

The Necessity of Teaching ESP Course to the Iranian Seminary Students of Hawza Ilmiyya

Hajar Khanmohammad

Department of English Translation
Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas Branch
Bandar Abbas, Iran

Maryam Kazemian Jahromi*

Department of English Translation
Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas Branch
Bandar Abbas, Iran
Email: saye2121@gmail.com

Abstract. The present study was an attempt to investigate the necessity of teaching Iranian seminary students of Hawza Ilmiyya, ESP course. Today the world is interested in English. Thus with the emergence of English as lingua franca of technology, education and research in global society, the demand for studying ESP course is increasingly necessary. One of the usages of ELT is in Islamic seminary schools when they decide to go to other countries to preach Islamic thoughts. In this qualitative and quantitative study, the participants were selected based on the random sampling in Iran. Then the needs of teaching ESP courses to 100 seminary students were investigated by means of questionnaires. Analysis of the results showed that it was necessary to teach ESP to seminary students.

Keywords: ESP, seminary students, Hawza Ilmiyya.

1. Introduction

The most important and widespread language used in the world in international academic conferences to news reports is English. It is used

Received: June 2014; Accepted: July 2014

*Corresponding author

for communication among native as well as nonnative speakers. Even though it does not have the greatest number of speakers in the world, it is the most widely used language in the world, and it will be used by more people in the future (Kitao, 1996).

1.1 Background

Today, as a result of development in technology, computer and internet, the necessity of teaching English is more tangible. For example the internet is used all over the world as a useful source of information. People use internet in order to gain answers to their questions.

Since the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA (master of art) in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham, and Aston University in The UK) and a number of ESP courses offered for overseas students in English speaking countries (Anthony, 1998).

As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorize, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p.19).

Tsao (2011) states:

The demand for ESP has led some higher education authorities and administrators in Taiwan to claim that ESP should replace EGP, the long-existing practice of English language teaching in Taiwan's universities, and thus become the mainstream of college English education. The rationale behind their claim is presumably as follows: EGP is basic language learning to be studied before, but not during college; College English should be more advanced, more specialized, and match students' majors of study, particularly in technological universities where students are trained to perform on-the-job; and finally, compared with EGP, ESP is more effective in increasing students' learning motivation because it relates to their fields of study and caters to their needs.(p.127)

There are many types of ESP. English for the student of Hawza Ilmiyya is one branch of ESP which is necessary to be taught and be

available among seminary students. In this case it is suffice to say that although the importance of English is widespread in the world and English is a language of communication and transferring culture, this important issue was ignored in some societies and schools. Islamic schools are one of the institutes where there is a lack of ESP which is of great importance and consideration for their students. There were some investigations in this area. Ratnawati (2005) referred to English and Islam as two absolutely different ways of looking at the world, and ELT, as Kermani (2005) pointed is effective in the political relations among countries. In line with Kermani, Aliakbari (2004), pointed to the culturally poor educational materials as the major reasons for weakness of ELT among Iranian high school students or theology schools and seminaries. Thus, these studies concluded that religion as a subdivision of culture doesn't have great influence on English as a foreign (FL) or second language (SL).

The purpose of this study is that Muslim students are required to know English in order to comprehend Islamic English texts without any need to translate them in Persian or Arabic. Also the ability of learning English is an aid for better functioning in responding to Islamic issues. Apart from these purposes, there is another advantage that Muslim students will be able to travel to overseas countries, to convey the message of Islam. As a result, the seminary students are required to know English and to develop the four language skills in order to preach Islamic culture.

The result of this research showed the necessity of teaching ESP courses based on the ESP purposes for seminary students by means of needs analysis of them. This study might be a beginning point for compiling an ESP book for seminary students.

As a result this study is useful for policy makers, teachers and theology institutions in order to compile ESP books in this area and also to prepare a specific methodology to instruct these courses. This study is useful for Islamic schools like Hawza Ilmiyya too. An important point is that today the necessity of learning English language is obvious in all fields of study. After Islamic revolution, teaching and preaching Islamic messages are more than before and Islamic issues need to be interna-

tional in all over the world. So this research may produce a motivation for Islamic schools in order to include ESP courses in Hawza Ilmiyya.

The following research questions have been posed:

1. Do seminary students need ESP courses?
2. What are the needs of the seminary students of Hawza Ilmiyya in studying an ESP course?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The importance of English

Talebinezhad and Aliakbari (2011) state that nowadays the necessity of English language teaching is obvious because world has a great interest in English, thus this new orientation made English an International Language (EIL). To overcome the inadequacies of the previous models of language teaching and to meet the needs of the learners, EIL opened new avenues for research and investigation.

Nur Nina (1996) states that English language has an important role as a conveyer of knowledge about Islam to the international community, indicating that there is a vital relationship between the English language and Islam.

2.2 Teaching English for specific purposes

English for specific purposes is a term that refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career (like law, medicine) or for business in general. This term became popular, when there was an expansion in scientific, technical and economic activities. In this case, Simion (2012) states that since 20 years ago, course designers paid much attention to teaching English for Academic purposes. When communicational technology and business were developed, their attitudes changed to teaching for more specialized purposes embodied in courses called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In fact this development comes from this fact that English has changed from simply being a foreign language into becoming a universal medium of communication in all walks of life.

Robinson (1991) states that English as a specific purpose is as a type of ELT (English Language Teaching), and as a “goal-oriented language

learning” implies that the students have to achieve a specific goal in the process of learning. He also adds that in ESP teaching, needs-analysis and the learners’ communication based on their fields of study should be considered.

Helsvig and kolegija (1990) indicate that the aim of Teaching ESP is improving students’ skills of professional communication in English based on the area of their professional field. This type of teaching refers to the students’ particular specialization.

2.3 Teaching English in islamic countries

Although the importance of English is widespread in the world and English is a language of communication and transferring culture, this important issue was ignored in some societies and schools. Islamic schools are also the institutes where there was rather lack of ELT which is required vitally for the students. In fact peoples’ religions should not hinder them from learning a foreign language. There are some investigations in this case.

Alonzo(2011) states:

Not only is there a scarcity of teaching and learning materials like books and manuals in teaching English for Theology but there is also a lack of developed curricula and syllabi specially designed for teaching English to seminary students. Most seminaries in the country do not have a curriculum that meets the demands of their growing number of students in need of English proficiency training. (p.51)

There are four elements that are essential in producing teaching and learning materials in English for Theology. It is necessary to consider these elements prior to the production of the ESP material (Alonzo, 2011). He states that these elements are “(1) The problematic theological concepts for Asian seminary students; (2) the common language problems that Asian seminary students may encounter; (3) the language skill/s an Asian seminary student needs for his/her theological training; and (4) the help that an English program can offer to the seminary” (P.68-69). Moreover he suggests that Asian theological students

had difficulty in comprehending theological concepts. It was because the students had language problems in reading, writing, speaking and listening in English. In fact the language skills that theological student needed for his/her seminary training was mostly found in the academic use of the English language.

Some Muslims believe that teaching English in their countries equals ignoring Islam (Pennycook, 1994). The establishment of a study in this case has an evidence to reject this claim. In fact a total of a 2000 studies conducted by 409 Kuwaiti undergraduates indicated that, Kuwaiti Muslim students well took positive attitudes toward learning English (Noori, 2012).

AL-Seghayer (2011) states “Teaching English as a foreign language in our public schools in Saudi Arabia is an important step to increase our global understanding and competitiveness in an increasingly interdependent and competitive world” (p.1).

Rohmah (2012) suggests that integrating Islamic messages in the English teaching material might prevent students from feeling bewildered and might reduce their tension.

Basthomi’s (2011) states that it is possible to change the attitudes toward English and we should help students to have better attitude toward English and use English materials with Islamic themes or the lives of the Muslims in English speaking countries. Therefore the main issue is in fact material selection. According to the advice from some Islamic School communities in Indonesia, English language training should be pure, and there should be no interference with the Western values because they have some shortages in moral foundation and the teaching materials should be appropriate to an Islamic educational environment (Indonesia Australia Language Foundation, 2007).

Therefore, (Phillipson, 1992) claims that writers and teachers need to modify English which is an imperialistic language into an instrumental language. As a result, Teachers in Islamic schools can include the Islamic messages in their teaching materials while helping the students to master the targeted English language skills and components.

There is a struggle between the English language and Islam. Harris (1991, p.90) refers to this struggle as follows “English is not just a

language, any more than Islam is just a religion. The names of English and Islam, whatever else they may be, are names of two very big battalions when it comes to the international power struggle for control of the Middle East”.

Farouqi (1986) is one of the scholars who adopt the idea of Islamization of English. Farouqi (1986, p.7) investigates the development of Islamic English and defines Islamic English as “the language modified to carry Islamic proper nouns and meanings without distortion and thus, to serve the linguistic needs of Muslim users of the English language”. In fact it is evident that Farouqi’s Islamic English is a method of reappropriating English in order to serve Muslim needs.

2.4 ELT and its necessity in Iran

Since English is considered as a dominant language all over the world, it is used for foreign trade, international conferences and the like. It is a means of communication. Today the necessity of teaching English is obvious for all the nations and Iran is no exception.

Noori (2012) states that the necessity of English in the outer world is beyond the mind, because English is the dominant language of foreign trade, international conferences, for air traffic in international airports, and sea navigation. Therefore, governments have a policy in order to promote the export of non-oil products. In this case they make companies and exporters take advantage of this medium to introduce their goods and products to the world market. So far, English seems to have found its way right into the heart of Iranian society. The Iranian national TV has started broadcasting authentic foreign programs. “Iran’s cooperation with UN, Islamic conference relations, ECO, OPEC, and other regional and world organizations has made English an important thing” (Aliakbari, 2004, P.1-14). Moreover Iran has some relationship with English-speaking Countries such as US and UK.

Today the necessity of learning English language is obvious in all fields of study. After Islamic revolution, teaching and preaching Islamic messages are more than before and Islamic dogma need to be international in all over the world. So this research may produce a motivation for Islamic schools in order to include ESP courses in Hawsa Ilmiyya.

As a result teaching English is required in all nations especially in Iran that need to cooperate with other countries and also to attend in Islamic conferences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The present study was a qualitative and quantitative one. The method of this research is descriptive. In this study one type of a questionnaire was prepared based on the ESP purposes and was given to three groups in order to analyze their needs. The groups under study included seminary students, their professors, and the people working in Hawza. They were selected by random sampling. Also five Hawza in Iran were chosen as follow: that of Mashhad, that of Qom, that of Jahrom, that of Tehran and that of Esfahan. The researcher managed to analyze the needs of these groups to find out the necessity of teaching ESP courses in Hawza.

3.2 Participants

In this research a random sampling technique was applied. The total samples were 100 seminary students from Iran. It is obvious that Iran has many cities and each one has many Hawses in it. First, the researcher selected five city of Iran based on random sampling. Second, she selected the main Hawza from each five city, and then she chose 20 seminary students from each of these five Hawses. So the total number reached 100 seminary students.

3.3 Instruments

The instrument used in this research was the questionnaires in collecting the data about the needs of the students. These questionnaires were prepared based on the seminary students' needs and the Idea of the people who worked in Hawza. In this case, the researcher consulted with the experienced teachers of Hawza that they are familiar with the Islamic contexts teaching, then according to their guidance, the nature and contents of the questionnaires were prepared. The teachers were also proficient in English language. They were as missionaries to preach the Islamic messages and they wrote Islamic books in English for other

countries in this regard. In the next section there are some points about checking the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

3.4 Procedures

English teaching tailored for the seminary students of Hawza Ilmiyya is one branch of ESP. In fact seminary students required to know English to be able to convey the messages of Islam directly.

As a result the researcher provided questionnaires to find out the necessity of teaching English in Islamic schools.

In this case, the researcher consulted with the people who were affiliated to the Islamic schools like the teachers, the people who work there and the seminary students. She spoke with the experienced teachers and professors of Islamic schools especially those who had PHD degrees. The researcher gathered their opinions and suggestions and examined them. In addition she used the Idea of two groups of males and females, because the attitudes of these two groups toward this issue were different. Also she considered the Idea of the people who did not know English but they had a great knowledge in this case. The researcher also studied ESP texts and used their main points for this purpose.

According to the obtained information from ESP books and the opinions of the think tanks, the researcher prepared a number of points about ESP. Then she selected some of them as the questions of the questionnaires. The selected questions contained all the necessary points of this study.

Being prepared, the questionnaires were given to one group of students as pilot study. Then the results of piloting were analyzed using SPSS and a kind of reliability, cronbach alpha was obtained. As a result it was concluded which questions were suitable and good and which ones weren't. Also it was realized which one was difficult and had to be omitted.

For validating the questionnaires it was better to consider the answers of the questionnaires after piloting, as a result it was concluded that if these answers covered the purpose of the research or not. And if these questions were expressive of the main purposes of the research, it would show the necessity of teaching ESP for seminary students.

When the reliability and validity of the questionnaires were computed, it was the time of distributing the questionnaires in five cities of Iran: Qum, Esfehan, Tehran, Jahrom and Mashhad. The participants from these cities selected based on random sampling. The cities were themselves selected based on random sampling too.

After selecting the participants, the researcher distributed the questionnaires. So they were given to the seminary students, their teachers and the people who work in Hawza. Finally, the researcher analyzed the needs of the students based on their answers by means of SPSS. So the researcher found out whether teaching ESP is needed in Hawza Ilmiyya or not.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Statistical analysis of the questionnaire

4.1.1 Reliability

Table 4.1 shows the reliability of the items. Reliability is about consistency in the results of the measurement.

Table 1. Reliability statistics of the questionnaire

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .948 | 37 |

Table 1 demonstrates that in this study, Cronbach's alpha is .94. This result shows a good reliability and no item was decided to be deleted.

4.1.2. Validity

In this study the researcher used content validity and construct validity. Content validity of the items is distinguished based on the opinion of the specialists in the ESP courses, also ESP books and theories in this case help the researcher to provide a suitable and appropriate items. Construct validity is distinguished by applying factor analysis.

4.1.3 Factor analysis results

Table 2. Statistical factor analysis of the questionnaire: rotated component matrix

| | Component | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| p16 | .952 | | | | | |
| p13 | .952 | | | | | |
| p15 | .952 | | | | | |
| p18 | .952 | | | | | |
| p30 | .794 | | | | | |
| p14 | .645 | | | | | |
| p1 | | .945 | | | | |
| p6 | | .945 | | | | |
| p12 | | .945 | | | | |
| p11 | | .856 | | | | |
| p7 | | .592 | | | | |
| p17 | | | | | | |
| p10 | | | .884 | | | |
| p8 | | | .884 | | | |
| p9 | | | .693 | .586 | | |
| p21 | | | .624 | | | |
| p24 | | | | | | |
| p32 | | | | | | |
| p25 | | | | | | |
| p22 | | | | .862 | | |
| p19 | | | | .815 | | |
| p34 | | | | .767 | | |
| p20 | | | | .634 | | |
| p36 | | | | | .741 | |
| p27 | | | | | .714 | |
| p5 | | | | | .662 | |
| p26 | | | | | .615 | |
| p2 | | | | | -.592 | |
| p3 | | | | | .572 | |
| p35 | | | | | | |
| p33 | | | | | | .702 |
| p23 | | | | | | .608 |
| p28 | | | | | | .599 |
| p29 | | | | | | |
| p4 | | | | | | |
| p31 | | | | | | |
| p37 | | | | | | |

Table 2 shows the rotated component matrix which is a matrix of the factor loadings for each variable on to each factor. In fact rotation is a method used to simplify interpretation of a factor analysis. Numbers in this table show the degree of relationship between factors and their variables. The high degree of these numbers like .9 and .8 indicate the high relationship between the variable and its factor.

There are several things to consider about the format of this matrix. First, factor loadings less than .6 have not been displayed because we asked for these loadings to be suppressed. Second, the variables are listed in the order of size of their factor loadings. Before rotation, most variables loaded highly on to the first factor and the remaining factors didn't really get a look in. However the rotation of the factor structure has clarified things considerably: there are six factors and variables loaded very highly on to only one factor.

The next step is to look at the content of the items (questions) that load onto the same factor to try to identify common themes. Factor 1 contains p13, p14, p15, p16, p18 and p30. they are related to the same theme as "the needs of the seminary students to learn English", that it has shown by h1. Factor 2 contains p1, p6, p7, p11, and p12. It indicates "the necessity of teaching English in Hawza Ilmiyya" and it is shown by h2. Factor 3 contains p8, p9, p10 and p21 that refer to "the importance of learning English in preaching Islamic culture". It is shown by h3. Factor 4(h4) contains p9, p19, p20, p22 and p34 that refer to "the importance of the students' needs analysis in teaching and compiling an ESP book". Factor 5 (h5) contains p2, p3, p5, p26, p27 and p36 that refer to "the importance of the relationship between the materials of the ESP books and the students' needs and interests". Factor 6(h6) contains p23, p28, and p33 that refer to "the importance of the syllabus in learning English". In fact all the questions in each factor are related to each other and also to their factors. These factors are the main purposes of this study. According to these factors and analyzing their components that how these questions are answered by the participants and also what their frequencies are, it is concluded that most of the participants agree with these factors and have positive attitudes about them. So the research questions are answered.

4.1.4 Chi-square

This table shows the result of chi-square in SPSS for the items of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Statistical analysis of chi-square tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 568.715 ^a | 36 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 559.841 | 36 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 13.079 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 3700 | | |

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 27.59.

Table 3 show a list of assorted chi-square tests, most of which are of no interest to us. The one we should pay attention to is the first one, i.e., the Pearson Chi-Square statistic. Reading across that row show that the chi-square value is 568.7 with 36 degree of freedom. The next column notes that the probability of getting this sort of result on the basis of chance variation alone is 0 (p-value = 0). In this column, Asymp. sig (2-sided) show that how these two variables are dependent. When p-value is zero, as a result the hypothesis “Teaching ESP course for the Iranian seminary students of Hawza ilmiyya is not necessary” is rejected and also two variables are related. As a result, significance reported by the statistics is less than .05; we can reject the null hypothesis and accept that the difference between items is not accidental.

5. Conclusion, Implications & Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

According to the results of the present study it is concluded that today teaching English is necessary and this course is of a great importance all over the world. Based on the results of the study and analyzing the answers to the questions showed that these Islamic schools have a great

need to syllabus for teaching English language. Also they need to prepare some ESP books in this case and a good method of teaching for seminary students.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

Based on the findings of this study and the review of literature, we find out the importance of teaching ESP in Islamic schools. Now, the necessity of teaching this course is obvious considering the scope of ESP teaching and learning expanding all over the world.

As the present research is a novel study that indicated the necessity of teaching ESP in Islamic schools to the seminary students to communicate with other communities and to preach Islamic principles. Hopefully this research may produce a motivation especially for Islamic schools in order to include ESP courses in Hawsa Ilmiyya.

Moreover these courses should be compiled under the supervision of EFL specialists in cooperation with the Islamic schools' principals.

An important point is that this course should be a compulsory course in Hawsa Ilmiyya. In fact seminary students should study in this course the same as their other courses in Hawsa Ilmiyya and the ESP teachers are needed to be trained to teach in Hawsa.

5.3 Suggestions for further studies

Based on the results of the study, the following are recommended:

- (1). Today other societies also need religious and they feel this need obviously. As a matter of fact, seminary students should themselves be aware this necessity. So, when they get aware of this requirement among the western societies, they will try to teach their language and culture to communicate with them and convey the messages of Islam. For this purpose they themselves should follow ESP. Also they should follow the main purpose of ESP that is teaching speaking, listening, writing, and reading.
- (2). Include English for seminary students as a field in itself and make it a part of the ESP categorization.
- (3). Researchers should investigate upon developing teacher training af-

fairs and specialization in ESP issues.

(4). More teaching English materials for seminary students should be developed. These should be culturally considered and relevant to the multicultural classes in seminaries. Writers of such manuals or books should endeavor to create teaching materials in English for seminary students that are culturally relevant, transferable, reproducible, publishable and affordable in the Asian context.

(5). It would be useful to have some investigations in preparing a special syllabus for this group of students.

(6). It is necessary to instruct some teachers for teaching ESP course for this group of students.

(7). It is better to compile an ESP book for seminary students and if these ESP books exist in the market, it will be necessary to do some investigations whether they are suitable for this group or not.

The authors:

Hajar Khanmohammad holds a PhD degree in TEFL from Science and Research University. She has been teaching English, various courses of Testing and Assessment, Methodology and Theories, Translation, and Research in Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, South Tehran Branch, and Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas and Qeshm. Her research interests include Testing, Linguistics, and Sociolinguistics.

Maryam Kazemian Jahromi holds an M.A degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas, Iran. She has taught various courses of EFL/ESL in institutions in Jahrom, Iran. Her research interests include Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Linguistics, and Discourse Analysis.

References

- Akbari, A. (2004). The place of culture in the Iranian ELT textbooks, in high school level. *The Linguistic Journal*, 1, 1-4.
- Alonzo, R. (2011). Interfacing theology, culture, and the English language. *Education Quarterly*, 69 (1), 50-71.
- Basthomi, Y. (2011). *A critical reflection on the praxis at English departments in Indonesia: Learning working in and by paradoxes*. Paper presented at a Talk at the State Islamic College Kediri, Indonesia.
- Faruqi, I. (1986). *Toward Islamic English*. International Institute of Islamic Thought: Herndon, Virginia, U.S.A.
- Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning centered approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kermani, S. (2005). Islam and English in the Post-9/11 Era: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4 (2), 85-86.
- Kitao, K. (1996). Why do we teach English ? *The Internet TESL Journal*, 2 (4), April. <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Kitao-WhyTeach.html>
- Noori, M. (2012). The impact of religionism of Iranian muslim collage students on learning EL reading. *International Conference on Language, Medias and Culture*, Singapore.
- Nur, N. (1996). Call for papers: English & Islam. *An International Conference organized by the Department of English Language and Literature of the International Islamic University, Malaysia*.
- Penny, C. (1994). *English and Islam. The cultural politics of English as an international language*. New York: Longman
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ratna, w. (2005). English and Islam: A clash of civilizations? *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4 (2), 103-118.
- Robinson, P. C. (1991). *ESP today: A practitioner's guide*. New York. Prentice Hall.

Rohmah, Z. (2012). Incorporating Islamic messages in the English teaching in the Indonesian context. *International J. Soc. Sci. & Education*, 2, 143-160.

Simion, M. (2012). The importance of teaching English in the field of tourism in universities. *Annals of the "Constantin Brncusi" University of Trgu Jiu, Economy Series*, 169-180.

Talebinezhad & Aliakbari. (2001). Basic assumption in teaching English as an international language. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VII, No. 7. <http://iteslj.org/>

Tsao, C.(2011). English for specific purposes in the EFL context: A survey of student and faculty perceptions. *Asian ESP Journal*, 7, 22-30.