

Undergraduate Students' Needs Analysis of University General English Course

Abstract

Needs analysis is an important step in terms of developing curriculum and syllabus for different courses. It is necessary to become familiar with students' objectives, attitudes, learning habits and expectations of the course in order to have an appropriate and suitable syllabus and course design. This study has tried to investigate the perceived English language needs of university students in the course of General English in Iran. The General English course is an obligatory three-credit course presented in all universities of Iran for which no specialized syllabus is proposed and different teachers would select dissimilar syllabuses, methods and textbooks based on their own beliefs and experiences without considering students' real needs and desires. Therefore, in this study it has been tried to gather students' conceptions and needs using a revised version of questionnaire presented by Sihong (2007) in order to detect students' views toward what they need to learn, their preferred learning style, and their attitudes, motivation and interest toward learning English. The results showed that students considered vocabulary the most important component of the language which needed the most practice, whereas they found grammar as the component that they resented most and had the least expertise in. They perceived reading as the most important skill, while they considered listening and speaking as their most problematic skills. The students had positive attitudes and high motivation toward learning English. It is hoped that this practical work can remind Iranian teachers and curriculum and syllabus designers to consider learners' preferences as an important part in determining this course as well as other courses' objectives.

Key Words: Needs analysis; General English course; University students; Syllabus design; learners' views

INTRODUCTION

The original idea of focusing on learners' needs was first presented in 1970s which resulted in designing language courses with the aim of satisfying the social and individual needs of the learners (Palacios Martinez, 1992). There have been many studies concerning the importance of learners in second and foreign language learning which have led language teaching toward more learner-centered methods (Brown, 2001; Nunan, 1988; Wright, 1990). Consequently, learners' wants and needs have become of great importance in recent years.

As Makarova (1997) states, in a curriculum based on learner-centered approaches, there is a greater role for the learners in teaching and learning process; therefore, their interests and motivation toward language learning would be promoted. Nunan (1988) believes that "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account" (p. 177). Consequently, needs analysis plays a vital role in developing and designing a curriculum or syllabus for a language course. Conducting a syllabus necessitates a need analysis at the beginning since as

Nunan and Lamb (1996, p.27) state, needs analysis “provides a basis for setting goals and objectives”.

General English Course is one of the compulsory courses that all undergraduate students should pass in all the Iranian universities. No specific syllabus is developed for this course and each teacher chooses his/her own textbook and method of teaching based on his or her own beliefs and ideas. Unfortunately, although General English as a base for ESP (English for Especial Purposes) is of great importance; most of the studies have concentrated on ESP (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Leong, 2001; Basturkmen, 2010).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explain that “what distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather as awareness of the need... for the time being, the tradition persists in General English that learners’ needs can’t be specified and as a result no attempt is usually made to discover learners’ true needs” (pp. 53-54). Richards (1990, p.2) asserts “needs analysis is also fundamental to the planning of General English” courses and materials. This study has tried to conduct a needs analysis of the undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University of Sirjan, Iran to find out their “target and learning needs” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) through the following questions:

- 1- What is the students’ opinion toward the language components and skills they have to learn?
- 2- What skills and components do the students consider as the most difficult or problematic?
- 3- Is there any difference between males and females’ opinions toward what they need to learn?
- 4- What are the students’ preferred learning styles and method of evaluation?
- 5- Is there any difference between males and females’ preferred learning styles and method of evaluation?
- 6- What is the students’ affective perspective toward learning English?

REVIEW OF LITRITURE

Needs analysis has become a part of language teaching over in mid-1970s and has become an important part of systematic curriculum development (Hutchinson & Waters, 2002; Shu, 2004; Wen, 2004; Ni and Liu, 2006). Iwai et al. (1999, P.7) has also mentioned, “It forms a rational basis for all the other components of a systematic language curriculum”. Brown (2001, p.35) defines needs analysis as “the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students”.

Richterich (1972) was the first person who proposed a model of needs analysis in language education in 1970s. Then needs analysis was used to define the content and objectives of language instruction programs and gradually found its way toward its role in EFL education and curriculum design. It became one of the important parts in designing curriculum and syllabus for General English course as the attention was given to the learning needs of the students rather than their language needs (Hutchinson & Water, 1987, p.56).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have classified needs into two categories of target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to “what the learner needs to do in the target situation”

(Nation & Macalister, 2010, p.24) and is categorized into three individual parts: necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities are “the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55). Lacks are the necessities that the learners do not possess and wants are the learners’ wishes and views toward what they need to learn. Learning needs refer to “what the learner needs to do in order to learn” (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p.24).

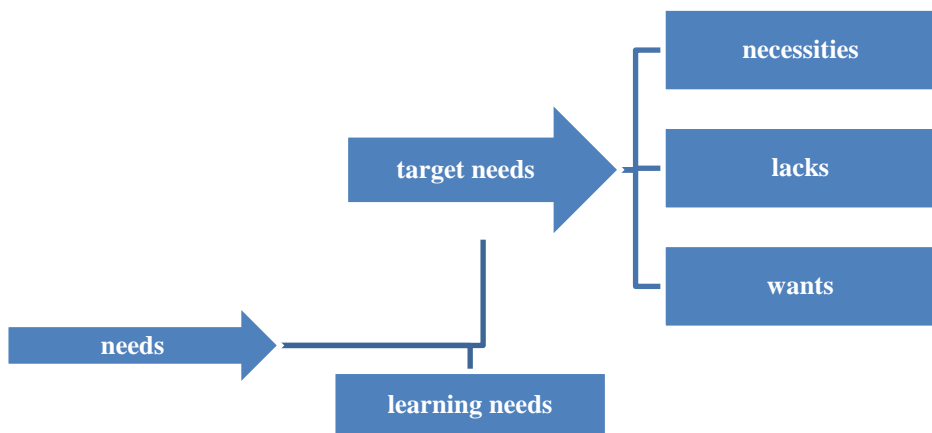


FIGURE 1. Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) classification of learners’ needs

Johns (1991) considers needs analysis as the first part of course design which provides relevancy and validity for the following activities of the course.

Research on needs of Iranian students is relatively new and has mostly been on ESP (English for especial purposes) and EAP (English for academic purposes). Pourshahian et al. (2012) have studied the Iranian students’ needs in an ESL context and concluded that the students had problems in writing skills and grammar. In another study, Atai and Shoja (2011) investigated the academic language needs of Iranian students of computer engineering in which writing skills and components of language (reading, writing, listening, speaking) created problems for the students. Allami et al. (2009) examined the students’ language needs and the present situation of English language teaching materials presented in school and the results showed that the syllabus and the materials developed for Iranian school students needed reconsideration. However, there was no specific study considering the needs analysis of General English course, a three credit compulsory course presented in all universities in Iran.

As mentioned above, there is no specific syllabus or book presented for this course from ministry of education, except for the Payame Noor University in which a unified book mostly emphasizing students’ reading skills is taught. In other universities, teachers would select among the available materials in the market based on their intuitions and teaching and learning beliefs. Therefore, it seems necessary to conduct a needs analysis for this course in order to reach a clear idea of the target needs and learning needs of students and to help the syllabus designers, material developers and language teachers in designing and conducting a useful, effective and successful course.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of 171 (103 males, 68 females) undergraduate students with the mean age of 21.55 who were having General English course in Islamic Azad University of Sirjan. As the course is compulsory for the students, the participants included students of different majors.

INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire survey for English language needs used in this study was developed by Sihong (2007). The questionnaire is composed of four parts. The first part is concerned with biographical data. The second part tries to detect the learners' views toward what they need to learn. The third part investigates the learners' preferred learning styles and strategies and the last part is called an affective perspective that investigates the learners' motivation, attitude and interest toward learning English. Some minor revisions have been applied to help participants' better understanding of the questionnaire or acquiring further information. As the students were not proficient enough in English language the questionnaire was translated into Persian.

PROCEDURE

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

All the participants were given a brief overview of the objectives of the study, the way of answering and the amount of time given for answering the questionnaire. The students were assured that their answers would be held confidential and their grades would not be affected by their answers in any way. Furthermore, they were informed that there was no force in attending the research or writing their names. Students were given 20 minutes to finish the questionnaire. After the administration of the questionnaire, the responses were analyzed using descriptive methods of analysis to prepare a report. Selective data was used to show the students' need preferences and attitudes. Furthermore, males and females' differences of views toward their needs and preferred learning styles have been investigated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As mentioned above part A of the questionnaire included biographical data of the participants, and part B included twelve questions regarding the students' views toward what they needed to learn. The first three questions asked students their views toward the importance, the amount of practice needed and the difficulty of each or the components of language: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

TABLE 1. Students' responses to the question "How important is grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation to you?"

Q1	Gender	low	2	moderate	4	high	mean	p value
Grammar	Male	11.7	10.7	34.0	9.7	34.0	3.44	0.112
	Female	13.2	7.4	36.8	22.1	20.6	3.30	
	Total	12.3	9.4	35.1	15.6	28.7	3.38	
vocabulary	Male	1.9	1.0	8.7	23.3	65.0	4.48	0.918

	Female	1.5	1.5	8.8	17.6	70.6	4.54	
	Total	1.8	1.2	8.8	21.1	67.3	4.51	
pronunciation	Male	4.9	7.8	17.5	16.5	53.4	4.06	0.221
	Female	2.9	7.4	5.9	20.6	63.2	4.33	
	Total	4.1	7.6	12.9	18.1	57.3	4.17	

The results from table 1 show that students with the mean score of 4.51 considered vocabulary the most important component of the language. Pronunciation with the mean of 4.17 was in the second place, and the grammar with 3.38 has the last place. Comparing the results between males and females showed no significant difference in their views toward the importance of different components of language.

TABLE 2: Students' responses to the question "How much practice of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation do you expect to get in class?"

q2	Gender	low	2	Moderate	4	high	Mean	p value
Grammar	Male	13.6	16.5	28.2	16.5	25.2	3.23	0.880
	Female	11.8	13.2	32.4	20.6	22.1	3.28	
	Total	12.9	15.2	29.8	18.1	24.0	3.25	
Vocabulary	Male	4.9	6.8	16.5	17.5	54.4	4.10	0.025
	Female	0.0	0.0	13.2	13.2	73.5	4.50	
	Total	2.9	4.1	15.2	15.8	62.0	4.30	
Pronunciation	Male	5.8	9.7	13.6	21.4	49.5	4.00	0.011
	Female	1.5	2.9	2.9	20.6	72.1	4.50	
	Total	4.1	7.0	9.4	21.1	58.5	4.23	

Table 2 shows the students' views toward the amount of practice that they would need on each component. Again, like the previous question, students believed in the importance of having more practice in vocabulary than pronunciation and grammar. The p value of the three parts shows the presence of a significant difference between males and females in their opinion toward the amount of practice in vocabulary and grammar. For the component vocabulary, females with the total mean of 4.50 believed in a need for more practice in vocabulary than males did with the mean of 4.10. Females also viewed pronunciation practice more important than males with a mean score of 4.50 in contrast to the mean of 4.00 for males. By looking at the mean scores of the three component of language for males and females, it can be concluded that with a mean of 4.50, vocabulary and pronunciation practice have the same value for the female students and are more important than practice of grammar.

TABLE 3. Students' responses to the question "How difficult is grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation to you?"

q3	Gender	low	2	moderate	4	high	Mean	p value
Grammar	Male	8.7	11.7	25.2	16.5	37.9	3.63	0.227
	Female	10.3	4.4	29.4	26.5	29.4	3.60	
	Total	9.4	8.8	26.9	20.5	34.5	3.62	
Vocabulary	Male	23.3	18.4	22.3	13.6	22.3	2.92	0.421
	Female	20.6	17.6	35.3	8.8	17.6	2.84	

	Total	22.2	18.1	27.5	11.7	20.5	2.90	
Pronunciation	Male	16.5	15.5	27.2	11.7	29.1	3.21	0.462
	Female	13.2	13.2	19.1	19.1	35.3	3.49	
	Total	15.2	14.6	24.0	14.6	31.6	3.33	

Table 3 results show students believed that their grammar was the most problematic component with a mean score of 3.62 and the least problematic one was vocabulary with the mean score of 2.90. Pronunciation with the mean of 3.33 was in the second place. The obtained p values show no difference between males and females in their most and least problematic areas.

The next four questions asked students' opinions toward the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. The fourth question as shown in table 4 includes students' beliefs in the importance of each skill in their studying English.

TABLE 4. Students' responses to the question "How important are the following skills to your success in the study of English?"

q4	Gender	Low	2	Moderate	4	high	Mean	p value
listening	Male	6.8	16.5	20.4	16.5	39.8		0.445
	Female	1.5	11.8	25.0	17.6	44.1		
	Total	4.7	14.6	22.2	17.0	41.5	3.76	
speaking	Male	13.6	15.5	17.5	15.5	37.9		0.247
	Female	5.9	10.3	17.6	13.2	52.9		
	Total	10.5	13.5	17.5	14.6	43.9	3.68	
Reading	Male	2.9	9.7	15.5	24.3	47.6		0.877
	Female	2.9	10.3	19.1	17.6	50.0		
	Total	2.9	9.9	17.0	21.6	48.5	4.03	
Writing	Male	5.8	8.7	17.5	22.3	45.6		0.790
	Female	2.9	7.4	16.2	29.4	44.1		
	Total	4.7	8.2	17.0	25.1	45.0	3.98	

In students' opinion, reading was the most important skill for their success in learning English with a mean score of 4.03. Writing, listening and speaking with the means of 3.98, 3.76 and 3.68 occupied the second to the fourth place. The calculated p values showed no significant relation between gender and importance of each skill.

TABLE 5. Students' responses to the question "How often are you engaged in the following activities?"

q5	Gender	Not sure	Never	Someti mes	Often	Always	mean	p value
listening	Male	13.6	29.1	41.7	9.7	5.8		0.243
	Female	22.1	22.1	32.4	17.6	5.9		
	Total	17.0	26.3	38.0	12.9	5.8	2.64	
speaking	Male	19.4	35.9	33.0	9.7	1.9		0.243
	Female	25.0	20.6	41.2	8.8	4.4		
	Total	21.6	29.8	36.3	9.4	2.9	2.42	
reading	Male	9.7	20.4	38.8	24.3	6.8		0.665
	Female	13.2	14.7	47.1	19.1	5.9		

	Total	11.1	18.1	42.1	22.2	6.4	2.95	
writing	Male	9.7	19.4	40.8	19.4	10.7		0.627
	Female	7.4	16.2	44.1	26.5	5.9		
	Total	8.8	18.1	42.1	22.2	8.8	3.04	

Question 5 shows the students amount of engagement in each of the mentioned skills. The acquired results show the students' higher level of engagement in writing with the mean of 3.04. Reading (2.95), listening (2.64) and speaking (2.42) comprised the other three places, respectively. In addition, no difference between males and females' amount of engagement in each skill was detected.

TABLE 6. Students' responses to the question "Which is/are your most developed skill(s) and which is/are the least developed?"

q6	Gender	Low	2	Moderate	4	High	Mean	p value
Listening	Male	14.6	19.4	24.3	20.4	21.4		0.552
	Female	17.6	16.2	30.9	11.8	23.5		
	Total	15.8	18.1	26.9	17.0	22.2	3.12	
Speaking	Male	27.2	31.1	27.2	5.8	8.7		0.818
	Female	26.5	26.5	29.4	10.3	7.4		
	Total	26.9	29.2	28.1	7.6	8.2	2.41	
Reading	Male	8.7	15.5	34.0	18.4	23.3		0.837
	Female	11.8	19.1	26.5	19.1	23.5		
	Total	9.9	17.0	31.0	18.7	23.4	3.29	
Writing	Male	11.7	14.6	29.1	20.4	24.3		0.574
	Female	13.2	10.3	38.2	13.2	25.0		
	Total	12.3	12.9	32.7	17.5	24.6	3.29	

As table 6 shows students considered both reading and writing with the mean of 3.29 as the most developed skill among the four. Listening with the mean of 3.12 occupied the second place and speaking with the mean of 2.14 was considered as the least developed skill. In this question there was no difference detected between males and females' views.

The following table shows the students' desirable amount of practice in each of the language skills in classroom.

TABLE 7. Students' responses to the question "How much practice in listening, speaking, reading and writing do you expect to get in class?"

q7	Gender	Never	Rarely	Someti mes	Often	Very often	Mean	p value
Listenin g	Male	2.9	13.6	22.3	31.1	30.1	3.71	0.999
	Female	2.9	14.7	22.1	29.4	30.9	3.70	
	Total	2.9	14.0	22.2	30.4	30.4	3.71	
Speakin g	Male	9.7	16.5	25.2	27.2	21.4	3.34	0.027
	Female	14.7	4.4	20.6	22.1	38.2	3.64	
	Total	11.7	11.7	23.4	25.1	28.1	3.46	
Reading	Male	3.9	12.6	23.3	26.2	34.0	3.73	0.806

	Female	2.9	8.8	20.6	25.0	42.6	3.95	
	Total	3.5	11.1	22.2	25.7	37.4	3.82	
writing	Male	6.8	10.7	26.2	26.2	30.1	3.62	0.463
	Female	1.5	11.8	32.4	29.4	25.0	3.64	
	Total	4.7	11.1	28.7	27.5	28.1	3.63	

The obtained mean scores showed students' preferences of having their most practices in reading (3.82). After reading, listening was the most desired skill to be practiced (3.71). Writing and speaking with the means of 3.63 and 3.46 respectively possessed the third and fourth places. The p value for speaking showed a difference between males and females. Females with the mean score of 3.64 showed a higher desire for practicing speaking than males with the mean score of 3.34.

For question 8, a series of situations regarding students' problems with language components and skills were explained. The first situation (I cannot understand what my teacher and my classmates are talking about because I have limited vocabulary and grammar) seemed to be less problematic while students had their most problems in the second situation (I find it hard to speak English because my pronunciation is poor).

TABLE 8. Students' responses to the question "How often do you experience the following situations?"

q8	Gender	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Mean
1	Male	20.4	25.2	36.9	17.5	
	Female	8.8	30.9	51.5	8.8	
	Total	15.8	27.5	42.7	14.0	2.55
2	Male	32.0	32.0	24.3	11.7	
	Female	26.5	36.8	29.4	7.4	
	Total	29.8	33.9	26.3	9.9	2.16
3	Male	25.2	31.1	30.1	13.6	
	Female	19.1	38.2	32.4	10.3	
	Total	22.8	33.9	31.0	12.3	2.33
4	Male	21.4	35.0	27.2	16.5	
	Female	26.5	38.2	30.9	4.4	
	Total	23.4	36.3	28.7	11.7	2.29
5	Male	12.6	38.8	31.1	17.5	
	Female	20.6	38.2	33.8	7.4	
	Total	15.8	38.6	32.2	13.5	2.43
6	Male	19.4	34.0	35.9	10.7	
	Female	25.0	33.8	30.9	10.3	
	Total	21.6	33.9	33.9	10.5	2.33
7	Male	23.3	34.0	34.0	8.7	
	Female	22.1	38.2	32.4	7.4	
	Total	22.8	35.7	33.3	8.2	2.27

The following table (table 9) shows the results for the question 9, which asked students opinions toward the usefulness of learning English for them.

TABLE 9. Students' responses to the question "In what way is English useful for you?"

q9	gender	Agree	p value
1-To help me complete my study	male	73.8	0.692
	female	76.5	
	total	74.9	
2- To help me get good school grades	male	38.8	0.492
	female	44.1	
	total	40.9	
3-To get the golden key to become a "world citizen"	male	48.5	0.708
	female	51.5	
	total	49.7	
4- To express thoughts and feelings	male	17.5	0.785
	female	19.1	
	total	18.1	
5- To get more world knowledge and know more about people living in English-speaking countries	male	48.5	0.090
	female	61.8	
	total	53.8	
6- To develop more esthetic sense of western arts and literature	male	19.4	0.675
	female	22.1	
	total	20.5	

It can be seen that most students believed in the benefits of learning English for finishing their studies (% 74.9). The second major benefit with 53.8 percent was "To get more world knowledge and know more about people living in English-speaking countries". The p values showed that there was no relation between gender and students' beliefs in this regard.

At the end of the second part of the questionnaire, as an answer to the first and second research questions, it was concluded that students considered vocabulary and reading the most important component and skill of language, respectively. They also stated that the most problematic and difficult component and skill for them were grammar, listening and speaking; however, they desired more practice in vocabulary, listening and reading. They also thought that the least problematic areas were vocabulary, reading and writing.

The third research question asked about the difference of opinion between males and females. The results showed that females considered both vocabulary and pronunciation as equally important in practice but for male students vocabulary practice was more important than practice of other components. Furthermore, female students showed more desire to practice speaking than male students did.

These result may reveal the students' lack of understanding of their real needs or inability to make valuable decisions for their language development and progress to some extent, because although they had pointed out having their most problems in grammar and speaking; they preferred to have more practice in vocabulary or reading that they considered as less problematic.

The third part of the questionnaire from question 10 to 17 required information on students' preferred learning styles and strategies. Table 10 below shows the students' opinions toward the methods and strategies that should be used by the language instructor in the classroom.

TABLE 10. Students' opinions on what the English teacher should do.

q10	gender	Agree	p value
1. The teacher gives lectures and delivers knowledge.	male	35.9	0.206
	female	45.6	
	total	39.8	
2. The teacher is the "authority" in the classroom.	male	42.7	0.061
	female	57.4	
	total	48.5	
3. The teacher talks for most of the class time.	male	14.6	0.207
	female	22.1	
	total	17.5	
4. The teacher gives time for student talk.	male	41.7	0.010
	female	61.8	
	total	49.7	
5. The teacher corrects every mistake that students make.	male	64.1	0.778
	female	66.2	
	total	64.9	
6. The teacher responds to students positively.	male	55.3	0.005
	female	76.5	
	total	63.7	
7. The teacher tries different activities in class.	male	39.8	0.133
	female	51.5	
	total	44.4	
8. The teacher encourages the students to ask questions.	male	54.4	0.083
	female	67.6	
	total	59.6	
9. The teacher should create a harmonious and pleasant learning environment.	male	66.0	0.002
	female	86.8	
	total	74.3	
10. The teacher should pay attention to students' needs.	male	61.2	0.288
	female	69.1	
	total	64.3	
11. The teacher uses the textbooks only.	male	33.0	0.014
	female	16.2	
	total	26.3	
12. The teacher teaches the students some learning strategies.	male	54.4	0.179
	female	64.7	
	total	58.5	

Among the strategies mentioned, numbers 9 (The teacher should create a harmonious and pleasant learning environment), 5 (The teacher corrects every mistake that students make) and 10 (The teacher should pay attention to students' needs) obtained the highest credit from the students. Numbers 3 (The teacher talks for most of the class time) and 11 (The teacher uses the textbooks only) acquired the lowest score.

It seems that students would desire an active role in the process of learning in a stress-free environment provided by the teacher. Furthermore, the obtained p values showed a difference between males and females choices in numbers 6, 9 and 11. For the items 6 and 9, female students selected a higher mean than males but for number 11 males had selected a higher mean than females. It might be induced that teacher's positive and pleasant interaction with students is more important to females than males. In addition, males desired teachers' use of textbooks as the solitary material more than females.

TABLE 11. Students' responses to the question "How useful are the following activities in studying English?"

q11	gender	Not useful	Useful	Very useful	p value
1	male	6.8	35.9	57.3	0.963
	female	5.9	35.3	58.8	
	total	6.4	35.7	57.9	
2	male	18.4	61.2	20.4	0.776
	female	17.6	57.4	25.0	
	total	18.1	59.6	22.2	
3	male	15.5	44.7	39.8	0.156
	female	5.9	48.5	45.6	
	total	11.7	46.2	42.1	
4	male	49.5	35.9	14.6	0.084
	female	35.3	38.2	26.5	
	total	43.9	36.8	19.3	
5	male	51.5	34.0	14.6	0.420
	female	41.2	41.2	17.6	
	total	47.4	36.8	15.8	
6	male	39.8	47.6	12.6	0.040
	female	26.5	47.1	26.5	
	total	34.5	47.4	18.1	
7	male	26.2	56.3	17.5	0.823
	female	29.4	51.5	19.1	
	total	27.5	54.4	18.1	
8	male	21.4	37.9	40.8	0.933
	female	19.1	39.7	41.2	
	total	20.5	38.6	40.9	
9	male	34.0	35.9	30.1	0.036
	female	16.2	47.1	36.8	
	total	26.9	40.4	32.7	
10	male	43.7	37.9	18.4	0.002
	female	19.1	45.6	35.3	
	total	33.9	40.9	25.1	
11	male	40.8	42.7	16.5	0.082

	female	26.5	45.6	27.9	
	total	35.1	43.9	21.1	
12	male	29.1	51.5	19.4	0.002
	female	10.3	51.5	38.2	
	total	21.6	51.5	26.9	
13	male	26.2	42.7	31.1	0.007
	female	7.4	48.5	44.1	
	total	18.7	45.0	36.3	
14	male	24.3	45.6	30.1	0.001
	female	7.4	35.3	57.4	
	total	17.5	41.5	40.9	
15	male	27.2	41.7	31.1	0.002
	female	7.4	41.2	51.5	
	total	19.3	41.5	39.2	
16	male	35.9	46.6	17.5	0.364
	female	30.9	42.6	26.5	
	total	33.9	45.0	21.1	
17	male	23.3	36.9	39.8	0.236
	female	13.2	38.2	48.5	
	total	19.3	37.4	43.3	

In table 11, seventeen different activities were stated and students were to determine the degree of usefulness of each activity in learning English. These results were in accordance with the results of the previous questions. Other than statements number 1(Memorizing bilingual words list) and 3(Doing English-Persian exercises), all the other higher ranking activities like numbers 17 (Participating in English camp), 8(Watching English movies), 14(Talking to friends in English) and 15(Talking to English speakers whenever I have the opportunity) emphasized the communicative way of learning and the active role of learners.

Comparing the results between males and females showed a difference of opinion in activities number 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 in which females believed in the usefulness of the activity more than males. The reason might be explained as the stronger motivation of female students in learning English or their stronger desire to have an active role in learning the language.

TABLE 12. Students' responses to the question "What kind(s) of learning style(s) do you like?"

q12	gender	%	p value
1	male	16.5	0.135
	female	4.4	
	total	11.7	
2	male	53.4	
	female	57.4	
	total	55.0	
3	male	4.9	
	female	2.9	
	total	4.1	

4	male	11.7	
	female	16.2	
	Total	13.5	
5	Male	13.6	
	female	19.1	
	Total	15.8	

In table 14, the students were asked to select the method of learning that they would prefer and 55 percent had chosen the answer “I study individually” which is somewhat in contradiction with previous results of students’ preferred method of teaching and activities. The reason might be that students considered their learning in the classroom different from their after class learning.

Question 13 included a question about students’ reaction toward their mistakes and question 14 asked about the necessity of planning for their studies. Most students had stated that they consider making mistakes as normal or they would try to make themselves understood even when they make many mistakes. In answer to question 14, 76 percent of students believed in the necessity of planning for their studies and thought that they themselves knew their situation better than anyone else did. Therefore, it can be seen that students would rather being dynamic in class and they are not afraid of making mistakes. They would also want to take part in planning for their language learning.

Questions 15, 16 and 17 were concerned with students’ perception of testing and evaluation. As it is shown in table 13, most students believed in the usefulness and necessity of having tests but their views toward their evaluation were not just limited to tests. The results show their belief in other alternatives for assessment like teacher process-based evaluation and self-reflection.

TABLE 13. Students’ perceptions of testing and evaluation.

Usefulness of standardized testing	
Useful and necessary	53.8
Necessary but not useful	27.5
Useless and unnecessary	18.7
Methods to assess progress	
Test scores	36.3
Teachers process-based evaluation	32.7
Self-reflection	31.10
Frequency of taking a test	
Once a week	21.6
Once a month	29.8
Twice a semester	32.7
Never	15.8

What can be concluded as an answer to research questions 4 and 5 would be that students mostly believed in communicative methods of learning English and female students seemed to have a stronger attitude in this regard. In addition, both male and female students considered assessment a necessary part of their learning; however, they preferred use of different methods of assessment than just use of tests.

The last part of the questionnaire (questions 18 to 23) was concerned with the students' attitude, motivation and interest toward learning English, which contains the answer to the last research question.

TABLE 14. Students' responses to the question "Why do you study English?"

q18	gender	Agree	p value
1. Because I like English.	male	29.1	0.002
	female	52.9	
	total	38.6	
2. Because English is useful language.	male	46.6	0.417
	female	52.9	
	total	49.1	
3. Because the university requires me to study English.	male	44.7	0.157
	female	33.8	
	total	40.4	
4. Because I want to get a good grade.	male	27.2	0.450
	female	22.1	
	total	25.1	
5. Because I want to travel to other countries.	male	30.1	0.269
	female	38.2	
	total	33.3	
6. Because I want to talk to foreigners.	male	22.3	0.686
	female	25.0	
	Total	23.4	
7. Because I want to understand the meanings of English pop songs.	Male	16.5	0.073
	Female	27.9	
	total	21.1	
8. Because I want to understand English movies.	male	25.2	0.157
	female	35.3	
	total	29.2	
9. Because I want to read English books.	male	24.3	0.119
	female	35.3	
	total	28.7	
10. Because my parents want me to learn English.	male	10.7	0.465
	female	7.4	
	total	9.4	

What can be understood from table 14 is that although students have to study English as a compulsory course at university; they have a positive attitude and motivation in learning English. Many of students have taught of English as a useful language, which they would like to learn. Furthermore, the p value and obtained mean-scores of the first statement has shown females' stronger appeal toward English. Questions 19 and 20 asked students if they considered learning English enjoyable and if they feel confident about their progress in English. Their answer to these questions confirms their positive attitude and motivation toward learning English as shown in tables 15 and 16.

TABLE 15. Students' responses to the question "Do you think studying English is an enjoyable experience?"

q19	gender	Never	Sometimes	Often	p value
	male	15.5	54.4	30.1	0.153
	female	7.4	51.5	41.2	
	total	12.3	53.2	34.5	

TABLE 16. Students' responses to the question "Do you feel confident about the progress of your English?"

q20	gender	No	Sometimes	Yes	p value
	male	14.6	39.8	45.6	0.318
	female	23.5	33.8	42.6	
	Total	18.1	37.4	44.4	

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of the study was working through a an example of needs analysis to establish the necessity of taking students' needs and wants into consideration in designing syllabus for university General English course in Iranian universities, as there is no predetermined syllabus for this course. Although this is an obligatory course for all university students but it seems that students are not satisfied with what is taught by different teachers.

Whereas this study may not be generalizable to all the universities in the country, but it has been tried to identify the various needs and wants of the students at one university. It is hoped that this description and analysis of students' needs in Islamic Azad University of Sirjan on the one hand can serve as a starting point to attract university teachers, curriculum designers and developers' attention toward the importance of this course alongside the specialized courses. On the other hand, makes them ponder over designing a special syllabus for this course; while they consider the concept of learner authenticity in their course design, classroom implementation and evaluation. In this way, students would probably reach a higher level of enjoyment and benefit more from the time that they spend in their General English classes.

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