

EGP or ESP Test for Medical Fields of Study

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to find the relationship between EGP and ESP test in medical field of studies in Iranian context. To do this, four fields of study were randomly selected out of medicine fields. Estimating the mean and standard deviation of the tests, the variance overlap between EGP and ESP tests were calculated. The results indicated that there was no systematic relationship between the students' scores on EGP and ESP tests. In fact the findings indicate that they do not provide similar information. In other words it is not safe to claim that students obtain higher scores in EGP test will receive higher score in ESP test or vice versa in medical field of studies Accordingly, it will be appropriate to accept that EGP and ESP tests have a complementary role in the assessment of the Language proficiency of ESP students.

Key words: EGP, ESP, test, Medicine, correlation, complementary, significant.

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Introduction

For many students, reading is by far the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language. If we consider the study of English as a foreign language around the world, reading may be regarded as the main reason why students learn the language. In addition, according to Eskey(1970) at advanced proficiency levels in a second language, the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate and with good comprehension has long been recognized to be as important as oral skills, if not more important.

In second language teaching/learning situations for academic purposes, especially in higher education in universities where English is the medium of instruction or other programs that make extensive use of academic materials written in English, reading is paramount. As Douglas (2004) mentions even as we are bombarded with unending supply of visual and auditory media, the written word continues in its function to convey information, to assume and entertain us, to codify our social, economic, and legal conventions, and to fulfill a host of other functions. Quite simply, without solid reading proficiency, second language readers can not perform at levels they must in order to succeed, and they cannot compete with their native English –speaking counterparts. Thus, for at least these three groups of students (those in EFL contexts, those at advanced levels of proficiency, and those with a need for English academic purposes) effective learning in a second language is crucial. According to Carrel (1988) professionals in second language education should be vitally concerned with approaches that can improve the reading skills of learners. Moreover, reading requires the reader to focus attention on the reading materials and

integrate previously acquired knowledge and skills to comprehend what someone else has written (Chastain, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

The students in different medical courses in Iran universities study EGP course in first year and ESP courses in their second year. Their EGP textbooks usually consist of reading comprehension texts with general topics followed by some grammatical and vocabulary activities. But their ESP textbooks consist of reading passages with specific topics related to students field of study followed by grammatical and vocabulary activities. The method of teaching are the same in both EGP and ESP courses with minor difference that translation is more favored by the ESP instructors.

It is a controversial point among the experts in the field whether it is necessary to offer EGP courses for medical students. Some believe ESP courses are sufficient because students who get high marks on ESP test will obtain high scores in EGP tests, while others believe it is not safe to claim that those who get higher marks in ESP exam will get the higher score in EGP test.

This is also a problematic in the entrance exam for MA, or MS. The same justifications can be traced among the experts. For some only ESP test is sufficient to measure the candidates English proficiency and there is no need for EGP test while some others have opposite view. This study is an attempt to find answer to this problem in EFL teaching in Iranian context.

Review of the Literature

English for General Purposes

English for general purposes is, in fact the foundation for later attainments in specialist field Trimble (1985). So its role for future performance cannot be ignored and a learner who wants to study in a special field needs to have at least some mastery of general English. The learners have a variety of purposes in studying it. It cannot be claimed that general purpose English is limited and it covers a large domain indeed. It is the language teacher who determines what to teach for different age groups with different purposes and motivation. The teacher decides where to begin and from what level, and when it comes to design a general English course a lot of factors should be accounted for. For Example, we should know something about the age, purpose, motivation, previous English knowledge, aptitude, attitude, and inclination of the learners McDonough (1984). We should also take into account the duration of the course, the sponsors' intentions, the administrative purposes, teaching materials, the teacher' methodology and the situation, whether it is English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). The general English course acts as a tool to the learners, and it depends on the learner's intentions to further continue the course towards their specialist field or stop it when the course ends up. If the learners want to know just generally about English language, they stop studying further the general English. But if they want to be communicatively competent in a special field of study they have to continue their studies in ESP courses.

English for Specific Purposes

Learners in both ESP and EGP courses are learning English for communication. The processes of learning are the same for the ESP and EGP learner. It is said that ESP is

an approach to language teaching and language learning which is based on learner need. It is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning. However, general course of English is also for some purpose. But it is also possible to specify needs like passing the exam at the end of the school year. Thus, ESP can be defined as a type of ELT that is goal-oriented in which students study ESP not because they are interested in the English language as such but because they have to perform a task in English.

Hutchinson and Waters (1986) argue that the difference between ESP and EGP is not in having an identifiable need but in the awareness of the need. They claim that what distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need but rather an awareness of the need. If learners, sponsors and teachers know why the learners need English, that awareness will have an influence on what will be acceptable as reasonable content in the language course and on the positive side what potential can be exploited. Thus, although it might appear on the surface that the ESP course is characterized by its content (e.g. Science, Medicine, Commerce, Tourism etc.) this is, in fact, only a secondary consequence of the primary matter of being able to readily specify why the learners need English. In brief it is not so much the nature of the need which distinguishes the ESP from the EGP but rather the awareness of a need.

Hutchinson and waters refer to five stages in the development of ESP as follows:

1. Register analysis
2. Target situation analysis
3. Discourse analysis
4. Skills and strategies
5. Learning-centered approach

Each of these stages relate somehow to development of ESP. In the first phase, they analyzed the special texts and identified the grammatical and lexical features of these registers and then used them as syllabus in teaching materials. So they gave high priority to the language forms students would meet in their science studies. In this phase the analysis was based on sentence and in the second phase there was a shift from sentence level to the level above the sentence and the emerging field was called discourse analysis. They studied that how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning. They taught students to recognize textual patterns and discourse makers. In the third stage they made a completed analysis of the linguistic features of the target situation and used these to these identified features in the syllabus of the ESP course. In the fourth stage unlike the previous stages which were based on surface forms, they paid attention to the underlying interpretive strategies like guessing the meaning of words from context, using visual layout to determine the type of text, exploiting cognates and etc. The last phase relates to the learning-process. Thus, ESP is an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners. Much of the work done by ESP teachers is concerned with designing appropriate courses for various groups of learners. Course design in ESP in comparison to EGP has an important role.

Course Design

ESP is an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners. Unlike the General English course, course design in ESP has an important role. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1986) answering to three main kinds of questions, constitutes the basis of course design which are related to:

1. Language description

2. Theories of learning

3. Needs analysis

Language description

In traditional grammar, there was an emphasis on the role of the each word in sentence. Register analysis drew heavily upon those traditional terminologies in syllabus design. In structural linguistics, they studied a finite range of structures which make it possible to generate an infinite number of novel sentences, and transformational generative grammar was important in making distinction between competence and performance. In ESP we not only need to describe what people do with language but also to describe the competence that enables to do it.

While register analysis paid attention to the features of specific contexts which were used as a syllabus in ESP courses, functional/notional grammar was a move from language syllabuses organized on structural ground to one based on functional or notional criteria. Majority of ESP students have already done a structurally organized syllabus, and their need was to learn how to use the knowledge they already have. What this suggests is that ESP is not after all to be equated with register (Johns, 1999). In discourse analysis the shift was from sentence level to the level above sentence i.e. how meaning is generated between sentences and this was a logical development of the functional/notional view of language which had shown there is more to meaning than just the words in the sentence.

Theories of learning

All language teaching courses are related to some theory of learning i.e. how people learn. Different theories of learning have look at learning process from different angles. None of them is unrelated to the learning and each

of them has had some effects on ESP courses. Hutchinson and Waters (1986) refer to four learning theories and explain their roles in ESP courses, behaviourism, mentalism, cognitive code, affective factor. In the first model learning is considered as habit formation and the emphasis is on pattern practice, particularly in the form of language laboratory drills. The second model is mentalism which emphasizes the role of mind in learning and sees thinking as rule-governed activity. The mind uses the individual stimuli in order to find the underlying pattern or system. The third model is cognitive code which considers learners as thinking beings. Hutchinson and Waters (1986) explain cognitive code model of learning in this way:

...the cognitive view takes the learner to be an active processor of information.

Learning and using a rule require learners to think, that is, to apply their mental powers in order to distil a workable generative rule from the mass of data presented and then to analyze the situations where the application of the rule would be useful or appropriate. Learning, then, is a process in which the learner actively tries to make sense of a data, and learning can be said to have taken place when the learner has managed to impose some sort of meaningful. (p. 36)

The basic teaching technique associated with a cognitive theory of language learning is the problem-solving task.

The fourth model is affective factor which considers learners as emotional beings. The role of motivation and interest is discussed in this model which has an important bearing on the success or failure of the learning. Motivation is one of the most important elements in the development of ESP. If learners get satisfaction from the actual experience of learning they will be more successful than

just from the prospect of eventually using what they have learnt.

Needs analysis

Nunan in his book (1993) states there are two different types of needs analysis used by language syllabus designers. The first of these is learner analysis, while the second is task analysis. Learner analysis is based on information about the learner. The central question of concern to the syllabus designer is: for what purpose or purposes is the learner learning the language? Needs analysis attempts to clarify many components of a syllabus which are concerned with any educational system. It determines not only the students' needs but also the educational institutions and/or system's requirements. The type of communication which should be carried out whether written or spoken is clarified in advance. The formality of language whether formal or informal is taken into account, and the period of course and materials as well the methodology is determined as far as possible. One important factor that should be taken care of before the course begins is the aim and purpose of the students. Before the students begin their course the teacher or administrator should carry out a needs analysis. To be aware of the students' needs the questionnaire-technique can be used.

Specification of Content

Halliday et al (1964) and Munby (1978) believe that when the purpose for which the target language is required can be identified, the syllabus specification is directly derivable from the prior identification of the communicative needs of that particular participant. They assume that a specification of language needs should define the language content of a

course designed to meet such needs. Widdowson (1983) argues that this is a mistaken view and suggests alternative criteria for course design. He says that the expression of learner needs is open to two different interpretations. One refers to the communicative needs of the learner that after the end of the course of instruction will be put in use and the other refers to what the learner needs to do for learning language. He calls the first definition goal-oriented approach and the second process-oriented approach. The early work on vocabulary selection that served as the basis for the structural approach is a goal oriented syllabus design. Willkins (1976) proposes other criteria for syllabus design and like structural approach he analyzes the target language but not in terms of vocabulary and structure used but in terms of functions and notions of the language. By teaching these functions and notions, communicative competence rather than grammatical competence would be developed in the learners. Willkins' syllabus design can be regarded as a goal-oriented approach which hasn't any qualitative difference with that of structural approach. In fact structural and functional notional approaches are two ways of describing a particular variety of English identified as the terminal goal of a particular group of learners. One is describing language as register that is the formal properties of a type of English text and the other as rhetoric that is based on discourse and mode of communicating. So both of these approaches assume that language description must directly determine course content and are goal-oriented approach to course design and focus attention on ends rather than means. Goal-oriented approach is mistaken in that it takes learning as equal to teaching, what is taught completely will be learned by the learner. But we know that this is not the case, learners produce deviate forms never taught by the teacher, called errors and these errors are

evidence of the learner's capacity for developing creative learning processes of his or her own.

The teaching is a kind of product, a collection of knowledge formal or functional to be stored in the mind, but learning is a kind of process a set of strategies for making sense. They can't be considered as equal. There is a conflict between what the learner needs to do in learning and what the learner needs to have acquired after learning. Goal-oriented approach focuses on the latter. A process-oriented approach is suggested as an alternative to product-oriented one. In this approach teaching is not equal to learning. The language content of the course is selected not because it is representative of what the learner will have to deal with after the course is over but because it is likely to activate strategies for learning while the course is in progress. In this regard Widdowson (1983) states that:

If one avoids presenting *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to students whose goal is to read engineering textbooks it is not because those novels are unrepresentative of engineering English but because we judge that they are not likely to engage the interest and to activate the learning strategies of such students and so would not have the necessary facilitating function. (p.182)

A process oriented approach relates to how people learn. People have different cognitive styles and use different learning strategies. A process-oriented approach to course design uses language data as a means of activating learning strategies and this activation can only occur if the manner in which the language is presented is in accord with the cognitive styles of the learners. There is a correspondence between disciplines and cognitive styles and the learners may be convergers or divergers and serialist and holist

according to Pask and Scott (1972). Finally Widdowson (1983) concludes that:

...It becomes feasible in principle to design programs of English for academic study to accord with the learners' cognitive bias because the learners have already grouped themselves by the process of a kind of natural selection in their choice of subject specialization. Thus a process oriented approach to the teaching of English to, let us say, physical science students would adopt predominantly serialist/convergent type procedures of presentation. A course for social science students, on the other hand, would adopt procedures of a predominantly holist/ divergent kind. (p.185)

EGP and ESP tests

According to Cheng et al ((2004) beliefs in testing tend to follow beliefs about teaching and learning. In traditional general purpose language testing, it is usually the case that test content is derived from a theory of language ability, such as that outlined by Bachman (1990), a theory of language acquisition, such as proposed by Pienemann et al. (1988) or a course syllabus which itself is based on a theory of language ability or acquisition. Furthermore, in general purpose testing, test methods are usually derived from psychometric theories about how best to measure cognitive constructs such as communicative language ability. This theoretical orientation in general purpose testing is a necessary consequence of the fact that the situations in which the language being tested will eventually be used are not specifiable in any great detail because they are largely unknown. Widdowson (1983) has suggested that the goal of general English teaching is to develop communicative capacity in learners that will equip them to achieve diverse communicative goals after completing the course. General

purpose Language tests are thus designed to measure this communicative capacity without substantial reference to the situations in which the language will be used.

On the other hand, testing of English for specific purposes(ESP) is premised on the assumption that there are distinct varieties of a language, for example, "medical English", Legal English", "business English", etc. In this regard Tratnik (2008) believes that one of the prevailing principles of ESP testing is that tests should contain tasks that mirror faithfully those of candidates' target language use situation. Therefore ESP approach in testing should be based on the analysis of learners' target language use situation and specialist knowledge of using for real communication.

ESP tests derive their content from an analysis of specific language use situations of importance to the test-takers. True, the analysis is guided by theoretical framework, but the point is that ESP test-developers can do find out in detail during the test development process what situations the test-takers will find themselves in and are able to draw on linguistic and situational features to obtain the material for test development (McNamara, 1997). Interestingly, though, too, in ESP testing, the test methods themselves may also be derived from the analysis of the target situation. The task that language users typically perform in the target situation can be translated into test tasks by reference to task features, such as those proposed by Bachman and Palmer (1996).

Davies (2001) questions the English for specific purposes enterprise on both practical and theoretical grounds. Davies rejects the notion of considering specific purpose as registers alone, supporting this idea that specific

purposes are characterized by their communicative natures. As he points out, with communication in mind, we are in the territory of discourse and therefore of blurred boundaries.

Douglas (2000) defines a specific purpose language test as a test in which the test content and methods are derived from an analysis of the characteristics of the specific target language use situation, so that test tasks and content are authentically representative of the target situation, allowing for an interaction between the test-taker's language ability and specific purpose content knowledge, on the one hand, and the test task, on the other.

Method

Participants

Four fields of study were randomly selected out of the different medical courses at Tabriz medical sciences pharmacy, midwifery, nursing and medicine courses were selected as the subject of this study. The number of students in pharmacy was 35, midwifery 24, nursing 30, and medicine 28.

Materials

EGP test consists of six reading comprehension passages on general topics appropriate for intermediate students followed by 40 multiple choice items.

ESP tests consists six reading comprehension passages in accordance to the field of study of the students followed by 40 multiple items. In preparing ESP tests experts in the selected fields were consulted and appropriate passages were selected.

Research Question

Is there significant correlation between the results of EGP and ESP tests administered to medical students?

Null hypothesis

There is no significant correlation between the results of ESP and EGP tests administered to medicine students.

Procedure

First EGP test was administered to the students of the four fields. A week later at the same day and at the same hour ESP tests were administered to the same students. The amount of the time for administration of EGP and ESP tests were the same. In each of these fields students' scores on both tests were listed (The maximum score for each test was 20). The mean and standard deviation of each set of scores were calculated and then the variance overlap between the students' scores on the two tests was estimated.

Pharmacy

The mean of the EGP test is 14.25 and the SD is 2.20 while the mean of the ESP test is 15.18 and the SD is 2.5. The SD in the both tests is nearly the same but the mean of both tests has a little difference. The performance of students on ESP test was a little better than on the EGP test. Since the correlation between the two sets of scores here is 0.32, the variance overlap between these two sets of scores will be 0.1. Thus in the field of pharmacy the students scores on ESP test predict their scores on the general English test to the degree of 0.1.

Midwifery

The mean of the EGP test is 16.44 and the mean of ESP test is 12.73. The SD in EGP test is 2.52 and the SD on ESP is 3.36. So the performance of the students on EGP test was much better than on ESP test. The variance overlap between the two tests is 0.05 indicating that in the field of midwifery the students' scores on the ESP test predict their scores on the general English test to the degree of 0.05 or vice versa.

Medicine

The mean of the EGP test is 15.76 and the SD is 2.24 and the mean of ESP test is 17.86 and the SD is 1.51. The scores of students on ESP test is higher than their scores on EGP test but the variability of scores from mid point in EGP test is higher than that of ESP test. The variance overlap between the two tests is 0.44 indicating the in the field of medicine the students' scores on the EGP test predict their scores on the general English test to the degree of 0.44 or vice versa.

Nursing

The mean score of the general English test is 13.45 and the SD is 2.61, and the mean score of ESP test is 17.16 and the SD is 2.35. The students' performance on ESP test is higher than on the EGP test. The correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores is 0.61. The variance overlap between the two tests is 0.37. This reveals that the students' scores on the ESP test predict their scores on the general English test to the degree of 0.37 or vice versa.

Conclusion

In sum, concerning the relationship between the students scores on the general English test and the ESP tests in the four fields under investigation there is only a high correlation in medicine and a moderate correlation in nursing while there is very weak correlation in pharmacy and midwifery.

It is clear from these findings that the performance on the EGP tests can not be used for predicting the performance on ESP tests or vice versa, because the performance on two tests doesn't provide us with similar information. It is not safe to claim the student scored low/high on EGP test will also score low/high on the ESP test and vice versa. Thus, it can be concluded that having knowledge of EGP is necessary and prerequisite for ESP course but is not the same as ESP knowledge. Accordingly, the EGP and ESP tests have a complementary role.

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