Students' Voice: A Needs Analysis of University General English Course in Iran

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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 was an attempt to investigate the perceived English language needs of students in university General English course in Iran. This is an obligatory three-credit course offered for all non-English majors, for which no specialized syllabus is proposed by the Ministry of Education and as a result different teachers would select different syllabuses, methods and textbooks based on their own beliefs and experiences while hardly considering students' real needs and wants. 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, a revised version of questionnaire developed by Sihong (2007) was utilized. The results revealed that the students considered vocabulary as the most important component of the language which needed the most practice, whereas they found grammar as the component that they most resented and had the least expertise in. In addition, they perceived reading as the most important skill, while they considered listening and speaking as their most problematic skills. The students also showed positive attitudes and high motivation toward learning English. It is hoped that findings from this study can assist Iranian teachers and curriculum and syllabus designers to consider the importance of the students' real needs and try to develop and design materials which can fulfill the present gap.

Keywords: needs analysis; General English course; Iranian university students; curriculum; syllabus design

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 (Nunan, 1988; Wright, 1990; Brown, 2001). Consequently, learners' wants and needs have gained great importance in recent years.

As Makarova (1997) states, in a curriculum based on learner-centered approaches, a greater role is defined for the leaner's in the process of learning and teaching; which will cause students' greater interest and motivation toward language learning. 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). 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".

One of the compulsory courses for all the Iranian undergraduate students in any field of study is General English course. 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 Special 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). The situation is the same for the university General English course in Iran. Although, there is a vast range of materials available on the market with almost the same title "General English for the university students" they are mostly concentrated on the aim of strengthening students reading comprehension. In addition, as there is no proper supervision provided by the authorities over the accuracy and usefulness of their contents, some of these books include apparent structural and spelling inaccuracies. Considering the lack of a comprehensive investigation regarding students' real needs and also a lack of a comprehensive syllabus in the mentioned course which has resulted in the publication of inappropriate materials, an in-depth study of this issue seems necessary. As a first step in this regard, a needs analysis of the undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University of Sirjan, was conducted to find out their "target and learning needs" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) through the following questions:

1- What is the students' opinion toward the language components and skills they have to learn?

2- Is there any difference between male and female students' opinions toward what they need to learn?

3- What are the students' preferred learning styles and strategies?

4- What is the students' affective perspective toward learning English?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Needs analysis has become a part of language teaching and systematic curriculum development since mid-1970s (Hutchinson & Waters, 2002; Shu, 2004; Wen, 2004; Ni & Liu, 2006) and as Iwai et al. (1999, P.7) has stated, "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). Johns (1991) also considered needs analysis as the first part of the course design which provides relevancy and validity for the following activities which should be done in each course.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) 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 are 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

Research on the needs of Iranian students is relatively new and has mostly been on ESP (English for Special 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 their writing skills and use of 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 the schools and the results showed that the syllabus and the materials developed for the Iranian schools needed reconsideration. However, there was no specific study considering the needs analysis of the General English course, a three credit compulsory course offered in all the universities in Iran.

As such, no specific syllabus or book has been developed by the Ministry of Education for this three-credit course, except the Payame Noor University for which the same book mostly emphasizing students' reading skills is used in its all branches throughout the country. In other universities, teachers would select among the available materials on the market based on their own intuitions and teaching and learning beliefs. In spite of the availability of numerous materials on the market, there are some serious problems in this regard. First of all the existing materials would mostly emphasize the students' reading comprehension skills and do not consider other skills and components of language. It is also worth mentioning that even in Iranian state education system the skill of reading is regarded as the most important skill as well (Sadeghi & Bidel Nikou, 2012). In addition, these textbooks are not well-compiled either qualitatively or quantitatively (Ahmadi & Bajelani, 2012) and do not consider the students' real needs and the constraints of the social life in which they should act in near future (Shamsaee & Shams, 2010). Finally, due to the diversity of the available materials as well as lack of any predefined and uniform criteria; research on the evaluation of the textbooks that are already in use or that would be used in future is very limited (Rahimpour & Hashemi, 2011). The presence of such deficiencies in syllabus design and material development for the mentioned course, calls for an exhaustive research in this regard. The first step would be conducting a needs analysis with the purpose of reaching a clear idea of the target needs and the learning needs of students.

METHOD

The methodology underlying this research is guided by the Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) model of needs analysis which was performed using a 20-item survey (see appendix A).

PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of 171 (103 males, 68 females) undergraduate students with the mean age of 21.55 who were studying in Islamic Azad University of Sirjan. All undergraduate freshmen have to pass the General English as a compulsory course. Therefore, the participants of this study consisted of students from different majors including civil engineering, architecture, management, computer science, industrial engineering, Persian literature, accounting and metallurgy with the intermediate level of proficiency. Utilizing cluster sampling, four General English classes were selected from the total of nine classes. The average of 40 students (male and female) who attended each class, answered the survey questionnaire.

INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire survey for English language needs used in this study was developed by Sihong (2007). Amongst the available survey instruments, the detailed structure of the questionnaire concerning the necessary skills and components in language learning made it suitable for the intended purpose. The questionnaire is composed of four parts. The first part is concerned with biographical data. The second part tries to inquire 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. As the students were not English majors, they did not have any idea regarding technical terms like stress and intonation; furthermore, they were not proficient enough to write sentences in English or have an in-depth knowledge of grammatical rules. Consequently, questions 8, 9, 10 and 13 including such issues were omitted and the questionnaire was translated into Persian. Moreover, with the purpose of gathering additional information, the number of choices provided for question 1 in part D was extended from 4 to 10. The translated questionnaire was examined by two experts for comprehensibility and then piloted among 30 students similar to the target participants and the Cronbach-alpha coefficient for its reliability was estimated at 0.875.

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 length of time given for answering the questionnaire. The students were assured that their answers would be kept confidential and their grades would not be affected by their answers in any way. Furthermore, they were informed that they were not compelled to participate in the research or to declare their names. It took about two weeks for the questionnaires to be administered among the participants. After the administration of the questionnaire, students' responses were analyzed using descriptive methods of analysis (frequency distribution and the mean) and the independent samples t-test (to determine the effect of gender on students' needs and wants) in order to prepare a report showing the students' need preferences and attitudes.

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 included the given importance to each

component of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) (Q1), the amount of practice needed in each component (Q2) and the most and the least difficult component (Q3).

TABLE 1. Students' views toward the components of language

Q1	Gender	Low	2	Moderate	4	high	Mean	Sig
	Male	11.7	10.7	34.0	9.7	34.0	3.44	0.112
Grammar	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	
	Male	1.9	1.0	8.7	23.3	65.0	4.48	0.918
vocabulary	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	
	Male	4.9	7.8	17.5	16.5	53.4	4.06	0.221
pronunciation	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	
Q2	**Gender**	**Low**	**2**	**Moderate**	**4**	**high**	**Mean**	**Sig**
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	
Q3	**Gender**	**Low**	**2**	**Moderate**	**4**	**high**	**Mean**	**Sig**
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	

The results from Table 1 show that students with the mean-score of 4.51, considered vocabulary the most important component of the language. They believed that they would need more practice in vocabulary than in pronunciation or grammar. In their views grammar was the most problematic component although surprisingly they did not like to have much practice on. Comparing the results between males and females showed no significant difference in their views toward the importance of the different components of the language as well as their problematic areas.

However the computed p values for the second question (with the level of significance 0.025 for vocabulary and 0.011 for pronunciation) showed the presence of a significant difference between males and females in their opinion toward the amount of practice in vocabulary and grammar. Females with the total mean of 4.50 demanded a need for further practice in vocabulary than males did (with the mean of 4.10). They 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 components of language for males and females, it can be concluded that with a mean of 4.50, vocabulary and pronunciation practice are of the same value for the female students; moreover, of greater importance compared to grammar.

The next four questions asked students' opinions toward the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing regarding their given importance (Q4), their amount of

engagement in each skill (Q5),their most and least developed skills (Q5) and their expected amount of practice in each skill during the time of the class (Q7).

TABLE 2. Students' views toward language skills

Q4	Gender	Low	2	Moderate	4	high	Mean	Sig
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	

Q5	Gender	Not sure	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	mean	Sig
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	

Q6	Gender	Low	2	Moderate	4	High	Mean	Sig
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	

Q7	Gender	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Mean	Sig
Listening	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	
Speaking	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	

In the 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 represented the second to the fourth places, respectively. They also expressed their active involvement in reading and writing compared to the other two skills. The students considered both reading and writing with the mean of 3.29 as their most developed skills among the four. Listening with the mean of 3.12 comprised the second place and speaking with the mean of 2.14 was considered as the least developed one.

Students' preferred having the most practice in reading (with the mean of 3.82) and then in listening (with the mean of 3.71). Writing and speaking with the means of 3.63 and 3.46 respectively were in the third and the fourth places. The only significant difference in the amount of p value was regarding the amount of practice in each mentioned skill (practice of speaking with the level of significance 0.027) and there was no difference detected with regard to other questions of this part. The results showed that females with the mean-score of 3.64 had a higher desire for practicing speaking than males (with the mean-score of 3.34).

While in question 8 a series of situations regarding students' problems with language components and skills were explained to detect the students' most encountered problems, question 9 asked students' opinions toward the benefits of learning English (see appendix B). In these different situations, students seemed to have their most problems when speaking specially in relation to their poor pronunciation. They also pointed out "learning English for completion of their studies" as the most important reason for studying English (74.9%). Another major reason (53.8%) included, "To get more world knowledge and know more about people living in English-speaking countries". Males and females showed no difference of opinion 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. Females considered both vocabulary and pronunciation as equally important in practice but for male students vocabulary practice was more important than practice of the other components. Furthermore, female students showed more desire to practice speaking than male students did.

This 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 (see appendix C) required information on the students' preferred learning styles and strategies. Students were presented with seventeen different activities to determine their most helpful learning activities. Among the activities which students considered beneficial other than 'Memorizing bilingual words list' and 'Doing English-Persian exercises', the others like 'Participating in English camp', 'Watching English movies', 'Talking to friends in English' and 'Talking to English speakers' emphasized the communicative way of learning and the active role of learners. These results

suggest that although students would not normally find a chance to study through negotiation in Iran as an EFL context, they would desire such communicative activities. There were also some gender differences in students learning style indicating females' stronger motivation for learning and a greater desire to have an active role in learning the language.

With regard to teachers' method of teaching strategies, students had chosen 'creation of a harmonious and pleasant learning environment by the teacher' as their highest ranking role of the teacher. It seemed that students would desire to have an active role in the process of learning in a stress-free environment provided by the teacher who would consider their needs and acts as a facilitator rather than being the sole authority.

There was also a difference between males and females concerning the teacher's role. It seemed that teacher's positive and pleasant interaction with students was more important to females than males. In addition, males desired teachers' use of textbooks as the solitary material more than females did.

Contrary to what students considered as the teacher's preferred role in the classroom, they had selected the choice 'teacher gives lectures and also provide opportunities for practice' as their desired learning style. This may suggest that although students would like to have some autonomy and authority in the classroom and over their own learning, they are not really familiar with any other system than what they have been experiencing throughout their education which is nothing but a 'transmission model of education' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Questions 15, 16 and 17 were concerned with students' perception of standardized testing and evaluation. As it is shown in Table 3, about half of the students believed in the usefulness and the necessity of having tests but the other half were not satisfied with the present situation of product-based system of testing and assessment. Their views toward their evaluation were not just limited to tests. Other alternatives for assessment like teacher process-based evaluation and self-reflection were also considered as important.

TABLE 3.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
Teacher 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

In order to answer the third research question, considering the results of the third part of the questionnaire (see appendix C), it was concluded that the students mostly believed in communicative methods of learning English and liked to be dynamic in the classroom and have the ability to plan for their own studies although they preferred a learning style in which the teacher has the authority in the classroom. This contradiction could be because the students had only experienced teacher as the authority throughout their studies and were not aware of any other teaching method. Males and females had the same points of view with regard to their learning styles; however, females seemed to have a more active role in the use of different learning strategies.

The last part of the questionnaire (see appendix D) was concerned with the students' attitude, motivation and interest toward learning English, which would contain the answer to

the last research question. As shown in Table 4, although students had to study English as a compulsory course at university; they had a positive attitude and motivation toward learning English. Many of the students thought of English as a useful language, which they would like to learn. Students' answers to questions like 'Do you consider learning English enjoyable' and 'Do you feel confident about your progress in English confirmed their positive attitude and motivation toward learning English as well (see appendix D).Therefore, with regard to the last research question, it can be inferred that the students have an overall optimistic view toward learning English. The only significant difference detected in Table 4 is with regard to question 1 in which with the level of significance 0.002 females like English language more than males.

TABLE 4. Students' responses to the question "Why do you study English?"

	Gender	Agree	Sig
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	

In general it seems that students have the necessary attitude and motivation to learn English as a foreign language, but unfortunately, their needs and wants have not been considered properly by the authorities, curriculum designers and even their teachers. It is hoped that such studies can help attract more attention toward this crucial issue and by creating the right kind of facilities and situations students can use their abilities.

CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that the influence of different social and cultural factors would produce a variety of needs for students' learning (Peck, 1991), a lot of credibility is given to needs analysis as a prerequisite in any course design (Richterich & Chancerel, 1987). Needs

analysis is used as a device to explore the learners' necessities, needs and lacks in order to develop courses and textbooks that are in accordance with students' requirements. However, Iranian students' real needs and wants in learning English have been mostly ignored in different levels of education (e.g. Allami, 2009; Atai & Shoja, 2011; Pourshahian et al., 2012) and there have not been many studies in this regard.

Consequently, the purpose of this study as one of the beginning steps concerning this issue was using an example of needs analysis to establish the necessity of taking students' needs and wants into consideration in designing a syllabus for the university General English course in Iranian universities, as there is no predetermined syllabus developed for this course. Although this is an obligatory course for all university students, it seems that the 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, it was an attempt to identify the various needs and wants of the students at one university with the hope that this description and analysis of the students' needs in Islamic Azad University of Sirjan can serve as a starting point to attract the attention of university teachers, the curriculum designers and developers' toward the importance of this course alongside the specialized courses.

Furthermore, it is also hoped that this study can persuade Iranian as well as other non-English speaking countries' scholars and teachers to do further research on the target and learning needs of students in the teaching and learning of English. Implementing worthwhile changes in the system of education of each country based on such inquiries would probably help students reach a higher level of enjoyment and benefit more from the time that they spend in their English classes which would eventually lead to an effective teaching and learning environment.

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APPENDIX A

(The Questionnaire)
Questionnaire for Students
The purpose of the questionnaire is to see what your language needs are, and whether your needs are being met and, if not, what can be done better. Please let your true feelings and opinions be known when filling out this questionnaire. Your grade will in no way be affected by your answers and you should not put your name on this form. It would be appreciated if you could complete this questionnaire, which should take approximately 30 minutes.

Part A
Please fill in the blanks with your personal information.
1. Age
2. Gender
3. Field of study

Part B
Please circle the responses which apply best to your own situation.
1. In your study of English, how important is grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to you?

	Low (Not important)		Moderate		High (Very important)
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5

2. How much practice of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation do you expect to get in class?

	None		Moderate		Extensive
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5

3. How difficult is grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to you?

	Low (Not difficult)		Moderate		High (Very difficult)
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5

4. How important to success in your study of English are the following skills?

	Low (Not important)		Moderate		High (Very important)
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5

5. How often are you engaged in the following activities?

	Not sure	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Listening to English	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking English	1	2	3	4	5
Reading English	1	2	3	4	5
Writing English	1	2	3	4	5

6. In terms of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which is/are your most developed skill(s) and which is/are the least developed?

	Low (Least developed)		Moderate		High (Most developed)
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5

7. How much practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing do you expect to get in class?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5

8. How often do you experience the following?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1) I can't understand what my teacher and my classmates are talking about because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	1	2	3	4
2) I find it hard to speak English because my pronunciation is poor.	1	2	3	4
3) I find it hard to speak/write English because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	1	2	3	4
4) I find it hard to speak/write English because I don't know the way English people speak/write.	1	2	3	4
5) I have difficulties in getting the meaning of what I read because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	1	2	3	4
6) I have difficulties in getting the meaning of what I read because I don't know how the sentences are put together.	1	2	3	4
7) I don't understand the cultural information.	1	2	3	4

9. In what ways is English useful for you? (You can choose more than one answer)
1) To help me complete my study.
2) To help me get good school grades.
3) To get the golden key to become a "world citizen".
4) To express thoughts and feelings.
5) To get more world knowledge and know more about people living in English-speaking countries.
6) To develop more esthetic sense of western arts and literature.

Part C
1. Read the following statements. Choose the ones that best describe your opinions on what the English teacher should do. Please put a tick on the line.
1) The teacher gives lectures and delivers knowledge.
2) The teacher is the "authority" in the classroom.
3) The teacher talks for most of the class time.
4) The teacher gives time for student talk.

5）The teacher corrects every mistake that students make.
6）The teacher responds to students positively.
7）The teacher tries different activities in class.
8）The teacher encourages the students to ask questions.
9）The teacher should create a harmonious and pleasant learning environment.
10）The teacher should pay attention to students' needs.
11）The teacher uses the textbooks only.
12）The teacher teaches the students some learning strategies.

2.   Have you ever used the following activities in studying English? If you indicate yes, how useful were they?

	Very useful	**Useful**	**Not useful**

1）Memorizing bilingual words list.
2）Studying the grammar rules of English.
3）Practicing drills on sounds, stress, and intonation
of English.
4）Practicing drills on gram mar patterns.
5）Reciting dialogues from a textbook.
6）Doing English-Chinese exercises.
7）Doing role play activities.
8）Watching English movies.
9）Listening to English music．
10）Reading English novels and magazines.
11）Writing English diaries.
12）Writing emails in English.
13）Chatting through Internet in English.
14）Talking to friends in English.
15）Talking to English speakers whenever
I have the opportunity.
16）Searching for learning resources out
of class.
17）Participating in English camp.

3.   What kind(s) of learning style(s) do you like?
1）The teacher gives lectures to which I listen.
2）The teacher gives lectures and also provides me with opportunities to practice.
3）I study individually.
4）I discuss with my desk-mates.
5）I discuss with my group members.

4.   When you make a mistake, how do you react? Circle the responses that most apply to you．
1）I am afraid of being laughed at by my classmates.
2）I hope my teacher will correct the mistake immediately.
3）I think my friends can also help me to correct the mistake.
4）I think it is normal to make a mistake.
5）I think I can improve myself by making mistakes.
6）I will try to make myself understood even if I make a lot of mistakes.

5.   Do you think it is necessary to plan for your study?
1）Yes，because I am the one who knows my situation best.
2）No，because I don't know my situation.

3）No，because I don't know how to make a systematic and reasonable study plan.
4）No，because the teacher and my parents have already planned for me.

6. What is your view of tests?
1）They are both necessary and useful.
2）They are necessary but are not necessarily useful.
3）They are neither necessary nor useful.

7. From what source(s) do you expect to know about your progress？
1）From the results of tests.
2）From the teachers evaluation.
3）From self-reflection.

8. How often do you expect to take a test? Please circle the appropriate response.
1）Once a week.
2）Once a month.
3）Twice a se m ester.
4）Never.

Part D
1. Why do you study English? Please circle the appropriate response(s).
1）Because I like English.
2）Because English is a useful language.
3）Because the school requires me to study English.
4）Because I want to get a good school grade.
5）Because I want to travel to other countries.
6）Because I want to speak to foreigners.
7）Because I want to understand English pop songs.
8）Because I want to understand English movies.
9）Because I want to understand English books.
10) Because my parents want me to learn English.

2. Do you think studying English is an enjoyable experience? Please circle the appropriate response.

Never	Sometimes	Often
1	2	3

3. Do you feel confident about the progress of your English? Please circle the appropriate response.

No	Sometimes	Yes
1	2	3

Additional Comments
Do you have any other comments which might be helpful for the school to improve the English Program, or anything else relating to your English language skills and needs? If so, please write them here:

APPENDIX B

(Tables regarding part B of the questionnaire)

TABLE 1. Students' responses to the question "How often do you experience the following situations?

Q8	Gender	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Mean
1. I can't understand what my teacher and my classmates are talking about because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	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. I find it hard to speak English because my pronunciation is poor.	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. I find it hard to speak/write English because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	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. I find it hard to speak/write English because I don't know the way English people speak/write	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. I have difficulties in getting the meaning of what I read because I have limited vocabulary and grammar.	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. I have difficulties in getting the meaning of what I read because I don't know how the sentences are put together.	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. I don't understand the cultural information.	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

TABLE 2. Students' responses to the question "In what way is English useful for you?"

Q9	Gender	Agree	Sig
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	

APPENDIX C
(Tables regarding part C of the questionnaire)

TABLE 1. Students' opinions on what the English teacher should do

Q10	Gender	Agree	Sig
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	

TABLE 2. Students' responses to the question "How useful are the following activities in studying English?"

Q11	Gender	Not useful	Useful	Very useful	Sig
1. Memorizing bilingual words list.	Male	6.8	35.9	57.3	0.963
	Female	5.9	35.3	58.8	
	Total	6.4	35.7	57.9	
2.Studying the grammar rules of English.	Male	18.4	61.2	20.4	0.776
	Female	17.6	57.4	25.0	
	Total	18.1	59.6	22.2	
3. Practicing drills on sounds, stress, and intonation of English	Male	15.5	44.7	39.8	0.156
	Female	5.9	48.5	45.6	
	Total	11.7	46.2	42.1	
4. Practicing drills on gram mar patterns	Male	49.5	35.9	14.6	0.084
	Female	35.3	38.2	26.5	
	Total	43.9	36.8	19.3	
5. Reciting dialogues from a textbook.	Male	51.5	34.0	14.6	0.420
	Female	41.2	41.2	17.6	
	Total	47.4	36.8	15.8	
6. Doing English-Chinese exercises	Male	39.8	47.6	12.6	0.040
	Female	26.5	47.1	26.5	
	Total	34.5	47.4	18.1	
7. Doing role play activities.	Male	26.2	56.3	17.5	0.823
	Female	29.4	51.5	19.1	
	Total	27.5	54.4	18.1	
8. Watching English movies.	Male	21.4	37.9	40.8	0.933
	Female	19.1	39.7	41.2	
	Total	20.5	38.6	40.9	
9. Listening to English music.	Male	34.0	35.9	30.1	0.036
	Female	16.2	47.1	36.8	
	Total	26.9	40.4	32.7	
10. Reading English novels and magazines	Male	43.7	37.9	18.4	0.002
	Female	19.1	45.6	35.3	
	Total	33.9	40.9	25.1	
11. Writing English diaries.	Male	40.8	42.7	16.5	0.082
	Female	26.5	45.6	27.9	
	Total	35.1	43.9	21.1	
12. Writing emails in English.	Male	29.1	51.5	19.4	0.002
	Female	10.3	51.5	38.2	
	Total	21.6	51.5	26.9	
13. Chatting through Internet in English.	Male	26.2	42.7	31.1	0.007
	Female	7.4	48.5	44.1	
	Total	18.7	45.0	36.3	
14. Talking to friends in English.	Male	24.3	45.6	30.1	0.001
	Female	7.4	35.3	57.4	
	Total	17.5	41.5	40.9	
15. Talking to English speakers whenever I have the opportunity.	Male	27.2	41.7	31.1	0.002
	Female	7.4	41.2	51.5	
	Total	19.3	41.5	39.2	
16. Searching for learning resources out of class.	Male	35.9	46.6	17.5	0.364
	Female	30.9	42.6	26.5	
	Total	33.9	45.0	21.1	
17. Participating in English camp.	Male	23.3	36.9	39.8	0.236
	Female	13.2	38.2	48.5	
	Total	19.3	37.4	43.3	

TABLE 3.Students' responses to the question "What kind(s) of learning style(s) do you like?"

Q12	Gender	%	Sig
1.The teacher gives lectures to which I listen	Male	16.5	
	Female	4.4	
	Total	11.7	
2.The teacher gives lectures and also provides me with opportunities to practice	Male	53.4	
	Female	57.4	
	Total	55.0	
3. I study individually	Male	4.9	
	Female	2.9	0.135
	Total	4.1	
4. I discuss with my desk-mates	Male	11.7	
	Female	16.2	
	Total	13.5	
5. I discuss with my group members.	Male	13.6	
	Female	19.1	
	Total	15.8	

APPENDIX D

(Tables regarding part C of the questionnaire)

TABLE 1. Students' responses to the question "Do you think studying English is an enjoyable experience?"

Q19	Gender	Never	Sometimes	Often	Sig
	Male	15.5	54.4	30.1	0.153
	Female	7.4	51.5	41.2	
	Total	12.3	53.2	34.5	

TABLE 2.Students' responses to the question "Do you feel confident about the progress of your English?"

Q20	Gender	No	Sometimes	Yes	Sig
	Male	14.6	39.8	45.6	0.318
	Female	23.5	33.8	42.6	
	Total	18.1	37.4	44.4	

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marjan Moiinvaziri got her BA and MA in TEFL from Bahonar University and her PhD in the same field from Shiraz University. She is currently a faculty member of Islamic Azad University of Sirjan. She has worked on several research projects regarding learners' strategy use, motivation, assessment and has presented several articles in national and international conferences. She has more than ten years of teaching experience. Her areas of interest include psychological and sociocultural factors in language teaching and learning.