The Linguistic needs of Textile Engineering students: A case study of National Textile University

Ansa Sattar

Ansa.appliedlinguistics@gmail.com

National Textile University, Faisalabad

Saira Zahid

Sara.linguistics@gmail.com

Government College University, Faisalabad

Muhammad Asim Mahmood

masimrai@gmail.com

Government College University, Faisalabad

Muhammad Abrar Tahir

Abrar_thr@yahoo.com

National Textile University, Faisalabad

Nasir Ali

Nasir_saim@yahoo.com

National Textile University, Faisalabad

Abstract

This study explores the academic needs of undergraduate students of Garment Manufacturing and Yarn Manufacturing at National Textile University, Faisalabad. A questionnaire has been designed to determine students' linguistic needs. The teachers are also asked about the students' needs. The questionnaire obtains the teachers and the students' preferences for learning language

in different contexts, for teaching methods and materials. The results show that students want to learn English language for academic and business purposes. They prefer to learn English focusing on communication strategies rather than grammar or translation methods and want to improve their listening and speaking skills. But the teachers are in favor of teaching methods which concentrate on grammar rules and they focus on the improvement of speaking and writing skills. The findings of this research also depict the students' will to acquire Pakistani accent, their need of English usage outside the country, their preference to learn English for face to face communication and also for participating in business meetings. This study provides an insight of English language learners' needs and also of teachers' preferences to the syllabus designers and ESP practitioners and helps them in developing language courses and materials for the students of Garment Manufacturing (G. M.) and of Yarn Manufacturing (Y. M.).

Introduction

English for academic purpose is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal educational system. It has basically two divisions: common core and subject specific. These two divisions have been described by Blue (as cited in Jordan, 1997) as English for general academic purpose (EGAP) and English for specific academic purpose (ESAP). Blue states that a large proportion of common core elements are known as 'study skills'; for example listening and note-taking. While subject specific English is the language required for a particular academic subject, for example economics together with its disciplinary culture. It involves the language structures, vocabulary, and the particular skills needed for subject, and appropriate academic conversation.

The students, who are learning English as a second language, possess study skills to an educational level in their own language. They may simply need to transfer their skills into English, and they have to adjust them to a different academic environment. Jordan (1997) describes learning environment as an important factor and states that the students' needs may differ according to their learning environment. For example students from educational system of Pakistan differ from those in UK, Australia or North America and may need considerable help with various study skills and the academic conventions attached to them if they go to study in those countries. There may be substantial differences between the structure and conversation attached to an academic discussion in Indonesia, Nepal or China, and a seminar for postgraduates in a British university. The complexity is the different cultural convention involved in academic arguments. So, it is clear that the consideration of academic environment plays crucial role in the assessment of students' needs. (Jordan, 1997)

Hence the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to their priorities plays crucial role in syllabus designing. It makes use of both subjective and objective information. (Richards et al. 1992)

Jordan (1997) explains that need analysis is the starting point for devising the syllaby, courses, materials and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place. Under the umbrella of need analysis, other approaches have been incorporated. For example it includes target-situation analysis, present situation analysis, deficiency analysis, strategy analysis. In addition, other terms have been proposed for needs. These terms include "necessities, demands, wants, likes, lacks, deficiencies, goals, aims, purposes and objectives" (Jordan, 1997, p. 21).

Furthermore, need analysis is important to check the involvement of students in every phase of educational field. It is necessary to know about the learner's objective, their attitude towards language, expectation from the course and learning habits in order to design an efficient curriculum (kayi, 2008).

According to Iwai et. al. (as cited in Songhor, 2008), formal need analysis is relatively new to the field of language teaching. However, informal need analyses have been conducted by teachers in order to assess what language skills their students needed to master. In fact, the reason of different approaches' birth and then replacement by others is the teachers' intention to meet the needs of their students during their learning.

 In the same way, Kayi (2008) discusses the importance of needs analysis. He explains the ways to conduct needs and situation analysis for developing English with the help of survey from teachers and students as a second language curriculum. Kayi (2008) indicates the ESL students' wish to improve their essay writing skills, pronunciation, general listening comprehension, oral presentations, and listening comprehension. It is clearly seen from his findings that there is a strong connection between the difficulties students face in learning the language and the skills they would like to improve. They would like to improve the skills which are challenging or problematic for them. In developing the curriculum for Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking courses, these findings have been taken into consideration by ESL instructors of community college and emphasis has been given to the most problematic skills for the learners in this specific setting.

Similarly, Choi has conducted a research on the needs of freshman students who study tourism English. The main purpose of his study is to find out what the tourism major students of college want to learn in their particular tourism conversation classes and also the ways which can

help them to achieve better results in acquiring their degree, licenses and getting a job. The conclusions drawn from Choi's study show the students' responses or needs regarding the content areas which should be included in tourism English courses and also the teaching methods. This study discusses many issues like what the students want to do after graduation, what should be taught in accordance with their aims to get job, how much they are motivated to learn English, what they think their level of English proficiency are and what skills of English they think they need to improve.

The importance of needs analysis is further supported by Hawang and Lin (2010). They have conducted a research on medical students, selected from Department of Medicine at Chung Shan Medical University. Through the questionnaire, the researchers determine the medical students' linguistic needs like their requirement of learning English to write patient charts, medication prescription and orders in English in their future. Hawang and Lin's work provides a very useful description of the linguistic needs and perceptions of medical students and faculty members in Taiwan. As they have discussed many issues and offered many recommendations according to the need of their medical students and compared the perception held by three groups; faculty, lower class group and higher class group. Preferences are, for example, improving the English curriculum for the school of medicine and other assistance or requirement for medical students.

Abdullah (2005) has conducted another study to find out the language needs of first-year students at the medical college of Aden university. As the subjects' responses reveal that the implemented ESP material does not match their present and future needs. He has provided a proposed schema for medical English course based on students needs.

Similarly, Tamimi and Shuib (2010) have investigated the English language needs of Petroleum Engineering students at Hadramount University of science and technology. They have identified the students' needs and perceptions on English language skills by means of questionnaire survey and conclude that the current course is not appropriate for the science and technology students. They suggest some recommendations according to the needs of students and redevelopment of ESP curriculum offered to the petroleum engineering students at HUST.

In the same way, Rehman (2011) also cites a survey of students' needs regarding ELT in Najran University, Saudi Arabia. According to the specific needs of the learners, Rehman has offered many suggestions for teachers and course planners and also recommended that the teachers should conduct their own need analysis in order to identify the basic needs of the students.

All the above mentioned studies reveal the importance of need analysis. The present study also aims to determine students' needs and focuses on the two aspects of need analysis triangle that are highly concerned with students' academic needs and the teachers' point of view. It is particularly concerned with the academic needs of the English language learners of Garment Manufacturing (G. M) and Yarn Manufacturing (Y.M) departments of National textile university Faisalabad. The results of this study can be generalized to the advance learners of English as a second language.

Methodology

For the purpose of present study a questionnaire has been developed in order to get participants' (students and teachers) opinions about their preferences for English language learning in different contexts. Kayi (2008) states that the data obtained from the questionnaires is helpful in diagnosing the problems related to the four language skills and the abilities which students would

like to improve. The questionnaire used for the present research, is based on Munby's model of Communicative Needs Processor (as cited by Songhori, 2008). Le Ha (2005) has criticized Munby's model for its redundancy. So for present study, it has been further modified with needs analysis template available online at www.englishabc.co.uk.

The first part of the questionnaire is used to get participants' personal information. The rest aims to find out the participants' opinion about context for language use (inside the country, abroad), language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), medium of communication, current level of students' linguistic proficiency and future target for linguistic competence, teaching methods (grammar, translation, communication), accent (British, Pakistani, American), language learning strategies (work alone or in groups) and the level of comprehension, vocabulary and their preference for daily English classes in a week.

The data has been collected from 35 students of Garment Manufacturing, 31 students of Yarn Manufacturing and 4 English language teachers from National Textile University Faisalabad. As this study aims to draw out learners' needs, the advanced English language learners of the same education level (undergraduate students) have been selected for this purpose. The teachers and students of G. M. and Y. M have been selected as participants because of the ease and access. One of the researchers is lecturer at National Textile University and is taking classes of G.M. and Y.M. students.

The collected data has been analyzed with the help of SPSS software and the frequencies have been measured to get inferences.

Results

The results of this study show the preferences of students about English language learning and also illustrate teachers' view in this regard. Most of the students give first preference to learn English for the sake of work and training. 34. 3 % students of Garments Manufacturing rank work as their first need and 31.4 % G. M. students mark training as their second need of learning English language. Fig. 1 shows the ranking of 'work' as first objective and also the ranking of 'training' as the second learning objective of the students of Garment Manufacturing. While, 35% students of Yarn Manufacturing rank work and 25 % students of Yarn Manufacturing grade training as their main objective to learn English. The ranking of 'work' and 'training' by Y. M. students is shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 1: Objective of G. M. students to learn English
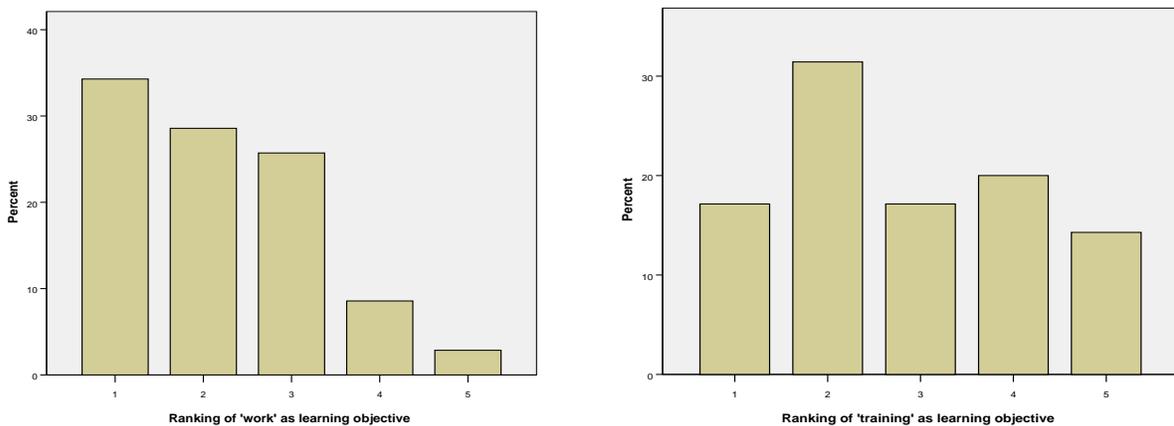
Fig. 2: Objective of Y. M. students to learn English
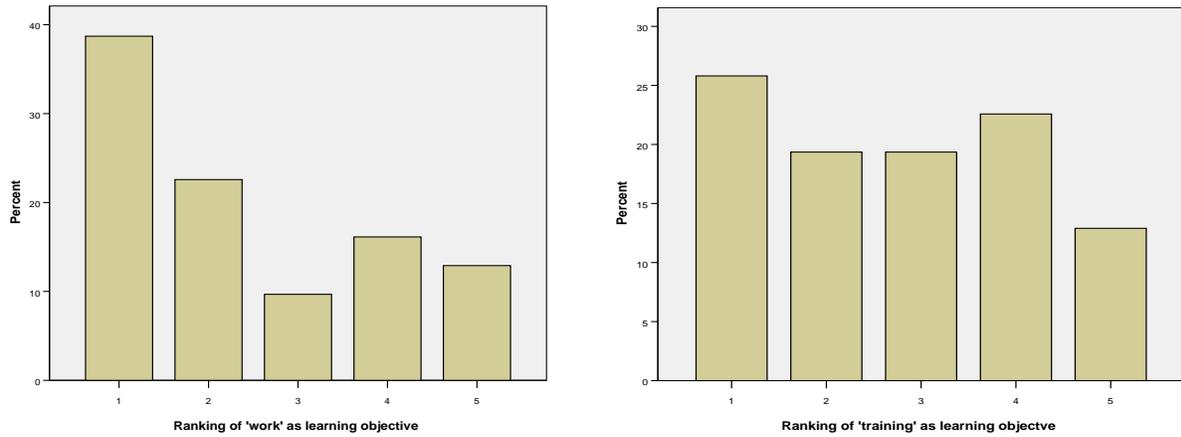
The teachers also position work and training as the students' first and second objective to learn English language respectively. 50 % teachers mark work as students' first objective and 50 % mark training as their second objective of learning English. (see fig. 3)

Fig. 3: Teachers' preference for work and training as students main objectives of learning English
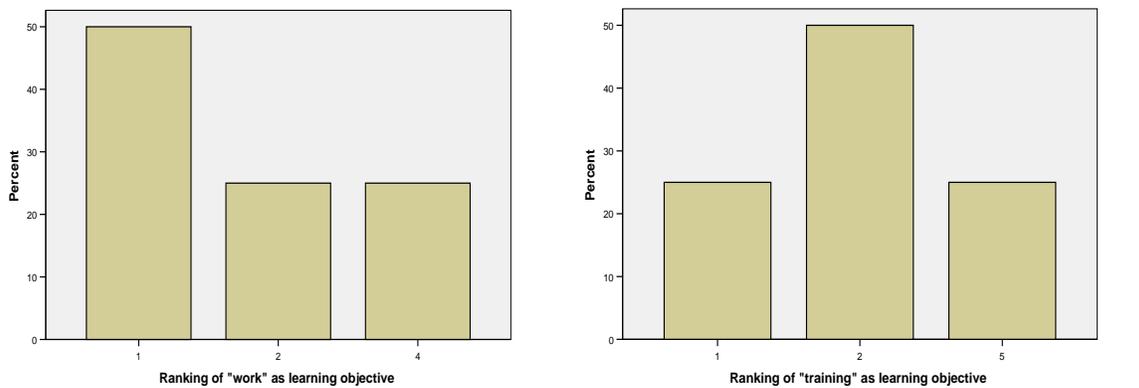
The students of both departments have placed speaking skill at the highest and listening at the second highest rank. 62 % students of G. M. and 64.5 % students of Y. M. mark speaking as highest ranking skill. On the other hand, 40 % students of G. M. and 35.5 % students rank listening as their second preference. Reading and writing are at the least preferred skills. Fig. 4 shows the ranking preferences of G. M. students and fig. 5 illustrates the ranking preferences of Y. M. students.

Fig. 4: Highest ranking of speaking and listening skills by G. M. students
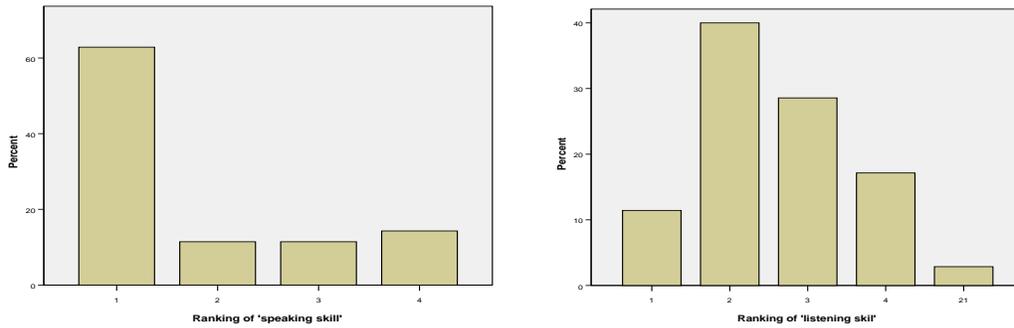
Fig. 5: highest ranking of speaking and listening skill by Y. M. students
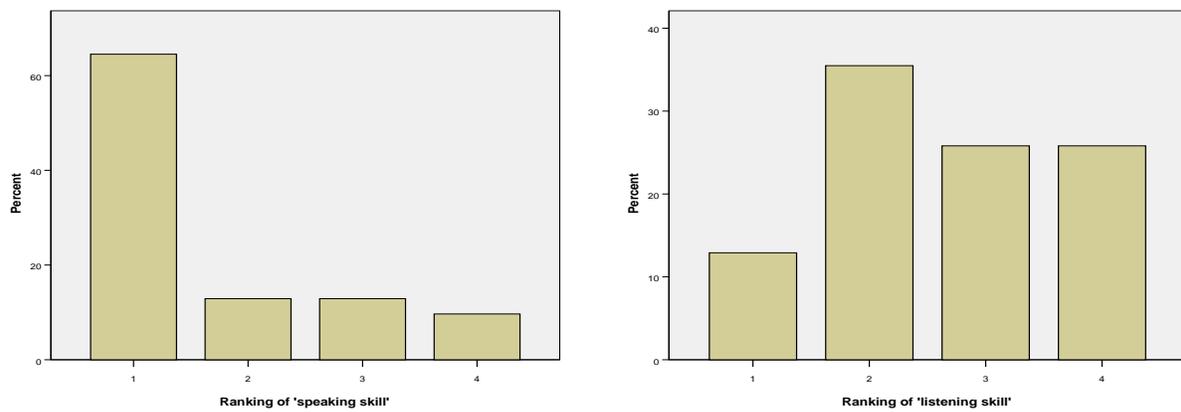
On the other hand, 75 % teachers mark speaking as the most preferred skill and 75 % teachers mark writing as the second important skill for students to be mastered. They place reading at third and listening at fourth position. Fig. 6 illustrates teachers' preference for language skills.

Fig. 6: Highest ranking of speaking and writing skill by the teachers
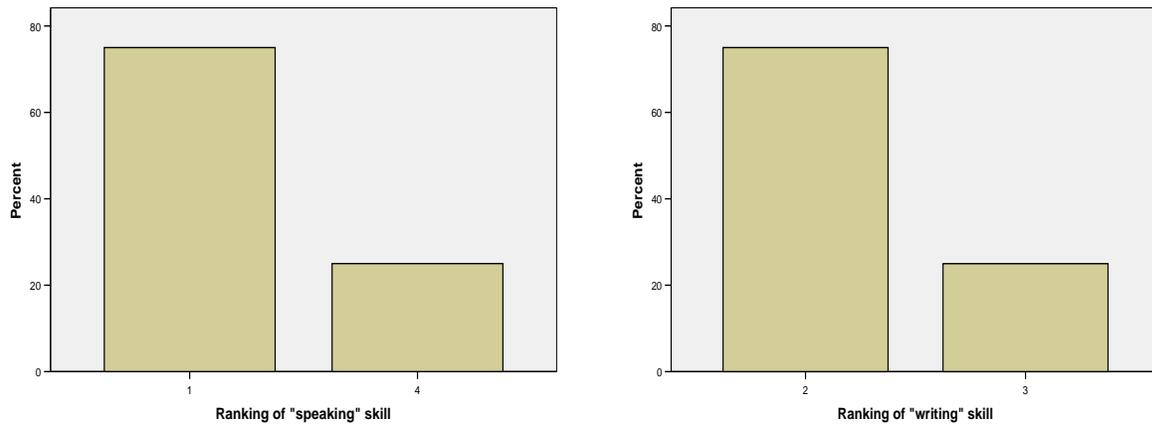
Most of the students agree that they use English in lecture room. Being students, they need linguistic competence in English for academic purposes. 37.1 % students of G. M. and 29 % students of Y. M. mark the lecture room for using English Language. 75 % teachers also agree that students need English language in lecture room to comprehend lectures (fig. 9). Fig. 7 shows the G. M. students and fig. 8 illustrates the Y. M. students' preference to use English language in the context of lecture room.

**Fig. 7:** Context for English Usage marked by G. M. students
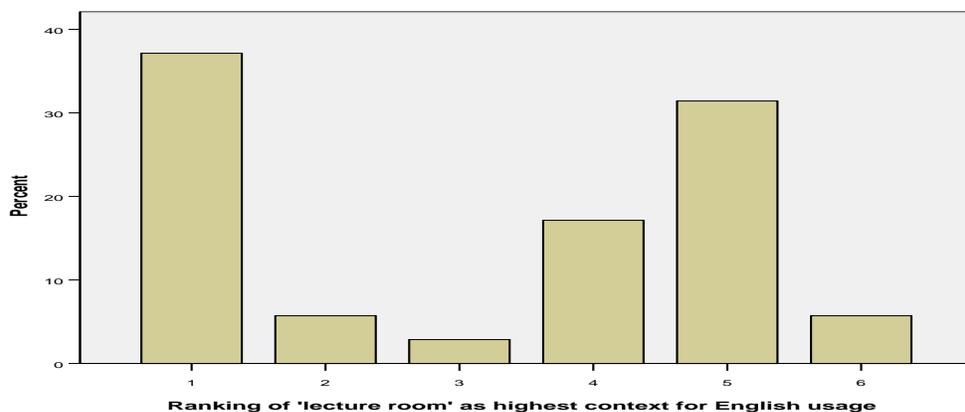
**Fig. 8**: Context for English usage marked by Y. M. students
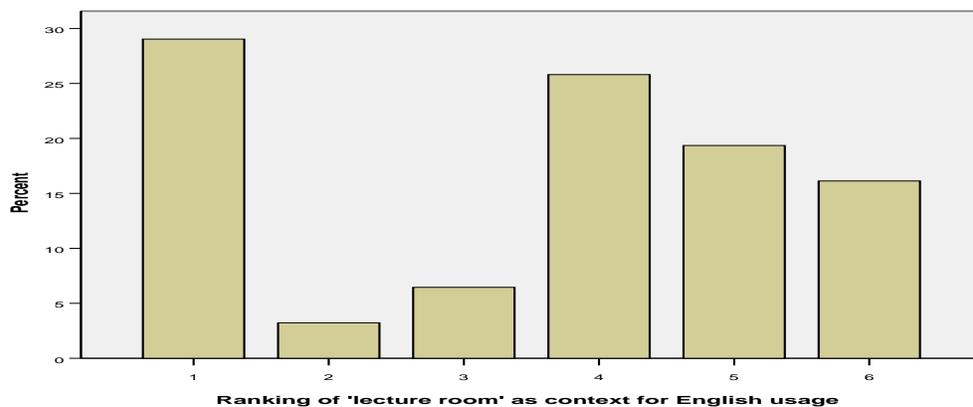
Fig. 9: Context for English usage marked by the teachers
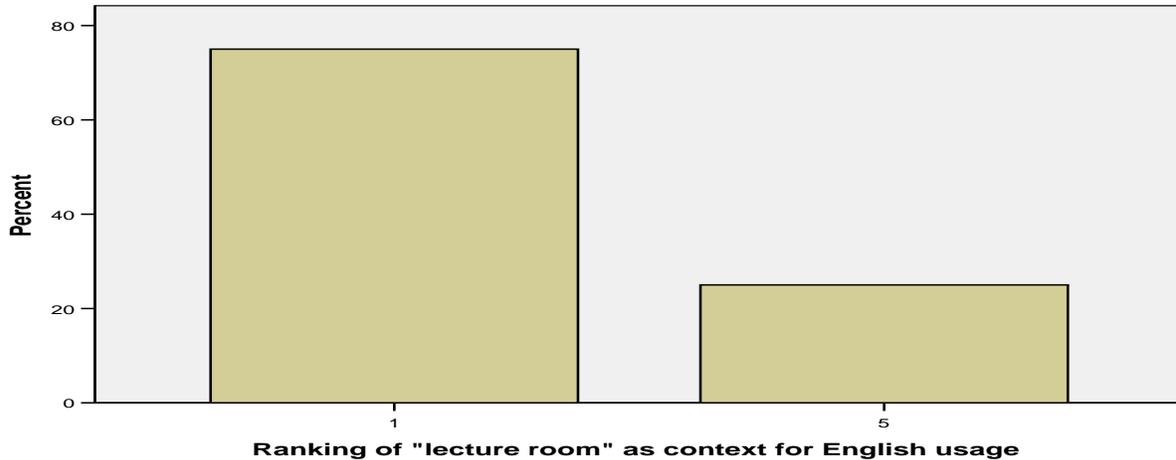
Most of the students want to learn English language to use it outside the country. It seems that they need English language relatively more abroad than inside the country as 62.9 % students of G. M. and 58.1 % students of Y. M. have chosen this context (abroad) for English usage. 70 % teachers confirm that students need English language more in abroad. When asked about the frequency of classes, only a limited number of students prefer to have English class daily. 37.1 % students of G. M. have preferred daily English class and 34.3 % have agreed on thrice in a week. On the other hand 38.7 % students of Y. M. prefer daily English language lecture and the similar number of respondents has preferred to have English class thrice a week. The 50 % teachers are also in support of having English class thrice a week.

When the students are asked for their preferred method to learn English language, they chose communicative approach. They want to learn English focusing on the ways of communication rather than grammar and translation activities. Communication focused method

is chosen by 65.7 % students of G. M. and 48 % students of Y. M. The results are stated in fig. 9

and fig.10.

**Fig. 9:** preference of G. M. students for teaching methods
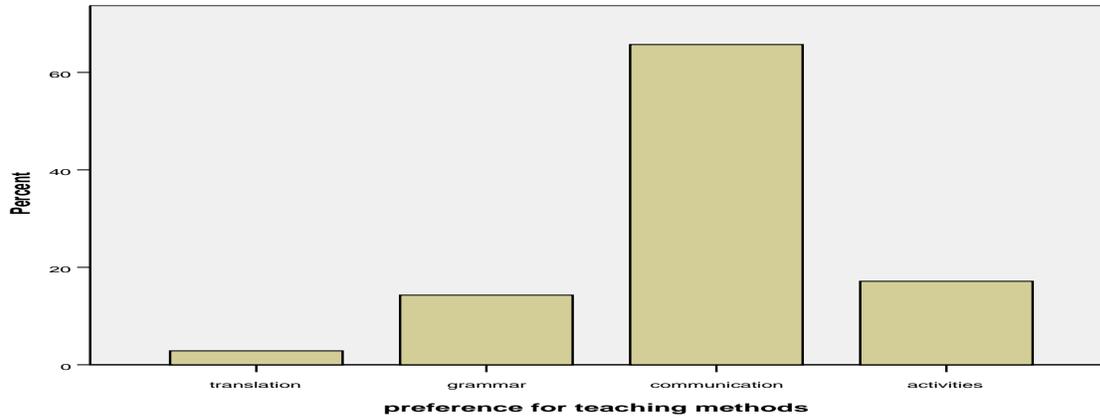
Fig.10: preference of Y. M. students for teaching methods
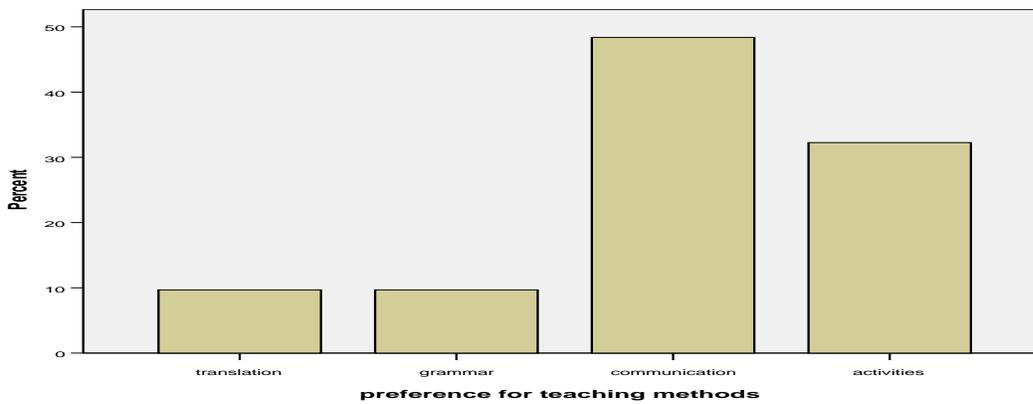
On the other hand, 75 % teachers state that students should be taught through the teaching

methods which focus on grammar rules while the other 25 % favors to teach through

communication strategies.

The students are also investigated about their present linguistic competence and their target competence level for the future. All the students respond that they are fairly good or neither good nor bad in their comprehension, speaking, listening, writing, reading and also have good vocabulary. They want to achieve the excellence in all these aspects of language and have target to enhance their proficiency level in future. But on the other hand the teachers state that students are neither good nor bad or rather are not very good in comprehension, reading, writing, listening speaking and are not good at all in vocabulary. The teachers agree that in future, the students will achieve excellence in all these language skills.

As for as the rules of grammar are concerned, most of the students prefer to learn English grammar only to be able to speak accurately. The students are willing to learn grammar rules so that they can communicate accurately. Fig. 11 and fig. 12 state the preference of students for learning grammar to speak perfectly.

Fig. 11: preference of G. M. students to learn grammar for accurate speech
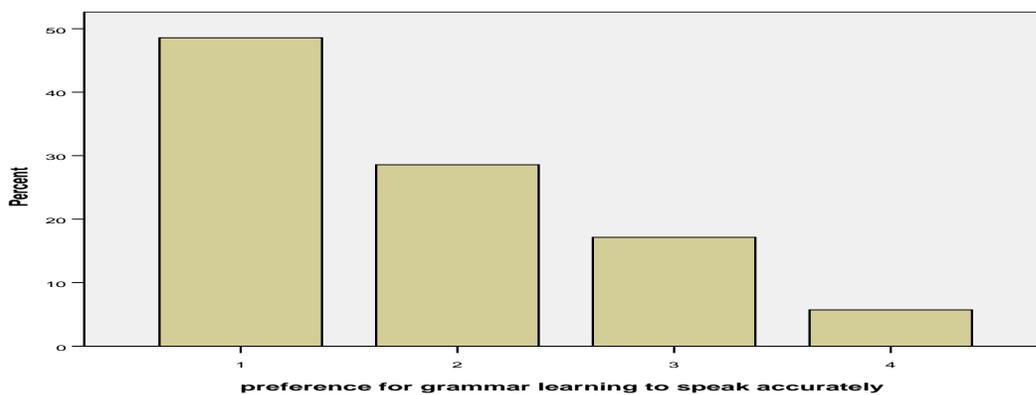
Fig. 12: Preference of Y. M. students to learn grammar for accurate speech
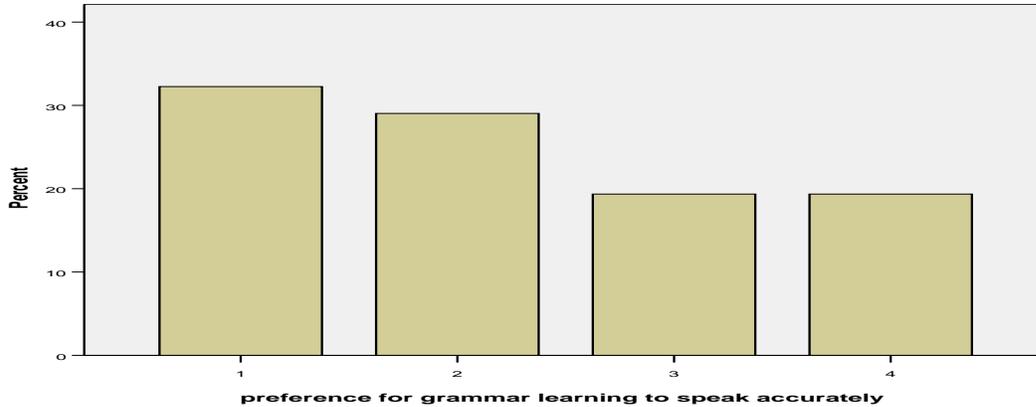
But the teachers demonstrate that students learn grammar rules to write accurately. Fig 13

illustrates teachers' preference that students should learn grammar rules for accurate writing.

Fig. 13: Teachers' preference for grammar learning for accurate writing
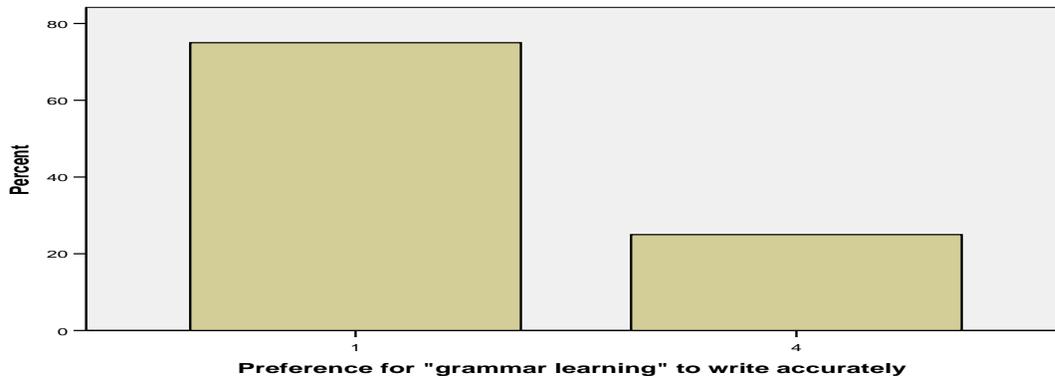
When the students are asked about their desired linguistic proficiency level, most of them prefer

to have comprehension of every word or the most words of language materials. They want to

comprehend almost all the words of provided material. On the other hand, the teachers also prefer for students to have comprehension of most words but not of all.

This study also inquires about students' preferred accent. Most of the respondents prefer to acquire Pakistani accent. As being educated and advanced learners, they seem to have awareness about regional and variety based differences among languages. 48.6 % students of G. M. and 51.6 % students of Y. M. agreed to acquire Pakistani accent (see fig.13 & fig. 14). 50 % teachers also prefer for their students to learn Pakistani accent and the other 25 % are in favor of British while 25 % prefer American accent (see fig. 15).

Fig. 13: G. M. students' preference for accent
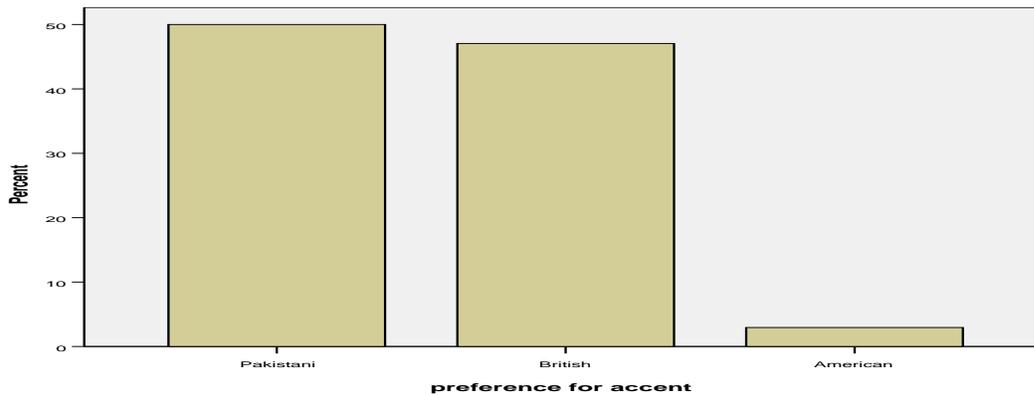
**Fig. 14**: Y. M. students' preference for accent
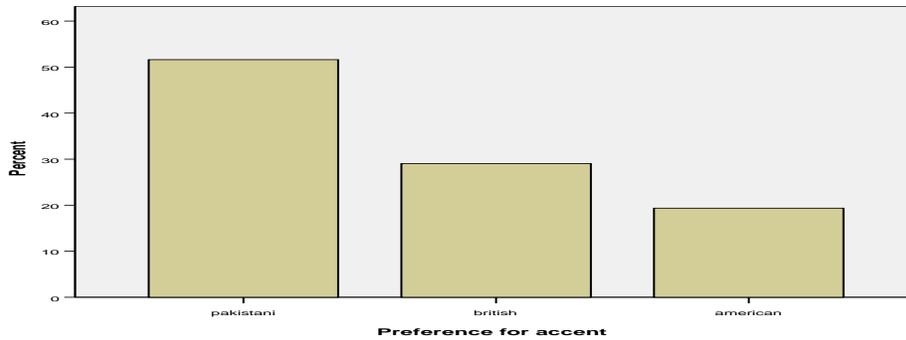
Fig. 15: Teachers' preference for accent
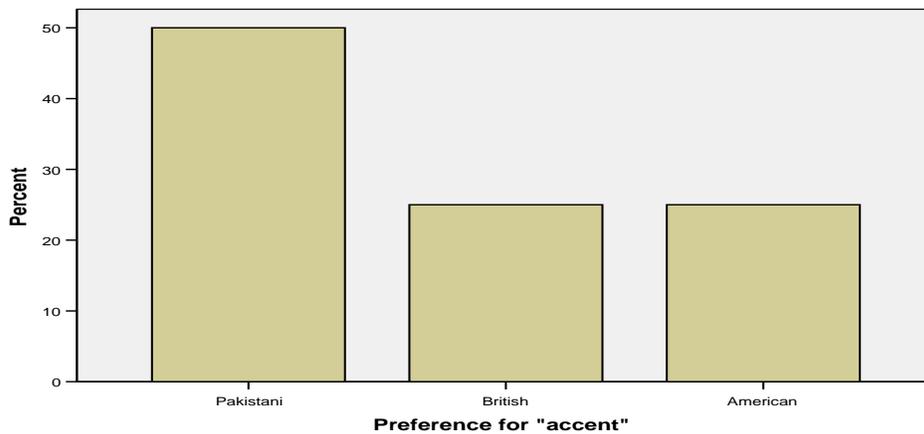
As far as the learning ways are concerned, most of the students wish to learn in groups, through different activities like role play, problem solving and project work. On the other hand, they also prefer to learn through a teacher directed lesson with explanations. The students desire to learn in groups and the teachers also prefer learning in groups or work as a class. Fig. 16 and fig.17 demonstrate students' preference of learning in groups while fig. 18 demonstrates teachers' view point.

**Fig. 16**: G. M. students' preference to work in groups
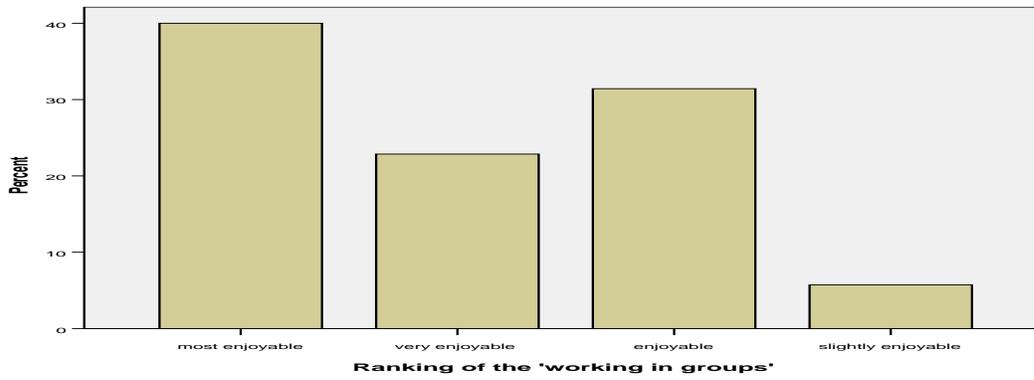
**Fig. 17**: Y. M. students' preference to work in groups
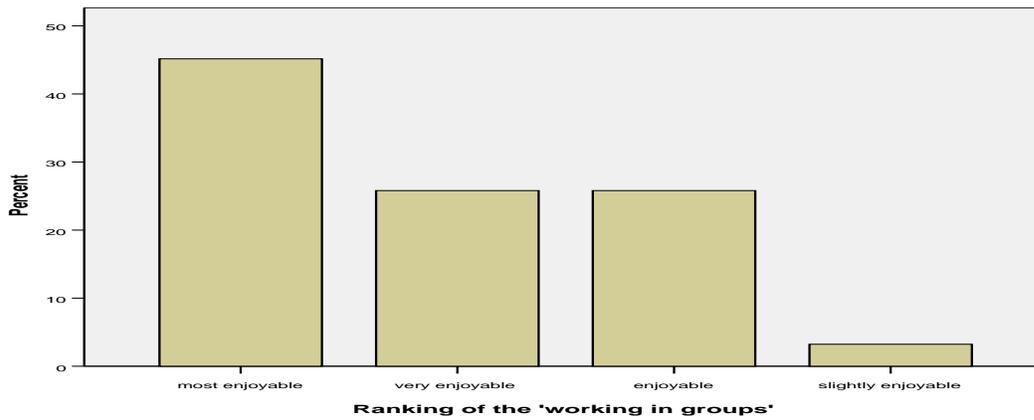
Fig. 18: teachers' preference for group work
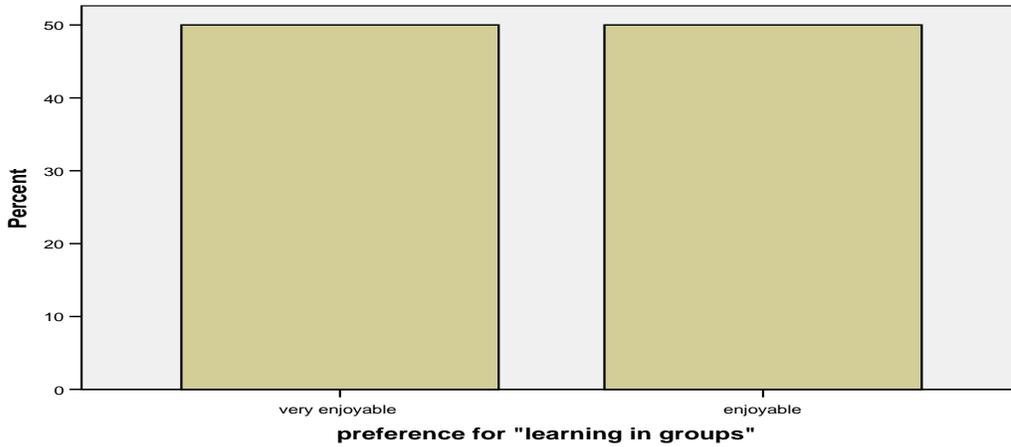
Discussion

This study has tried to frame the issues regarding students' needs which certainly have a great impact on the teaching methods, materials, and learning proficiency. The conclusions drawn from the collected data show students' preferences for learning English language and also discuss teachers' point of view in this regard. The students state that they need linguistic competence in English for academic purposes and also for business. Being students, they use English in the lecture room for learning purpose and want to be master in its usage so that they can use it for their future needs.

Talking about their future needs, students are concerned about their professional needs. They want to have linguistic competence in English so that they can participate and communicate effectively in business meetings. The students want to acquire proficiency in speaking and listening skills for face to face communication. For that purpose, they prefer to learn through the teaching method which focuses on communication strategies.

In contrast, the teachers do not agree with these preferences marked by the students. They consider speaking and writing more important skills to be mastered rather than speaking and listening. The teachers' opinion about teaching methods also contradicts the students' preferred methods. They consider teaching methods more effective which concentrate on grammar rules while students prefer communicative strategies.

The students are not willing to learn English language through the teaching methods which focus on grammar, but to get command on speaking skill, the students are ready to learn grammar rules also. But the teachers recommend grammar learning for accurate writing not for speaking. Furthermore, the students want to comprehend either every word or most of the words of the available linguistic material. This depicts their desire to achieve a high degree of linguistic competence in English. The preferred schedule of classes is thrice a week or daily. They agree that they are good at vocabulary, listening, speaking, comprehension, reading and writing, and also want to excel in all these aspects. The teachers agree at these points with the students.

Another important opinion of the students of both the departments is their desire to learn Pakistani accent. This depicts the fact that the students are well aware of the concept of World Englishes. They are familiar with the variety based differences among languages. So they want to acquire English with the Pakistani accent. The teachers also prefer Pakistani accent.

As far as the learning strategies are concerned, the students prefer to learn in groups. They do not favor working alone or only with one fellow and they mark working in groups as the most enjoyable activity. Learning in groups is considered most effective by the teachers as well. In addition, students want to learn through interactional activities. On the other hand, they favor teacher directed lectures as well.

So, the course designers and the material developers should keep all these preferences of the students and the teachers in their mind while designing courses for the students of Garment Manufacturing and Yarn Manufacturing.

Conclusion

The present study has explored the academic needs of the students of Garment Manufacturing and Yarn Manufacturing. The findings of this research support the course designers and the teachers to develop language courses focusing on the students' needs as it explores two aspects of need analysis which are the needs of the learners and the opinions of the teachers. It focuses on what the students want to learn and which teaching methods and materials will be the most preferred. The results show the students' preferences to learn English for academic and business needs, to work in groups, to learn through communication strategies, and also their desire to improve their listening and speaking skills. It also discusses teachers' preference for grammar teaching methods and for the improvement of speaking and writing skills. Hence, this study helps EAP practitioners as it is concerned with the academic needs of the English language learners from G. M. and Y. M. departments. The results of this study can be generalized to the students of textile Engineering as the students of both departments (G.M. and Y.M.) have shown the same preferences for English language learning.

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