ESP Learners' Needs: A case Study of Medicine Students at Some Sudanese Universities.

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Abstract:

This study investigates ESP learners' needs at some Sudanese Universities. In particular the study targets the students studying medicine through the medium of English language. Learners' needs are divided into three categories which cover the needs for English language for general purposes, academic purposes and for job purposes. Three universities were chosen to examine the hypotheses of the study. The method used to collect data was students' questionnaire. The study has come out with a number of facts the most important of these facts are: In their daily life the students need English language to listen to radio, understanding TV programs and films. In the academic field, the need for English language to understand lectures was highly rated. Finally in their future jobs the study revealed that the students need English language to read written or printed materials connected with jobs.

Introduction

Although the term ESP has widely been used over the last three decades, there has been a considerable debate about what is ESP? Reflecting the dispute over ESP, Robinson (1991: 1) argues that "what is specific and appropriate in one part of the globe may not

be elsewhere", indicating an impossibility of producing a universally acceptable definition of ESP. Yassin (1999: 52) points out that "It would not be possible to give an accurate and precise definition of ESP as it is by its very nature an interdisciplinary area of enquiry". Thus, In order to understand what ESP means, several elements and factors such as the characteristics and features of ESP, age of ESP learner, time, purposes of the program and learners' need should be considered. Hutchison and Waters (1987: 9) conceive of ESP as an "approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning".

Needs analysis has played a crucial role in identifying learners' needs and designing the courses of English for specific purposes (ESP). It has been acknowledged by many scholars such as Munby, 1987 and Hutchison and Waters 1987. The notion of needs analysis (NA) appeared in 1920 in India by Michael West when he introduced the idea of "needs" to cast light on what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation and how learners might best master the language during the time of learning. The importance of needs analysis lies on the facts that it defines the aspects of language that are essential for a specific area of teaching. It also gives the students the chance to have a say in the courses they study. In this regards Hutchinson and Waters (1997, p.53) argue that "any language course should be based on needs analysis". Dudley-Evans & St John (1998, p.121) state that "needs analysis is the process of establishing what and *how* of a course". They also emphasize three mail aspects of needs analysis: First, needs analysis aims to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners. Second, needs analysis study also aims to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group. Third, needs analysis study aims to know the target situations and learning environment so that data can appropriately be interpreted. (p. 126).

In the context of Sudan formal education in started in 1898 during the British colonial administration. At that time, English language was the medium of instruction not only for education but even for the official policy in the country. From that time English

language has played an important role in Sudan educational system; all the subjects were taught through English language except for two subjects Arabic and religion. In 1965 Arabicization of high schools took place where English language continued to be medium of instruction only in tertiary level. The sequence of applying Arabicization in high schools was that, some new students came to universities with a very poor command of English language to the point that they could not cope up with their course subjects which are written and delivered in English language. That situation called universities administration in Sudan to establish a body called English Language Units (ELU). Its main object was to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to help students cope up with their and raise their standard of English language. That situation continued till the emergence of what was known as the *Higher Education Revolution* in 1990. This was considered one of the features of the new political regime in Sudan. Accordingly, a new academic body named as the Higher Authority of Arabicization was established in 1999. The purpose of forming that committee was to in pursuance to a political decree stipulating that Arabic language should be the language of teaching and scientific curriculum at the Sudan higher education institutions. In addition, the new policy entrusted with the implementation of the Arabicization policy. In the light of this brief background, the higher education in Sudan can be classified into two main periods, education pre-Arabicization and post-Arabicization. The Arabicization of higher education has its impact on the role of ESP programme and syllable designing. However, ESP programmes seem to have suffered lack of due attention on the part of course designers and researchers. ESP programmes in higher education should cater for the immediate needs of the students' English language back ground. The current situation of ESP at the Sudanese universities does not cope up with the modern methods of handing ESP courses. The courses of ESP are set according to the available materials regardless of the students' needs. In addition to that needs analysis programme is not practiced at all and ESP courses are mixed up with general English courses. Based on the above mentioned situation this study tries to investigate students' needs for ESP in some medicine colleges in the Sudan.

Research Methodology

Research Design:

The study, adopted a descriptive and analytic methods. The study used a questionnaire, as a needs assessment tool.

Subjects:

The subjects, who participated in this study, for the purpose of conducting needs analysis, were 300 students, from three different universities in the Sudan namely (University of Khartoum, University of Anilein and Al-Azhari University). Those students were studying at an undergraduate level in the Faculty of Medicine. In the year 2006, (semester-2 in 2006-2007 academic session). The total population of this study was (2320) students all of them were medicine students. 300 students were chosen for this research. Most of those students were either in the final or semi-final level. The rationale was that these students of medicine had been exposed to the ESP programme for two years in their early stage of studying as a university requirement. Therefore they might identify the need for English language in their medical discipline. Thus, they were able to give feedback on which skills of language they needed for their academic purposes.

Data Collection Method: Questionnaire

The instrument, which was used in this research to collect data, was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to reveal the target information based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire sought to collect information concerning the immediate and long-term perceived needs for the students studying medicine through English medium instruction. The assumption of selecting the language skills lay on their capability to cover the general needs, academic needs and future needs of the students. The language skills selected were organized under three main types: general needs, academic needs and job needs respectively. Following these needs the questionnaire was divided into three sections: **In section one**, (general needs for English) the questions sought to investigate learners' perceived general needs for English language in their daily life in the university campus or outside it. **Section tow** (Academic needs) in this section the questions sought to elicit information on the need for English language skills in the medical field what do they need to do with English, and which English language skills that most help them cope with their studying of medicine. **In section three (**jobs needs) the students have to expect their needs in their future jobs like. e.g. The need for English to write reports or memo or conduct a paper research, or doing on job training abroad in the US or UK.

The data collection procedures:

The data of the study was collected through the distribution of questionnaires. The students' questionnaires were administered to the undergraduate students in the field of medical, Faculty of Medicine. The questionnaires were distributed to the undergraduate students in the classrooms or in the laps after taken permission from the respective professors. In some cases the questionnaire was administered by language instructors in their classrooms. Because of the subjects being in different Universities in Khartoum, it took the researcher about four weeks to carry out the data collection.

Results and analysis

The data of this study was collected through a questionnaire. The needs of the students are divided into three categories: (A) general needs, (B) academic needs and (C) future needs. The following tables show each category results according to the students' view.

students' general needs:-

Section (A) in the students' questionnaire is designed to generate a general idea about the need for English in the students' daily life. It consists of seven questions. Questions 1, 2, and 7 ask about the students' needs for reading, while question 3 and 4 ask about conversation skills. Question 5 asks about listening skills. Question 6 asks about writing skill.

Table (1). Shows Students' Assessment to their general needs in descending order.

Quest .No.	The questions	Mean Rank	Chi Square (χ2)	Significances
	The general needs			
1	Listening to the radio, understanding TV programs and films.	4.72		
2	Survival English (being abroad as a tourist).	4.52		
3	Reading English literature in the original.	4.39	6	
4	Reading for pleasure	3.92		
5	Conversing with fellow students and friends	3.91		
6	Writing private letters.	3.72		
7	Reading newspapers	3.23		0.009

The Academic Needs:

In this section the students were asked to rate the skills needed in their specialization. It consists of eight questions. It covers various academic areas in which the students may need certain English skills.

Table (2) shows a summary of the Needs for English for Academic Skills as Perceived by the Students.

The Academic needs		Mean Rank	Chi square ($\chi 2$)	Sig
8	Understanding lectures.	5.00		
9	Taking part in class discussion.	4.57		
10	Reading course textbooks.	4.76		
11	Reading specialization books and journal.	3.82	4	0.009
12	Taking notes from lectures.	4.58		
13	Writing term papers, essays or reports.	4.16		
14	Writing answers to examinations questions	4.92		
15	Asking, answering and talking with your professors.	4.18		

The jobs needs:

The jobs needs are the last kind of needs to be investigated in this study. They are different from the other two kinds of needs mentioned above in the way that the students have to speculate these kinds of needs for their future. The students do not

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experience this kind of needs. In this part of the questionnaire the students were asked to speculate what they may need English in their future job through five situations. The students' answers are shown in table (2.3).

Table (3) Shows the Students' Assessment to their Future Needs for English

Q. No	The job needs	Mean Rank	Chi Square $(\chi 2)$	Sig.
16	Conversing with English-speaking colleagues.	3.20		
17	Reading written or printed materials connected with jobs.	3.31	4	0.009
18	Conveying information or instructions from English language to Arabic speaking workers or vice versa	2.74		
19	Following in-service courses conducted in English.	2.73		
20	Reading or writing letters, memos or reports in English	3.01		

Discussion

General Needs

As shown in (table 2.1), the subjects rated listening to radio, understanding TV programs and films very highly with (mean rank= 4.72). Although this is a general need, but it can also be considered as part of academic needs. At the of presence of TV satellite revolution there are specialize TV channels which offer medical programs or even a living show of operations form very famous hospitals in the world or education channels specialize in medical. This reinforces the role of TV as a learning audiovisual tool. Thus, the result may show the students' awareness of this positive role of TV. This finding supports the need for listening skill, which is a neglected skill in the Sudanese ESP syllabuses. Survival English is the learners' second priority in the general needs which received (mean rank= 4.52). The high rating of this kind of need might be influenced by the high expectation of most of the students to work or migrate after graduation to countries where English is used as a medium of communication. This emphasizes the role of English as a very important international tool for communication. The third priority in the general need comes "reading English literature in the original" that received (mean rank=4.39). Followed by "reading for pleasure with a rate of (mean rank=3.92) and conversing with fellow students and friends with a rate of (mean rank= 3.91) in the last two columns come "writing private letters" with a rate of (3.72) and "reading newspaper with a rate of (mean rank=3.23). These results revealed that the students do not appreciate their need for English as a mean of reading for pleasure and reading English literature in the original or reading newspaper, which indicates a very low motivation in the language and reading material written in English in particular. As motivation is considered to be a very essential factor in foreign language learning, it is necessary for the ESP teachers to pay more attention to encourage general reading by providing some suitable material in the college's library to raise students' motivation in the language which would have positive results in their performance in ESP courses. The respondents' answer to these two questions 1 and 7 in the questionnaire revealed that

the students are not motivated to use English for general purposes. This relatively weak value can be explained by the lack of the appropriate materials that encourage the students to general reading in English. In the college of Medicine in the Sudan, almost all the books and references deal absolutely with medicine subjects, giving very limited choices for the keen reader who might try to add different kind of knowledge through English. Taking into a count the economic situation of the majority of the students which does not allow the possibility of making their home library, section C devoted for general reading materials in English should be added to the colleges' libraries to balance the weight given to English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of the college. Generally, students do not pay more attention to the importance of the general needs compared to the other two kinds like (academic and job needs) since general needs are not relevant to their field of study. These results practically reinforced what was mentioned in (2.3) that ESP learners often have high level of motivation to materials which are directly relevant to their immediate communicative needs.

The Academic Needs:

Based on data showed in table; (2) the first question asked the students to rate the need for English to understand lectures. The result was really surprising. The respondents gave the top rating to this skill with a (mean rank=5.00), the results clearly showed the importance of listening skills, so developing this skill is essential in the field of specialization which call for its noteworthy weight in any syllabus that caters for the students' language needs. Listening skill is a neglected skill in Sudanese curricula particularly the ones offered in the intermediate level. This situation continued in ESP programme in the Sudanese universities which leave developing this skill to the students' own efforts. This neglecting is attributed mainly to the availability of reading resources compared with listening materials, which are usually rare and made to serve the needs of specific learners while making home-made materials need a lot of time and money.

In the second question the respondents were asked to rate the need for English in taking part in class discussion. Students rated this skill as (mean rank= 4.57) this result showed the importance of conversation skills, the need for English in class discussions seems to be very important although it can be conducted in Arabic. In this sense, Yassin (1999:38) states, "English language is a highly requested tool of communication in the class." as the findings showed. In the third question, the students were asked to rate their needs for reading course textbooks. The results rated as (mean rank= 4.76) the students appreciated highly the need for reading course textbooks. On the other hand when the students were asked to rate their need for reading specialization books and journal the answer was unexpected as shown in the previous table it received (mean rank=3.82) which is very low compared by reading course textbooks. The above two results revealed clearly that the students highly rate the need for English to read course textbooks which clearly reflects and instrumental motivation in the language particularly if compared with the relatively low rating for the need to develop general reading. Though, some specialists believe that instrumental motivation can, with some efforts, be developed into intrinsic motivation through careful choice of the students' preferred teaching methods and the students' participation in setting the objectives of the ESP programme and through selecting appropriate materials. The fifth question the students were asked to rate their need for taking notes from the lectures, which received rate of (mean rank=4.58), is relatively high. It that many students did not take notes during their lectures and they only depended on their colleagues to recall all lectures conveyed in English; this calls for supplying the students with the suitable instructions that enable them to carry on their academic duties. This question is followed by the need for English to write term papers, essays or reports which received low rate (mean rank=4.16) compared to taking notes although, the two skills have the same importance and priority in the academic field. This indicates some variation in the students' assessment of interrelated needs which signify students' unawareness of their needs. In the seventh question the students were requested to rate the need for English to write examinations answers which received very high value of (mean rank=4.92) that put this skill second in

position of priority. This is natural because all students are required to use English language to answer examinations papers. The above result draws attention to the high extrinsic motivation towards English language. This emphasizes the importance of developing writing skills in ESP courses in respond to this need. Asking, answering and talking with your professors is the last question in section B. the students rating to this skill is (mean rank= 4.18) this revealed that the students do not need this skill since they can use their mother tongue in the above situations. The general overview of the data concerning the academic needs showed the need for English language in understanding lectures as highly requested skill. On the other hand, reading specialization books and journal are rated below understanding lecture in the academic needs. Based on table (2) the academic needs results showed a significant importance of this of need. These findings indicated that the students are aware of their own needs. Moreover, they could easily identify their needs specifically as the results showed that "understanding lectures" is more important than e.g. "reading specialization, books and journals". This is reinforced by what was mentioned in the introduction i.e. those ESP learners are aware of their own needs and course objectives.

The jobs needs:

The jobs needs are the last kind of needs to be investigated in this study. They are different from the other two kinds of needs mentioned above in the way that the students have to speculate these kinds of needs for their future. The students do not experience this kind of needs. In this part of the questionnaire the students were asked to speculate what they may need English in their future job through five situations. Table (3) shows that the top rating in section C goes to reading written or printed materials connected with jobs which received (mean rank=3.31) this shows that the students are in need for reading skill not only in their present studying but also in the future job. This reinforced the need for reading skills in medicine field during studying and after graduation. Conversing with English-speaking colleagues is rated as the second job needs with a mean rank of (mean rank=3.20) followed by reading or writing letters,

memos or reports. This shows the need for writing and reading for the future jobs as most if not all-medical reports are written in English language. Here, the students show some kind of awareness of their future needs. Following in-service courses conducted in English and conveying information or instruction form English language to Arabic workers or vice versa is considered the least needed skills for medicine students. The last finding revealed that medicine students do not pay enough attention to translating medical terminology, technical passages and formal and informal letters, memos and notes form Arabic to English and vice versa. To sum up this discussion, it is clear from the previous results, that the need for English for academic is highly requested by the students than the other two types general and jobs needs.

Conclusion:

Considering the results of the students' questionnaire the study arrived to a clear identifiable conclusion that the most needed language skill in the in medical field is listening to lectures, medicine students' regardless of their different academic level do not have the same English needs. The need for the academic English is more important than the need for occupational English, general English. Learners are the main resource of data in the needs analysis and failure of most ESP programmes in the Sudan is attributed directly to the absence of needs analysis practice.

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Appendix (A)
The students' questionnaire

Student number: ....

Academic level: ....

University: ....

Secondary school☐vate ☐ Governmental

Sex: ☐ **Male** ☐**Female**

<u>**Needs** **Analysis**</u>

What do you need English for? Indicate your answer by circling <u>one</u> of the numbers.

    5= extremely important
    4= important
    3= not so important
    2= not important at all
    1= not applicable

A- **General Needs**

1. Reading for pleasure
       5   4   3   2   1
2. Reading newspaper,
       5   4   3   2   1
3. Survival English (being abroad as a tourist)
       5   4   3   2   1
4. Conversing with fellow students and friends
       5   4   3   2   1
5. Listening to the radio, understanding T.V programs and films.
       5   4   3   2   1
6. Writing private letters
       5   4   3   2   1
7. Reading English literature in the original
       5   4   3   2   1

B. **Academic Needs**: In your field of specialization, you need English for...

8. Understanding lectures.
       5   4   3   2   1
9. Taking part in class discussion
       5   4   3   2   1
10. Reading course textbooks
       5   4   3   2   1
11. Reading specialization books and journals
       5   4   3   2   1
12. Taking notes from lectures
       5   4   3   2   1
13. Writing term papers, essays or reports
       5   4   3   2   1

14. Writing answers to examination questions

     5   4   3   2   1

15. Asking, answering and taking with your professors.

     5   4   3   2   1

C. Job Needs: In your future job, what do you expect you may need English for?

....

16. Conversing with English-speaking colleagues.

     5   4   3   2   1

17. Reading written or printed materials connected with the job.

     5   4   3   2   1

18. Conveying information or instruction from English language to Arabic speaking workers in Arabic or vice versa.

     5   4   3   2   1

19. following in-service courses conducted in English.

     5   4   3   2   1

20. Reading or writing letters, memos or reports in English.

     5   4   3   2   1

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