

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS ANALYSIS OF NURSING STUDENTS AND NURSING PRACTITIONERS IN URMIA

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### ABSTRACT:

English has become the worldwide lingua franca of science. Large groups of people have become aware of the importance of learning English language for their profession. This study investigated the English language needs of nursing students and nursing practitioners in the workplace. The participants consisted of 144 nursing practitioners working in three different hospitals in Urmia, Iran and 91 nursing students majoring in Urmia Medical Sciences University. The study was conducted via a questionnaire including two sections with 12 questions in order to answer the research questions. The results of the study revealed that most nurses agree on the importance of English in the workplace, but it is used slightly in their career. The findings also indicated that reading and writing skills were perceived as more important than speaking and listening. The findings revealed that participants need English to conduct activities which require general English knowledge more than ESP. Finally, this study clearly showed that nursing students need English more than nursing practitioners. Based upon the findings of the research, English should have further use in nursing field in order to empower them in their career.

*Key words: ESP, EAP, needs analysis, general English, occupational needs, nursing practitioners*

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## 1. Introduction:

English has become the world's major language for the communication of research findings (Swales, 1995) and the international language of research and academic publication is English. Anyone who wishes to have ready access to these academic materials needs to know the language. The predominance of English as the lingua franca in educational settings and its increasing importance in science and technology is continuing (Cook, 2003). In the field of English teaching (ELT), this growth has brought attention to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which has been considered as the most "innovative and vibrant area of language teaching" (Hyland, 2000).

ESP searches for "what learners need to do with English, which of the skills they need to master and how well, and what genres they need to learn" (Dudley-Evans, 2001). To teach learners successfully, the answers of these basic questions should be investigated and focus should be put on the reasons why learners want to learn the language in the curriculum development process (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Only if they are identified should it be possible to design programs responsive to learners' needs (Richards, 1990), but in Iran most of instructors select different materials from available textbooks which have been provided for a large group of students in different contexts with different needs, to teach English for medical purposes.

English and Arabic are two foreign languages taught in public schools in Iran. Students take English language courses for seven years, from first grade in junior high school until they graduate from high school. English teaching program in Iran continues in universities by some course in general English (EGP) and English for specific purpose (ESP). Nursing students take a three-credit general English course and a three-credit ESP course during their education in university.

When the curriculum content, materials, and teaching approaches match learners' perceived and actual needs, learners' motivation and success are enhanced, therefore learning is promoted (Weddle & Van Duzer, 1997). In contrast, if student's needs are not taken into consideration in the process of curriculum development, this may cause gaps between actual and desired performance of students and this in turn results in the demotivation of the students towards the course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). These evidences clearly show the importance of needs analysis.

The purpose of ESP programs is to provide students with an English language knowledge that enables them to join the workforce. One of the greatest contributions of ESP programs to language teaching has been its emphasis on careful and extensive needs analysis for course design (Johns, 1991).

Needs analysis can be simply defined as the sum of processes in collecting information about the learners' current and future language needs in order to give priority to the ones, which are thought to be more responsive to the immediate needs of learners in the curriculum development process (Richards, 1990; Tarone & Yule, 1989).

The data gathered by means of needs analysis can be used for different purposes. These data not only help to develop new curricula but also to review and evaluate existing curricula (Richards, 1990).

Considering the fact that English has become the world dominant language of medicine and technology (Crystal, 2003), the English language has therefore become crucial to health professionals. To date, there has been no investigation of English needs of Iranian nursing students and nursing practitioners at the same time. Therefore, teaching English for nursing purposes seems to be far from satisfactory level.

## **2. Review of the related literature:**

ESP movement is categorized by Dudley-Evans and St. John (2002) in to four main stages, (a) register analysis, (b) rhetorical and discourse analysis, (c) analysis of study skills, and (d) analysis of learning needs, therefore there is a shift from Chomskyan register analysis to needs analysis. Linguistic structures and lexicons as the main elements to design ESP courses in register analysis were replaced by analysis of language situations in actual language use to design ESP course in needs analysis trend

According to Munby (1978) instructional materials are selected based on a systematic learners' needs by analyzing the following:

1- Reasons for learning

- 2- Place and time of anticipated target use
- 3- Others with whom the user will interact
- 4- Content areas (activities involved)
- 5- Skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, etc)
- 6- Level of proficiency required

Any needs analysis studies are conducted through three stages (Brown, 1995; Schutz & Derwing, 1981).

1. Preparation stage.
2. Information gathering stage.
3. Information using stage

The target situation analysis and the present situation analysis are the main two approaches in needs analysis (Jordan, 19947). The former one started with Munby's (1978) model of the communication needs process. This model analyzes the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in various job related activities in terms of receptive and productive skills leading to generate a general profile of the language situation to be used as an input in course design (Jordan, 1997).

The present situation analysis proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). In this approach the information to define needs is drawn from a wide range of sources: the students, the teaching establishment, and the place of work (Jordan, 1997). The aim is to seek information about levels of ability, available curricula, teaching methods, resources, views on language teaching and learning, surrounding society, and cultural elements (Jordan, 1997).

Considering the size of the sample population and the available resources this study followed the framework of target situation analysis.

## 2.1 Research studies on needs analysis

To date many needs analysis have been carried out in different parts of the worlds along with Iran, in the following part some of Iranian surveys are introduced.

Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) developed a study, this study was to investigate the Foreign language learning needs of undergraduate medical science students, studding in faculty of nursing and midwifery in Iran.681undergraduate students as well as 168 subject specific instructors and 6 EFL instructors participated in the study, interview and questionnaire were used to collect data. Outcome of the study revealed that, most of the students perceived that they need to master the foreign language before they attended their specialized courses, because they need to use Persian and English sources to study their subject. Over one- third of students expressed their dissatisfaction with the number of students in each class, with the teaching methodology used, the method of evaluation, and content of the textbooks, and the amount of foreign culture taught in the class. Equally, the subject specific instructors' responses revealed total dissatisfaction with their student's language skills. They inferred that the course doesn't fully prepare the students to embark on their studies, because it doesn't sufficiently take in to account their:

1. Learning needs
2. Present level of foreign language proficiency
3. Objectives of the course
4. Recourses available in terms of staff, material, equipment finance, and time constrained.
5. The skill of teachers and the teacher's knowledge of the specific area.

Nikui Nezhad (2007) carried out an English needs analysis at Kashan University among three different majors, electrical engineering, Persian Literature, and Chemistry. Through questionnaire in ESP classes to find academic needs of learners in terms of skills and sub-skills. And the attitude of learners towards their class materials and ESP courses were analyzed

statistically. The study concluded with some pedagogical implications to improve and develop ESP course material and methodology.

Eslami (2010) conducted a study in Texas A&M University. Her study was to describe the perception that EAP students and instructors had of the problematic areas in EAP programs. A total of 693 EAP students majoring in different academic fields and 37 instructors participated in the study. Survey information included respondents' perception the importance of problematic areas in EAP programs. The results showed discrepancy between the perceptions of EAP learners in different academic fields and between learners and instructors.

Alavi and Esfahani (2005) carried out a needs analysis survey at Tehran university. The prime purpose of this study was to examine English language needs of studying Physical Education from the perspectives of five groups of language users, BA, MA and PhD students of Physical Education, Physical Education instructors, and officials in Physical Education federations, to establish a common ground for materials development. This study also intended to investigate the hierarchy of English language skills in terms of their importance in studying this discipline. To achieve these objectives, the participants (N=256) were asked to complete a unique and valid questionnaire that was developed for the purpose of this study. The result of this investigation showed that there is a significant difference among the views of participants on reading, writing, speaking, listening, translation, and study skills preferences. Having valued the language skills differently, the participants, however, had a common agreement on the rank of English language skills in terms of the needs in studying Physical Education, and expressed their highest agreement on the need for reading and speaking demands of the field. Finally, this study found that the official language program developed for the students of Physical Education does not meet the required needs of the language users in this discipline. This study suggests national curriculum developers to take into account the common language needs of the language users in Physical Education in the design and development of ESP courses.

In order to contribute data to the ESP context in nursing education, this study investigated the English language needs of nursing students during their education, and nursing practitioners in the work place.

In order to achieve the goals of this study, the following questions were to be answered:

Q1: What are the learning needs of nursing students at under graduate programs?

Q2: What are the target and occupational needs of nursing graduates in hospitals?

Q3: Is there any relationship between perceived needs of nursing practitioners and nursing students?

### **3. Method:**

#### 3.1 Design of the study

This study was primarily descriptive in nature and the frame work of needs analysis has been used to conduct the study. It tried to investigate the academic and professional English needs of nursing students and nursing practitioners.

#### 3.2 Participants

The study was conducted at Urmia Medical Sciences University, since the goal of this study was to provide data for the English language needs of nursing students and nursing practitioners, the sample population focused on nursing students majoring in Urmia Medical Sciences University and nursing practitioners working in Urmia hospitals, who graduated from different universities in Iran. Therefore the sample population was selected from three hospitals in Urmia. The participants consisted of 91 nursing students and 144 nursing graduates working in Emam Khomeyni Hospital, Seyyedoshohada Hospital, and Talegani Hospital in Urmia.

#### 3.3 Instrument

Needs analysis can be conducted by variety of procedures. According to Brown (1995) these procedures are classified as follows: gathering existing information, tests, observations, interviews, meetings, and questionnaires.

Since questionnaires are more practical and easy to use, they are widely used in the process of data collection in needs analysis studies. The instrument of the current survey was a questionnaire that explored the opinions of nursing students and nursing practitioners in Urmia. It was an existing questionnaire which had been used in a similar study in 2005 by Alharby. In order to ensure that the questionnaire did not have any parts causing misunderstandings or ambiguities, it was given to 3 English teaching professionals and 4 nursing professionals along with 15 nursing students and graduates to check the face and content validity of the instrument.

The questionnaire contains two sections the first section includes demographical questions that provide background information about the participants profile. The seven questions in this section are mainly based on the information concerning the participants' current title, their university and their graduation date along with professional experience, age, gender and qualification. The second section in the questionnaire consists of five questions that some of the items were subdivided into different sub questions. All the data gathered via the questionnaire were computed and analyzed by using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 18), to find out percentages and frequencies.

#### **4. Results and analysis:**

##### 4.1 English use

Participants were asked about percentage of using English while educating in university and working in work place. Data gathered from this question reveals that, the participants' perceptions are varied. The percentage of the majority of respondents was in the range of 10% to 50%.

On the other hand the use of English language was also reflected in the respondents' nursing training Courses. They were asked, were they introduced any English resource when they receive medical training courses working at the hospital. This question required a yes/no answer, and it was answered only by graduates group, as students do not get any training program while working. According to the following figure the answer of 120 respondents out of 140 participants was "no".



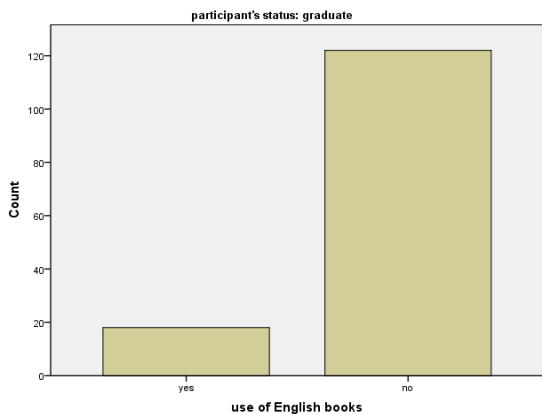


Figure.1 Using English in nursing training

In other words only in 12.5% of courses at work place, English books are introduced, the majority of resources are in Persian.

#### 4.2 English usefulness

Participants were asked about English usefulness in their academic and professional lives. This part sought information about the usefulness of English as a tool to conduct the job. Regarding students response to this question, 60 students or (65.9%) reported that English is “very useful” to perform the job effectively. 23 students or (25.3%) reported that English is “useful” and 7 students or (7.7%) reported that English is “of little use”. Only one student or (1.1%) reported that English is “not useful” to perform the job effectively. On the other hand In graduate’s response to this question, 72 nurses or (50.0%) reported that English is “very useful” to perform the job effectively. 57 nurses or (39.6%) reported that English is “useful” and 10 nurses or (6.9%) reported that English is “of little use”. 3 nurses or (2.1%) reported that English is “not useful” to perform the job effectively these result are illustrated in figure 2. According to the obtained result for this question ( $\chi^2=85$ , 2df,  $p=0.05$ ), it can be concluded that the two groups have different view points towards English and its usefulness.

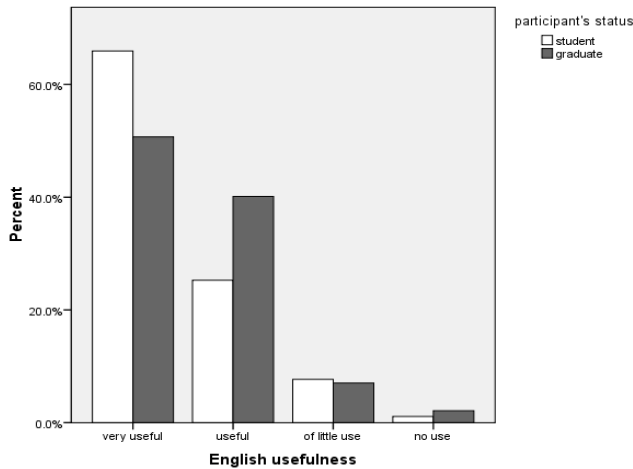


Figure.2 English usefulness

#### 4.3 The influence of English in nursing tasks

The influential level of English in various job related activities was the next section. The participants were introduced ten activities, and they were asked to rank influential level of English in each activity in a Likert scales, a scale from 1 to 4 was used, with 1 representing the most influential and 4 representing the least influential. The results were summarized in the following table.

Table.1 The influential level of English in different tasks

		very	to some extent	a little	not	P value
Caring patients	S	18.7	24.2	31.9	20.9	>0.05
	P	15.3	27.1	23.6	29.9	
Phone conversation	S	28.6	30.8	23.1	15.4	0.05
	P	16.7	24.3	28.5	25.7	
Email & Faxes	S	79.1	15.4	2.2	1.1	0.00

	P	51.4	25.7	9.0	8.3	
Forms & Application	S	33.0	35.2	16.5	7.7	>0.05
	P	22.2	36.1	14.6	13.9	
Device instruction	S	71.5	15.3	1.4	6.7	>0.05
	P	74.7	9.9	-	1.1	
Communication with colleagues	S	31.9	30.8	23.1	12.1	0.00
	P	16.0	29.2	19.4	31.3	
Letter writing	S	36.3	34.1	19.8	7.7	0.00
	P	20.8	25.7	18.8	30.6	
Doing research	S	9.0	4.4	2.2	2.2	0.04
	P	75.7	13.9	2.8	4.2	
Using computers	S	87.9	5.5	2.2	1.1	>0.05
	P	79.2	18.1	-	-	
Presentation	S	28.7	4.4	2.2	2.2	>0.05
	P	28.5	13.9	1.4	-	

S=Students P=Practitioners

#### 4.4 Skill importance

Participants were asked to rank the importance of four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), therefore a scale from 1 to 4 was used, with 1 representing the most important and 4 representing the least important. This item gives an overall estimate of the emphasized skill at the work place and in the college. The results of this question have been summarized in the following table.

Table.2 skill importance

		very	to some extent	a little	not	P value
Speaking	S	34.1	27.5	13.2	23.1	>0.05
	P	27.1	22.9	16.0	28.5	
Listening	S	28.6	33.0	29.7	6.6	0.02
	P	26.4	27.1	19.4	20.1	
Reading	S	68.1	16.5	8.8	5.5	>0.05
	P	61.1	22.9	5.6	6.3	
Writing	S	49.5	20	14.13	13.2	>0.05
	P	47.9	24.3	11.8	11.1	

S=Students P=Practitioners

According to the above tables, it can be observed that there is an agreement between both nursing students and graduates in the following areas: caring patients, application forms, device instructions, using computers, presentations, speaking skill importance, reading skill importance, writing skill importance.

Consequently, the two groups have different view points towards English in these areas: English usefulness, phone conversations, emails and faxes, communication with colleagues, letter writing, doing research and listening skill importance.

## 5. Discussion:

### 5.1 Students' needs

Based on this research question, students were asked about their percentage of using English while educating in university. Data gathered from this question revealed that, the participants' perceptions are varied. The percentage of the majority of respondents was in the range of 10% to

50%. In general considering the fact that English has become the science language (Cook, 2003) it is obvious that it plays an important role in people educational lives, these results indicate that, although nursing students believe that they need English to carry out their educational life sufficiently, it isn't used in their field adequately.

Then they were asked about the English usefulness in their academic life. Most respondents, (69.9%) reported that English is very useful and 25.3% reported it as useful, since English has become the world's major language for the communication of research findings, as Swales (1995) notes, and the international language of research and academic publication is English, and on the other hand English has become the world dominant language of medicine and technology (Crystal, 2003). It seems absolutely obvious that the English language plays an important role and useful in their academic life.

In the next part of the questionnaire students were asked to rate the influential level of English knowledge to perform different activity in the work place, including Caring patients, Communication with colleagues, Phone conversations, letter writing, emails and faxes, doing research, forms and applications, using computers, device instructions, and presentations . The result of this research indicated that, English knowledge is really influential in participants' academic life, according to the result English plays very important role while doing research, using computers, presentation, and in email and faxes.

On the other hand there is a general agreement between students that, it is not so influential while caring patients and in phone conversation. They can be arranged in the following way:

1. Doing Research
2. Using computers
3. Presentation
4. Email and faxes
5. Device instruction
6. Letter Writing
7. Application Forms
8. Communicating with colleagues
9. Phone Conversation
10. Caring Patients

English is the international language of research and academic publication, therefore these results looks logical. On the other hand considering the fact that, Urmia is a city where there are

few, even no, English speaking patients or coworkers it seems not important while caring patients or communicating with colleagues to have a high knowledge of English.

Mazdayasna et al (2008) claimed students greatly need to increase their general proficiency in English. It can be concluded from this result that more demanding nursing related tasks such as doing research or using computers require general English conversely less demanding tasks such as caring patients require medical English knowledge, so the result is supported by mentioned study.

Students were asked to rate four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) according to their importance in their college. So far, the data analyzing revealed that most participants believe, reading is the most important skill, in contrast listening is the least important one in nursing education, and writing is more important than speaking. The findings of this part are in agreement with these facts, that In an academic context, reading is an essential skill for all students, and university students are required to research, analyze and synthesize information in academic texts in their fields as a regular part of their courses, in addition reading which is claimed to be the main purpose of foreign language teaching in Iran (Rahmani, 2009; Bahmani, 2009) is a very important skill in learning a foreign language.

There have been a number of studies which have investigated the importance of skills in different fields (Alavi et al, 2005; Mazdayasna et al, 2008; Ounis, 2005; Ostler, 1980) all these studies demonstrated a common agreement on the importance of reading. Other skills have been ranked differently in each study, for instance in Mazdayasna et al research, reading is followed by listening, speaking and writing, whereas in the present study writing is perceived to be more important than listening and speaking.

## 5.2 Nursing practitioners' needs

Along with students, nursing graduates were asked about their percentage of using English in work place. The participants' perceptions were varied, and the percentage of the majority of respondents was in the range of 10% to 50%. On the other hand The use of English language is also reflected in the respondents' nursing training courses, surprisingly In this highly specialized job, only in 12.5% of courses at work place, English books are introduced, the majority of

resources are in Persian. These results indicate that, although nursing practitioners believe that they need English to carry out their career sufficiently as demonstrated in this study, it isn't used in their work place adequately.

The English usefulness in their work place was the next question, they were asked about. Half of respondents, (50%) reported that English is very useful, and (39.6%) think it is useful. Only 3 respondents think it is not useful. In the other words, they think that they need English to carry out their career sufficiently.

The purpose of ESP courses is to provide learners with the competence to cope with a specified set of tasks in order to achieve occupational or academic targets (Jordan , 1997), Therefore participants were asked to rate the influential level of English knowledge to perform different tasks in the work place, including caring patients, communication with colleagues, phone conversations, letter writing, emails and faxes, doing research, forms and applications, using computers, device instructions, and presentations .The result of this question indicated that, English knowledge is really influential in participants professional life, according to the result the activities can be arranged by their importance in the following way:

1. Using computers
2. Presentation
3. Doing Research
4. Device instruction
5. Email and Faxes
6. Application Forms
7. Phone Conversation
8. Caring Patients
9. Letter Writing
10. Communicating with colleagues

As Dudley-Evans (2001) stated ESP searches for “what learners need to do with English, which of the skills they need to master and how well, and what genres they need to learn”, and to teach learners successfully, the answers of these basic questions should be investigated and focus should be put on the reasons why learners want to learn the language in the curriculum development process (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Only if they are identified should it be possible to design programs responsive to learners' needs (Richards, 1990). It can be seen that

most of nurses need English knowledge to use computers, presentation and doing research which are followed by other tasks mentioned in the previous part.

As it was mentioned in the previous research question nursing practitioners need general English even more than medical English. The finding of this part is in agreement with the finding of other researches that claimed, general English is more important for medical practitioners, (Mazdayasna et al, 2008; Abidin, 1992), they claimed ESP students in earlier stages need to focus on the basic four skills rather than specific one.

four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) were to be rated according to their importance in work place, So far, the data analyzing demonstrated that reading and writing are the most important language skills for nurses to perform their job. Conversely, listening, and speaking are not considered as an important language skill for respondents, since they seldom have to listen or speak in English. Consequently the finding of this question is in the harmony with previous one, since each activity, which considered to be influenced by English knowledge, requires reading or writing skill. In the previous section it was mentioned that there are many researches which obtained same result (Abidin , 1992; Alavi et al, 2005; Mazdayasna et al, 2008; Ounis, 2005; Ostler, 1980) on the other hand there are some other studies which appear to contradict this study in a way they ranked the importance of skills. (Lambardo, 1988)

### 5.3 The needs of nursing practitioners and nursing students

The relationship between two groups is established by finding Chi-square. It was obtained for all related items. When the p-value or the significance level for the chi-square test is less than 0.05, this means the existence of a statistical association between the two variables.

According to the result, it can be observed that both nursing students and graduates statistically are in agreement in the following areas: caring patients, application forms, device instructions, using computers, presentations, speaking skill importance, reading skill importance, writing skill importance.

On the other hand, the two groups have different view points towards English in these areas: English usefulness, phone conversations, emails and faxes, communication with colleagues, letter writing, doing research and listening skills.



Both students and graduates believe English is useful in nursing field, but according to the P-value obtained from results (0.05), there is a little difference between their perceptions. The students group thinks English is a little more useful than graduates group to perform nursing job.

As it can be seen using computer, doing research and presentation, for both groups are more demanding areas and these demanding areas require general English knowledge more than ESP, consequently it can be concluded that participants need general English even more than medical English. Caring patients, communicating with colleagues and letter writings are in the final ranks.

The investigation of both students and graduates questionnaire results demonstrated that phone conversation, email and faxes, communicating with colleagues, letter writing, doing research, using computers, and presentation for students are more demanding than graduates.

The respondents were asked to give their opinions on the four basic language skills by stating their importance for the academic and professional life. The results showed that the respondents have agreed upon the importance of all the language skills in general, it can be concluded that reading and writing outweigh the two other skills. 68.1 % of the students and 61.1% of graduates indicated that reading is very important skill and the p-Value shows that there isn't any significance difference between their opinions.

The results obtained for writing revealed that writing is the second important skill affecting student and graduates success in university or in work place, with a percentage of 49.5% for students and 47.9% for graduates, there isn't any significance difference between two opinions.

The opinions of participants regarding the importance of listening and speaking are very close, but the percentage of the speaking is a little more than listening, it can be said that speaking is more important than listening for nursing groups. Concerning Speaking, both groups have similar opinion, but for listening considering the p-value (0.02), it is more important for students than graduates.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the students need English more than graduates. It also shows that working in the work place not only doesn't increase their need for English, but also lessen their needs and demotivate them to learn English. When the curriculum content, materials, and

teaching approaches match learners' perceived and actual needs, learners' motivation and success are enhanced. Therefore, learning is promoted (Weddle & Van Duzer, 1997).

## **6. Conclusion:**

When the curriculum content, materials, and teaching approaches match learners' perceived and actual needs, learners' motivation and success are enhanced. Therefore, learning is promoted (Weddle & Van Duzer, 1997). These evidences clearly show the importance and implication of any needs analysis study.

This survey revealed important information about the most important English needs of nursing group and as Christison and Krahnke (1986) believe " curriculum design in language programs for academic preparation should be based on empirical data that reflect what is really useful to students and not only on the intuitions and experience of the teaching personnel". At the same time, Atai (2000) believes in the importance of conducting a detailed and systematic needs analysis investigation. Concerning the fact that academic needs of students generally vary across time and instructional contexts, the requirement of an ongoing needs assessment for any educational institution becomes crucial in order to assess the effectiveness of the system (Atai, 2000). The results provided by this study can be used as an input to select proper materials for nursing students, in other words ESP practitioners can benefit from this study to design ESP programs for nursing students or even for medical students. The findings of this study can be compared and contrasted with other investigations to obtain a comprehensive picture of ESP in Iran especially in medical field. The present study provides an understanding of how English is used in workplace settings as a foreign language.

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