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## **The Application of Curriculum Components for Course Evaluation\***

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### **Abstract**

Generally, program evaluation is of prime importance to check the workability of a course. In this way, it can be made sure that the course achieves its intended goals and objectives, and consequently fulfills the learners' needs, wants, and aspirations. Therefore, an attempt was made to evaluate the instructional functioning of the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course which is offered to the undergraduate English majors at the university of Tabriz, Iran and is taught by the researcher/instructor himself. To this end, Brown's (1995) model of program evaluation was opted for. Based on local needs and objectives, this model was modified and extended to seven curriculum components: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment. In order to gather quantitative and qualitative data, a mixed methods design was employed. The quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire which comprised 35 items based on the aforementioned curriculum components, i.e. five items for each component. Also, the qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The participants consisted of 36 undergraduate English majors, i.e. 12 male, 24 female. The results of the study indicate that this course is quite useful for the students to develop their linguistic, cultural, and social knowledge. However, it needs to be modified in order to be more fruitful. One of the main implications of this study might be that the seven curriculum components proposed by the researcher could be employed for the evaluation of any course of study. Another implication might be that these seven curriculum components could be utilized by syllabus designers or curriculum developers for the development of any syllabus.

**Keywords:** course, evaluation, syllabus, curriculum

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### **Introduction**

As language teachers or learners, we are familiar with evaluation and have been involved in it in one way or another. Generally, evaluation is a key element in any educational endeavor especially within the curriculum development (Worthen et al., 2003). However, evaluation has received scant attention in the field of foreign or second language teaching. Also, in the field of language teaching very few books or journals have appeared on evaluation. Meanwhile, one of the main deficiencies of earlier approaches to program evaluation was their lack of attention to process. They practically disregarded what actually took place within an instructional program.

Generally, in the literature on language teaching different experts have rendered varied definitions on evaluation. For example, Ryan (2007) holds that evaluation is concerned with process of description and making value judgments. He reckons that evaluation is an indispensable part of a syllabus and it should be included in any curriculum. In this way evaluation can be made accountable to the changing needs of a society. Robinson (2003, p. 199) presents a succinct definition of evaluation as “the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information ... for forming judgments about the value of a particular program.” Meanwhile, Murphy (1985, p. 4) argues that “evaluation should be an integral part of the working of the curriculum to ensure that what is done is worthwhile, necessary and sufficient.” On the whole, emphasis should be on evaluating the entire learning process rather than the learners. It is believed that the emphasis should be on investigating the productivity of a course rather than merely on assessing the learners. Assessing learners barely provides us with necessary data. Therefore, stress should be on the process of course evaluation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 144) hold that “This kind of evaluation helps to assess whether the course objectives are being met – whether the course, in other words, is doing what it was designed to do.”

In order to assess students’ progress or a course’s success, each researcher employs different evaluation techniques (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Evidently, interest in course or program evaluation process mainly came into prominence in the 1960s. In the early days evaluation was thought of as the testing of students through the end-of-

semester tests. The emphasis was on the final product, that is, the students' test results. There was no attention being paid to the process of evaluation. In the beginning, program evaluation consisted of and was equal to investigating the efficiency and effectiveness of language teaching methods and materials.

Nevertheless, through the passage of time method and experimental studies gave way to more naturalistic studies of classroom processes. As Yang (2009, p. 77) stresses, "More recently, language education practitioners have begun to realize the benefits of broader notions of evaluation as a means of informing program development, and a focus on program processes ... has gained substantial attention." To this end, Kiely (2009, p. 114) posits that "As well as inputs and outcomes, there is a need to examine the interactions and the factors which shape input use and impact." Royse et al. (2005) believe that the interest in more naturalistic data gathering and interpretation began in 1980s. For instance, Guthrie (1982) studied a language teaching program in California in which she used ethnographic approach. She observed the actual process of language teaching which took place in the classroom.

On the whole, course or program evaluation can take place at different levels. Langbein and Felbinger (2006) suggest that it may occur at two levels: macro-level and micro-level. At macro-level a program is usually evaluated by experienced researchers along with several personnel who are expert in the field too. This type of evaluation involves a large-scale national or state program involving students, teachers, staff and so on. In these studies the whole process and details of a program are investigated. As Keily (2009, p. 99) puts, "The task is thus a broad, holistic one, incorporating all aspects of the program and informed by all stakeholders." On the other hand, a micro-level or small-scale evaluation might involve only the teacher and learners. Usually, in this type of study only one classroom is investigated by its own teacher. The present study is a macro-level evaluation in which the researcher himself who taught the course – *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* – also carried out the research. Concerning what to evaluate, Brown (1995, p. 233) opts for six components: needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation. However, in the present study taking into account other researchers' views (Akst & Hecht, 1980; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001b; Kiely, 2009) and based on

local needs and goals the researcher came up with the following seven curriculum components: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment.

### **Review of the Related Literature**

Any course needs to be evaluated from time to time to ensure its effectiveness, efficiency, and appropriacy. The answer to the question: What should be evaluated? is one of the most overarching aspects of any evaluation endeavor. Yang (2009, p. 96) suggests that the stakeholders should “prioritize the most immediate evaluation needs of the program, that is, the program components about which they have most concerns and questions.” The elements that a researcher selects for inspection depend on “its purpose, and also to the objectives of the particular program” (Alderson, 1996, p. 281). However, some objectives may prove, in the long run, to be of limited use. So, they might lose their credibility and appear to be useless. Some important issues may surface during the lifetime of a program and if a researcher only concentrated on observable objectives he/she might lose sight of them. To this end, Alderson (ibid.) emphasizes that “focusing upon objectives stated in a program document may lead the evaluator to overlook important outcomes which were unexpected.” An experienced researcher usually considers different aspects before embarking on evaluation. One of these important aspects is the context or educational setting where evaluation activity takes place. Dudley-Evans and St John (2000, p. 129) rightly contend that “To evaluate everything is unrealistic; priorities can be set, the type and timing of data collection can be planned ...” Therefore, from the very beginning the researcher should decide what to examine and, of course, reach an agreement with the various stakeholders in this matter. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001b, p. 193) claim that the researcher should investigate “the course design ... to see if the course is meeting its stated objectives.” They assert that the content of the evaluation includes: syllabus, materials, tasks, and methods.

There is hardly any consensus on what to evaluate. So it is indeed a dilemma for the researcher to come to terms on what to evaluate. However, it would be better to choose the factors that have either direct or indirect effect on the students’ progress rate. Therefore, “it is up to individual teachers and curriculum personnel to decide how widely they

should cast the net” (Nunan, 1999a, p. 119). Nunan also believes that the likely factors for evaluation might include “initial planning procedures, goals, content, materials and learning activities, teacher performance and the assessment processes ...” (ibid.). Yet, it might be suggested that different program constructs (needs, objectives, testing and teaching) can be evaluated from different points of view (effectiveness, efficiency and attitude). Kiely (2009, p. 99) believes that the three important aspects that need to be evaluated are: “innovation, teachers at work, and the quality of the learning experience of students.”

Evaluation could be narrow or broad in its scope, product- or process-oriented, summative or formative, goal-free or objective-based. It can also be implemented at different levels. However, the present study endeavored to take a broad approach, in fact, based on actual classroom process, formative in nature and according to some overall objectives. The reason that this research did not stick to a strictly dogmatic objective-based approach was that some points might be hidden and surfaced during the actual process of the investigation. So, the present researcher attempted to scrutinize what practically occurred in the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* class. Therefore, the curriculum constructs to be explored in this research were adopted from Brown (1995, p. 20) which include: needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation. However, in order to study the course under study more deeply the six components were revised and modified into seven elements: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment.

### **Objectives**

All in all, objectives are one of the quintessential aspects of any course or program. Any curriculum usually determines its instructional objectives at the beginning of the course. These objectives should clearly elucidate the language elements or skills which the students might learn during the program. In fact, objectives or goals are the ends towards which we try to direct our efforts. That is, objectives are things we aim to achieve at the end of the course (Van Blerkom, 2003). In this regard, Richards (2007) contends that objectives are the goals of a program which attempt to bring about some changes in students. Therefore, objectives determine the goals of a program and offer guidelines for students and teachers. Mainly, the overall goals of the

*Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course are to enable students to read and understand different types of passages and newspaper texts. On the whole, specification of objectives has the following benefits:

- They save a lot of teachers' time and energy.
- They help to determine the necessary course materials.
- They improve the adequacy and effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.
- They direct the students' attention, increase their persistence and motivate them.
- They encourage students to become involved and develop their own learning skills and strategies.
- They help to develop criteria for evaluating materials and methods as well as monitoring students' progress.

### **Attitudes**

In the main, students' attitudes determine whether or not they intend and like to learn a foreign or second language. Generally, favorable attitudes toward the language and its speakers can augment students' motivation and their learning rate (Lightbown & Spada, 2003). In fact, motivation for learning a second language is one of the realizations of positive attitudes toward the language. Therefore, if students develop positive attitudes toward the teachers, materials and methods, they will try hard to learn the second language eagerly. However, if they feel hostile toward the language, materials, and the teachers, they will barely achieve any success (Harmer, 2002). Thus, negative attitudes will increase the students' affective filter and hinder language learning. Also, external pressure can bring about negative attitudes toward the second language. Breen (2001b) maintains that students' views about the classroom, their previous experiences of learning, and their understanding of the classroom culture can have an overarching influence on their attitudes toward the language. In this regard, Lin (2001, pp. 271-2) argues that teachers can hardly know about their students' attitudes because students "hold an ambivalent, want-hate relationship with English." It goes without saying that teachers can play an important role in forming and maintaining positive attitudes in their students. Therefore, teachers need to:

- encourage the students in positive attitudes,
- prepare the students in efficient skills and strategies,

- involve the students and make them responsible for their own learning,
- create a supportive and pleasant atmosphere to suit different student types,
- familiarize the students with the intended culture,
- try to know their students and their attitudes,
- try to lower the students' anxiety and promote their self-confidence.

### **Needs Analysis**

We had better carry out needs analysis in order to devise a course and prepare materials and methods based on the students' and institution's objectives. As Richards (2007, p. 51) holds, "a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learner needs." Needs analysis is the starting point which is usually done before, during, and even after the course in order to determine the course's outline, materials, and resources. Any course should be set up based on the students' needs and we should be "sensitive to our learners and their needs" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 136). To this end, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 178) contend that needs analysis attempts "to fine tune the curriculum to the specific needs of the learner." Generally, in addition to determining the students' needs, materials, and methods, needs analysis intends to:

- ascertain the students' objectives and goals,
- find out what the students need to do in order to learn language (learning needs),
- determine what the students might do in the target situation (target situation analysis),
- check the place and its availability of the resources, equipment, materials and facilities (means analysis),
- establish the students' language level at the beginning of the program (present situation analysis).

### **Time**

To some extent, one of the crucial factors which has tremendous effect on the students' learning rate is the amount of time spent on teaching-learning exercises and activities in the classroom. Certainly, the amount of instruction per day, week, and month play an overriding role in language acquisition process (Rahimian, 2005). Peacock (2009) also believes that the students' time in the classroom is limited and short.

Consequently, the restricted amount of time could damage and decrease the quality and efficiency of the classroom teaching-learning activities. Therefore, Brinton and Holten (2001) argue that a few weeks of instruction could barely impact the students' language proficiency level. Also, language is too complex and varied to be learned in a short period of time. Therefore, the language teachers can hardly cover the main syllabus topics in a restricted period of time. In this regard, Hedge (2002) states that teachers barely have any time to devote to revision and obtain feedback from the students.

To compensate for the shortage of class time, the students need to manage their time as efficiently as possible. To this end, Van Blerkom (2003, p. 51) recommends "using good time-management skills." Also, Longman and Atkinson (2002) argue that if the students want to achieve their goals, they need to regulate their time effectively. The students need to learn and develop effective strategies and tools in order to become autonomous. At this juncture, Peacock (2001) emphasizes the importance of independent study outside the classroom. Generally, language teachers need time to plan and organize coherent courses. The teachers, also, need to regulate and distribute the class time as carefully as possible in order to have enough time for each activity and exercise (Hedge, 2002). On the whole, because of the shortage of time, the teachers should teach those aspects of the course that are urgently needed by the students and are based on the course objectives.

### **Classroom Activities**

It goes without saying that effective and interesting classroom activities and exercises can tremendously contribute to learning and make it enjoyable. Students do not learn language by absorbing transmitted knowledge. They need to practice and produce language in meaningful contexts in order to acquire it. However, Dogancay-Aktuna (2006, p. 283) contends that "in many EFL contexts the goals of language teaching and norms of classroom participation differ from those in ESL contexts." Nunan (2001) argues that in EFL situations students are only taught about the language forms and do not learn their functions and consequently cannot use them in meaningful communications. Alvarez (2007, p. 135) notes that "there is no single shared paradigm for foreign language education." The important point is that every student, instructor and institution is unique and "language of instruction and



curricula vary from country to country” (Mercer, 2001, p. 243). Therefore, the important task for the teacher is to design exercises which could engage different types of students and consider their objectives, language levels, needs and wants (Richards, 2007). In order to keep students engaged, teachers need to provide them with a variety of exercises and activities. Also, teachers should create situations in which the students could do exercises in meaningful contexts, rather than just answering them in a mechanical and abstract way. As Richards and Rodgers (2002) stress, teaching activities that emphasize grammatical points are quite different from those that focus on communicative activities. Mainly, there should be a balance of activities between the grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency.

### **Materials**

Appropriate and effective materials not only can be taught straightforwardly but also can facilitate learning process. However, Clapham (2001, p. 99) argues that finding useful materials is difficult and their suitability “cannot be known in advance.” In this regard, Mishan (2005) recommends selecting the best and most appropriate materials which are available. Essentially, most of the teachers do not have time or are not provided with enough time to develop their own materials based on their students’ needs and course objectives (Gatehouse, 2001). As language teachers, we need to engage students with pertinent and interesting materials. Hence, textbooks are one of the adequate and handy means which mediate between the students and teachers. However, the teachers should not depend too much on them. Cunningsworth (1995, p. 10) cautions that “heavy dependence on coursebooks is far from ideal” because they limit the teachers’ creativity and flexibility. To this end, Harmer (2002, p. 305) suggests the use of both textbooks and “a variety of homegrown materials.”

### **Assessment**

Assessment is an important tool through which language teachers can obtain information about the students and their learning processes. The teachers should continuously monitor their students in order to ensure that they are making adequate educational progress (Mercer, 2001). On the other hand, students expect to be assessed in order to obtain

feedback on their progress (Harmer, 2002). Therefore, teachers need to gather enough and adequate information about the students and, of course, through different procedures. Additionally, the teachers need to carry out assessment in order to ensure that they are doing their job effectively (Johnson, 2001). In fact, efficient assessment can enrich teaching and stimulate learning process.

Rea-Dickins (2002) makes a distinction between testing and assessment. She believes that assessment is more inclusive than testing. Assessment is continuous and is carried out over an extended period of time. But testing is one of the means within the assessment procedure which only measures the students' attainment of course objectives and materials. Testing is more concerned with the mechanical ways of measuring the structural and grammatical knowledge of the students. It reveals nothing about the functional and practical use of language by the students. However, assessment tries to gather information on all aspects of learning by the students. Testing can be fulfilled through the end-of-semester exams and can be carried out via the conventional paper-and-pencil means (i.e. written form) (Bachman & Palmer, 2000). Assessment can be done not only by means of tests and exams but also through investigating the students' works: reports and comments (by both students and teachers), self-assessment (by students), classroom observation (by teachers), and portfolios (samples of students' written and oral works). Clearly, scores, marks or grades barely reveal anything about the individual students' development. Therefore, in addition to tests and exams, other means of monitoring students' progress are necessary to be implemented. So, assessment can provide a wide range of methods to identify students' progress. Therefore, inspired by the following research questions, the present researcher tried to conduct and evaluate the usefulness and appropriacy of the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course.

- 1- What are the most prominent curriculum components?
- 2- How can a course of study be evaluated?
- 3- What are the English majors' perceptions toward the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course?

## **The Study**

### **Site of the Study**

The present study took place at the University of Tabriz, Iran. The *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* which is a 3-unit-credit course is offered to undergraduate English majors by the English Department, at the Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages. It is a compulsory course and is taught by the present researcher. A homegrown textbook consisting of 28 units prepared by the researcher and another textbook by M.R. Shams (2010) entitled *Reading English Newspapers* are taught for this course. This course is intended to familiarize the students with different types of readings especially through newspaper articles. In order to ensure that this course is useful and achieves its goals the present research took place. Therefore, adopting and at the same time adapting Brown's (1995) curriculum components, the following seven curriculum components were applied and evaluated: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment.

## **Method**

### **Design of the Study**

This study employed a mixed methods design. It is because there are both quantitative data obtained through questionnaire items and qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interview. As Lynch (1996b, p. 171) states, "The preferred evaluation approach ... is mixed strategies (i.e. quantitative analysis of qualitative data) or mixed design (positivistic and naturalistic)." Therefore, the mixed methods easily allowed the present researcher to collect both numerical data and text data.

Meanwhile, the focus of the study was on *formative* evaluation rather than *summative* one. In formative evaluation the emphasis is on the process of learning and teaching but in summative evaluation the focus is on the end results which are the students' final scores. In fact, scores, grades, and marks hardly show the students' use of language in real situations. But involving the students in the process of curriculum development and evaluation can enhance their ownership of the course and their participation in the classroom activities.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study consisted of 36 undergraduate English majors: 12 male and 24 female. Their age range was between 20-26, and they were in their sixth term of study. As the researcher was their instructor and explained the purpose of the study, the students eagerly and enthusiastically participated in the research and answered the interview questions and filled the questionnaire form.

### **Instruments**

In order to study the students' perceptions toward the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course, a questionnaire consisting of 35 items divided into seven curriculum components (five items for each component) were given to the students at the end of the course. The items are in the form of Likert scale. That is, the items comprise five answers: Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A), Strongly agree (SA). Also, each option was given a number in the following form to ease the process of interpreting mean scores: SD=1, D=2, U=3, A=4, SA=5.

Also, in order to triangulate the data, a semi-structured interview was conducted at the beginning, during, and at the end of the course. The advantage of semi-structured interview is that data collection is both systematic and conversational (Burns, 2003). Meanwhile, the students were not pressurized into a formal and stressful interview. Rather, the researcher asked the intended questions whenever and wherever the students were ready, eager, and willing to talk. Therefore, based on seven curriculum components, the following seven interview questions were devised and used:

- 1- Do you think that there is a match and balance between your goals and the courses' goals? explain. (objectives).
- 2- What is your impression and understanding about the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course? (attitudes).
- 3- Can this course meet your academic and workplace needs, wants, and desires? (needs analysis).
- 4- Do you think that the 3-hour per week time is enough for this course or more time should be allocated? (time).
- 5- Are the classroom activities including tasks, exercises in the textbook, slide presentations, and homework useful and appropriate? (classroom activities).

- 6- Are the textbooks prepared by your instructor and the one by M.R. Shams useful and appropriate for this course? explain. (materials).  
 7- Do you think that the questions asked by the instructor every session are useful in enhancing the learning process? (assessment).

**Data Analysis and Results**

The findings of the present study are presented through tables and necessary explanations and elaborations are provided accordingly. Since the data of the study are a combination of numbers (questionnaire) and texts (interviews), for each table adequate descriptions are rendered. In order to easily and clearly analyze and present the results, the findings appear in seven categories of curriculum components: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment.

**Objectives**

Table 1

*Responses to Items on Objectives*

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
1- <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course directed my attention, increased my persistence, and motivated me.	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	25 69.4%	6 16.6%	3.9
2- The reason that I am taking this course is to meet graduation requirements.	2 5.5%	23 63.8%	1 2.7%	9 25%	1 2.7%	2.3
3- This course encouraged me to become involved and develop my own learning skills and strategies.	2 5.5%	5 13.5%	5 13.5%	21 58.3%	3 8.3%	3.5
4- There is a close approximation between the objectives of the course and my academic goals.	–	6 16.6%	4 11%	22 61%	4 11%	3.6
5- This course is useful to me to achieve my workplace goals.	–	1 2.7%	11 30.5%	18 50%	6 16.6%	3.8
Mean = 3.42	Standard deviation = 0.64		Variance = 0.41			

As item no. one shows, many of the students (A+SA=86%) agree that the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course was influential in directing their attention, increasing their persistence, and motivating

them. Therefore, it can be deduced that when the course and students' objectives are rather the same, the learners can be attentive, persistent, and motivated.

Based on item no. two, most of the students ( $D+SD=69.3\%$ ) disagree that their sole purpose of taking this course was to meet the graduation requirements. When interviewed, many of the students (85%) believed that the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course was an important course. It was because this course familiarized them with the target culture, and every day issues.

According to item no. three, many of the students ( $A+SA=72.1\%$ ) became involved in doing exercises and activities. Also, this course raised the students' awareness toward their skills and strategies. During the interview the students (90%) pointed out that since the course objectives were somehow compatible with their goals, they tried hard to find their specific skills and strategies in doing exercises, and tasks.

Item no. four shows that there is a close proximity between the students' academic goals ( $A+SA=72\%$ ) and the course objectives. It was during the interview that most of the students (80%) pointed out that this course is crucial to familiarize them with the target culture. It is because the every day cultural, social, economical, and political issues appear in newspapers. Therefore, newspapers are a rich source for students to acquire how the target people think, act, and deal with various issues.

It can be deduced from item no. five that the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course is useful for most of the students ( $A+SA=66\%$ ) to achieve their workplace goals. When interviewed, most of the students (85%) believed that the reading skill is an important asset in an EFL context. Since in Iran English acts as an EFL, many graduates need reading and writing skills more than any other skills. In Iran there is barely any speaking or listening skills to take place in workplace contexts. Accordingly, the graduates mostly use the reading and writing skills in their workplace.

**Attitudes**

Table 2

*Responses to Items on Attitudes*

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
6- <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course encouraged me in positive attitudes.	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	4 11.11%	24 66.6%	5 13.8%	3.8
7- This course involved me and made me responsible for my own learning.	-	3 8.3%	2 5.5%	25 69%	6 16.6%	3.9
8- Our instructor created a supportive and pleasant atmosphere to suit different student types.	-	-	1 2.7%	27 75%	8 22.2%	4.19
9- Our instructor tried to know the students and their attitudes.	-	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	26 72.2%	7 19.4%	4
10- This course lowered my anxiety and promoted my self-confidence.	-	2 5.5%	3 8.3%	20 55.5%	11 30.5%	4.11
Mean = 4	Standard deviation = 0.15		Variance = 0.02			

As item no. six shows, only a few students (D+SD=8.2%) state that the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course did not provide them with positive attitudes. However, most of the students (A+SA=80%) agree that this course encouraged them in positive attitudes. When interviewed, most of the students (85%) believed that this course was interesting and the different types of materials and activities encouraged them to study more and consequently learn better.

Based on item no. seven, it can be seen that most of the students (A+SA=86%) were involved in doing activities inside and outside the classroom. During the interview the students stated that the nature of activities were in a way that they had to concentrate closely on doing the textbook exercises. This made them to focus and try hard in order to learn optimally.

It can be understood from item no. eight that the instructor (also the researcher of this study) of the course created a supportive and learner-friendly atmosphere for most of the students (A+SA=97%). The interview results indicate that most of the students (95%) were happy and satisfied with the classroom atmosphere. They stated that the

instructor treated them in a very amiable way. Therefore, they developed positive attitudes toward the course, the class, and their instructor.

Item no. nine illustrates that the instructor used every means and took each opportunity in order to study and know his students and their attitudes toward the course (A+SA=91%). During the interview the students stated that their instructor tried to talk to them and elicit their opinions about the course, materials, methodology, and everything.

According to item no. ten, the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course lowered the students' anxiety and promoted their self-confidence (A+SA=86%). During the interview the students mentioned that their instructor created a positive and encouraging classroom condition. Therefore, their anxiety dropped tremendously and they developed their self-confidence accordingly.

### Needs Analysis

Table 3

#### *Responses to Items on Needs Analysis*

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
11- I can achieve my needs through the <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course.	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	6 16.6%	25 69.4%	2 5.5%	3.7
12- This course can equip me with necessary skills and knowledge needed to function in workplace.	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	5 13.8%	26 72.2%	1 2.7%	3.6
13- This course can equip me with necessary skills and knowledge needed to function in my future studies.	-	3 8.3%	4 11.11%	27 75%	2 5.5%	3.7
14- This course tried to find out what the students need to do in order to learn language (learning needs).	2 5.5%	5 13.8%	7 19.4%	22 61.11%	-	3.3
15- This course tried to determine what the students might do in the target situation (target situation analysis).	2 5.5%	4 11.11%	8 22.22%	22 61.11%	-	3.3
Mean = 3.52      Standard deviation = 0.20      Variance = 0.04						



It can be seen from item no. 11 that the students' general needs (A+SA=75%) can be fulfilled by the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course. During the interview most of the students (90%) emphasized that this course can improve their reading skills and increase their vocabulary repertoire.

As item no. 12 indicates, most of the students (A+SA=75%) are of the opinion that this course can equip them with necessary skills and knowledge to function in workplace. It can be reasoned that since Iranian context is an EFL one, the students mostly need the reading skill more than any other skills. So during the interview most of the students (95%) emphasized that this course can be a great asset for them to function adequately in their workplace.

Based on item no. 13, the majority of the students (A+SA=80.5%) think that this course can equip them with necessary skills and knowledge to perform in their future studies. The students who participated in this study were at BA level and most of them (95%) were eager to further their studies up to master and PhD. Therefore, it was during interview that they pointed out this course was very useful for them to widen their reading skill and enrich their vocabulary knowledge. They believed that this course could help them not only to prepare for the Master Entrance Exam but also to perform well during their higher education.

Item no. 14 illustrates that more than half of the students (61%) agree that this course tried to find out what they needed to do in order to learn language. It was during the interview that the students stated that by doing different exercises and activities they became aware of their styles and strategies of learning.

It can be deduced from item no. 15 that more than half of the students (61%) agree that this course tried to determine what they might do in the target situation. When interviewed, the students stated that their instructor of the course explained the goals and objectives of the course at the beginning of the term. The students emphasized that their instructor described in detail what they might do during the course in order to achieve their target situation needs. Therefore, the instructor of the course tried to gear the class and out of class activities and exercises toward fulfilling the students' target situation needs.

**Time**

Table 4

*Responses to Items on Time*

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>M</b>
16- Three-hour per week during one term allocated to <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course is enough.	9 25%	19 52.7%	4 11.11%	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	2.13
17- We can perform different classroom activities and tasks during three hours per week in one term.	6 16.6%	23 63.8%	3 8.3%	3 8.3%	1 2.7%	2.16
18- We have enough time to participate in classroom activities because the class size is appropriate.	5 13.8%	24 66.6%	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	3 8.3%	2.27
19- There is equal and enough class time for each activity and exercise.	-	5 13.8%	3 8.3%	23 63.8%	5 13.8%	3.7
20- There is equal and enough class time for slide presentation.	4 11.11%	22 61.11%	5 13.8%	3 8.3%	2 5.5%	2.36
Mean = 2.52		Standard deviation = 0.66				Variance = 0.44

As item no. 16 reveals, most of the students (D+SD=77.7%) disagree that the time allocated to the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course is enough. When interviewed, most of the students (90%) stated that the time dedicated for this course should be tripled.

Based on item no. 17, most of the students (D+SD=81.4%) disagree that they can perform different classroom activities and tasks during three hours per week in one term. During the interview most of the students emphasized that they needed more time in order to carry out various classroom activities and tasks in more detail.

It can be seen from item no. 18 that most of the students (D+SD=80%) disagree that they have enough time to participate in classroom activities. It was during the interview that the students stated that because of crowded classes (n=40) they could barely have the

opportunity to participate in doing the activities and tasks. Indeed one of the main problems at BA level is the big size of the classes. When there are about 40-45 students in a class, the instructor can hardly have enough time to call each and every student to do the exercises. It is here that the instructor just tries to manage the students because of behavioral issues.

Item no. 19 shows that most of the students (A+SA=77.6%) agree that their instructor allocates equal and enough class time for each activity and exercise. During the interview most of the students (85%) emphasized that although the time was very short for this course, their instructor tried diligently to divide the time wisely and meticulously. According to item no. 20, most of the students (D+SD=72%) disagree that there is equal and enough class time for slide presentation. Three quarter of the course time was dedicated to doing exercises and activities. Only one quarter was allocated to slide presentation. Therefore, during the interview most of the students were of the opinion that the time for slide presentation to be increased.

### Classroom Activities

Table 5

*Responses to Items on Classroom Activities*

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
21- The type of exercises and activities that we do in the class foster creative responses.	-	2 5.5%	5 13.8%	22 61.11%	7 19.4%	3.9
22- Our instructor encourages us to do task-based activities inside and outside the class.	-	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	28 77.7%	5 13.8%	4
23- Some class time is devoted to revision.	-	-	3 8.3%	29 80.5%	4 11.11%	4
24- Our instructor encourages us to do pair and group work inside and outside the class.	-	-	4 11.11%	26 72.2%	6 16.6%	4
25- In order to be certain that we learn the materials adequately, our instructor carries out comprehension checks.	-	-	3 8.3%	25 69.4%	8 22.2%	4.13
Mean = 4	Standard deviation = 0.08		Variance = 0.00			

Based on item no. 21, most of the students (A+SA=80.51%) believe that the classroom exercises and activities foster creative responses. When interviewed, most of the students (85%) stated that the classroom activities were devised in a way that lead them to produce their own responses. At the same time that the activities emphasized correct use of the language, they also encouraged the students to produce meaningful and creative responses.

As item no. 22 shows, most of the students (A+SA=91.5%) agree that their instructor encouraged them to carry out task-based activities inside and outside the class. During the interview the students stated that their instructor preferred more task-based activities. They believed that task-based activities were more motivating and interesting than mechanical exercises.

Item no. 23 illustrates that the instructor of the course knew the value of revision (A+SA=91.6%) so he allocated some class time to it. It was during the interview that the students stated that the review process augmented their learning capacity.

According to item no. 24, most of the students (A+SA=88.8%) agree that their instructor encouraged them to do pair and group work inside and outside the class. When interviewed, most of the students (90%) believed that pair and group work allowed them to share their experiences, involve them to do the activities, and raised their self-confidence.

It can be seen from item no. 25 that the instructor carried out regular comprehension checks (A+SA=91.6%) to make sure that the students learned the materials appropriately. During the interview the students stated that their instructor asked questions at each session from almost all the students. Therefore, the question-answer activities encouraged the students to prepare themselves before coming to the class. In this way the learners tried to be ready at each session which consequently resulted in more learning and use of language.

**Materials**

Table 6

*Responses to Items on Materials*

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>M</b>
26- The materials for the <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course have been selected based on course objectives and students' needs.	-	2 5.5%	3 8.3%	24 66.6%	7 19.4%	4
27- The materials include a combination of simple, simplified and authentic materials.	-	3 8.3%	5 13.8%	20 55.5%	8 22.2%	3.9
28- The materials offer a balance of exercises, activities, study skills and language skills.	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	4 11.11%	23 63.8%	6 16.6%	3.8
29- The materials contain a variety of texts, styles, and genres for different levels of students.	-	1 2.7%	5 13.8%	25 69.4%	5 13.8%	3.9
30- The materials include relevant and interesting topics and texts.	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	4 11.11%	22 61%	6 16.6%	2.9
Mean = 3.7      Standard deviation = 0.45      Variance = 0.20						

As item no. 26 reveals, most of the students (A+SA=86%) agree that the course materials have been selected based on the students' objectives and needs. When interviewed, most of the students (85%) believed that the materials fulfilled their goals and needs. They stated that the reading texts were varied, interesting and contained useful exercises, activities, and a rich source of vocabulary.

Item no. 27 illustrates that the materials include a combination of simple, simplified, and authentic materials (A+SA=77.7%). For this course two types of materials were used. The first one was a homegrown textbook compiled by the researcher/instructor himself. The second one was a course book written by M.R. Shams (*Reading English Newspapers*, 2010). These materials contain both simple reading texts, which are for instructional purposes, and some authentic newspaper articles.

Based on item no. 28, most of the students (A+SA=80%) agree that the materials offer a balance of exercises, activities, study skills and

language skills. During the interview most of the students stated that the textbook compiled by the researcher/instructor contained varied and numerous types of materials. The materials were appealing to different types of students with different tastes.

It can be understood from item no. 29 that the materials contain a variety of texts, styles, and genres for different levels of students (A+SA=83%). When interviewed, most of the students (90%) contended that the materials were varied in terms of text types and suited their levels.

Item no. 30 illustrates that almost 77.6% of the students agree that the materials include relevant and interesting topics and texts. During the interview most of the students stated that the materials engaged them in doing exercises and activities due to their relevance.

### Assessment

Table 7

#### *Responses to Items on Assessment*

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
31- Only our final exam will determine our score on the <i>Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles</i> course.	4 11.11%	25 69.4%	7 19.4%	-	-	2
32- Our instructor asks questions from the textbook every session in order to make sure that we have acquired the materials adequately.	-	-	-	25 69.4%	11 30.5%	4.3
33- The assessment criteria were described at the beginning of the course.	-	2 5.5%	3 8.3%	21 58.3%	10 27.7%	4
34- The final exam motivated us to study more rather than to memorize the materials.	1 2.7%	4 11.11%	5 13.8%	19 52.7%	7 19.4%	3.75
35- I think that considering different factors rather than just the final exam is appropriate and fair.	1 2.7%	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	19 52.7%	12 33.3%	4
Mean = 3.61      Standard deviation = 0.92      Variance = 0.84						

Item no. 31 indicates that about 80.4% of the students disagree that only the final exam would determine their score on the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course. When interviewed, the students stated that their instructor explained at the beginning of the course that various factors would be used for the final score. They emphasized that based on their instructor's explanation there would be several elements involved in determining their final score.

As item no. 32 illustrates, all the students agree that their instructor asks questions every session in order to make sure that they acquired the materials effectively. During the interview almost all the students contended that their instructor asked questions every session without exception. Therefore, the students had to study hard and prepare themselves each session in order to participate in the classroom activities. These activities consequently augmented the learning processes.

Based on item no. 33, most of the students (A+SA=86%) agree that the assessment criteria were described at the beginning of the course. It was during the interview that most of the students stated that their instructor explained the assessment criteria and his expectations from the students in more detail in the first session.

It can be deduced from item no. 34 that 72% of the students believe that the final exam motivated them to study more rather than to memorize the materials. During the interview the students stated that their instructor allocated equal weight both to classroom activities and the final exam. In this way the students were motivated to study and learn the materials in each session instead of deferring them to the end of the term.

According to item no. 35, most of the students (A+SA=86%) agree that considering different factors rather than just the final exam is appropriate and fair. During the interview the students expressed their satisfaction and happiness toward their instructor's decision in considering various factors for the final score.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The main objectives of this study consisted of: how a course or program of study could be evaluated, and what are the main components of evaluation. In this study it was tried to evaluate different components of the *Simple Prose and Newspaper Articles* course, which is offered at

the University of Tabriz to undergraduate English majors. Therefore, drawing on Brown's (1995, p. 233) model of program evaluation this study opted for seven components: objectives, attitudes, needs analysis, time, classroom activities, materials, and assessment.

The communicational teaching project (CTP) was initiated from 1979 to 1984 by Prabhu (1987) in Bangalore, India. It is said that Beretta (1996b) was asked to evaluate this project at its final months of implementation. At the same time, the CTP was compared and contrasted with a structure-based approach in Bangalore. The CTP was implemented at several schools along with the regular traditional structure-based syllabuses. CTP was studied in two phases. In the first year the experimental group (CTP students) was compared with the control group (the old structure-based classes). They were tested and the result of the testing indicated that the CTP students were better than the structure-based ones. The second phase of the study focused on the "levels of implementation, teachers' stages of concern and the treatment of errors" (Beretta, 1996b, p. 251). One of the shortcomings of this project was that it had not built evaluation process right from the beginning into its curriculum. In fact, Beretta and Davies (1985) present an aloof and distanced account of the Bangalore project in their 1985 article. It seems that the evaluation task has been imposed on them and they have no choice other than doing it. In that article their approach is completely product-oriented and focused on the quantitative data. There is no mention of students', teachers' and administrators' views on the project. They have rather completely relied on administering some tests and studying their results. However, in his 1996b account, Beretta honestly describes the process of evaluation in a clear and convincing way. He acknowledges that he was required to carry out CTP project's evaluation only at the last months and he could barely obtain enough data. However, Lynch (1996b) criticizes Beretta and Davies and expresses that they only studied students' outcome. He then adds that "the methods of the evaluation were product-oriented and summative in nature. No systematic effort was made to evaluate what was actually taking place inside the classroom" (ibid. 35). In this regard, Richards (1984) also criticizes Prabhu's project and states that objectives and evaluation were not included in it.



The present study is different from Mazdayasna and Tahririan's (2008) study because they were outsiders not insiders. They conducted their research at medical science faculties with students of nursing and midwifery. They investigated the students' needs, wants and lacks. Their participants consisted of students, language instructors and subject instructors. The study revealed that the students were not totally satisfied with class size, teaching methods, testing system, treatment of foreign culture and content of their textbooks. On the other hand, the instructors emphasize that the students' main weakness lies in their four language skills. The researchers conclude that the English courses do not adequately prepare the students to tackle their academic and workplace needs. They believe that these courses do not take into account the students' learning needs, current proficiency level, course objectives, and so on. Overall, this study mentions several important issues involved in academic English. That is, it touches on many weaknesses and problems that most of the Iranian university students face. This research treats the issue at hand rather deeply; however, it hardly suggests any practical solutions. The researchers mention their own opinions most of the time and rarely voice the students' and instructors' views.

A study was conducted by Kita (2006) at Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah Polytechnic in Malaysia. The aim of the research was to identify the factors that caused the civil engineering students to do poorly in their Technical English Course. The constructs under study comprised the attitudes, motivation and perceptions of the students and lecturers. Meanwhile, the researcher of this study was a lecturer at the polytechnic and had taught the technical English course for about eight years. She states that the students did not perceive the importance of the English language as a means of communication. The findings of this study indicate that an ongoing needs analysis is necessary every semester. Also, the students need to work more on the language skills in order to perform optimally in their courses. The researcher comes to the realization that when the students are motivated they develop positive attitudes towards acquiring the English language. However, the only problem with this research is the constructs of the study. That is, the researcher claims that the factors to be studied are attitudes,

motivation and perceptions. Nevertheless, she does not mention what constructs of the syllabus she intends to scrutinize.

The present study is greatly similar to the large-scale program evaluation which was conducted by Peacock (2009) on the TEFL program in the Department of English at the City University of Hong Kong. Peacock believes that the program has some strengths and some weaknesses. Based on the students' and teachers' interview comments the program is to some extent successful. That is, it promotes the skills of reflection and self-evaluation. Also, it promotes the developmental character of learning to teach. However, it needs to be updated and the hours of teaching practice need to be increased. Meanwhile, Peacock offers a five-step procedure for teacher training program evaluation (see section 2.8). By reading this study, we notice that it is well organized and is clear. However, it does not describe in detail the process of data collection and analysis. Also, it does not clearly reveal the students' and teachers' views about the program.

It is believed that the present study, which focused on the process of learning and teaching, is in line with Brown's (1995) study that he undertook in Guangzhou English Language Center (GELC) at Zhongshan University in China. Brown (*ibid.* p. 242) calls his study as the "formative evaluation." This is because his emphasis was on the process of teaching and learning. Some of the shortcomings of Brown's (1995) program evaluation are that he does not mention in detail how and for how long the classroom observations took place. Also, he does not elaborate on how many participants were interviewed and what the results of the interview process were. On top of that, he does not mention how many participants received questionnaires and what their reactions to the program were.

Also, it can be stated the results of the study are compatible with Lynch's (1996a) study which took place at the Faculty of Chemistry Sciences at the University of Guadalajara in Mexico. Lynch (1996a, p. 77) points out that his evaluation focused on "program goals, program processes, events, setting, participants and outcomes." However, the problem is that in this study Lynch was an outsider researcher and could barely obtain comprehensive information about the students, setting, staff and the teachers. Also, he hardly provides the reader with actual qualitative data and what was taking place in the classrooms. However,

the positive point about this study is that it raised the students' and the teachers' confidence in the reading skill.

The language instructors can use the results of this study to modify their teaching methods, adopt and adapt appropriate materials, try to raise their students' attitudes towards their courses, do some small-scale research in their classes, use more task-based activities and project works, promote the students' communicative and linguistic knowledge, encourage pair and group work, and make students responsible for their own learning and make them independent language learners.

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