

Assessment Task–Based Language Needs of Sport Management Students (Case study: University of Mazandaran)

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to identify specialized language needs of MA students in University of Mazandaran. **Method:** This study was mix method instruments which would deeply explore the perspectives of English for specific purpose teachers and students about task–based language needs of teaching ESP. Semi-structured interview was carried out with a number of teachers and students in the field of sport management. The statistical population of the stage includes some teachers and students in the field of sport management. The sampling method was Purposive sampling and Sampling continue until theoretical saturation. Three ESP teachers who have been teaching ESP to the students for at least four years participated in this study. They were all selected through purposive sampling. Also, MA and Ph.D. (twelve persons) students who had passed this course were selected in qualitative stage. In quantitative stage and based on the results of the first stage, the questionnaire was designed. This questionnaire was broadly distributed amongst students and teachers (33 persons) in the field of sport management. Descriptive and Inferential statistics, were used to analyze the demographic information of the participants and their responses. **Results:** The results of the study showed that the main real tasks which were most frequently used in the English sport management classes include Participating in daily conversations, giving lectures at conferences, Conversation with foreign experts, Understanding daily conversations. The method of working with and using English to English dictionary to take advantage of all the capabilities contained in it. **Conclusions:** The information obtained about the target tasks and their frequency can be employed when taking decisions about which tasks should be part of a curriculum. **Keywords:** ESP, Need analysis, Task–based language needs, Learning, Teaching

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental goals of communicative, analytic approaches to second or foreign language teaching is to relate instructional purposes, processes, and practices to real-life performance outside the classroom. To do so, a crucial first step is the identification of students' needs (what learners need to learn) concerning the second or foreign language (L2). One way to identify those needs is to conduct a task-based needs analysis, which is a comprehensive, in-depth inquiry into the kinds of tasks learners need to be able to do, typically outside the classroom, as well as the language associated with them. A task-based need analysis sees tasks as goal-oriented processes, with several steps, which draw on a series of cognitive and communicative procedures, and that have a defined outcome. The information collected and analyzed based on an NA can then be used to inform instructional programs that use tasks as their organizing units. NA not only identifies a 'map' of the typical tasks and sub-tasks that a specific community of users may need, but it also provides rich information about the content and goals of each task, the steps that need to be taken in standard performance of a task, the cognitive operations, communicative procedures, and linguistic requirements required to achieve the task goals, and the criteria for assessing the acceptable accomplishment of the task outcome (Malicka, Gilabert Guerrero, & Norris, 2019).

An undisputed fact being that any ESP course should be needs driven (Akbari, 2014). ESP deals with preparing the students to become able to use English in academic and workplace settings. In a review of the literature, one can find different definitions of NA by some researchers with varying degrees of overlap and/or deviation. For instance, Malicka et al. (2019) stated that NA also provides information about performance standards of any particular task (i.e., what 'good task performance' means). Obtaining this information can be the first conceptual step in developing criteria for and making informed decisions concerning task-based assessment. An approach essentially corresponds to the 'strong' version of task-based language teaching (TBLT), as exemplified by the kinds of activities that 'authentic communication' on his focus-on-forms to focus-on-meaning continuum; that is, 'using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are

unpredictable' (for example creative role play, complex problem solving (Evans, 2013).

Language, as one of the most straightforward and essential tools of communication, plays an explicit and critical role in the job market. Therefore, proficiency in English is key to achieving high economic efficiency as well as maintaining a safe working environment (Tan, 2016). The field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained much attention in recent years due to its emphasis on language training for job performance. (Nezakatgoo & Behzadpoor, 2017). Research on understanding how language learning takes place has received considerable attention in the last decades. The issues such as the role of instructors, their knowledge of the conceptual framework of the subject, need analysis and course design in ESP, text-task authenticity, and the development of materials for teaching the four basic skills have been extensively analyzed (Fuertes-Olivera & Gómez-Martínez, 2004). In EFL learning, especially in teaching ESP, teaching content is geared to the specific language 'repertoire' about the specific aims that are required of the learners. (Aniqoh, Fauziati, Hum, Sutopo, & Hum, 2018). Recently, ESP teaching in Iran has become a heated debate in higher education. It is clear that colleges should encourage practical English teaching to improve the comprehensive ability of college students. At the same time, college students, especially the sport sciences students in modern time, have higher requirements for English and are prone to study a higher level of professional English. Learning English should adapt to reality. With the help of several English learning classroom models, they put forward a new idea.

In the field of sport sciences, English language teachers who are not specialists in the area and who are not experienced at all carry out the teaching of English for specific purposes. The problem is that no predetermined objectives are defined in the learning of English, and students' needs are not taken into account at all. As a result, the students fail in their attempt to acquire the basic knowledge of both the English language and the sport sciences in which they are specializing. As Nezakatgoo and Alibakhshi (2014) argue, there is little correspondence between the pedagogical tasks in medical ESP courses and the real-life tasks. The only language skill which is given appropriate attention was technical reading skill, whereas the real-life tasks are carried out through

all four language skills. It could be strongly argued that such real-life tasks are not covered in ESP classrooms. Therefore, the contents of ESP courses are not in accordance with the students' needs (Nezakatgoo & Alibakhshi, 2014).

Forey and Cheung (2019) illustrate the benefit of explicitly teaching discipline specific language for curriculum learning, and highlight the language of physical education, which tends to be a marginalized subject in the discussion of ESP. Malicka et al. (2019) argued that how the information obtained from an NA conducted in the domain of a hotel receptionist's job can be effectively applied to task design, and in particular how the information about a task's difficulty can serve to establish tasks that vary in levels of cognitive load. Cognitive load was manipulated along with two complexifying conditions identified in semi-structured interviews and in observations, which were linked to variables contemplated in a current theoretical task complexity model, the Triadic Componential Framework (Malicka et al., 2019). Needs analysis includes all stakeholders in the process of needs analysis and tries to meet the needs expressed by different stakeholders while focusing on the needs of the learners. In spite of the increasing concern about a critical approach to needs analysis and its role in ESP curriculum design, there have been a few research studies in the context of ESP in sport and the setting of a developing country like Iran. Considering very few systematic and documented research studies in Iran in this regard, this research seeks to establish a profile of ESP needs and wants of the students of sport management and to determine the extent to which the specified needs are covered in present ESP courses in Iran.

This research dealt with the relationship between ESP and need analysis, which cannot be separated from each other. The recent conditions need to have students know not just general English but to have extensive English vocabulary on various specific scientific such as sport sciences, social, medical fields, and so on. Therefore, it is evident that knowing English and using English for particular purposes is a challenge. Students would be much appreciated if they have good command not only in the general foreign language but also have a particular field. Needs Analysis is then an essential stage as it tells syllabus developers about the particular language used by the learners in their contexts.

Despite the new large number of studies on ESP (Marjanovikj-Apostolovski, 2019; Whitehead, Ramos, & Coates, 2019; Menggo, Suastra, Budiarsa, & Padmadewi, 2019; Sönmez, 2019; Marina, Yakusheva, & Demchenkova, 2019; Poedjiastutie & Rifah, 2019), the ESP in sport has received little attention. The existence of related studies on teaching, to our best of knowledge, no one has appropriately investigated whether teaching ESP to students of sport management meets the requirements of principles of teaching ESP or not. So far, no study has examined the specialized language needs of sports management students. The purpose of the present research was to investigate and identify the specialized language needs of master's students in sport management, with the hope that this research will fill a gap in improving the specialized language of the students.

METHOD

This study was mix method research, which would deeply explore the perspectives of ESP teachers and students about TBL needs of teaching ESP. Hence, data collection will start with the intent of conducting semi-structured face to face individual interviews. First questions will refer to the present and target situation TBL needs of the students of sport management from the teacher's and the students' perspectives of participants in ESP as instructors and learning ESP as students. This research is applied in terms of its purpose and was done using the mixing method (both qualitative and quantitative). The study was carried out in two stages: The first stage includes: to identify the present and target situation, TBL needs semi-structured interview that was carried out with several teachers and students in the field of sport management. The statistical population of the stage includes some teachers and students in the field of sport management. The sampling method was Purposive sampling, and sampling continue until theoretical saturation. The second stage includes: based on the results of the first stage, the questionnaire was designed. This questionnaire was broadly distributed amongst students and teachers in the field of sport management.

This study was conducted at the sports management department of the University of Mazandaran. Three ESP teachers who have been teaching ESP to the students for at least four years participated in this study. They were all selected through purposive sampling. Also, MA and Ph.D. students who had passed this course were selected. The criterion

for the number of the participants was the data saturation point. In this study, the data saturation point emerged when the fifteenth persons (three teachers and twelve students) were interviewed. To assess task-based real-life needs of the students in the target situations, three teachers and twelve students were interviewed. Researcher conducted all interviews. The data of the study were analyzed at two different stages. To analyze the tasks, at first, the ESP course were extracted by the interviewees. In the step, meaningful descriptions of language needs were identified by Thematic Content Analysis. Data collection and analysis were conducted until data saturation was reached. Interviews with relevant teachers were performed at their workplaces and interviews with students were conducted by the researcher. Each interview took between 30 minutes to an hour to complete. After conducting the interviews on paper and analyzing the information, a questionnaire was developed for the master's students based on the information received from the interviews and the questionnaires used in the valid studies.

The questionnaire consisted of three main parts, including the questions about students' personal information as the first part and a questionnaire about the current and desired status of different tasks training in specialized language courses as the second part. Also, the third part of the questionnaire was about the number of hours devoted to a specialized language course and the half academic year as well as the level of students' proficiency. Before finalization of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered to 3 teachers to assess the face and content validity of the questionnaire. To determine its reliability, the questionnaire was given to 30 master's students of sport management. After collecting and analyzing the data, the reliability value was Cronbach's $\alpha=0.9$. The questionnaire, as the data collection instrument was used to identify the perceptions of language needs within the groups of participants: students and graduates. The students and the graduates were asked about their perceptions regarding current tasks and either expected them to be their main future target tasks. The questionnaire items were adopted from the interviews. Descriptive statistics, such as the percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the demographic information of the participants and their perceived levels of language competence. As the research design required comparisons of

two dependent groups, Wilcoxon was chosen to clarify whether the value of variables differed significantly among the groups.

RESULTS

The interviewees' responses were content analyzed. The main real-life task-based language needs of the sport management students after getting graduated from the universities emerged. The requirements reported by the participants were listed as the most dominant real-life task-based needs of students of sport management. A summary of these tasks is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Real-Life Task-Based requirements of the sport management students Target Situations reported by the interviewees.

Tasks
Participating in daily conversations
Giving lectures at conferences
Conversation with foreign experts
Understanding daily conversations
The method of working with and using English to English dictionary to take advantage of all the capabilities contained in it, not just finding the meaning
Listening to English content like listening to English news or listening to English lectures on your specialized field of study
Translation of the filed texts or articles from English to Persian
Translation of the filed texts or articles from Persian to English
Reading specialized journals
Reading specialized books
Using English electronic resources, e-book, CD, online source
Reading Catalogs
Writing correct sentences
Writing Emails
Writing articles
Filling out the forms
Grammar
Submitting articles to English language magazines
Specialized terms and words
Preparation of educational slides in English
Correct pronunciation of words

As the results in Table 2 show, the Learning style preference encountered most frequently were watching film (36.4%), conversation (33.3%), and listening (12.1%).

Table 2: Learning style preference

Style	Frequency	Percent
Conversation	11	33.3
Watching film	12	36.4
Listening	4	12.1
Reading	2	6.1
Writing	1	3.0
Use images	1	3.0
No particular style	2	6.1
Total	33	100.0

As the results in Table 3 show, the question was about participants' perceptions of their level of language. Participants were asked to rate their language proficiency at one of the five levels of elementary, below average, average, above average, and advanced. When asked to assess the English language proficiency level, nearly all of the participants rated the average (45.5%) and below-average (39.4 %). While only 15.1 % (5 people) of participants believed they were above average and advanced.

Table 3: English language proficiency

Proficiency level	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	3	9.1
Lower than average	10	30.3
Average	15	45.5
Above average	4	12.1
Advanced	1	3.0
total	33	100.0

Table 4: The best time to deliver specialized English

Best Time to Deliver	Frequency	Percent
First semester	22	66.7
Second semester	8	24.2
Third semester	3	9.1
Total	33	100.0

As the results in Table 5 show that most of the respondents find Giving lectures at conferences to be the least problematic skill, with a conversation with foreign experts rated as the second-least problematic skill. The perception of difficulties giving lectures at conferences and conversation with foreign experts is not as uniform.

Conversation with foreign experts appears to present the greatest difficulties for participants. The discourse community members, including students and faculty members, might give a lecture. In doing so, higher levels of involvement and interaction are needed. Interacting: Through this task discourse, community members act together or towards others or with others to accomplish a task, such as giving and receiving information: the people involved might need to give/ receive information to/from each other. In doing so, they can understand each other and speak English accurately and comprehensibly. Personal expression: sometimes, the discourse community members need to express their own ideas, suggestions, wants, desires, opinions, performing.

The responses of the participants to the question regarding the necessity to improve particular language skills in the target situation reveal that it is necessary to improve writing articles.

Table 5: The comparison between Present Situation Analysis and Target Situation Analysis

Tasks	Present Situation Analysis		Target Situation Analysis		Wilcoxon sig
	mean	Std. Deviation	mean	Std. Deviation	
Participating in daily conversations	2.24	0.9	4.18	1.18	0.001
Giving lectures at conferences	1.76	1.01	3.85	1.15	0.001
Conversation with foreign experts	1.81	1.02	3.88	1.08	0.001
Understanding daily conversations	2.64	1.08	4.22	0.99	0.001
The method of working with and using English to English dictionary to take advantage of all the capabilities contained in it, not just finding the meaning	2.67	1.02	4.3	0.88	0.001
Listening to English content like listening to English news or listening to English lectures on your specialized field of study	2.4	1.25	4.3	1.06	0.001
Translation of the filed texts or articles from English to Persian	2.67	1.25	4.18	1.05	0.001
Translation of the filed texts or articles from Persian to English	2.18	1.19	4.25	1.03	0.001
Reading specialized journals	2.58	1.25	4	1.25	0.001
Reading specialized books	2.4	1.23	4.06	1.2	0.001
Using English electronic resources, e-book, CD, online source	2.6	1.37	4	1.11	0.001
Reading Catalogs	2.16	1.3	3.99	0.99	0.001
Writing correct sentences	2.34	1.08	4.03	1.16	0.001
Writing Emails	2.79	1.25	4.09	1.38	0.001
Writing articles	2.22	1.3	4.03	1.34	0.001
Filling out the forms	2.4	1.4	3.9	1.2	0.001
Grammar	2.6	1.5	4.27	0.94	0.001
Submitting articles to English language magazines	2.33	1.19	4.09	1.07	0.001
Specialized terms and words	2.6	1.08	4.06	1.17	0.001
Preparation of educational slides in English	2.48	1.18	3.82	1.13	0.001
Correct pronunciation of words	2.4	1.03	4.06	1.27	0.001

DISCUSSION

Needs must be stated in terms of goals and objectives, which, in turn, can serve as the bases for developing tests, materials, teaching activities, and evaluation strategies. In other words, needs analysis is the foundation based on which we can develop curriculum content, materials, and teaching approaches, which may, in turn, enhance learners' motivation and success. Identifying learners' needs in specialized language courses is one of the primary factors in designing these courses. As Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun (2011) argue, all decisions about content and teaching methods regarding the specialized language course should be based on the needs assessment of its learners and their reason for learning the language. With this in mind, target situation needs of the students' were analyzed in this study through an interview with the teachers and students in the workplace and learning situation, objectives of the course were determined based on the needs analysis, and ESP course were analyzed to investigate whether they meet the students' needs or not.

The purpose of this research was to identify the specialized language needs of MA students at Mazandaran University. The results of the study and analyzing the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by the students indicate that the students consider English language tasks important in their future education and career. Students seem to have sufficient motivation, which is one of the most essential factors in learning, especially in specialized language courses. To develop more effective classroom pedagogies that suit individual learners' learning goals, instructors and educators should first develop a better understanding of students' different language needs (including but not limited to categories such as necessities, wants, and lacks). Curriculum design should take learners' perceptions and goals into consideration so that the courses will not only be more efficient, but also more motivating and engaging. Moreover, perhaps more importantly, instructors and educators should help students become more aware of the complexity of their needs and the importance of taking suitable EGP or ESP/EAP courses to acquire the specific language skills that the students initially might not perceive as necessary, desirable, or insufficient. After all, having students become active and self-responsible learners is going to bring about long-term benefits for learners than passively feeding them fixed sets of information (Liu et al., 2011:70).

The first objective of the present study was to identify the real-life tasks which are used in English sport management classrooms. The results of the study showed that the main real tasks which were most frequently used in the English sport management classes include Participating in daily conversations, Giving lectures at conferences, Conversation with foreign experts, Understanding daily conversations, The method of working with and using English to English dictionary to take advantage of all the capabilities contained in it, not just finding the meaning, Listening to English content like listening to English news or listening to English lectures on your specialized field of study, Translation of the filed texts or articles from English to Persian, Translation of the filed texts or articles from Persian to English, Reading specialized journals, Reading specialized books, Using English electronic resources, e-book, CD, online source, Reading Catalogs, Writing correct sentences, Writing Emails, Writing articles, Filling out the forms, Grammar, Submitting articles to English language magazines, Specialized terms and words, Preparation of educational slides in English and Correct pronunciation of words. The content analysis of the interviews with participants showed that some tasks including performing, giving information, receiving information, and personal expression was performed by the discourse community members in real-life situations, which are rarely practiced by teachers or students in English sport management classes. Nor are they practiced in the textbooks provided for English sport management classes.

The second objective of the present study was to analyze the real-life tasks of the sport management ESP students. The results showed that in English sport management courses stakeholder's expectations of English from present tasks situation. The opinion of participated students about their conditions of language tasks was different. The results show that among the twenty-one questioned tasks; most students rated their giving lectures at conferences task weaker than the other tasks. Conversation with foreign experts was the second tasks in which students rated their students as weak or very weak. The condition of another task in the present situation was nearly the same and most of the students rated themselves as both lower than average.

Briefly giving a lecture, to perform the mentioned task, the discourse community members need to be proficient in both general language skills

as well as technical language skills. Without proficiency in general and technical language skills, they might not be able to do the mentioned tasks. The results of the present study showed that there is little correspondence between the current task's conditions in sport management ESP courses and the real-life task expectations. It could be strongly argued that such real-life tasks are not more attention in ESP classrooms. Therefore, the present performing of ESP courses is not in accordance with the student's needs. The student's existing level of proficiency and target situations are perceived in different ways, such as asking student's opinions on what they think they need, which can be misleading. When the needs of the students are not thoroughly investigated to design a course for them, it affects ESP teaching in more than one way. It could be strongly argued that ESP teacher training is the solution to it. Training teachers can prove fruitful. If the teachers are not trained, the administration can conduct a needs analysis and provide the teaching faculty with an outline to develop their courses. Consultation with ESP experts and doing a self-study on ESP can also serve well.

The contents of ESP courses taught to students of sport management should be changed favoring the stakeholder's priorities needs in real-life situations. The sport management students need to take more ESP courses so that they can meet their language needs in real-life situations. All language skills are crucial to sport management students. ESP teachers should analyze the student's needs so that they can maximize the similarities and minimize the disparity. As the present study was carried out in universities of Mazandaran, the findings can be theoretically and practically implied by different groups of stakeholders, including teachers of English for sports management, English for sports management text developers, students of sport management. Students should know that whatever they learn through their English courses at universities might not suffice. Therefore, they need to develop their language skills (receptive and productive) through self-studies. Moreover, it could be argued that because of the nature and context of the study, the results must be generalized to the other universities with great care because there are some differences between the facilities of the other universities and the language proficiency of the students.

According to the heading approved in the field of sport management, the specialized language is defined as one dedicated course that all

students are required to pass. While most of them have stated that the dedicated hours are not adequate. The hours and the number of units needed to provide specialized language are not enough. It seems necessary to increase the hours of specialized language teaching.

Undoubtedly, students need English as the most important scientific language in the world to continue their specialized education and to communicate with the discourse community that they belong to. Based on the results, it can be concluded that there is a need for corrections in the specialized language curriculum to meet the specialized language needs of students in sport management and empowering them. Some of the difficulties, such as the general weakness of students' general language, are related to before the entry of university, which can be partially remedied by the disorganization of the educational system. On the other hand, single-skill and single-purpose headlines and programs, which emphasize the development of specialized vocabulary reading and learning skills seem to have failed to satisfy students who are the primary beneficiaries of the specialized language course. Revising and modifying the curriculum based on the student's needs can lead to improved educational quality and optimal use of resources. Furthermore, given the learner-centered needs assessment, engaging learners in identifying their goals and needs and listening to their voices and preferences can increase their motivation for long-term learning and benefits.

Regarding the target situation tasks, nearly all of the students believed that it was important to understand daily conversations, to listen to conference lectures, and also listen to the English language media. Understanding daily conversations were the important need for most students, and the ability to listen to lectures and English-language media was important for the participants. Regarding the reading tasks, reading English language websites and magazines and reading specialized books were important from the view of students. Reading specialized journals and reading specialized catalogs was the requirement for students. Writing papers, sending emails, and filling out forms were the students' top priority. The results of the questions about the tasks in the target situation indicated that nearly all the students believed that all tasks were somewhat important to them. None of the participants in the study stated that the tasks required for the real-life situation were not required. In other words, in all cases, the students stated that these tasks are important

to them to some extent, even more. This result is consistent with (Moslemi, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; Boshier & Smalkoski, 2002; Astika, 1999; Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014).

Regarding the appropriate semester for specialized language courses, the first semester was selected as the most inappropriate time for this course. The reason that the students have chosen the first semester as the most inappropriate semester for a specialized language course may be because they prefer first to get acquainted with the relevant specialty and then go into specialized language studies. Meanwhile, nearly more than half of the students knew the third semester as the best time to provide a specialized language. The most students' assessment of their English language proficiency is at an elementary level and below average. This result is consistent with (Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018; Masoumpanah & Tahririan, 2013), who showed that students' general language proficiency in various academic disciplines is low and needs to be improved. This is an obstacle to performing a variety of activities in specialized language courses. One of the essential aspects of need assessment is identifying areas of language in which students feel need and weakness.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion Based on the results of the present study and review of the related literature, the following conclusions can be made: current tasks in sports management ESP courses are not aligned with target language use situation tasks expectations. The results of the study suggested that the present course does not meet the students' needs.

The information obtained in this sports management an NA can serve many pedagogical purposes. First, the information obtained about the target tasks and their frequency can be employed when making decisions about which tasks should be part of a curriculum. Second, the findings obtained allow for the design of a variety of tasks to be delivered in the classroom. Needs-analysis should be seen as an indispensable aspect of ESP syllabus design to link the present students' academic needs with their needs in their prospective employees. Needs-analysis involves not only the students but also all parties in the educational system and relevant user institutions that ultimately employ students. The literature in this field abounds with models and approaches of needs-

analysis and they should be reviewed and selected based on contexts and conditions of teaching and learning in Iran.

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