

# **ESP Program in Iran: A Stakeholder-based Evaluation of the Program's Goal, Methodology, and Textbook**

**Mahnaz Mostafaei Alaei**

*Assistant Professor, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran*

**Ali Reza Ershadi**

*Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran*

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## **Abstract**

It is now over four decades that ESP is taught in Iran, but there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of the program among its providers and users. This study is an attempt to evaluate certain areas of the Iranian ESP program through the lens of its immediate stakeholders, i.e. policy implementers, authors, teachers and learners. Using questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations through a quantitative-qualitative mixed-method design, the collected data were analyzed. The results of the study indicate that the program is suffering from lack of systematic observation and evaluation policy, and its stakeholders especially in the users' strand are not satisfied with the program's current status, goal, methodology and textbooks. The origin of the problems and dissatisfaction in the program was found to have varying shares from different sources. Contextual factors, improper policies, unprincipled teaching methodology, and old fashioned spiritless textbooks were found and concluded to have their impeding roles in the Iranian ESP program achievement and satisfaction. The findings of the present research are hoped to provide the concerned communities in both strand of providers and users with clear insights around the common flaws and drawbacks in the program along with possible clues for the program improvement.

**Keywords:** ESP program evaluation, ESP stakeholders, ESP goal, ESP teaching methodology, ESP textbook

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**Corresponding author:** Mahnaz Mostafaei Alaei (mahnaz.mostafaei@yahoo.ca)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The necessity of evaluation in an educational program is the necessity of its survival and maturity. In other words, a program without evaluation is always prone to failure. As a diagnostic way of problems in a program, the necessity of evaluation also rests on the necessity of awareness, awareness of the pitfalls and flaws, of lacks and loops in the program to provide the concerned communities with the insights to have the right stitch in time to save nine in future. To make the stakeholders aware of a program's falls and flights can actually pave the way for its improvement and growth. This is possible only through systematic observation and constant evaluation with active involvement of the program's stakeholders. As an intention oriented activity and illuminative means, evaluative research has always been a haunt for the proponents of educational programs' promotion.

Evaluation in Tomlinson (2003), Benson (2001), Weiss (1986a) and many others' view is conducted for various purposes ranging from collecting authentic information around a program and its working parts, all with the aim of improving the program structure and achievement.

Despite the weight of ESP program and its long history in Iranian academic education, unfortunately no comprehensive evaluative research has so far examined the status and effectiveness of the program among its main stakeholders. In other words, the paucity of published research on ESP program evaluation with the participation of its immediate stakeholders is a bothering lack in the literature of the pedagogy in Iran.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Historical Background of ESP**

As Howatt and Widdowson (2004) stated, the first serious need to ESP appeared after WWI. To Benson (2001) and Starfield (2016), however, its fast growth and global spread was hastened by the third wave of globalization and the boom of funding for science and technology after WWII, increasing the dominance of English as an international language in the professional communities. The urgent need for English language use, (see Corbluth, 1975) created an opportunity and demand for its teaching in professional and academic settings. The changing waves in educational psychology and the revolution in linguistics brought by Chomsky (1957) also opened new horizons in front of language teaching

and learning in modern era. New demands appeared with each new discussion in ELT to foster its growth in different branches including ESP. Gómez and Räisänen (2008) opine that ESP teaching and learning was born under such condition in UK in the 1960s and has been a growing demand ever since. Hyland (2002) similarly traces the term emergence in the 1960s, while West (1994) specifically refers to its introduction in 1960 for the first time at the Makerere Conference. To Howatt (1984), ESP in its modern sense has begun in 1969 with the publication of a conference report called *Languages for Special Purposes* in London.

In terms of the factors and forces behind ESP emergence and growth, Robinson (1991) believes that an important reason for the emergence and development of ESP was the need to use the language in specialized contexts. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) hypothesized that ESP emergence was not a pre-planned and coherent movement; rather, it was a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends. In their view, three main reasons were common to the origin and emergence of ESP: “the demand of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics and focus on the learners” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 6).

In the course of its evolution, ESP has experienced different historical periods. To Starfield (2016), ESP started its rapid growth during and after WWII under the enormous social changes and massive economic developments. Striving for an independent identity in the ELT, the early years and during the 1970s, ESP was working to establish its colony and position. The attempts to expand and polarize its scope by a good number of proponents turned the 1981-1990 periods for ESP to be the most shining time in terms of its straggle for identification and autonomy.

From 1990 to the early millennium, ESP received new trend in its development by Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993) and Dudley-Evans' (2000) seminal works and argumentations on rhetorical discourse and genre analysis in the pedagogy.

Currently, while quite established in many parts of the world, ESP is in the focus of research and promotion in Asia and Spain (J. H. Swales, personal communication, December 2, 2013). Working for its stable position and opening up new ways towards its effective teaching and learning, ESP is expected to continue its demand and development in the Middle East (B. Tomlinson, personal communication, September 28, 2013).

### ***ESP in Iran***

The global spread of English as an international language in early twentieth century has resulted in its operation in a range of professional academic, economic, and socio-political domains. The pressing demand for English language and rapid developments in this era was valued by Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) to make up the modern history of ELT with various approaches and sub-sets. Along with universal trends, local needs for English language especially in those mineral rich regions, fueled the demand and needs to ELT and consequently ESP.

Parallel to the worldwide and regional developments, Iran as a striving country to westernize its society and industry was among the first countries to adopt English language as its main foreign language in the formal education (Foroozandeh, 2011) and was also a frontier in joining the camp of ESP (see Swales, 1985). Retaining its historical common background around the world, ESP in Iran has a close link with the history of oil and its exploitation.

Roughly speaking, we may argue that English language entered Iran in its ESP skin for oil industry long before adapting its international and local reputation under the acronym. In fact, far later than its purposeful use in target situations, ESP instruction gained a formal ground by being included in the national academic programs in Iran. Owing to the close relationship with US and UK, the country was in touch of any scientific and technological developments occurring in the West. In addition to this, the presence of organizations such as British council, Ford and Fulbright Foundations in the region and Iran paved the way for English language and ESP teaching fast spread in different sections. By the mid 1970s, the British Council (BC) was engaged in a number of projects connected with the development of education and training programs in Iran. These included a major program for the teaching of English to employees of the Oil Services Company of Iran in Ahvaz, Abadan, and Khark Island, (BC archive, 2013). Perhaps this can be considered as the oldest if not the first formal attempt to teach ESP in Iran, not forgetting that it was started much earlier in the army, especially in the old infantry and medical education (Arasteh, 1962), navy and later in universities.

As Howatt (1984) stated, following the western universities initiation in establishing centers to teach special English courses for oversea students and not far from its introduction to the world, Iranian universities adopted the trend and established English language departments and centers for teaching English and ESP in 1975 which

continued its steady growth up until the Islamic revolution in 1979. With the universities close down for Cultural Revolution in 1980-82, ELT and ESP in Iran faced a fatal stagnation.

In 1984, the ministry of higher education- now Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) - established the organization for researching and composing university textbooks in the humanities (SAMT) with a department devoted to English language and ESP textbook development, (SAMT booklet, 2015). This was a turning point for ESP promotion and establishment in the country. Since then, growing to be more discipline wised in the form of EAP, (see Atai & Shoja 2011) ESP in Iran has continued its straggle for better position and growth (J. H. Swales, personal communication, December 2, 2013) with addressing newly emerged needs in the pedagogy (B. Tomlinson, personal communication, September 28, 2013).

The present and new era for ESP in Iran starts with the boom of computer science and application in educational settings in the late 1990s followed by the rapid expansion of information technology (IT) in the millennium turn. With the wide spread of IT and rapid progress on the part of computer driving and internet navigation, the need for English language was strongly felt among various communities. It is remembered well that the first pages of www, at least in major universities of Tehran were accessible only in English.

In the early years of the 2000s, the demand for learning English as the dominant language of cyber world, now providing more specialized data, fostered and affected other narrow sub-domains among them ESP which was a core subject for the first national conference of ESP in 2005.

On the part of the program's teaching practice, and drawn from Eslami Rasekh and Simin (2011), ESP being taught at tertiary level in Iran comprises one to three EAP reading courses with a maximum of 120 hours time allocation that are covered through 1-3 semesters.

## **ESP Goal**

Along with the universal goal of ESP teaching with reading skill promotion in focus (West, 1995) and following the general trend in the early years of ESP programs in the West, ESP goal in Iran, as Atai and Tahririan (2003), Hayati (2008), Farhady, Hezaveh, and Hedayati (2010), Eslami Rasekh and Simin (2011), Vosoughi, Davoudi Sharifabad and Raftari (2013), Ghaemi and Sarlak (2015), Soodmand Afshar and

Movassagh (2016), Khany and Tarlani-Aliabadi (2016) maintained, has been set to promote the learners' reading comprehension (RC) skill without taking the newly required skills into account.

### **ESP Methodology**

Teaching methods as the practical plans to guide an educational program and achieve its goals have long been a major concern in ESP. Since the inception of the pedagogy, there have been a debate over whether the teaching of ESP requires a definite methodology or it is just a general English teaching with specific orientation. Despite many attempts to solve the problem, the controversial debate over ESP teaching methodology remains on apart between two groups of researchers who support an individual methodology for the pedagogy and those who do not believe in such a separation.

Emphasizing on the commonality of the method in the domain of ELT, Strevens (1988b) listed some instructional activities common to all forms of language teaching. However, Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) countered this by arguing that, "ESP requires methodologies that are specialized or unique" (p. 305). Donesch (2012) supporting the idea, believes that the specialty of ESP methodology stems from three sources; the learners' needs, their target situation, and the language used in this situation.

### **ESP Methodology in Iran**

ESP teaching methodology in Iran has experienced almost the same global trends in the pedagogy. The presence of western academicians particularly, from US and UK in the country's educational system provided Iran with the opportunity of keeping pace with the world developments in ELT both in trends and methodologies. However, the story of ESP and its teaching methods after Islamic Revolution in 1979 differs from its past widely.

According to Rajabi, Kiany, and Maftoon (2012) currently, ESP teaching methodology in Iran suffers from unprincipled diversity and there is hardly any published document on the patterns of methodological adaptation and preference among the Iranian ESP practitioners. To Fakharzadeh and Eslami Rasekh (2009), ESP teaching methodology in Iran has been a victim to fashions in the past twenty five years without being checked for their efficacy and positive impact.

Examining the influential factors behind the diversity of ESP methodology, Hosseini Massum (2011) argues that ESP methodology in Iran is affected by the students specialized field knowledge and learning process brought from their disciplines to their ESP classes. Influenced by the users' content knowledge and contextual requirements, ESP teaching methodology in Iran does not seem to follow a sound theory because it is mostly adopted by the practitioners on the basis of their knowledge, experience and teaching environments.

### **ESP Textbooks**

The world of ESP textbook is the world of ever changing science and technology. Since its first modern emergence in 1962, ESP textbook has changed tremendously. As a "universal element" which provides framed input for teaching and learning "in the form of texts, explanations and activities" in Hutchinson and Torres' (1994, pp. 315-317) view and "the visible heart of any ELT program" in Sheldon's (1988, p. 237) analogy, textbook has proved to be an integrated part of language teaching and learning forums including ESP.

In terms of ESP textbook historical development, Swales (1980) is on the point that there have been serious ESP course books since the publication of Herbert's book "The Structure of Technical English", in 1965. He (1985) later maintains that Herbert's textbook was the first real ESP textbook with a precise aim and clear title, but it was not the best one.

In spite of the importance and steady growth of ESP textbook and contrary to its global position, a pinching fact in the enterprise is that they are not taken serious often and are margined in many ways. For example, in an early evaluation Swales (1980) concludes that; "ESP textbooks have been in many respects an educational failure" (p. 11). Confirming this, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) remark that regardless of massive production and huge copies sold yearly in different countries, textbooks are found to suffer from apathy and even hostility in ELT literature.

### **ESP Textbooks in Iran**

Drawn from Swales (1985), Iran is a frontier in ESP textbook development in the world with its share in introducing one of the most

important ESP textbooks developed by Bates and Dudley-Evans at Tabriz University in 1974.

Following the global boom for in-house ESP materials development in the 1980s (Tomlinson, 2003), ESP material development in Iran was boosted by the establishment of SAMT in 1984. The first formal step towards preparing an Iranian in-house ESP textbook was taken in 1985 (Fadavi & Ershadi, 2014, p. 1155) by a group of experts and teachers under the title of English for especial purpose (ESP) for the students of humanities. Since then, it has continued its growth to address the needs for any new field of study.

Elaborating on the enterprise, Atai and Shoja (2011) explain that in the 1980s, when MSRT undertook the responsibility for nationwide ESP instruction at all Iranian universities, it could “published eight EAP textbooks for students of sciences, humanities, sociology, engineering, medicine, and agriculture” (p. 306). Presently, there is almost one specific ESP textbook for every major in the university. The content of these books are progressively closer to the original materials that students expectedly will face in the original materials in their major fields of study (Farhady et al., 2010).

## **ESP Stakeholders**

Different parties are engaged in ESP affairs all over the world and Iran. Boards and committees in high and low state ranks have a hand in the process of decision making, production and consumption of the program. Weiss (1986b) cited by Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005, p. 12) has divided a program’s stakeholders into two main categories and defined them as; “those who are affected by the program” (users) and “those who make decisions about the program” (providers).

## **ESP Stakeholders in Iran**

The stakeholders of ESP in Iran and any non-English contexts are almost similar in at least two general strands of providers and users. They can be further divided into different remote and immediate stakeholders. To this research, four main parties, i.e. policy makers and policy implementers, authors, teachers and learners who are considered as the immediate stakeholders of ESP program are in focus.



### **ESP Policymakers and Policy Implementers**

Educational policies in Iran are made by different councils and committees. Often with political nature, councils are essentially involved in general and upper hand documents. Educational committees, however, are mostly none political and engaged in the realization of the policies in the form of programs and curricula (see Farhady et al., 2010). Heads of educational department at universities are on mission of implementing those pre-set policies on different course coverage among them ESP.

### **ESP Authors, Teachers, and learners**

Being among the early starters in developing local ESP textbooks for the learners, ESP authors in Iran are of two groups in terms of their profession. They are either teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) or subject specialists (SS). Most of the ESP materials have been and are developed by the former group, while there are some sources developed by the latter ones as well. A combination of the two is a happy fortune in the enterprise, because textbooks produced by such a compound group can enjoy maximum authenticity and accountability. Around 63% of the available in-house developed ESP textbooks in Iran have been authored by a group of TEFL and SS teachers.

Teachers of ESP in Iran are often from three different strands with TEFLs as the forerunner, subject specialists (SS) as the most popular and preferred ones by the learners, and non-TEFL non-subject-specialists in the disciplines they teach ESP for. A fourth, but rare group of ESP teachers are those professionally trained to teach ESP.

ESP learners in Iran can be divided into two broad groups on the basis of their learning contexts. They are either university students majoring in a subject field other than English language, or vocational learners receiving their ESP in-service courses (Ergolect) for their professional needs and target situations.

### **ESP Program Evaluation (ESPPE)**

Educational programs among them ESP, are always in need of close observation and constant evaluation to keep up their appropriateness and effectiveness. Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2009) consider evaluation as a required activity at all levels of university programs and courses which can pave the way for the programs' maturity and provides learning opportunities for all the stakeholders.

As a major subset to ELT, ESP normally follows those theories and trends in the parent pedagogy within the various frameworks outlined by Lynch (1996). According to Strevens (1977), the changes which have brought new forms of language can be considered as the immediate result of critical analysis and close evaluation of the previous programs. In fact, ESP teaching enriched by precise evaluation findings can guarantee its steady move towards new stages of improvements and developments.

### **ESP Program Evaluation in Iran**

With all the decisive importance rested on evaluation in ESP literature, it is misfortune to mention that no state or semi-state comprehensive evaluation of Iranian ESP program could be spotted through the current research investigation. Worsening this is that, ESP program in Iran, as a part of aid-project in nature, has no typical commissioned body for its observation and evaluation. Currently, the bulk of evaluative researches around ESP teaching and learning in Iran are often restricted to some scattered studies in limited academic scope to spot the merits and demerits of one or some components of the program mostly its textbooks.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of the current study is to examine the overall status of ESP program in Iranian context and evaluate its goals, teaching methods and materials through the lens of the immediate stakeholders in the program. Identifying the program's pitfalls and drawbacks in its means and materials and recognizing new demands in the pedagogy is the second major purpose for the research.

In an attempt to fulfill the above mentioned purposes and to draw a vivid picture of ESP program in the country, the following four research questions were formulated:

1. What is the perception of the stakeholders towards ESP program's importance and status in the Iranian context? Is there any significant difference between the perception of the providers and users?
2. What is the main goal of ESP program in Iran? Is it appropriate in the eyes of the stakeholders?
3. What is the dominant and preferred methodology in the Iranian ESP

- teaching courses from the stakeholders' perspective, and why?
4. What is the perception of the stakeholders towards ESP textbooks' importance and appropriateness? Is there any significant difference between the perception of the providers and users?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants in the present research are drawn randomly from two major clusters of the Iranian ESP program immediate stakeholders, i.e. ESP providers and users. The sample population for the providers' strand comprises 66 policy implementers and 44 authors. On the part of the users, some 219 teachers with at least four years of ESP teaching experience and 854 mostly MA students from eight target universities represent this strand. Gender, age and university levels of the participants were not controlled in the current study.

### **Instrumentation**

The bulk of instruments used in the process of the present research data gathering were:

1. A semi-structured interview with 7 questions asking the stakeholders' view within a 20 minute interview session.
2. Four Likert scale questionnaires with thirty items (20 common core and 10 discrete items for each group of the participants), validated through piloting process.

Validation of the questionnaires underwent the following steps. (1) The main items were borrowed from some valid samples in the literature, enforced by a pool of items collected through tentative random interview with some experts in the field. (2) Four TEFL colleagues were asked to review the questionnaires for any item addition and omission to increase the clarity and avoid ambiguity. The questionnaire format geared to be as close to standard questionnaire defined by Dornyei (2011), as possible. (3) To test the questionnaire validity and reliability, they were handed to 16 policy implementers (department heads), 14 ESP textbook authors, 36 ESP teachers and 70 students for the first round piloting and asked them to give their descriptive views and comments around any problems in terms of the items irrelevancy and generality. Carrying out the necessary changes

suggested by the respondents, the questionnaires were piloted with the same participants for the second time within a fortnight interval. In this second piloting process, some 11 policy implementers, 12 authors, 31 teachers and 67 students took part and their scores for the two rounds were tested and compared. 4- In the final step, a factor analysis with Varimax rotation was run. With the KMO being 0.645 ( $p=0.001$ ), the validity of the questionnaires were supported. To check the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha test was carried out. The result of the calculation was 0.683 for the providers and 0.743 for the users, which were in the range of acceptable domain.

3. An observation form constructed on the basis of similar experiences, especially those of Weir and Roberts (1994), Fulture and Davidson (2007), and Dornyei (2011). Enriched by some expert consultations and direct observations, the form consisted two sets of items in the form of multiple choice questions and open ended items.
4. A localized checklist for textbook evaluation adopted from Cunningsworth (1995), McDonough (2010), Tomlinson (2003), Nunan (2004), and Basturkmen (2006).

To avoid any possible misunderstanding the language for all the instruments, except for the checklist, was decided to be Persian.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The operation of data collection for the current research went through different steps over a moderately extended time span of two years, mostly because of the geographical distribution of the user participants at the target universities. In terms of provider participants, having decided on the right people in two state boards, namely, SAMT and target universities, they were requested to take part in the research through E-mail, telephone contact and personal meeting. For the users' data, 8 universities (4 provincial and 4 in Tehran the capital city of Iran) were surveyed through a semi-structured interview, classroom observation (6 classes; 4 participant and 2 non-participant observation for each university), and questionnaire administration to both teachers and learners. To locate the dominant teaching methodology and materials used in ESP classes, 46 classes were observed. Non-participant observation was excluded from Allameh Tabataba'i University classes for the threatening nature of the process.

## **Data Analysis**

The required data collected through the means mentioned above were analyzed through two phases of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### ***Phase I: Quantitative Data Analysis***

The quantitative data analysis for the research started with descriptive statistics and other calculations by using the SPSS software (version23).

An independent samples t-test was run to compare the provider and user participants' answers to the categorical common core and discrete items of the questionnaires addressing the concerned areas.

### ***Phase II: Qualitative Data Analysis***

The qualitative data attained through interviews were primarily content-analyzed to validate the participants' answers to the related items in the questionnaires. The technique to content analysis was comparing the items repeated in interview questions and Likert scale questionnaires

Observation and checklist data were also analyzed with specific focus on the teaching methodology and materials used in the classes. Findings and results obtained for each part (see Table 4) are brought under the quantitative data analysis for further verification of the findings.

## **RESULTS**

All the analyses and calculations were primarily directed to find answers for the research questions seeking to evaluate certain areas of ESP program through the lens of its immediate stakeholders. The questions were examined one by one for their returned results in each particular part of the program.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question aimed to explore the perception of stakeholders towards ESP program importance for Iranian students' future academic career and its current status. With a total mean of 4.50 and 4.67 for the providers and users respectively, the item (ESP importance) received the highest mean score from both parties. Confirming this, the lowest mean score for the provider and user participants came from item #5 (1.28), which suggests "ESP is not necessary for Iranian students' future education.

The following three items (#.2, 3, 4) addressing the status of the program assumed that the current ESP program in Iran is successful, appropriate and satisfactory. These items returned a negative response from the users' strand with a mean score of 4.31, while providers' strand valued it as successful, appropriate and satisfactory with a mean score of 3.57.

The result of the interview data analysis about the program importance revealed that 85% of the policy implementers, 73% of the authors, 83% of the teachers and 87% of the learners supported the program decisive importance. The alternative questions probing the program's appropriateness and satisfactory among the stakeholders revealed that 43% of authors, 67% of teachers, and 83% of the learners perceived it as inappropriate and dissatisfactory. Policy implementers contradicted this with 86% of their supporting vote. Comparison of the independent samples t-test values ( $t=3.48$ ,  $df=48$ ,  $p=.18$ ) for the policy implementers, ( $t=3.75$ ,  $df=44$ ,  $p=.21$ ) for the authors, ( $t=1.35$ ,  $df=204$ ,  $p=.11$ ) for the teachers) and ( $t=1.28$ ,  $df=844$ ,  $p=.09$ ) for the learners confirms the descriptive statistical results.

## **Research Question Two**

In view of ESP programs' goal in Iran, the related literature and current research findings indicate that reading comprehension (RC) promotion is the main target for the program. Appropriateness of the program's goal examined through the second research question returned conflicting views from the two strands. Users criticized the mono-skill orientation of the program with a mean score of 3.55, but the providers especially, policy implementers voted for the appropriateness of the program's goal with a mean of 4.32. T-test carried out between the two strands ( $t = 4.32$ ,  $df= 95$ ,  $p=.15$ ) for the providers and ( $t=2.55$ ,  $df=1044$ ,  $p= .11$ ) for the users verified the significant difference.

The result of the interview questions asking about the appropriateness of the program's goal showed that 31% of the authors, 67% of the teachers and 87% of the learners do not consider the program current goal as appropriate, while only 25% of the policy implementers believe that the orientation of the program is not on the right track.

### Research Question Three

The related items (#.6, 14, 15, and 16) analysis for the third research question addressing the preferred and dominant methodology in the pedagogy revealed that there was a unanimous consensus over teacher-centered methods to be appropriate for Iranian ESP classes. T-test run among the groups (see Table 3) revealed that three out of the four participant groups supported the approach with the mean scores of ( $M=4.02, 3.99, 3.87$ ) for policy implementers, authors and teachers respectively. The low score for the learners (2.15) can be attributed both to their dissatisfaction and unfamiliarity with teaching approaches.

The interview data analysis showed that 63% of the respondents considered teacher-fronted approach as the right and preferred methodology. In this regard, Pishghadam (2013) argues that “in a stuffed and heterogeneous class it is impossible to give an active role to the learners” (R. Pishghadam, personal interview, June 17, 2013). Sabouri (2014) believes that: “interaction requires active involvement and motivation” (A.R. Sabouri, personal interview, April 11, 2014). This is missing among most of the ESP learners. Kiani (2014) maintains that “in a class where the majority of the learners attend to pass the course any way, we cannot expect them to take the central role in the class” (M.R. Atai, personal interview, May 27, 2014). This was also confirmed by the data collected through the observations. Out of 48 observed classes, 41 classes (85%) were managed by the teachers as the only active one on the stage. Triangulating the results obtained from interviews, observations and questionnaires revealed that there is not a significant difference among the stakeholders’ perception about the dominant and preferred methodology.

### Research Question Four

ESP textbooks’ importance and appropriateness was the main concern of the fourth research question. The analysis of the related data showed that providers and users were quite consensus about ESP textbook importance ( $M=4.08$  and  $3.98$ ) respectively, but for the appropriateness of the textbooks, there is a considerable difference between the perception and evaluation of the two strands ( $M=3.95$  for the providers and  $1.32$  for the users). The independent samples t-test results comparison between the two strands confirmed this too: ( $t=3.95, df=108, p=.13$ ) and ( $t= 1.32, df= 1012, p=.18$ ).

The qualitative data analysis also revealed that there is a complete agreement on the importance of ESP textbooks, but in terms of the book appropriateness, three out of the four clusters, i.e. policy implementers, teachers and learners were against it with 45%, 72%, and 76% of their votes respectively. Authors on the contrary, supported their books' appropriateness with 78% of their voices.

In order to check the possible differences among the users' and providers' inter-group perception towards the research concerned areas, a separate t-test was carried out between the groups of each strand and then the results of the analysis for the two strands were compared and contrasted for their converging and diverging viewpoints. Table 1 summarizes the providers' data analysis results on the concerned areas.

**Table 1:** Descriptive analysis and inter-group independent t-test results for the providers

<b>Evaluands</b>	<b>Providers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.</b>
<b>ESP Status</b>				
Importance	policy	66	4.30	1.37
	implementers			
Satisfactory	authors	44	3.87	0.17
	policy	66	2.40	1.23
	implementers			
	authors	44	4.30	1.07
<b>ESP Goal</b>	policy	66	4.30	0.18
Appropriateness	implementers			
	authors	44	4.30	1.20
<b>ESP Methodology</b>	policy	66	4.30	1.04
Teacher fronted	implementers			
	authors	44	4.30	1.03
<b>ESP Textbooks</b>				
Importance	policy	66	4.30	1.02
	implementers			
Appropriateness	authors	44	4.30	1.04
	policy	66	4.30	1.83
	implementers			
	authors	44	4.30	0.39

As in Table 1, the analysis results indicate that there is not a significant difference between the two groups of this strand in their perception about the program's concerned areas. Except for the program being satisfactory



which turned the lowest mean (2.40) from the authors' side, all other areas were valued as important and appropriate with a moderately high score from both groups in the strand. The values obtained from t-test analysis ( $t=3.95$ ,  $df=58$ ,  $p=.16$  for the implementers) and ( $t=3.32$ ,  $df=43$ ,  $p=.14$  for the authors), verify the results of descriptive statistics.

Statistic calculations for the users also revealed that there is a converging perception among the two groups of the strand on the program's evaluated parts. The results of the data analysis for this strand are brought in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Descriptive analysis and inter-group independent t-test results for the users

Evaluands	users	N	Mean	Std
<b>ESP Status:</b>				
Importance	teachers	219	4.57	1.30
	learners	854	4.77	1.10
Satisfactory	teachers	219	1.89	0.21
	learners	854	1.23	1.32
<b>ESP Goal</b>				
Appropriateness	teachers	219	2.77	1.08
	learners	854	2.39	0.81
<b>ESP Methodology</b>				
(teacher fronted)	teachers	219	3.07	1.12
	learners	854	1.32	1.00
<b>ESP Textbooks:</b>				
Importance	teachers	2019	4.53	1.26
Appropriateness	learners	854	4.37	1.18

As Table 2 demonstrates, there is little difference between the two groups of user's strand views on the concerned areas. T-test analysis ( $t=3.95$ ,  $df=183$ ,  $P=.16$  for teachers) and ( $t=3.32$ ,  $df=683$ ,  $p=.14$  for learners) support the results of descriptive calculations.

To explore the possible differences between the means of the providers and users' views on the concerned areas, an independent t-test was run. Comparing the providers' and users' t-test results revealed that there was little or no significant differences between the two strands' view on certain areas such as ESP program and ESP textbook importance, but there is a significant difference in the respondents

perception towards the program's current status, its goal and textbook appropriateness. The results of the calculation and comparison are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics and t-test results comparison for the providers and users' perception

Evaluateds	Stakeholders	N	Mean	Std
<b>ESP Status:</b>				
Importance	providers	100	4.44	1.20
	users	1073	4.40	1.36
Satisfactory	providers	100	3.49	1.37
	users	1073	1.17	0.95
<b>ESP Goal</b>				
Appropriateness	providers	100	4.54	1.21
	users	1073	2.19	1.98
<b>ESP Methodology</b>				
Teacher fronted	providers	100	3.49	1.30
	users	1073	2.33	1.58
<b>ESP Textbooks:</b>				
Importance	providers	100	4.89	1.03
	users	1073	4.49	0.02
Appropriateness	providers	100	4.28	1.13
	users	1073	2.13	0.68

Checking the t-test values ( $t=3.95$ ,  $df=105$ ,  $p=.11$  for the providers) and ( $t=1.22$ ,  $df=1073$ ,  $p=.19$  for the users), against descriptive statistics in table 3 confirms the significant difference between the two strands perception about the concerned areas.

The findings from the quantitative data analysis were further verified through the qualitative data analysis results. Qualitative data analysis indicated that 80% for the providers and 68% of the users, considered ESP important. In terms of the program's current status, 28.5% of the providers and 68.3% of the users believed that the program was not satisfactory. 21.5% of the providers and 73% of the users valued the program's goal as inappropriate. Teacher-fronted methodology was supported by 60% of the providers, while the vote for the method falls to 42% as a mean for the users. TEFL teachers with 78% of their voice and learners with 13% supporting vote make up the highest and lowest score in the users front. Textbooks appeal and appropriateness was criticized

by 21.5% and 12.5% of the provider interviewees, while 63% of the users did not value the books appealing and appropriate.

Comparing the two sets of the findings reveal that there is no significant difference among the findings attained from quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

A summary of the qualitative data analysis findings around the four concerned areas are given in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Qualitative data analysis results on ESP program and components

<b>ESP Program Evaluation</b>	Stakeholders' perception about the concerned areas			
<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Policy implementers</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Teachers TEFL-SS</b>	<b>Learners</b>
<b>ESP Program Importance</b>	Important (IMP) 85%	IMP 75%	IMP 83% --34%	IMP 87%
<b>ESP Program Current Status</b>	Not Satisfactory (NS) 14%	NS 43%	NS 67% --55%	NS 83%
<b>ESP Goal Appropriateness</b>	Not Appropriate (NA) 12%	NA 31%	NA 67%-- 65%	NA 87%
<b>ESP Teaching Methodology</b>	Teacher-Fronted (TF) 73%	TF 47%	TF 78% --35%	TF 13%
<b>ESP Textbooks Position</b>	Not Appealing (Nap) 21%	Nap 22%	Nap 68% --72%	Nap 76%
<b>ESP Textbooks Appropriateness</b>	<b>Not Successful (Nsucfl)</b> 14%	<b>Nsucfl</b> 11%	<b>Nsucfl</b> 74% -- 81%	<b>Nsucfl</b> 34%

## DISCUSSION

The findings from quantitative data analysis and expressive explanations provided by the stakeholders through the interviews and observations show that there is both consensus and lack of consensus over various parts of ESP program. For the scanty of related literature in Iran, the findings of the current study cannot be sufficiently discussed against those previous studies and results. Nevertheless, reviewing the views collected through different means and discussing them against the current realities in the program will hopefully shed light on the

problematic areas in the pedagogy and help to arrive at a better understanding about the program in terms of its current status, goal, methodology and textbook.

### **Discussion on ESP Status**

Educational policies in Iran have always been made under certain socio-political situation (see Riazi, 2003). The political nature of the educational programs have in most cases lead to conservative code based decisions in upper hand documents which do not usually go with the realities of the needs out there among the users. The influence of the political and ideological insights can be traced in the educational committees in lower level, where they work on the realization of the policies and decide on the forms of the instructional program and its implementation means and materials. This top-down process has resulted in a gap and confliction between the real needs of the users and policies and goals set for the program.

Under such a condition, ESP status like other areas of ELT has always been influenced by different socio-political factors. Perhaps that is why any success and failure in a program is directly attributed to the policies and policymakers. As the findings of the present research revealed, ESP program current status in the Iranian context does not appeal to the users' interest in terms of its means and materials' appropriateness. Seeking for the reason revealed that inappropriate policies stand at the center of the hampering factors. This is arguably because the program policies are not based on needs analysis (NA) (see Atai, 2002; Eslami Rasekh & Simin, 2011; Farhady et al., 2010; Khany & Tarlani, 2016; Mal Amiri, 2008). This vital missing ring in ESP pedagogy has created many challenges for the program and its practice. Drawing from the findings of the current research, it can be argued that unless the program is developed on the basis of NA, expecting it to address the needs and attain the users' support and satisfaction is a naive optimism.

### **Discussion on ESP Program Goal**

As it was maintained in the literature, ESP program in Iran aims to promote reading comprehension skill (RC). While having its value and importance, the reality of communicative means overwhelming dominance in different layers of socio-educational settings makes the

researchers to argue strongly that ESP without giving a place for other skills of the language will fail to stir the learners' motivation, interest and interaction which are all necessary for a successful teaching and learning program. This is supported by the current research findings through the related items analysis and interviews' data results all of which pointing at a serious demand for various skills in the practice.

Borrowing from Hyland (2002), we believe that ESP program and course should involve in teaching the skills appropriate to the purposes of particular academic and professional communities. This should be decided on the skill(s) most essential for each discipline. In other words, a single skill program policy for all fields will hardly end in any achievement and satisfaction. For this, there is a train of supportive justification in the literature. For example, Bhatia, Anthony and Noguchi (2011) argue that in business the need to adequate English proficiency to "forge relationships and finalize contracts" is of paramount importance (50th JACET Proceedings), but for a scientist and researcher, the priority is being able to read and write effectively. As it was revealed in the data analysis, the t-test results for the appropriateness of the program goal indicated a significant difference between the two strands of providers and users ( $M=4.32$ , and  $2.55$  respectively). This can be explained in two ways. First, the providers are not aware of the user's needs and expectations. Second, they are not prepared for taking the right decision and action for many reasons among them the financial restrictions. Whatever the reason might be, it should be maintained that the current demand among the users does not go with the pre-set goal of the program with RC as its main target.

### **Discussion on ESP Methodology**

The specialty of methodology in ESP lies in the nature of the relationship among the context, content and the users. As Flowerdew (1990) asserted, the highly practical nature of ESP teaching tends to extend its (S) to all part of the pedagogy including its teaching methods. As a major subset in the ELT pedagogy, ESP teaching has experienced many different approaches and methods all originating from the need for its effective teaching. The wide variety of ESP teaching courses and activities around the world and the inaccessibility to all of them in Johns' (1990) view makes it almost impossible to make a clear cut decision and discussion about the global trend and methodology of ESP teaching. Being affected

by the policies, goals, contextual restrictions, teachers' knowledge, experiences and teaching strategies, methodology in ESP seems to suffer from serious indifference. To Widdowson (1983), "methodology has generally been neglected in ESP" (p. 87). This is quite visible in the Iranian ESP teaching context. Lack of principled methodology supported by sound theories has changed ESP program teaching in Iran to a "no man's land" practice (Eslami Rasekh & Simin, 2011). The results of the research findings, specially the reports from classroom observations confirming this, indicate that the dominant and forcedly preferred methodology of ESP teaching in Iran is teacher-fronted, with its own features, merits and demerits. The justification for the approach mostly comes from contextual realities. Influenced by many factors, such as top down policies and rigid syllabus, management and financial considerations, learners' linguistic proficiency and teachers' professional background and preference, ESP methodology in Iran seems to be entrapped amid various musts and musts not. Among the most influential factors impeding the use of a straightforward and appropriate methodology in Iran is "the resistance against adopting pedagogical innovation in the EFL context" (Atai & Dashtestani, 2013, p. 36), and the "crowded heterogeneous ESP classes" (R. Pishghadam, personal interview, June 17, 2013). Stuffed classes with varying degrees of the attendants' language and content field proficiency make the adaptation of a principled methodology almost impossible. In such situations inevitably, the teachers' priority is to cover the syllabus plan and manage the classes.

### **Discussion on ESP Textbooks**

Textbooks are the most commonly used tools in teaching language classes. The importance and effectiveness of this integrated part of any teaching and learning situation has been acknowledged and maintained by many researchers. To Hutchinson and Torres (1994), ESP textbook can be an agent of change. Cunningsworth (1995) counted seven roles for ESP textbooks, while O'Neill (1982) has maintained that well-designed course books allow for innovation by teachers and empower the learners to initiate interaction in the classes. He believes that textbooks can predict the learning process of the learners by determining "where to start, how to proceed and where to end" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 104).

With all its overwhelming importance, role and share in academic and vocational education, a bothering fact about ESP textbooks in Swales' (1980) view is that they are not welcomed by most of the users for various reasons. For instance and despite its long standing history, ESP textbooks in Iran were not valued as appropriate to be used in ESP classes mostly for their structural deficiencies. Interview data analysis and classroom observation revealed that there is little if no tendency in using the current ESP textbooks among the users. Unappealing physical features, mono-skill promotion and spiritless content delivery format of the books are only some of the major factors discouraging the users.

By and large, we may discuss that the current dissatisfaction in the program has its share from the lack of proper textbook indeed, but as maintained by Nunan (1991), dissatisfaction towards an ESP program and components often has its root in the lack of proper policies and systematic observation for reforming it in time to address and meet the client's needs and expectations.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The necessity of a dynamic program evaluation stems from its striving for promotion and maturity. Promotion needs means and mechanism, and maturity in turn requires appropriate breeding actions decided on by the policymakers and realized by the experts on the basis of the educational realities and present day needs of the users. The primary step towards a successful program promotion is examining and evaluating it for its current status, quality and potential in meeting the users' needs and expectations.

Based on the results of the current survey, the researchers are able to conclude that ESP program in Iran while suffering from lack of needs analysis (NA), starves for an overall evaluation with an active participation of all those involved in its production and consumption. The research findings also reveal that the program mono-skill promotion policies and goal is seriously in need of reorientation, its methodology waits for a locally defined and principled standard with practical strategy, and the trend of textbook development should be redirected in the line of addressing the users' lacks and expectations through using computer technology and cyberspace. Drawn from the findings of the research, we may argue that the current mono-goal program and its mono-skill sources for all courses and majors, is fatally ineffective. To

mend this and return it to the right track, each major should be given its required means and materials in theory and practice. Deviated from this, the current ESP program in Iran has failed to satisfy its stakeholders, particularly on the part of the users' strand. This dissatisfaction which has ended in indefensible achievement of the program is concluded to have its varying shares from the inappropriateness of the program policies and course structure, its traditional teaching objectives, ineffective teaching method and old-fashioned materials. All these may well be attributed to the big suffrage of Iranian ESP program rising from the lack of systematic evaluation and observation policy.

For the implication of the current research findings suffice to say that in addition to raising the stakeholders' awareness about the falls and flaws of the program which has a decisive value for the program improvement and promotion, the findings of the current study while shedding light on different parts of the program, can particularly provide the policymakers and concerned authorities with insights on new demands and needs prevalent among the users and hand them a firm basis for their right decision and action on the program parts and parcels.

### **Bio-data**

**Mahnaz Mostafaei Alaei** is presently the Head of English Language and Literature Department at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. She holds a Ph.D. degree in TEFL and has been teaching various courses in applied linguistics since 1990. Her research interests focus on materials development, teacher education programs, psycholinguistics, and instructional issues in multicultural contexts.

**Ali Reza Ershadi** is a Ph.D. candidate of TEFL at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. He is interested in ELT/ESP in none-English speaking contexts as well as translation technology and its effect on English language and ESP future.

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