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Investigating English for Specific Purposes Tourism Management Textbooks. Evidence from Iranian ESP Needs Analysis

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Abstract:

The current study was an attempt to investigate whether the current textbooks applied in English for Tourism Management courses complied with the standards of such texts in the world-leading universities. In addition, it explored the instructors' and students' needs in relation to the quality of the texts. To this end, 5 instructors and 61 students of Tourism Management from four universities were selected. Two questionnaires were administered among the participants in the study. The obtained data were analysed through descriptive and content analysis. The findings revealed that current texts were in line with the standards of the world-leading universities. Concerning the second question, the instructors' and students' needs were clarified and discussed. Suggestions for further research were also reported.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; English for Tourism Management Textbooks; Needs Analysis; Instructors' and Students' Needs

JEL Classification: Z32; Z13.

Introduction

The major aim of needs analysis (NA), according to Richards (2001), is to collect information about learners' needs and requirements during the learning process. The two fields of English for Specific Purpose - ESP (Hutchinson and Waters 1987) and English for Academic Purposes - EAP (Jordan 1997) have long been interested in NA. Besides these areas of studies, most general language courses which support learner-centered curricula, task-based curricula as well as performance-assessment courses emphasize on NA as their core components (Tudor 1996, Long and Crookes 1992, Norris *et al.* 1988).

One of the thoroughly-investigated sub-components of ESP, that is EAP, eventually landed on its feet in most educational environment. The reason for its popularity is due to the fact that English has changed its form from being "another foreign language into having become a universal form of communication in all walks of life" (Dominguez and Rokowski 2002, 34). According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), in order to apply English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), one should start with the analysis of the four traditional skills in the selected context, to provide the appropriate conditions identical to the workplace conditions. Furthermore, they support the idea that an efficient syllabus should have the capacity to overcome the probable shortcomings in an educational

system under which they are working. Acting on the previous line of researches' advice, EOP programs shifted their attentions from "knowing everything about language" to knowing "those skills most relevant within the workplace (Dominguez and Rokowski 2005, cited in Afzali and Fakharzadeh 2009, 1). Consequently, EOP programs develop their participants' communicative competence, in all four communicative skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing, in fields such as business, aviation, or tourism. Examples of writing skills to perform a job, for instance, are report writing, memo and letter writing (Anthony 1997).

Among the variegated vocational areas in EOP, English for Tourism has caught many researchers' attention since, according to Simion (2012, 153), "all of us are tourists on countless occasions, bringing our own real experiences to the classrooms". As the literature shows, the field of English for Tourism has focused on the students' needs analysis in work place, the appropriateness and adequacy of instructional materials presented to the students and the degree of students' involvement in syllabus design procedure (Al-Khatib 2007).

Iran, as one of the biggest tourist-attracting countries from all over the world, is expected to have tour guides who have a good command of English language knowledge. Although a great amount of attention has been paid toward the issue of analyzing the English for Tourism Management courses offered in universities (see for example Eslamirasekh and Simin 2012), little knowledge exists as whether these courses comply with the standards of equivalent courses in the world-leading universities. In other words, the current study aims to evaluate English for Tourism Management course to find out its weaknesses and strengths. The other major aim of this study is to have needs analysis of Tourism Management students to enhance the course and textbook's quality which are offered to them.

1. Research Background

1.1. English for Tourism Management in Iran

English for Tourism Management curriculum in Iranian universities pursues the central guidelines dictated from the Supreme Council of Planning, an organization which works under the supervision of Ministry of Science and Technology and endeavors to achieve its educational strategies and policies. The aim of ESP courses, for undergraduate and postgraduate Tourism Management students, is to have the desired capability to cope with the target language needs which might encounter them in the working environment. The curriculum of Tourism Management, Geography and Tourism Planning consist of eight ESP and EAP-related units. This indicates that the students in these programs are required to pass about one hundred and twenty hours of compulsory English instructions (Eslami-Rasekh and Simin 2012).

Though there were great financial investment on the part of government in EAP and ESP programs, the results were not satisfactory enough (Atai 2000). The research also revealed that, in spite of the great expenditure devoted to English courses, still, students are incapable of functioning in EAP and ESP situations (Eslami Rasekh and Simin 2011). This is what the students themselves frequently complain about. Due to the importance of such issues, it is still a requirement for practitioners and researchers to evaluate English for Tourism Management courses in order to examine whether such courses meet the learning objectives articulated by the curriculum or not.

1.2. Iranian-related studies

English for Tourism Management has long been the focus of attention during the last years. Among the range of investigation conducted on this topic, content analysis gained momentum among Iranian researchers. For instance, NajafiSarem, Hamidi and Mahmoudie (2013) conducted a case study in which they evaluated the English texts applied for International Tourism Students. The researchers found the content of textbooks to be suitable and interesting for students. Applying Daoud and Celce-Murcia's (1979) checklist, the researchers claim that more care should be paid to select the textbooks which meet the teachers and students' expectations and course objectives. Similar to other needs analysis studies conducted in the field, Eslami Rasekh and Simin (2012) had the attempt to examine the current needs of a group of postgraduate students enrolling in Tourism Planning and Management courses. The focus of the study was on the students' preferences for their target experience needs, besides their present proficiency levels and their attitudes towards the role of English language in their professions. The collected data revealed the fact that lack of homogeneity, both in students' level of proficiency and attitudes, was the primary obstacle for the course to be successful enough. As suggested by the researchers, "in addition to measures to be taken before admission of students to the program of study... modifications to the course design" are suggested as well (p. 46). In another vein, Masoumpanah and Tahririan (2013) had a need analysis of Tourism Management students' target needs beside a systematic evaluation of textbooks presented to them. In researchers' viewpoint,

the two issues, i.e. target situation needs and content analysis go hand in hand. For this purpose, the required data were collected through interviews with the professionals in the workplace and questionnaire survey with students of tourism. The analysis approved the fact that developments in English for Tourism Students' textbooks are required, since the current texts cannot answer the target situation needs of students.

Although a great amount of research has been conducted on English for Tourism Students in the context of Iran, little attention has been paid to the evaluation of the tourism educational program. In spite of the fruitful results these investigations produced, the efficiency of the English Program for the students of Tourism Management has seldom been considered in the previous studies. It is of interest, therefore, to evaluate the educational system in order to see if the program responds to the language requirements of students and instructors. Accordingly, the following research questions are the focus of attention in this study

RQ1. Do the current textbooks applied in English for Tourism Management courses comply with the standards of such textbooks in the world leading universities?

RQ2. What are the instructors' and students' needs in relation to the quality of the textbooks?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of the current study were instructors and students of English for Tourism Management. The characteristics of each group are presented below.

The instructors participated in this study were 5 male and female instructors from four universities located in center of Iran. All the participants were involved in teaching various courses of English for Tourism Management. Their age ranged between 32 and 39. In addition, the participants were different in their teaching experiences, and courses they taught in English for Tourism Management. Their teaching experiences, as reported by them, ranged between 5 to 11 years. In addition to the instructors, a number of 61 students, 35 females and 26 male, studying Tourism Management major, and enrolling in English for Tourism Management course, were invited to participate in the present study. Their age ranged between 22 and 25. Regarding their general English proficiency, approximately most of them are regarded to be at intermediate level. The participants of the study were selected non-randomly based on convenient sampling, since they were the only available students to the researchers.

2.2. Instruments

In the current study, two main instruments were utilized.

2.2.1. Questionnaire of Compliance to the Standards

In order to investigate the first question, which is interested in measuring the amount of compliance of texts currently applied in English for Tourism Management courses with the standards of such texts in the world-leading universities, a researcher-made questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire, which was adopted from Peacock's (2009) Evaluation Questionnaire, had 15 questions and was written based on the standards suggested by Peacock about the acceptable measures for ensuring the quality of an English for Tourism Management course. The response to each item was on a Likert format scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three language experts, and their comments were utilized in its final draft. In addition, utilizing Cronbach Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated and reported as .79, which was satisfactory for the purpose of the study.

2.2.2. Instructors' and Students' Needs Questionnaire

The second instrument of the study was instructors' and students' needs questionnaire. Again, a research-made questionnaire was designed and administered to explore the instructors' and students' needs on quality of English for Tourism Management courses. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used for these items. The validity of this questionnaire was ensured through reviewing by three language experts. To calculate the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach Alpha was run and rendered the reliability of .81.

2.3. Procedures

To administer the questionnaires to the instructors and students, it was essential to ask for permission. Thus, the permissions were granted verbally from four universities located in the center of Iran. Then, the researcher was introduced to the instructors and students, and the researcher gave a brief overview of the study, addressing any concerns that instructors and the students had about the study. Eventually, the researcher requested consent from

the instructors and students to participate in the study. Obtaining informed consent from participants is a vital process in ethical research practice (Brown 1995). The participants' responses were kept anonymous; there was no identifying information on the survey instrument itself, with the exception of general demographic information (*i.e.*, years of teaching experience, level of education, and gender). Finally, those who agreed to participate were given the questionnaires to complete it in 30 minutes. The questionnaires administered among the students were translated in the participants' first language, Persian, in order to prevent any language inefficiency in answering them. The participants filled up their questionnaires at home to be at ease and comfort in answering the items.

3. Findings

The first research question explored whether the current textbooks applied in English for Tourism Management courses complied with the standards of such textbooks in the world-leading universities. Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of all participants' responses to this questionnaire.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Questionnaire of Compliance to the Standards.

Items	Questions	SA	A	N/U	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1	Do the texts have a clearly stated philosophy?	36.7%	17.9%	33%	11.9%	8.2%	2.31	1.011
2	Do the texts reflect program philosophy?	18.2%	27%	29.7%	11.8%	12.5%	2.11	1.519
3	Do the texts promote trainee flexibility in using different teaching approaches for different situations?	31.6%	30.3%	19.4%	10.1%	8.6%	2.64	1.647
4	Do the texts promote the ability to use, and to adapt foreign-language-teaching materials?	26%	26.2%	24%	11.3%	16.4%	2.09	1.398
5	Do the texts balance received versus experiential knowledge?	35.1%	21.1%	20%	11.4%	12.4%	2.04	1.055
6	Do the texts incorporate and encourage trainee reflection on the experiences and values they have when they enter the program?	20.3%	22%	21.4%	17.4%	18%	2.68	1.461
7	Do the texts promote the skill of reflection and self-evaluation as a teacher?	18.2%	22%	25.7%	11.8%	13.2%	2.96	1.993
8	Do the texts promote future reflective practice?	24%	20.2%	22%	11.3%	17.4%	2.74	1.235
9	Do the texts promote the 'long-term, developmental nature of learning to teach'?	17.8%	22.4%	27.1%	15.7%	16%	2.54	1.688
10	Do the texts have good linkage among courses, avoiding overlaps?	17.1%	23.1%	27.2%	15.6%	16.5%	2.51	1.469
11	Are the texts up-to-date?	14.9%	18.2%	23.7%	38.2%	27.6%	2.66	1.004
12	Do the texts balance teacher- and student-centered learning?	19.7%	30.1%	31%	10.9%	8.3%	2.42	1.255
13	Do the texts prepare teachers to function in the sociocultural context in which they will work?	35.2%	28.7%	17.8%	18.6%	7.7%	2.64	1.621
14	Do students believe the texts meet their needs, are relevant to their needs, and adequately prepare them for classroom teaching?	38.1%	24.8%	23.3%	12.4%	17.2%	2.33	1.238
15	Do the texts incorporate and balance linguistic, pedagogic, and managerial competence to an appropriate degree?	17.4%	16.6%	22.6%	10.3%	14.9%	2.04	1.361

The findings obtained from the answers participants given to the first questionnaire indicated that, roughly speaking, in the participants' viewpoints, these texts were in line with the standards of the world leading universities. The following table illustrates the students and teachers' answers to the needs questionnaire.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Instructors' and Students' Needs.

Items	Questions	SA	A	N/U	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1	The texts are level-appropriate, valuing the teachers' and students' affective learning.	8.1%	17.9%	23%	11.9%	39.1%	2.55	1.716
2	The teacher uses teaching platform and integrates course texts appropriately.	18.2%	27%	29.7%	11.8%	12.5%	2.64	1.309
3	Overall, the English listening skill has improved from taking the texts.	8.3%	12.2%	13%	26.1%	40.4%	3.84	1.272
4	Overall, English speaking skill has improved after taking the texts.	9.2%	13.4%	9.7%	37.3%	30.4%	2.37	1.013
5	Overall, English reading skill has improved after taking the texts.	35.1%	21.1%	20%	11.4%	12.4%	2.66	1.908
6	English writing skill has improved after taking the texts.	11.1%	9.6%	11.2%	32.4%	35.7%	3.98	1.194
7	The role of grammar in the texts is important.	18.2%	22%	25.7%	11.8%	13.2%	2.17	1.153
8	The texts integrate grammatical structure with communicative functions.	7.6%	5.2%	18.5%	31.3%	37.4%	3.01	1.847
9	The course objectives match the themes of the syllabus.	17.8%	22.4%	27.1%	15.7%	17%	2.33	1.565
10	Texts activities are well-designed and promote positive classroom atmosphere.	8.3%	10.1%	16.3%	29.1%	36.2%	3.64	1.641
11	The type of tasks in the texts includes students' academic and future jobs.	14.9%	18.2%	23.7%	38.2%	27.6%	3.67	1.309
12	9. During the instruction via the texts, you feel supported and your opinions heard. In fact, you feel a sense of accomplishments.	14.6%	8.1%	11.1%	30.9%	35.3%	3.02	1.284
13	The teaching materials in the texts are authentic.	31.1%	27.2%	17.2%	18.2%	6.3%	2.06	1.664
14	The texts deal with (1) communicative functions as properties of language, (2) communicative behavior and activities.	38.1%	24.8%	23.3%	12.4%	17.2%	2.41	1.343
15	All the learners have the freedom to create "meanings" and language for themselves.	14.4%	11.3%	12.6%	27.1%	34.6%	3.54	1.519
16	The texts imply a focus on both patterns of interaction and linguistic content.	17.1%	23.1%	27.2%	15.6%	16.5%	2.33	1.009
17	Texts have "cohesion" and "coherence".	4.8%	9.2%	3.7%	38.2%	44.1%	3.19	1.416
18	Texts ensure the accuracy of form in relation with context	19.1%	27.1%	15.3%	20.2%	18.3%	2.58	1.592
19	A teacher's guide, worktexts, and audio-tapes accompany the texts.	4.2%	8.7%	10.8%	28.6%	47.7%	2.69	1.307
20	Texts highlight the four language skills.	8.1%	4.1%	13.2%	41.4%	33.2%	2.74	1.236

According to Table 2, the instructors and the students of Tourism Management showed their real needs by indicating their dissatisfaction with the current texts, especially represented in Items 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, and 19.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating a group of students and instructors' opinions about the available English for Tourism Management textbooks. More specifically, the study was an attempt to investigate whether the current textbooks applied for English for Tourism Management complied with the standards of such textbooks in the world-leading universities. The other major aim of this study was to examine the participants' needs in relation to the quality of the textbooks. Having these purposes in mind, the researchers administered two questionnaires among the selected participants. The overall findings of the study demonstrated that the participants' viewpoints about the current textbooks were positive, while they showed to have specific needs in relation to their profession. Among the needs they mentioned were enhancing the listening and speaking skill, integrating both grammatical and communicative aspects, considering the students' academic and future jobs, supporting the students' feelings and opinions, adding some supplementary materials such as teacher's guide, work texts, and audio-tapes, etc. The

results of the current study reaffirmed the Iranian students, especially tourism students, of growing and continual needs of evaluating the textbooks which are recommended for their ESP courses. Furthermore, aligned with the results of previous studies done on needs analysis among tourism students (Cañas and Pérez 2015, Prachanant 2012, Masoumpanah and Tahririan 2013), among the essential needs of these students lies the teaching of the four skills, especially writing and speaking. Lack of attention to the primary skills of communication in the analyzed textbooks expresses considerable concerns to redevelop the textbooks according to the ongoing needs of the students. It is hoped that the results of this study provide a baseline for taking important decisions about the state of English for Tourism Management course.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

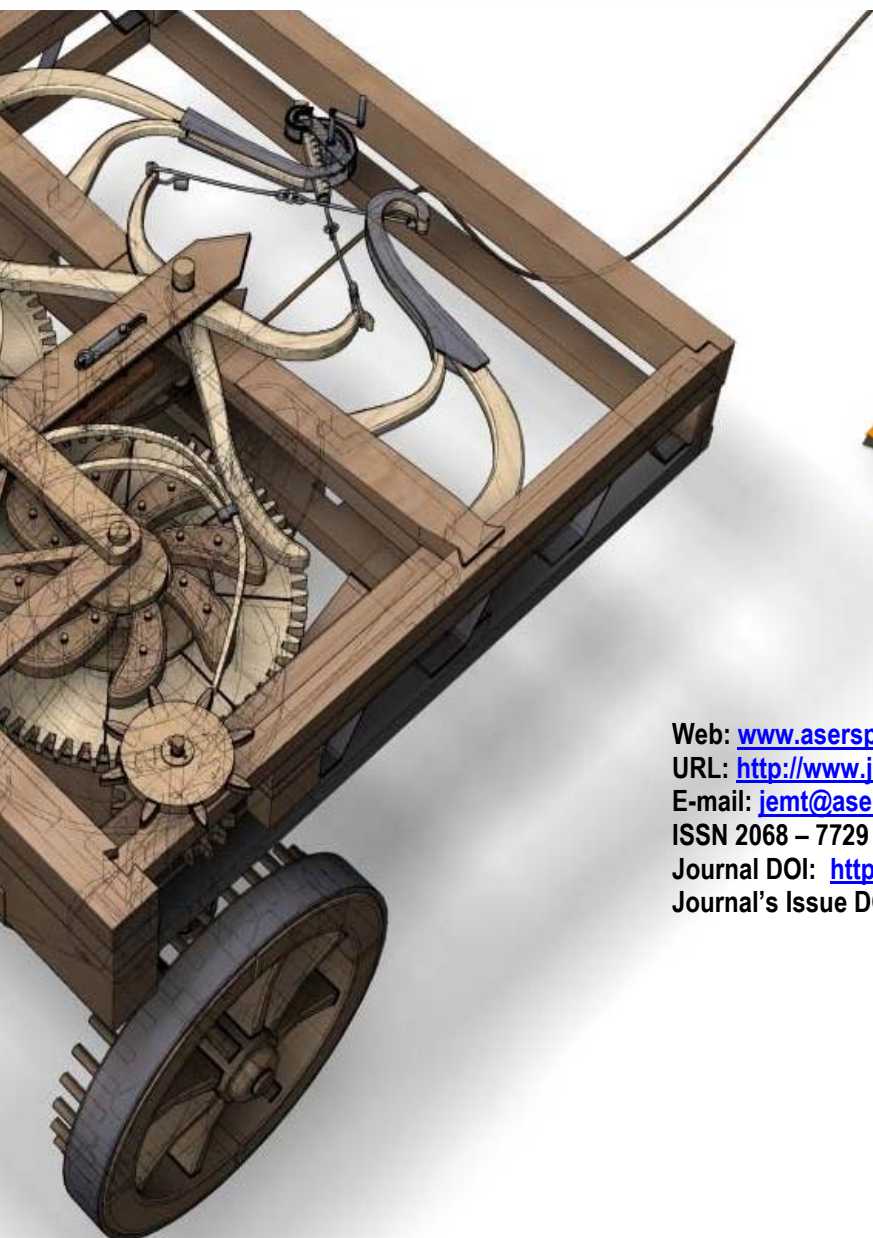
Certain limitations were imposed in this study, including the limitations regarding data collection instruments. Although most needs' analysis studies apply survey type instruments such as questionnaires and interviews (Prachanant 2012), the results obtained cannot reveal the complete picture of the issue at hand. This study is suggested to be replicated with mixed-method research designs. Future research in dealing with tourism would ideally incorporate both qualitative research approaches (such as think-aloud), content analysis research method and survey-type techniques of collecting data.

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