on personal experience, and unwilling to do the necessary analysis of difficult specialist texts to verify their contents. In Language Center of University of Isfahan the decision was to stop using previous published books which served neither the learners' needs nor their interests without observing their proficiency levels. We need to train teachers who are skillful researchers in doing materials evaluation and designing courses with a good syllabus; and then the successful teachers implement the new syllabus and try to adapt themselves to the changes in their methods of teaching.

To sum up, the new EAP materials combined concepts taken from scientific subject matter with knowledge of English language and packed them with pedagogical skill which we have and need to develop for teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study. Being able to use the vocabulary and structure that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation. Therefore, the students' abilities in their subject-matter field, in turn, improve their ability to acquire English. Subject-matter knowledge gives learners the context they need to understand the English of the classroom (Fiorito, 2005).

Finally, for the EAP to grow and flourish in the future, it is vital to understand what EAP actually represents. Only then, can new members join with confidence, and existing members carry on the practices which have brought ESP/EAP to the position it has in EFL teaching today. In Iran, ESP and in particular EAP are still in their infancy and it is the ideal time to form a consensus to encourage great investments in progress and developments vitally needed.

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