

Teachers' Beliefs about the Role of Needs Analysis in the Process of EAP Course Design: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

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Needs analysis is a basic component in the process of course design that plays a vital role in specifying and identifying learners' needs, wants, and necessities when designing courses and materials. The aim of this case study is to explore how needs analysis is perceived by a group of teachers in an EAP/EFL context who have the privilege of designing the courses they teach at an undergraduate academic level. The case study is guided and shaped by the philosophy and methodology of the qualitative approach. The data were collected by the method of semi structured interviews. The results of the study revealed the teachers' focus and prioritization of needs analysis considering it as the foundation of the process of course design. The study presents a set of implications based on the participants' practical experiences and perspectives.

1. Introduction

Over the past half century, the term needs analysis has been widely emphasized by theorists, scholars, and educators across all stages of curriculum development and pedagogical instructions. This is due to its vital role in specifying and identifying learners' needs, wants, and necessities when designing courses and materials. Hence, English for specific purposes (ESP) advocates (such as Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Dudley Evans & St John, 1998, 2002) considered needs analysis as the cornerstone in developing a language course or program. Pedagogically, needs analysis plays a vital role in raising learners' motivation and attitude towards learning a target language (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2006; Alkhalidi, 2001).

In EAP or EFL, authors (such as Richards, 2007; Graves, 2000; 1996) hold the same perspective in viewing needs analysis as the initial step in designing EFL courses. They believe that needs analysis functions as the foundation of any language course or program due to its role in determining all other course components such as syllabus design, material design, content, goals and objectives, and assessment criteria.

The current study is concerned with examining the role of needs analysis in the process of EAP course design. The process of course design is defined by Graves (2000: 178) as "a teaching/learning experience that occurs over a specific time with a specific focus". This implies that courses must be designed in accordance with the reality of the learning context taking into consideration the socio-cultural factors and students' ability. For this, course designers, administrators, and teachers need be aware of a crucial issue that is how to design powerful and effective courses based on students' needs. Fink (2007, p.13) points

out that the power of course design lies in preparing courses that “prepare students not only for future classes but also for future personal, social, and professional life experiences”. This requires designing courses that integrate with students’ needs and the learning goals. Additionally, at the level of course implementation, designing a powerful or effective course contributes to achieving students’ motivation and engagement in classroom participation. Accordingly, teachers need to be aware of how to design a powerful course in light of these goals.

In the context where the current study takes place teachers are given as Toohey (2002, p.1) states the advantage of designing the courses they teach as this reflects “their control over curriculum”. In this respect, teachers’ role involves selecting materials and content for a particular course, developing specific objectives, and preparing formal written and oral exams for students’ assessment. The aim of teachers, no doubt, is to articulate courses that benefit students not only for classroom purposes but also for future purposes.

The literature on course design has provided considerable work on identifying, conceptualizing, and analyzing course design through providing several models and approaches. However, there is a lack of research conducted to investigate the role of needs analysis in designing EAP courses. This in turn has stimulated the researcher of this study to conduct a case study that aims to approach further understanding and exploration of the participants’ perspectives and experiences based on reality of their professional context. It is expected through this investigation to understand how teacher participants design their courses within the considerations and circumstances of their professional context. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. explore how teachers in an EAP context perceive needs analysis when designing the courses that they teach,
2. identify and analyze the aspect of needs analysis in relation to course design.

The study is guided by the following questions:

Q.1 What do teachers in an EAP context think of needs analysis when designing an EAP course?

Q.2 How do Teachers identify and analyze students’ needs when designing EAP courses?

2. Literature Review

This section sheds light on the relationship between course design and needs analysis from theoretical and practical views based on theories and previous studies, respectively. It starts with defining and outlining the process of course design for the purpose of reflecting on its relationship with needs analysis.

Course design: Definition and Framework

Hutchinson and Waters define course design as “an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge” (1991, p. 65). They further provide a detailed description of the process pointing out that:

Designing a course is fundamentally a matter of asking questions in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent processes of syllabus design, materials writing, classroom teaching and evaluation.

We need to know a very wide range of questions: general and specific, theoretical and practical. Some of these questions will be answered by research; others will rely more on the tuition and experience of the teacher; yet other will call on theoretical models...

The questions are concerned with the following:

“Why does the student need to learn?”

Who is going to be involved in the process?
 Where is the learning to take place?
 When is the learning to take a place?
 What do the students need to learn?
 How will the learning process be achieved?"

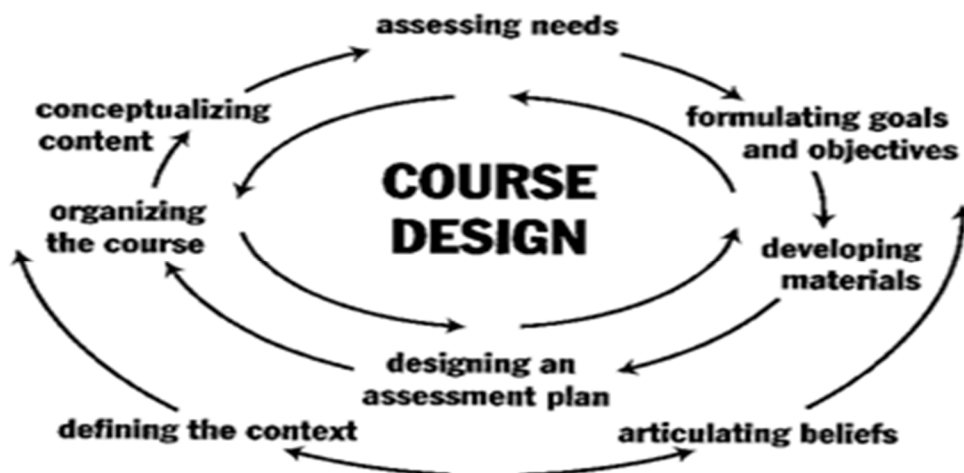
(Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters, 1991, p. 21).

Graves (2000, p. 3) views course design as a process that is composed of several key components that comprise setting goals and objectives, determining content, selecting materials, identifying learners' needs, and setting evaluation and assessment. Similarly, Robinson (1991, p.34) provides a comprehensive definition of ESP course stating that:

ESP course design is the product of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements: the results of the need analysis, the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials (if any). All of these are modified by the contextual constraints.

The literature on course design has introduced a number of models and frameworks that have been developed by scholars and educators of language curriculum development (such as Dubin and Olshtain, 1987; Yalden, 1987; Brown, 1995; Nation and Macalister, 2010; Graves, 2000). Probably, Graves's framework (See Figure 1) is the most practical one since it fits the context of the case study in which teachers are given the privilege of designing the courses they teach. Besides, the framework prioritizes the role of needs analysis in designing an EAP course. Thus, in terms of focus and aims, this model is compatible with the entire study that seeks to understand the role of needs analysis in course design from the teachers' perspectives.

Figure 1: A Framework of Course Development Process (Graves, 2000, p.3)



Needs Analysis

Needs analysis or needs assessment is defined by Graves as "a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs" (2000, p. 98). Needs analysis is viewed as the basic component in course design upon which the other

components such as the goals of the course, activities, topics, and assessments and evaluations are built (Richards, 2007; Brown, 1995; Jordan, 2004; Brindley, 1989). The value of its importance lies in its relatedness to students' involvement in the process of course design. It is based on the belief that learning is a teacher student interaction, rather than merely a matter of learners' "absorbing preselected knowledge" (Graves, 2000, p.98).

As teachers we need to know what kind of information we have to gather about our students. For this, Graves provides a very useful and simple illustration where the information is organized according to both the present status of the students and the future (goals of a course). Regarding the present status, the information involves the level of the learners' language proficiency, the level of the learners' cultural competence, learners' interest, preferences, and attitudes. The information about their future involves their goals and expectations, the learning context, types of communicative skills and tasks they need to perform, and language aspects they will use.

Nation and Macalister (2010, p.24) points out that "What needs to be learned" is a crucial issue within the notion of needs analysis. For this purpose, they refer to three approaches underlying the type of needs to be focused on. One approach is by Munby called 'target-situation analysis' that focuses on "the students' needs at the end of a language course, and target-level performance" (Jordan, 2004). The second approach is advocated by Richterich and Chancerel called "present-situation analysis" concerned with "the students' state of language at the beginning of the language course" (Jordan, 2004, p. 24). The third approach is advocated by Hutchinson and Waters (1991) called the 'learning-centered approach'. In light of this approach, Hutchinson and Waters make a distinction between 'target needs' and 'learning needs'. Target needs are concerned with "what the learner needs to do in the target situation", whereas learning needs are concerned with what the learner needs to do in the learning situation". Furthermore, Hutchinson and Waters analyze target needs into three types: 'necessities', 'lacks', and 'wants'. Below is a brief definition of each type:

Necessities-involve what is important for students to know in order to act effectively in the target situation.

Lacks-involve any gaps between what the students already know and the target situation.

Wants-involve what the students wish to learn.

Hutchinson and Waters (1991) add a further categorization to the learners' needs in terms of 'objective needs' and 'subjective needs'. Both 'necessities' and 'lacks' fit to objective needs, while 'wants' fit into subjective needs (Jordan, 2004). However, Jordan (2004) raises a crucial issue in this respect that concerns learners' subjective needs that might conflict with teachers or course designers' beliefs. For example, a language course may focus on writing, while students are concerned with improving their speaking skills. In this regard, Jordan says "there is no easy answer to this, but it is important that these views are taken into consideration" (2004, p. 26). McDonough (1984) points out that in this case, teachers need to take into consideration their students' views and attitudes along with needs analysis. This requires from teachers to be more flexible and adapt their courses in accordance with the learning situation.

In order to collect information about students' needs, Graves (2000) and Richards (2007) provide a set of practical procedures involving 'questionnaires', 'interviews', 'charts', 'lists', 'writing activities', 'group discussions', etc. (for further discussion of these procedures see Graves, 2000 and Richards, 2007). They both view needs analysis as the initial step in designing ESP courses that are designed to prepare learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their field of study or work

situation. They pointed out that it determines all other components such as syllabus design, material selection, goals and objectives, the content, as well as the evaluation of a program.

Hutchinson & Waters (1992) refer to an essential issue that is the awareness of the importance of needs analysis to stimulate teachers and course designers to think of the content and materials that best meets the learners' need for academic as well as professional purposes. They said ESP approach uses the needs analysis framework as a main tool to define learners' needs in a specific field because the awareness is more recognizable in a specific target situation.

Furthermore, needs analysis plays an important role in determining the quality and suitability of an ESP textbook of any discipline at any context. In this regard, Bouzidi points out that the suitability of a textbook already in use is determined and "accomplished by a needs analysis that documents the type of workplace" (2009). Moreover, the ESP teaching-learning is directed by a kind of students' academic and professional needs related analysis. For example, in the ESP for Business Studies, ESP course designers should analyze how the learners can develop effective communication skills in business dealings, conferences, negotiations and job interviews. Therefore, ESP courses make use of needs analysis to determine which language skills are useful for the learners to be able to accomplish certain professional tasks. Dudley-Evans & St. John, (1998) point out that ESP courses are centered on the learners' context and subject matter, and as such the ESP practitioner has "five key roles to perform: teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator." (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Long (2005) refers to four reasons for performing needs analyses: "First, to determine the relevance of the material to the learners' situations; second, to justify the material in terms of relevance for all parties concerned (teacher, learner, administration, parents); third, to account for differences in learner needs and styles, fourth, to create a syllabus which will meet the needs of the learners as fully as possible within the context of the situation".

A needs analysis is a process of collecting data about the English language needs of learners from a specific group of participants by means of various data collection methods. Scholars have various views on the description of needs analysis; however, several of them think of needs analysis as an approach mirroring the requirements, motivation, and needs of learners in a specific subject area (Fadel and Elyas, 2015). Others (e.g., Richards, 2007; Graves, 2000; Long, 2010) view needs analysis as a progressive term which might be conducted before, while and after a language program.

3. Method

Philosophically, this study draws on the interpretivism paradigm and hence, the case study has been chosen as a research strategy for the purpose of providing a framework for data collection and analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Chapelle and Duff, 2003; Devers and Frankil, 2000; Esteberg, 2002). Furthermore, the case study has been selected to fit the epistemological and methodological considerations, the purpose, and questions of the study.

The principal goal of this research is to explore teachers' perspectives and beliefs regarding the role of needs analysis in course design and the meanings they attach to. The researcher's intention behind that is to provide rich insights and develop multiple interpretations, patterns as an ontological stance (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Smith, 2003). For this, the researcher needs to gather detailed and thick information from the participants about the case (Yin, 2009; 2005; 2003; Stake, 2000; 2005; Merriam, 2002; 1988).

Sampling

Since this research is qualitative, the sampling must be purposeful, which means selecting participants who can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The purposeful sampling in this research is represented by a group of teachers belonging to a particular TESOL context, department of English at a tertiary institution in Oman.

The sample of teachers involves nine teachers who teach a variety of EFL/EAP courses at the undergraduate level. Most of the participants have a minimum of five-year experience in TESOL, particularly in teaching and designing (or redesigning) their courses. Having good experience in this area indicates that they can reflect on their perspectives and beliefs. The advantage of selecting experienced individuals will, in turn, support the goal of providing highly comprehensive and meaningful findings (Ritchie et al., 2014; Dornyei, 2011; Punch, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; 1994).

Methods of data collection

The main source of data collection for this study is the semi-structured interviews that depend on open-ended questions set up within an interview guide (Kvale, 2006). The author followed a professional protocol including procedures of “thematizing” and “designing” the questions to be asked in accordance with the main research questions and purpose of study (Dorny, 2011, p. 173). Table 1 below includes the open-ended questions that have been designed according to the main research questions.

The author met each participant individually and faced to face for one to two hours with short breaks. Every interview was recorded by a digital voice recorder. In addition, the author took notes in her notebook immediately after the end of the interview, particularly notes about the body language and whether the interviewee was interested or not (Cohen et al., 2000; Kvale, 2006, Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Table 1: Interview Guide

Research questions	Interview questions
Q.1 What do teachers in an EAP context think of needs analysis when designing an EAP course?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Generally, how do you perceive the process of course design? * What do you think the basic components of a course are? <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What do you think of needs analysis when designing an EAP course? Why?

<p>Q.2 How do Teachers identify and analyze students' needs when designing courses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How do you identify students' needs when designing an EAP course? * How do you analyze students' needs when designing a course? On what basis? * Do you follow any procedures or criteria for conducting needs analysis when designing an EAP course? * Do you have any suggestions for teachers working within TESOL area for improving the process of needs analysis when designing an EAP course design?
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The Analytical Process

The data were analyzed qualitatively, relying on Miles and Huberman's model (1994) and Miles, et al. (2013) in addition to other basic analytical techniques from other models such as Creswell (2007), and Lincoln and Guba (1985). The data that was collected from the interviews passed through three stages of analysis: "data reduction," "data display," and "conclusion drawing/verification." In the data reduction stage, the data were first categorized according to the two research questions.

The data were then deductively categorized according to the research questions. Under each category, the emergent themes from the data after analysis are grouped, defined, and displayed. After collecting the data from interviews, the researcher transformed them in the form of written texts supported by direct quotes from the participants. The third stage involves coding the data. In this study, the process of coding begins with reviewing the transcribed data word by word and line by line within each particular answer of each interview to decide which segment that implies important information to include and which segment that is irrelevant to pull out. After reviewing and reflecting on the transcribed data, codes, or labels were assigned below or beside each word or segment to describe the aspects of the content.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized according to the main research questions as below:

Q.1 What do teachers in an EAP context think of needs analysis when designing an EAP course?

Overall, the data show that the teachers conceptualized course design as a process of prioritizing and articulating the basic learning elements. However, there was an obvious variation in their responses regarding which element to start with and which element to prioritize when designing EAP courses. Most of the participants reported that it is necessary to start with addressing students' needs, while a few of them prefer to start with one of the basic elements like learning objectives or materials design. Generally, teachers' responses might be categorized in terms of four priorities as shown below:

Priority one-starting with students' needs

Priority two-starting with methodology (beliefs about how to teach)

Priority three-focuses on conceptualizing content (sequencing materials and integrating language skills)

Priority four-starting with learning objectives

The teachers who believe in prioritizing students' needs draw on the rationale that students' needs determine the articulation and development of other elements. Nevertheless, the teachers were different in both their perceptions of students' needs and in how they influence the articulation of other elements.

Q.2 How do Teachers identify and analyze students' needs when designing EAP courses?

This section is concerned with presenting further details about how teachers analyze students' Needs when designing courses. The results have shown that these teachers provided a variety of perspectives regarding students' needs. Therefore, the findings obtained from teachers' perspectives will be grouped in terms of three categories: the importance of addressing students' needs, analysis of students' needs, and procedures of needs analysis.

With regard to the category of the importance of students' needs, the majority of teachers argued that addressing students' needs is considered as a key factor that contributes to the efficiency, relevance, and practicality of course design. One of the participants emphasized the importance of students' needs describing this element as "the driving force" that leads to building up the whole course. Similarly, another participant considered it as the starting stage saying that "If I want to design a course, first of all I should start with students' needs analysis." In this respect, the teachers held the same beliefs regarding the importance of students' needs.

A couple of participants (A and M) believed that considering students' needs from the beginning of a course saves teachers the trouble of designing irrelevant courses, that is courses that don't respond to what students need. In this regard, participant (A) reported that "If needs are not addressed in the course, the course will not be relevant to the students". Similarly, participant (M) argues that if students' needs were not addressed from the beginning, the teachers might expect the risk of conflict between what students need and what is already prepared.

When we analyze students' needs, we discover what they like or need. If we don't address students' needs, later on, when we start teaching the course, we discover that the students need something else, so we ... have to satisfy the students' needs. (M)

In his emphasis on prioritizing students' needs, participant (M) considers this element as the starting stage in course design.

In addition, four participants (F, M, N, and R) believe that addressing students' needs helps determine the articulation of other elements such as materials design, content, methodology, and learning objectives. For example, participant (N) states that he takes the aspect of students' needs into account because it helps teachers to find the materials and methodology that are suitable for students. In this regard he focused on two types of students' needs: their language level and their preferences that lead him to be "practical rather than theoretical". He explained the idea of being practical in

terms of designing tasks and activities that engage students into classroom interaction and discussion. The excerpt below serves as an illustrative example of this comment:

I need to take into consideration two important things. The first one is which semester this course is designed for ... and the level of students because this is going to help you find the material that is suitable for your students... The second thing I take into consideration is to be practical not theoretical.

Participant (F) provided a similar argument, but with more focus on the content and methodology. In his preference of students' needs, he stated that:

Students' needs should be considered in planning an effective course.... to show a good command of content and educational skills. Without knowing our students needs the course may be useless.

Likewise, participant (R) designs his courses on the basis of what students need. He focused on "their abilities, their deficiencies, and their preferences" that in light of which he selects his materials. The excerpt below illustrates this:

I always look at the students I have, their abilities, their deficiencies, and their preferences. Sometimes the students don't know anything about the course they have but they have preferences. So, I just try to find what they like when I design my course.

The teachers clearly emphasized the importance of students' needs. However, it is in the varied understanding of the needs that the data reveal the connection between perceptions of students' needs and the design choices. Accordingly, several themes emerged that can be used to classify students' needs culturally, linguistically, and psychologically.

Culturally, one participant (A) confirmed that knowing students' culture helps "to tailor the course based on their needs". Linguistically, two teachers (A and N) argued that teachers must take into consideration "the students' level" (A). Likewise, participant (N) said "I need to take into consideration... what kind of level the students have because this is going to help you to find the material that is suitable for your students, not just providing information". Participant (W), on the other hand showed his interest in focusing on individual differences regarding students' skills of fluency when he said "I need to understand the students' ... needs and who the skillful students are? Their fluency is important... So I give them special material to improve their fluency".

Analyzing students' needs intellectually and socially was provided by participant (F) who said that:

We should look at students not only as intellectuals, but also as social beings and these dimensions interact to influence learning and performance. So, students' needs should be considered in planning an effective course. We should know who our students are and take into consideration their prior knowledge, intellectual development.

Participant (S) referred to a psychological factor such as motivation when designing a language course. Her argument is based on the rationale that teaching language is difficult and therefore we should think of "lively topics" for classroom motivation. This is illustrated in her quote below:

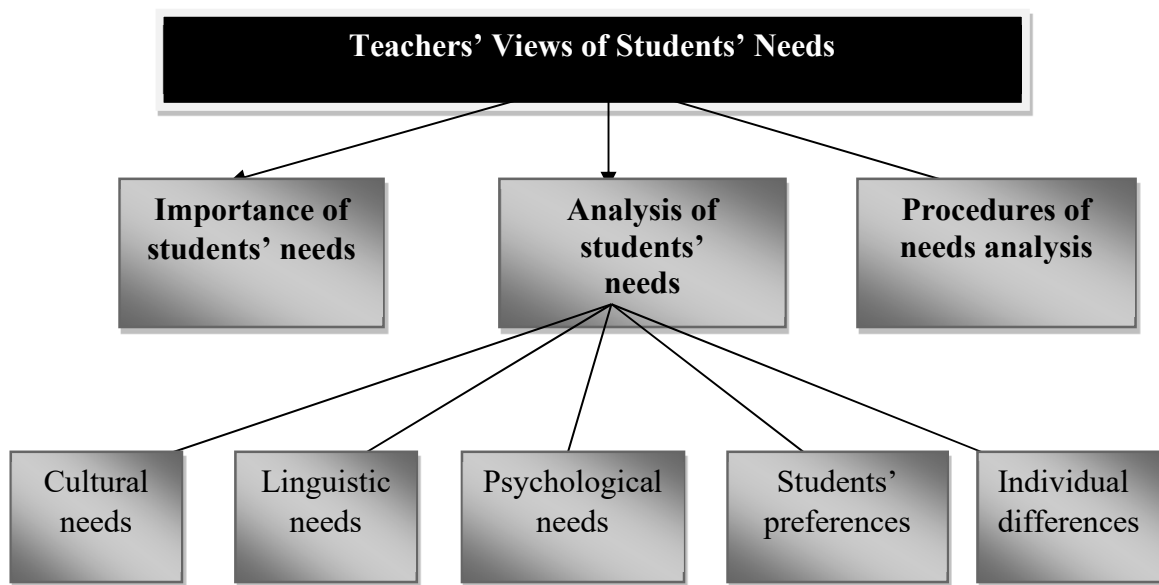
Psychological factors are very important. It is very easy to give a lecture to the students and make them motivated ... but for the language it is static and as such we must change it into very lively topics...

She proceeded in her argument to raise another issue in addressing students' needs that is the tension between designing a course at the class level- a course that suits the needs of the majority of students, or at the individual level- a course that suits the needs of particular students. This is evident in her quote below:

We cannot say that all the students are the same. There are individual differences. It is sometimes difficult to focus on every student's needs, but we take into consideration the common needs.

The third category involves the procedures followed for analyzing students' needs. Since there is no formal procedure in the department concerned with analyzing students' needs, a group of teachers said that they do it individually. For example, two participants (M and W) reported that they do it "by a questionnaire to collect information" or "by asking students direct questions and conducting interviews" (W). The other participants said that they do by means of classroom observation and their daily interaction with students.

Figure 2: Teachers' Views of Students' Needs



Discussion of the Findings

The major theme in the whole data analysis is that the teachers in investigated setting considered students' needs as the key element in every stage of course design. This finding has several interpretations. First, it reflects teachers' awareness of students' needs as an essential component and factor in the process of course design. The majority of teachers believed that students' needs must be considered initially in order to determine the articulation of the other basic elements of a course like materials, objectives, and assessment methods. Another importance of students' needs lies in its contribution to making the course more relevant to students, as Graves states "a more focused and responsive course" (2000, p. 99).

Second, within this finding, it has been noticed that in this context there is no official procedure for the assessment of students' needs neither at the institution level, nor at the teacher level. Rather, teachers do it individually based on their beliefs and critical reflections at the course level. This individuality in addressing students' needs has resulted in a variety of evaluations and analyses

of students' needs reflecting teachers' various focuses. For example, some teachers focused on students' language proficiency level, while others focused on their preferences, and a few of them focused on their cultural background. Accordingly, we can interpret that in this context the notion of students' needs is shaped and influenced by teachers' beliefs and both are two interrelated factors in course design. Teachers' beliefs and perspectives as has been discussed in the literature review chapter play a great role in course design. However, in relation to the assessment of students' needs, many researchers (like Graves, 2000; Richards, 2007; Dudley Evans and ST. Johns, 2004) recommend adopting more principled and designed procedures such as a survey questionnaire and interviews. The rationale behind this is to engage students directly to the process of assessment rather than relying on only teachers' intuitions (Davies, 2006; Conrad, 1999). Engaging students in this process helps avoid troubles such as conflict or mismatch between teachers and students' perceptions.

From the other hand, the variety in teachers' analyses of students' needs leads to a third interpretation that these teachers take into account the two important types of students' needs, the objective and the subjective needs. Analysis of students' cultural background and their language proficiency indicate teachers' concerns with objective needs that stand for the 'target needs' represented by 'necessities' and 'lacks' (Hutchinson and waters, 1987). In addition, teachers' concerns with students' interests and preferences indicate their concerns with students' subjective needs. Taking into account students' needs, both the objective and the subjective, is a crucial issue that helps teachers to avoid the risk of having courses that conflict with what students need or like.

5. Conclusion

The important finding in this study is that designing efficient courses must be based on students' needs. Teachers in this context believe that designing a particular course must start initially with addressing students' needs. Their belief is based on the assumption that addressing students' needs helps produce courses that are more efficient, focused and responsive. This finding has several implications. First of all, teachers who are concerned with designing their courses must be aware that students' needs is really crucial to designing EAP/EFL courses. This issue has been raised previously in the literature on EAP/EFL course design. Experts in EAP curriculum development (like Richards, 2007; Dudley Evans and St. John, 2004, Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997; Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001) believe that designing EAP courses is shaped and guided by the analysis or assessment of students' needs. Given this, they recommend teachers and institutions to consider students' needs in relation to the unique characteristics of the context.

The second implication for prioritizing students' needs concerns the involvement of students into the process of course design. Yalden (1987, p. 98) stresses the importance of students' involvement stating that "The learner...should be consulted and involved in the design process...once they have understood what is being requested and why...adults can happily and easily make the kind of contribution one would hope for". Students' involvement means taking into account their needs, preferences, and expectations at all pedagogical, cultural, and psychological dimensions when designing a course (Islami, 2010; Kayl, 2008; Kaur, 2007; Nunan, 1990; Brindley, 1989). This procedure in turn helps teachers articulate the elements of a particular course in a way that creates classroom motivation and interaction.

In practice, teachers in the current context were engaged in addressing students' needs individually depending on their contextual reflections and beliefs. The process of addressing students' needs involved analyzing their students' needs and taking particular decisions. Analyzing students' needs involved three aspects: their culture, English language proficiency, and their

preferences- what they like and dislike in the classroom. The second part of addressing students' needs involved teachers' taking decisions such as adaptation, suitability, flexibility, and alignment. This finding raises a third implication relating to the idea of contextualizing EAP courses. Taking decisions such as those previously mentioned indicate that teachers in this context aim at contextualizing the process of designing EAP courses to go in alignment with their students' needs and institutions' concerns. Each institution has its own "particularities and requirements" (Zohrabi, 2010, p. 167), and as such the EAP courses cannot be designed in the same way in all educational institutions (Richards, 2007; Flowerdew, and Peacock, 2001).

The discussion and implications above have mainly stressed the value of considering students' needs and involvement in the course design process. However, the findings of this study raise certain crucial issues that teachers have to be aware of. One of the issues is relevant to the confusion between learning needs and learners' needs. This issue has been previously raised by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) whose focus is on the learning centered approach more than on the learner centered approach. Dudley-Evans and ST. John (2004) raised a similar issue when they suggest that "we must distinguish between overall needs and course needs". There must be a strong focus on this question: "What is wanted from the course? Richterich (in fatihi, 2003) refers to another relevant issue that is the distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective needs'. Objective needs constitute the initial phase of needs analysis. They are relevant to students' learning, i.e., what students need from the course. Subjective needs, on the other hand, come at a later stage and they are related to the learners' needs (rather than learning needs). In light of those issues, the reasonable implication is that teachers must mediate between students' needs (objective as well as subjective) and learning needs. Ideally, this leads to producing courses that meet all kinds of students' needs.

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