EAP Instruction for the Islamic Students in the Iranian Higher Education System: Challenges and Recommendations in the Courses of Islamic Texts

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ABSTRACT

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is derived from the umbrella term ESP, which means to meet learners' and employers' needs. It has gained a noticeable role as a language of knowledge dissemination, which has developed into an ongoing need for the improvement of language proficiency among non-English major university students. This has highlighted the significance of EAP courses, which are dominant in the context of Iranian universities. Although there is a reasonable body of contemporary research in the realm of ESP/EAP instruction nationwide, much of the literature in the Iranian EAP setting has been concentrated mainly on quantitative survey-based or experimental studies examining the syllabus and teaching contents with little or no attention to the teaching methodology. Moreover, there is scant research on the body of current EAP literature demonstrating a holistic picture of the running courses in terms of syllabus and methodology in EAP. The present paper aims at shedding light on the existing status of EAP courses for Iranian Islamic students in the tertiary educational system of Islamic universities of Iran through a comprehensive review of some major studies conducted in the related realm. Furthermore, it examines some of the major challenges and criticisms levelled at EAP instruction and EAP courses for Islamic students in Iranian higher education, with a focus on two major dimensions: syllabus and teaching methodology. The paper concludes by giving some practical and pedagogical implications for EAP practitioners, emphasizing the role of teaching methodology, aiming to raise the practitioners' awareness in promoting the efficiency of EAP courses.

1. Introduction

English for Academic Purposes has experienced rapid development, becoming a major subject in English language teaching and research in higher education throughout the world (Hyland, 2006). Learners in different disciplines take EAP as a course to learn the particular discourse of their specialty areas and subject matters or to develop their general language skills (Hamp-Lyons, 2011). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses equip students with the required knowledge of English to pursue their university studies. Moreover, as Dominguez and Rokowski (2002) emphasize, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction takes place in academic environments, and the essence of its inclusion in academic settings promotes English as "a universal form of communication in all walks of life" rather than simply a foreign language. Yet, EAP has grown to the point that it is considered a way of developing academic literacy rather than just preparing learners to study English (Hyland, 2006). Discourse specificity is one feature that distinguishes EAP from other fields. Moreover, EAP is always accompanied by the notion of community, and the exclusive form of texts and practices related to them is not what constitutes it.

The publication of a variety of English academic references, such as journals and books, or even textbooks for different content areas, is evidence highlighting the importance of English proficiency and necessitating an appropriate skill in English. Students majoring in various fields of study in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context frequently need to read English-language content-area textbooks that are in English and develop proficiency in reading academic texts for their courses (Huang, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for second- or foreign-language learners to have appropriate reading comprehension skills to succeed in academic contexts.

Textbooks are regarded as the primary source of academic language exposure in EAP studies because they provide access to specialized knowledge. However, because EAP learners are expected to learn more than just language, they should be primarily concerned with study skills and specific knowledge. As a result, Stoller (2016) mentioned the use of EAP materials and tasks as (a) participating in academic tasks and their consequences; (b) using strategies to achieve goals; (c) comprehending and producing spoken and written genres; (d) developing study skills; (e) strengthening critical thinking skills; (g) using information technology (IT) for academic purposes and (f) developing test-taking strategies for test types such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and EAP as an offshoot tend to focus more on language in context than on teaching language structures and usage. Hence, an appropriate context is provided for meeting students' academic needs and focusing on language functions. In contrast to general English classes where equal attention is given to all language skills, in an EAP class, a specific skill such as reading, which is required by the students, can be the course orientation to improve their reading skills and gain a better understanding of their field-related technical texts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Thus, an EAP course can provide a valuable opportunity to implement effective teaching methods to compensate for students' shortcomings in a specific area (e.g., reading comprehension).

To date, it is widely acknowledged that EAP is extremely important for university students because they require specific knowledge for language learning in the academic context. To achieve the main goal of learning a language, both language and study skills are

required in the EAP course. However, EAP can present significant challenges for both the teacher and the learner. Teachers face difficulties in preparing appropriate course materials due to issues such as a lack of time; financial constraints in hiring more teachers to assist with material writing; difficulty accessing specific information data; and a lack of creativity and self-confidence. Learners are less motivated to learn specific skills in their discipline. To bridge this gap, there should be appropriate material available as a learning resource for both of them. EAP course-books play an important role in language teaching because they are very useful in helping learners learn the language in an academic setting, which can be very motivating. It also assists teachers in providing guidelines for what should be conveyed in a language classroom.

Some research conducted on Islamic epistemology has been conducted by many scholars. First, Halstead (2004) notes three central points related to Islamic epistemology. 1) Knowledge can be gained through revelation as well as human intellect activity. All branches of knowledge are aimed at making people aware of Allah and of their relationship with Allah. 2) The pursuit of knowledge should enhance students' spiritual consciousness, which nurtures their faith (īmān), virtuous action (amal sālīh), and certainty (yaqīn). 3) Teachers should possess academic expertise as well as character and moral integrity, for parts of their teaching objectives are to expand the students' spiritual and moral awareness. Second, Adebayo (2010) emphasizes that Islamic education promotes the acquisition of foreign languages like English through the framework of Islamization of science. Thus, religion should be integrated into linguistics or language pedagogy. In other words, English Language Teaching (ELT) should be delivered in a way that fits Islamic religious principles.

In Indonesia, EAP instruction in Islamic higher education indicates that it focuses on general English rather than a specialist discourse. Dewi (2012) investigated ESP teaching in which it was more focused on general English and English textbook materials did not represent EAP design materials; additionally, this presented grammatical activities and reading skills. They used English for the Muslim book, which was written by a local developer but was never released to the public. Wahyudi (2014) also conducted a textbook evaluation study at Indonesian Islamic University. According to the findings, general English does not include EAP materials. The majority of teachers used locally compiled materials created by a local materials developer or written by a non-native speaker.

The learning process of English has received great attention. It has been undergone by adults, children, and even toddlers. Many people now realize the importance of English mastery as the main instrument for living in a global society (Nashruddin, 2015). To prepare the next Muslim generations, a move should be made from now on. Teaching English as a foreign language in Islamic universities is a concern.

Currently, the epistemological polarization between Islam and the West has been real. Muslim scholars from generation to generation have realized the domination of Western epistemology. Such dominance has had negative cultural and intellectual consequences for Islamic epistemology (Qomar, 2012). Through the imperialist agenda, the Western worldview and epistemology have gradually replaced the values and culture of the Islamic educational system *(Tarbiyah)* (Amin, 2009). Western hegemony can be seen in the curriculum used by many schools all over the world. Schools that do not meet Western standards are frequently labeled as underdeveloped (Al-Hadar, 2011).

Teachers of Islamic Higher Education face some challenges when it comes to EAP teaching materials. Most of them create their own to compile and tailor materials to the needs

of the learner, which is a time-consuming and labor-intensive process. It is unquestionably necessary to be creative as well as to have some money. To address this, many English books, particularly for Islamic Studies students, have been published in recent years by various publishers and are widely available on the market. Despite the fact that these textbooks were created by a local developer, non-native speakers can use them as a reference for both teachers and students, and they can apply the content to the students. Because of the importance of textbooks, it is important to note that they should be of high quality and meet the needs of Islamic studies students and their academic studies. Coursebook evaluation should be performed to determine whether their quality is appropriate so that the teacher can provide a picture of how the lesson will be conducted and can identify which parts of the book can be adapted. In addition, with a favorable academic situation, students could easily access and learn it.

Supporting documents, like curriculum and learning materials, in the research setting show the need to create professional ELT practitioners with the capability of integrating Islamic values into their teaching activities. ELT practitioners should use sources from Islamic and Western traditions to meet this need. The sources, particularly in the form of teaching materials, include texts that nurture students' cognitive domain, research sense, intuition, and spiritual growth. Hence, the existing academic papers often represent the knowledge derived from Islamic and Western sources. These findings reflect that the use of sources from the two traditions is inevitable.

2. Types of EAP Courses

Creating goals and objectives for a specific course helps to create a clear picture of what the course will be about. Furthermore, a clear understanding of goals and objectives will assist teachers or course designers in developing appropriate instructional materials. As a result, goals reflect the curriculum's ideology and how it is achieved. Objectives, on the other hand, refer to the more specific aims or purposes of activity within a lesson to achieve one goal of the study (Brown, 2006).

EAP has two subdivisions. Based on the course being common core or subject-specific, it may be called EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) for the former and ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) for the latter. An EGAP course mainly deals with general skills that students at the university level need, such as writing reference skills or listening and note-taking. An ESAP course is subject-specific, dealing with, for example, medicine, economics, or engineering. Concerning the content, as the name suggests, the vocabulary used in ESAP is more technical while the general, structural, and sub-technical vocabulary may be the same (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997). Figure 1, taken from Jordan (1997), illustrates the EGAP as the base and the ESAP as the pinnacle. As is shown in Figure 1, while ESAP is more discipline-based and relevant to students, EGAP includes generalizable skills that are applicable to larger groups of students.

(Discipline specific: motivation and relevance for students)

ESAP

EGAP

(Generalizable skill, applicable to most students; economical of effort and time of the tutor)
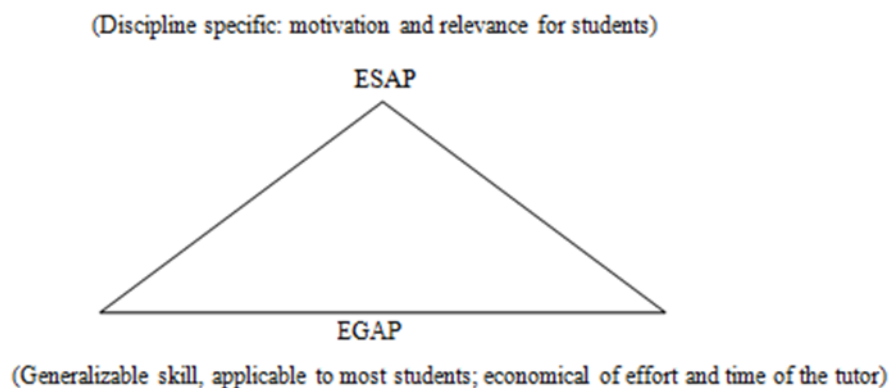
Figure 1. Jordan's (1997) illustration of EGAP and ESAP

EAP courses are defined by Hutchinson and Water (1987) as the process of interpreting raw needs analysis data to produce an integrated series of learning experiences that lead learners to a specific state of knowledge. Furthermore, Strevens (1980) defined EAP courses as those in which the aims and content are determined, principally or entirely, not by general education criteria, but by functional and practical English language requirements of the learner.

To put these definitions into practice, it is critical to define the general goals and objectives of the EAP course for the Islamic Studies discipline. According to Smaihi (2019), the following goals should be pursued:

•   To familiarize Islamic Studies students with the terminology used in the context of Islamic Studies,

•   To familiarize them with how to use English properly related to students' specialism and subject area so that they can communicate properly through a set of activities moving in sequence from simple to more complex,

•   To familiarize them with fundamental communication and presentation skills for use in their academic lives and future careers.

The importance of instructional materials in ESP courses cannot be overstated. They play an important role in the English classroom. Materials, according to Richards and Renandya (2002), are one component of the instructional process. Teaching them is a significant part of most language programs. As a result, the creation of mediated materials necessitates both artistic and technical skills (Carey, 2001). Crawford (2002) cited the following key principles for the design of effective teaching materials in this regard:

•   Language has a function and must be contextualized

•   Language development requires the deliberate use of language

•   The use of language should be realistic and authentic

•   The majority of classroom materials will have an audio-visual component

•   Learners must be able to deal with both written and spoken genres

•   Effective instructional materials that encourage independence

•   Materials must be adaptable to individual and contextual differences

•   Learning must engage learners both effectively and cognitively (cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002).

In fact, authentic materials from the real world are the best materials for any English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) course. As a consequence, designers should think about using real-life, authentic materials that reflect the target audience's area of expertise. This will assist students who are weak in the English language to at least comprehend reading text, for example, due to prior knowledge.

Authentic materials and ESP courses are inextricably linked. Students or learners should be given authentic materials that reflect their real-world experiences. They should benefit students or learners so that when they go out into the real world, they will naturally involve the language the students require. Use context, texts, and situations from the student's subject area – Whether they are real or stimulated, they will naturally involve the language the students require. They will not only be able to function well in the real world, but they will also be able to use English in their working life.

Therefore, Harding (2007) suggested three recommendations to consider while coming up with a set of authentic materials:

•   Use context, texts, and situations from the students' subject area—whether real or simulated, they will naturally incorporate the language the students require.

•   Exploit authentic materials that students use in their specialism or vocation—Do not be put off by the fact that it may not look like oral English.

•   Make the tasks authentic: Get the students to do things with the materials that they actually need to do their work.

To conclude, in the case of Islamic Studies, some ELT educators, such as Ashraf (1997), have proposed the need for Islamic teaching materials for teaching English to Islamic Studies students. She stated that cultural resistance emerges in Muslim students when English teaching materials containing western culture, values, and norms are used. This can demotivate students, stifling the development of their language skills.

In another study, Abudhahir, Mahdun, and Nor (2015) declared that in the context of Islamic studies, the materials used for these students are expected to be integrated with the text that they use in their daily lives. It could be a sermon or a text used by preachers while preaching. It could also be a dialogue, a question-and-answer session, or a discussion between Islamic preachers. The main goal is for the texts used to reflect their real-life experiences as well as their prior knowledge. A material designer should be aware that the goal is not to teach these students. It is Islamic Studies in English, but rather to teach them how to use English properly in relation to their field of study, so that they can communicate whatever they have learned at university to the community.

Furthermore, Smaihi (2019) states that the material content includes knowledge about Islamic tenets, Islamic jurisprudence, prophetic tradition, Islamic history, and so on, allowing learners to achieve proficiency in the target language while also developing

knowledge in their field of specialization. In the case of Islamic Studies, the materials are linked to the students' background knowledge as well as their language ability, with the ultimate goal of contextualizing the English language and, to a large extent, fostering communication in real-life situations.

In a study by Abudhahir, Mahdun, and Nor (2015), authors and designers should consider the language and register to be used when selecting items for inclusion in teaching materials. This information can be gleaned from the Target Situation Analysis as well as the needs of the students. It is a topic that is discussed in all ESP courses as to what type of language should be used in the materials as well as in the classrooms. In this context, it is critical to emphasize the importance of Islamic English. According to Al Faruqi (1986), Islamic English is the English language modified to carry Islamic proper nouns and meanings without distortion, and thus to serve the linguistic needs of Muslim English users.

Furthermore, Al Faruqi's (ibid.) goal was to encourage the incorporation into English of a wide range of Arabic terms that, in his opinion, were untranslatable and would enrich and enlarge the English language vocabulary. Similarly, Sameh (2016) observes that the continuous growth of Muslim communities in English-speaking countries has coincided with an increase in demand for authoritative English translations of religious texts such as the Qur'ān and Hadith. In this context, the translation of Islamic religious terms (IRTs) into English takes on added significance. In this article, IRTs are lexical items that include Allah's names (Al-Ramn1, Al-Ram, etc.), names of the prophets and their companions, and terms related to the pillars of Islam. Consequently, this inclusion of Islamic religious terms concerns an important step to familiarizing learners with how to use English properly related to their specialism and subject area. Hence, they will be able to communicate properly and effectively in real-world situations.

3. EAP Methodologies

While EAP is an offspring of ESP, the implementation of teaching methodologies related to it is quite possible for EAP. Several perspectives seem to be vital concerning methodology in this field, including authenticity, problem-solving, communicative activities, or learning by doing (Jordan, 1997). Tarnopolsky (2009) and Todd (2003, cited in Basturkmen, 2006) advocate learner autonomy, cooperative and inductive learning, the inclusion of process syllabuses, and the use of authentic professional materials and tasks that are designed and tailored towards those materials for teaching ESP courses. The favorable effects of such syllabi have also been highlighted by Author (2015) and Naeini and Rahimi (2016), who investigated the impact of authentic contexts and materials on Iranian EAP students.

Some of the most applicable teaching approaches, according to Strevens (1980), are functional, notional, and communicative. Tarnopolsky (2009) refers to content-based instruction as another methodology appropriate for ESP instruction. Content-based language teaching or instruction (CBI) is known to be a widely used approach in teaching EAP courses, which has positive outcomes (Song, 2006). The CBI approach is closely related to EAP, while the only difference remains in the focus of the former being on content and the latter on language.

According to Karimkhanlui (2007), a more communicative approach is a more appropriate methodology for materials design and teaching of EAP courses today. Since there is the belief that knowledge of the language is not equal to the ability to use the language. In such an approach, what is probably getting more attention is the inclusion of

communicative skills and communicative tasks. She refers to Nunan's (1989) definition of a communicative task, which primarily focuses on meaning rather than form and which involves learners' comprehension, manipulation, and production of the target language, which finally leads to interaction with the target language. To make the courses more communicative, Karimkhanlui (2007), referring to Brumfit and Johnson (1979) and Taylor (1983), calls for a task-oriented teaching approach as a more applicable approach, because it provides a situation in which the students pass on and receive information, and consequently, communication takes place.

Another teaching approach advocated for EAP is genre-based. As Hyland (2006) mentions, in a genre-based approach to teaching, contextual knowledge is used in order to make the linguistic resources, which are shared by a specific community, available for the students so that they achieve specific goals.

However, Strevens (1980) remarks that there is no single methodology appropriate for ESP/EAP courses. Moreover, Bloor and Bloor (1986, cited in Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) and Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991, cited in Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) mention that the methodology which is implemented is quite innovative and specialized in ESP/EAP courses. Thus, depending on the context, learner needs, aims of the course, goals, and study skills included, a multi-methodology or an eclectic approach is more practical for teaching EAP courses, which rely on different perspectives driven by different approaches.

4. EAP Syllabuses

A syllabus is defined by Hyland (2006, 83) as a plan of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning, identifying what will be worked on in reaching the overall course aims and providing a basis for evaluating students' progress.

Spector-Cohen, Kirschner, and Wexler (2001) propose four prongs in designing the EAP syllabus: focus on linguistic forms; reading comprehension strategies; typical academic genres and rhetorical forms; and criterion tasks. They suggest the inclusion of these prongs to a specific extent for various learner levels. As far as the intermediate-level students are concerned, they offer the presentation of content-based authentic academic texts based on the students' areas of specialization, which are not highly specialized. Highly specialized texts may need a broad background knowledge, which will deter the students' application of skills learned at lower levels. They also recommend the introduction of representative academic genres so that top-down reading is facilitated while there will be a simulation of the task kinds which the students will need to perform in their academic content courses.

Jordan (1997) introduces three classifications of syllabuses t have been used in literature in relation to ESP or EAP. These include the syllabuses which focus on the end result (called content or product), the models which focus on the means to the end (called method or process), and the syllabuses which focus on skills. The syllabuses which go under the content or product group are grammatical/structural/syntax, notional-functional, situational, topical, and content-based. Language, communication, and cognitive skills belong to the second category. The third category includes procedural/task-based, learning-centered/negotiated, and process.

As far as the syllabus is concerned with the process (how) to teach or the product (what) to teach, White (1988, cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2009) distinguishes two types of syllabuses: Type A and Type B. Type A syllabuses are authority-based and external to

learners while an objective is defined. The content is selected by experts. Instead, a Type B syllabus is an inner-directed and internal kind of syllabus that is formed as a result of the negotiation between the teacher and the learners, and the objectives are stated afterward. Process, procedural, and task-based syllabuses are among the Type B syllabuses that principally focus on the process rather than the product.

In comparing the type A and type B syllabi on their weak and strong points, Spector-Cohen et al. (2001) refer to some problems. They exist when adapting a type A syllabus for EAP courses, including the troubles associated with materials that are inauthentic and also the learners' needs which are not considered in such syllabi. In contrast, they mention that a type B syllabus exposes learners to the target language hastily and that the focus will be mainly on mastering and learning some communicative tasks. Thus, they argue that type B is superior since it will equip learners with the skills that are most required of them in the future. Although type B syllabi are recommendable in this sense, Spector-Cohen and colleagues also consider that they have their own weaknesses which require close attention and consideration. Firstly, there needs to be a certain threshold level of linguistic proficiency. Besides, at the initial stages, the whole course might seem to lack a fine rationale for sequencing the various tasks and the teacher may not have easy access to ready-made materials. Moreover, deciding on an evaluation process might be a dilemma. Hyland (2006) believes that EAP employs different elements of both (Type A and Type B). While it is more liable towards the analytical syllabus (Type B, process and task-based syllabuses), refers to these kinds of syllabuses as two ends of a continuum rather than two opposing poles of a dichotomy.

In the same vein, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) add two important syllabus types for EAP. The first syllabus takes the skills-based approach that emphasizes the teaching of specific skills that closely relate to what learners need. However, if language skills are concerned, we will have a study-skills syllabus (Jordan, 1997). The other syllabus is the content-based syllabus. According to Jordan (1997), a content-based syllabus mainly relates to the requirements which are embedded in specific academic disciplines. Thus, the starting point in a content-based syllabus is topics, themes, or even content units rather than grammar, situations, or functions (Richards, 2001).

Other EAP scholars believe in the suitability of different syllabus types for EAP courses. For example, Jordan (1997) and Ostbye (1997) name problem-based, content-based, and activity-based courses as having important positive aspects in ESP/EAP course planning and syllabus design. Ellis (2003) refers to task-based and process-based syllabuses because these two emphasize communication and focus on meaning while exposing learners to authentic, unmodified chunks of language and stressing the negotiation of meaning for learners. Hyland (2006) lists some EAP syllabuses which have been used and implemented into EAP courses from the past to the present as lexico-grammatical, functional, task-based, process, text-based, and content-based.

To conclude, in practice, syllabuses for EAP are hybrids, touching upon many of the different aspects of syllabus types (Hyland, 2006). Jordan (1997) also believes that the EAP syllabus is founded on the communication of an array of syllabuses. These syllabuses may be content or product-based, concentrateing on the end result; skills-based, focuseing on language skills; process or method-based, emphasizing the means to an end and may include communicative activities, self-access materials, or team-teaching. Thus, Jordan (1997) proposes a multi-syllabus to be efficient for an EAP course since every such course will differ from another based on the participants and contents.

5. Materials and Textbook Evaluation

Teaching materials play an important role in teaching and learning because they are a valuable learning resource for both the teacher and the learner. According to Richard (2001), a textbook is an essential component of a language course. A well-written book can determine the success of language learning. This is intended to provide learners with a significant amount of input in order for them to use language communicatively. Furthermore, the textbook can be a valuable resource for teachers in terms of teaching and planning lessons that are appropriate for their classroom.

It is necessary to go over the task component, the learning task design model, and principles when dealing with materials. A task is structured by task components to function effectively as an activity, a work plan, and a piece of classroom work. According to Nunan (2004), tasks have six components. These are (a) the goal, (b) the input, (c) the procedure, (d) the teacher role, (e) the learner role, and (f) the settings. Because a task is a component of teaching materials, a guiding, and informing principle is required during the development process. Nunan (2004) investigates several principles, including (1) scaffolding; (2) task dependency; (3) recycling; (4) active learning; (5) integration; (6) reproduction to creation; and (7) reflection. Nunan (2004) developed a course design and review model that can be used to design learning tasks. This model was chosen because it allows learners to focus not only on the language, but also on the learning process itself. The communicative task follows the focus on form (language analysis and practice) in this model, and it consists of six stages per unit: (1) schema building; (2) controlled practice; (3) authentic listening; (4) focus on linguistic elements; (5) providing freer practice; and (6) introducing the pedagogical task.

In terms of developing materials, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) provide hands-on experience with writing instructions and using illustrations, layout, and design. Salience, simplicity, obvious reference, specification, standardization, sequencing, separation, and staging are some criteria for writing clear instructions. Visual elements are used in a material, for example. Photos, drawings, paintings, cartoons, graphs, color backgrounds, and so on are examples of these elements. The importance of design and layout in material evaluation cannot be overstated. A good layout should include positioning, size, sequence, use of space, visual and text balance, separation, repetition, and good material design that is appealing, aesthetic, impactful, functionally clear, easy to use, and cost-effective.

That data clearly depicts a picture of comprehensive materials that can be used as a comprehensive reference when designing materials. Furthermore, that can be an evaluation that can aid in reflecting on a material's strengths and weaknesses. In discussing materials evaluation, Tomlinson (2003) distinguishes between materials analysis, which refers to the description of materials contained, and materials evaluation, which is the measure of materials' effect on users. Similarly, Tomlinson and Matsuhara (2004) define materials evaluation as a procedure that involves measuring the value of a set of learning materials and discovering the effect of materials use on their users. Materials should be evaluated in accordance with some principles or criteria. Candlin (1987) asserted in Nunan (2004) that textbook evaluation should include three criteria: problematicity, implementability, and combinability. Problematicity refers to the tasks that should be used to discover the various abilities and knowledge of learners, as well as to provide monitoring and feedback. Implementability encompasses organizational and management complexity, as well as task adaptability. Combinability is concerned with the sequenced and integrated task, in which a task should be linked to one that came before it.

To conclude, it is critical to understand the criteria for selecting coursebooks, particularly in the information and sophisticated technology eras, where learners are expected to meet high standards in materials and presentation. The materials in this study should be judged to match learner needs and language learning principles. It is also intended to evaluate and determine the appropriateness of the EAP textbook and tasks for Islamic students at Islamic higher education institutions.

6. English Language Teaching in Iran

In secondary and high schools, English is taught as a foreign language in the Iranian context. It is allocated to English language lessons and is limited to two to four hours of instruction per week. At both the junior high school and high school levels, oral and written skills are emphasized equally. In a study by Farhady, Sajadi Hezaveh, and Hedayati (2010), spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension parts shape the written test. Speaking skills are very narrowly and indirectly tested via written pronunciation items.

As an academic field of study, many universities also offer degree programs in English teaching, literature, and translation. Furthermore, English is taught along with other foreign languages in private language schools nationwide.

According to Saffarzadeh (as cited in Moghimizadeh, 2008), a Cultural Revolution Council was formed in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education in 1981. Now, it is known as the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, to review the status of education in the university phase after the Islamic revolution. In its decisions, the council highlighted the importance of English knowledge required for university students to cover two objectives: first, developing the ability to employ scientific and technological information written in English to achieve national self-sufficiency; and second, using English as a medium for cultural exchanges and the transition of Islamic-Iranian culture to the world. As a result, great importance was given to scientific English reading in determining the objectives of the ELT program in order to obtain industrial, economic, and agricultural autonomy (Atai & Mazlum 2013). According to the High Council of Cultural Revolution [HCCR] (2002), due to the fact that recent scientific and technological knowledge is reflected in written form. An appropriate command of reading skills could lead to the independence of the country, and the goal of ELT programs was mainly to improve the reading ability of the students.

Despite many years of attempts to create and revise English teaching practices in schools and institutions, difficulties persist (Doudman 2006; Farhady et al. 2010). A key issue that has brought about significant alterations in the educational setting regarding the processes of learning, teaching, and assessment is a paradigm shift from a positivist theoretical framework to a constructivist conceptual framework.

However, theoretical developments require a considerable amount of time in order to be transformed into practice. All members of an educational community, such as learners, teachers, curriculum developers, and administrators, need to go through some necessary alternation in their beliefs through an expensive and long process. According to Farhady et al. (2010), despite teachers' and instructors' acceptable knowledge of theoretical aspects of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) such as methodology, linguistics, and assessment, a significant gap exists between theory and practice. Among many problems involved in moving from theory to practice, the inefficiency of teacher training programs is of great concern. In addition, a lack of adequate instructional materials would not help

teachers improve the language instruction process. Therefore, all these variables should be taken into account in this particular educational context and many parties should presume responsibility, including teachers, teacher education centers, administrators, and universities, to move toward quality-centered language learning.

Moreover, in the Iranian context, there are generally two types of ESP courses, called EAP in the academic context, offered in the higher education phase. The main purpose of these courses is to empower students to communicate and understand the written discourse in their specialty literature. The first type is a three-credit English course of three hours a week designed to provide students with an English reading course to familiarize them with academic English reading comprehension. It prepares them to read specific discourse in their fields of study (e.g., engineering, medicine, science, etc.). The second type of EAP is a two- or three-credit English course of two to three hours a week, which is called Specific English. It provides students with academic texts in their specialty area. The course is designed to enable students to read and understand the academic discourse and vocabulary of their majors written in English.

7. Challenges of EAP Instruction in Iran

English for Academic Purposes in Iran, which is mainly limited to university level and in-service training (Talebinezhad & Beniss, 2013), is part of EFL instruction and has a crucial position in higher education. Although remarkable educational and financial investments have been made in EAP programs, the majority of the students and many teachers are not satisfied with these so-called EAP classes (Eslami, 2010). EAP courses in Iran are criticized for several reasons. These incorporate: excluding study skills and discourse genre appropriate for the authentic use of the language (Hassaskhah, 2005); lacking perspectives such as pragmatics (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005); taking a read-only approach; taking a product-based approach (Tayebipour, 2005); being text-based while advocating the use of form to get the meaning; the absence of variety for exercises, tasks, activities, and drills (Soleimani, 2005); finding no trace of real-life communication; ignoring learners' purposes and interests; and lacking the motivational principle to encourage students (Fathi, 2008).

Among many influential factors leading to the inefficiency of EAP courses, teachers and teaching methodology are of great concern. According to Hayati (2008), EAP classes lack skillful and innovative teachers who can implement communicative approaches in the classroom. It is highlighted in the literature that the dominant methodology in the EAP context is the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), which is quite outdated and not efficient in developing the reading comprehension ability of the students (Ajideh, 2009; Atai & Nazari, 2011; Erfani, Iranmehr, & Davari 2011; Farhadi et al. 2010; Hayati, 2008; Mazdayasna & Tahririan 2008). As a result, based on the above-mentioned discussion, students are still lagging behind, and underperformance in reading comprehension tests is a challenging problem among Iranian undergraduate students.

When students enroll in universities, their curricula focus on the content area of their specialization rather than generalizing. Since, except for English majors, most students do not have to take English courses after the first year of their studies, they begin to struggle with difficulties posed by complex English texts college professors assign to be studied.

Pritchard and Nasr (2004) have maintained several explanations for why reading presents a difficulty to non-English students in an EFL context. First, the students are accustomed to

simplified texts at pre-university level, but at university level, they are exposed to academic materials which they find difficult. Second, their existing strategies are to comprehend their texts merely through the intensive use of bilingual dictionaries and dependence on the teacher. The third reason is due to the fact that during the years of English study at school, they are heavily exposed to GTM, in which rules, structures, vocabulary, and translation are highlighted. Almost all of these reasons also apply to the Iranian context, where English classes in the mainstream education system are dominated by GTM focusing on structural features of texts (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010; Jahangard, 2007; Riazi, 2005).

Another existing problem in the realm of EAP is teachers' and learners' dissatisfaction with and negative attitudes toward EAP reading courses, which is probably another outcome of ineffective methodology. A survey conducted by Author (2015) clearly identifies that the preference of the students has been on the productive skills of speaking and writing. However, a crucial challenge, indeed, is trying to enhance L2 learners' reading abilities and keep their interest in reading. Many of the difficulties L2 learners face when reading in English are the result of their lack of knowledge about effective methods of reading and comprehending a text, which leads to reluctance, influencing their attitudes toward English reading comprehension courses (Enisa, 2010; Hayati, 2008; Izzitin, 2010; Kiani, 2010). The methodological and attitudinal gaps in EAP have also been emphasized by Author, Pandian, and Modirkhameneh (2014a; 2014b), who studied the impact of a learning-centered approach on students' reading strategies and attitudes. In describing the status of ESP instruction in Iran, Hayati (2008) highlights the problem of teaching methodology as one of the crucial concerns, indicating that such classes are teacher-centered, focusing on grammatical structures and translation of texts. Therefore, students are not equipped with adequate skills and strategies for reading comprehension. Therefore, many students are not satisfied with EAP classes. As a result, this challenging Iranian EAP context in which students struggle to read in English causes a negative view toward EAP.

Concerning the teaching materials, the existing English textbooks are mostly published by Western publishers. A few books combining English teaching and Islamic content are available, among others: *Digest Islam and Build Up Your English,* written by Bustami (2006); Islamic *English: A Competency-Based Reading and Self-Study Reference,* authored by Syah (2009); and *English for Islamic Studies,* compiled by Darwis (2012). To cope with the provision of Islamic-related English teaching materials, strategies proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2012) can be taken into account, namely: (1) lecturers form a small group and design contextually relevant and culturally sensitive materials; (2) use the materials in the classrooms; (3) ask for feedback from colleagues and learners; (4) use feedback to revise the materials; (5) circulate the revised materials digitally; and (6) undertake a small pilot study. Alternatively, the lecturers might want to adopt the internationally published materials following the techniques proposed by Richards (2001), namely: (1) modifying content; (2) adding or deleting certain parts of the content; (3) reorganizing content; (4) addressing omissions by adding relevant vocabulary and activities; and (5) modifying tasks. It is worth noting that the published materials might not suit every learning situation. Adaptation, then, ought to be undertaken in order to meet the distinctive features of the English education system for Islamic students.

8. Pedagogical Recommendations

By adopting a learning-centered EAP instruction, EAP practitioners can identify students' weaknesses in EAP reading comprehension and attempt to make the necessary efforts to solve the problems as much as possible. Teachers can figure it out. The sections are not fully

considered by them. Then, they can emphasize the role of using them for successful reading comprehension strategies and guide students.

EAP teachers can act as material providers, collaborators, and evaluators in an attempt to enable the students to fulfill reading comprehension by using multiple strategies and the required skills introduced in a learning-centered EAP approach. As far as material development for EAP is concerned, it is recommended that authentic principles such as authentic texts and authentic tasks be integrated into the setting of learning (Author, 2015). Besides, teachers can help learners use different strategies to facilitate their learning. As stated by Author et al. (2014b), strategies instruction, the explicit teaching of language learning strategies to students, enhances the students' learning and helps them to be independent and autonomous. The first stage in the process of strategy instruction is to help students discover the strategies they already use (Cohen, 1998; Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson, 2007). Subsequently, the teacher introduces different strategies based on tasks and reading passages. Additionally, clear and adequate information is given on what, how, and why to use a particular strategy by teachers during instruction (Carrell, 1996; Cohen, 1998; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). Teachers can provide ongoing guidance as well as individual counselling for different minor problems the students encounter at the early stages, motivating them to read and helping them gain confidence in reading in a foreign language.

Teachers can also highlight that reading does not mean understanding the meaning of the words or chunks in isolation, but it means comprehending the meanings in relation to the surrounding and connected phrases and sentences in a text. Therefore, teachers can benefit from a learning-centered, strategies-based EAP approach in accomplishing their demanding task of teaching academic English in the present EFL context where learners have inadequate exposure to language compared to ESL contexts.

Through implementing a learning-centered EAP instruction on reading, teachers can dispose of the traditional reading method, focusing only on the grammatical structures and words involved in a text, and shift to a practical reading method that concentrates on the meanings and understanding of a reading passage through equipping students with knowledge of strategies and utilizing their skills. As a result, the learners would not lose interest in analyzing different grammatical patterns and memorizing vocabulary items for a particular passage, which, in turn, leads to their underperformance in reading comprehension and dissatisfaction with the course.

Being aware of the students' ideas, teachers can make attempts to enable students to play a more active role in the class. Although teaching decoding skills to students is crucial in English reading, as claimed by Lee and Oxford (2008), teachers should provide students with chances to develop positive self-images as English readers.

EAP teachers play an important role in identifying students' needs and limitations in English courses because, with the exception of English majors, many do not study English after the first academic year. Although teachers have generally been seen as information producers in the classroom, EAP teachers cannot be completely proficient in the individual subject areas. Thus, from a pedagogical standpoint, learning strategies training can be an effective way of instruction for EAP instructors who teach science or humanities students. As a result, students, particularly those who struggle with comprehension, might benefit from tools that assist them to grasp what they read.

That Islamic epistemology acknowledges the revelation, Qur'ān, and hadith as the sources of knowledge makes it different from that of Western epistemology. Such divergence ought to be seen as an entry point for the notion of integration and interconnection, rather than a phenomenon of epistemological contestation.

Also, two recommendations are proposed. First, ELT practitioners are to explore the philosophy of language education within the Iranian context and Islamic educational institutions. For this purpose, the notion of the Qur'ān as the basis of all branches of knowledge, including linguistics and language pedagogy, could be a stimulating point of departure. Second, a relevant workshop must help the lecturers integrate Islamic epistemology into the instructional activities. The workshop ought to be linked to the current issues in the ELT field, such as post-method pedagogy and ELT. With the understanding of the issues, ELT practitioners will observe, conduct research, and generate educational products that accommodate the particularities of Islamic educational institutions.

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