

Investigating the Iranian EAP Stakeholders' Ideas Apropos of Applying the Internet in EAP Curriculum

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Abstract—English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become one of the most important fields in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iran. Thus, researchers, syllabus designers, and EAP instructors are always in search of new materials and tools to enhance learning. The Internet is regarded as one of the most useful and practical tools which can be used in EAP pedagogical settings. As a result, becoming aware of the EAP stakeholders' attitudes toward using the Internet is necessary. Therefore, university students from Chabahar Maritime University and EAP lecturers were given questionnaires. The analyzed data revealed that most EAP instructors and students have a positive attitude toward using the Internet as one of the main sources of EAP courses. However, there were few cases that a relatively significant number of participants had a negative attitude toward internet resources. These cases are discussed in detail and some solutions are suggested.

Keywords—EAP, Internet, Attitudes, EAP Lecturers

1 Introduction

In today's world, the Internet and computer have a key role in the process of teaching and learning a second and foreign language. Therefore, making changes in the structure of educational system and moving towards Internet-based educational activities seems to be necessary [1]. Nowadays, employment of technology and the Internet for educational goals has drawn a lot of attention; furthermore, it is believed that using them can be helpful for learning and teaching [2]. As a result, a lot of efforts have been made to improve the quality of educational syllabi and to integrate Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into pedagogical programs [3].

Khoshshima and Khosravani [4] proposed that “as computers became widespread everywhere, the researchers started to work on different aspects of using them in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages” (p.172). In recent years, a large body of research has been conducted to investigate the effect of technology, CALL, and the Internet on education ([5]; [6]; [7]; [8]; [9]; [10]). Besides, numerous studies have been done to probe the stakeholders' attitudes toward applying CALL in the process of learning and teaching EFL/ESL ([11]; [12]; [13]; [14]).

Stepp-Greany [15] conducted a research on using technology in Spanish classes. She enumerates the advantages of technology-based methods in the educational systems as follows:

“increased motivation, improvement of self-concept and mastery of basic skills, more student-centered learning, and engagement in the learning process, and more active processing, resulting in higher-order thinking skills and better recall” (p. 165).

Fidaoui, Bahous, and Bacha [16] worked on learners' and teachers' attitudes toward using CALL in Lebanese elementary writing classes. The result of the study reported that they both have positive attitudes; as a result, the researchers proposed some tasks on using CALL while dealing with writing skill. Sanchez, Marcos, Gonzales, and GuanLin [17] discovered that teachers have a significantly positive idea on using CALL in educational environment but its application in class depends on the teachers' creative style of teaching. Furthermore, a research had been done in Turkey by Mathews-Aydinli and Elaziz [18] to investigate the attitudes apropos of using interactive whiteboards. It is revealed that learners and teachers do agree on using it in ESL/SFL classrooms and appreciate its usefulness. Oh and French [19] held the view that teachers gained more skills and more self-esteem with technologies which upgraded their ideas toward using technology positively.

English for Specific Purposes (EAP) outlined as “a language course or program of instruction in which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the academic needs of a particular group of learners” [20]. In other words, needs analysis plays a vital role in EAP [21]. As in EAP courses, university students are expected to read technical texts and learn technical terms of their field of study, CALL and the Internet can be a suitable and beneficial pedagogical source and enhance the EAP curricula. Atai and Nazari [22] believed that the Internet can be a useful material to enhance the EAP reading skill. Since in Iran EAP courses are text-based and examination-centered the Internet is not assumed as an educational tool [23]. Becoming aware of the EAP stakeholders' attitudes apropos of the Internet will enable the syllabus designers, EAP instructors, and learners to incorporate the Internet in their pedagogical process in order to enhance learning. Therefore, this study is applied to investigate the EAP stakeholders' insights toward using the Internet in EAP courses.

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants who entered this study consisted of 19 EAP lecturers and 121 university students. The EAP lecturers were MA or PhD holders teaching EAP courses at Chabahar Maritime University (CMU) and Birjand University, Iran with a teaching experience of one year to more than twenty years. These participants were between 25 and 50 years old. The university students were studying in management field of study and the age range of 19 to 26 years. Because of the practical facts, the students cannot be chosen according to random sampling.

2.2 Instruments

In this study, two questionnaires (one for students and the other for EAP lecturers) adopted from Kia Heirati and Ahmadi Alashti [24] were applied. They checked the reliability and validity of the questionnaires via conducting a pilot study and then the reliability was calculated with Cronbach's Alpha, which presented that both questionnaires have got high reliability.

2.3 Procedure

Before distributing the questionnaires, the aim of the study was explained to participants. The privacy of the students and EAP lecturers was reserved by not mentioning their names in questionnaires. Then the questionnaires were collected and the data were analyzed.

3 Results

Results related to the general ideas about using the Internet for EAP courses have been given in Table 1. These figures show that the majority of participants agreed or strongly agrees with statements. However, there are several cases that the percentage of disagreement is significant.

Table 1. General ideas about using Internet for EAP courses

Item	Participants	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree(%)
Internet applications can play an important role in the classroom.	<i>Students</i>	0	2.2	24	73.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	2	6	28.7	63.3
Using internet applications is an appropriate activity for some students.	<i>Students</i>	1.7	5.4	79.4	13.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	3.7	11.3	78.9	6.1
Internet applications can be used in the classroom to make learning more interesting for all students.	<i>Students</i>	0	2	63.5	34.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	4	24	53.4	18.6
Information obtained from ESL/EFL websites is useful.	<i>Students</i>	0	7.8	71.2	21
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	11.1	19.9	69	0
In my belief, it is easy to find teaching ESL/EFL materials on the Web.	<i>Students</i>	4	8.7	75.5	11.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	3.7	10	84.1	2.2
In my belief, ESL/ EFL Websites are useful for teaching (learning) English.	<i>Students</i>	0	1.7	56	42.3
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	7	11	50.4	31.6
The Internet has become an indispensable tool in my teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	1	5.5	68.9	24.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	2.2	8	71.2	18.6
Using the Internet could speed up my teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	0	2.3	9	88.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	11	8.7	48	32.3
It is easy to locate useful information on the Internet.	<i>Students</i>	3.6	6.6	66	23.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	18.8	29.1	45	7.1

Time spent on the Internet is worthwhile for teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	5.8	16.9	53.7	23.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	17.5	24.9	48.7	8.9
The Internet is always my first choice for research for finding new methods.	<i>Students</i>	1	4.3	45.9	48.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	11.7	33.9	51.4	3
Internet can improve education.	<i>Students</i>	0.8	2.3	45	51.9
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	4.5	11	38.9	45.6
Internet can improve the quality of students' learning.	<i>Students</i>	0	9.4	34	56.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	8.9	21.1	43.5	26.5
Using Internet makes the subject matter more interesting.	<i>Students</i>	0	1	38.3	60.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	1	4.5	70.5	25
Internet is useful for language teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	0.8	5.6	38.3	54.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	4.5	11.1	45.6	38.8
Internet has an important place in the classrooms.	<i>Students</i>	7.8	19	56.2	17
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	33.6	12.3	44.3	9.8
Internet can be an effective teaching way for teachers (learning way for students).	<i>Students</i>	0	14.5	38.9	46.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	11.8	23	51.1	14.1
Using Internet for teaching (learning) is a priority for me.	<i>Students</i>	5.6	15.1	27.6	51.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	21	18.6	23	37.4
I find using the Internet as an integral part of the educational process.	<i>Students</i>	0.8	7.7	43	48.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	4.5	21	62.7	11.8
Using internet applications is an appropriate activity for some students.	<i>Students</i>	0	12.3	52.4	35.3
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	5.2	10.5	54.6	29.7

Results related to practical ideas about using the Internet in EAP courses have been given in Table 2 that in most cases, participants agree or strongly agree with the statements. In the next section, it will be tried to find some explanation for those items that percentages of disagreement are significant.

Table 2. Practical ideas about using Internet in EAP courses

Item	Participants	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Internet applications can be used in the class to enhance the teaching of important skills.	<i>Students</i>	5.6	11.1	58.8	24.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	17.1	21.4	38.5	23
Internet applications are best used for drill, remediation or reinforcement of facts.	<i>Students</i>	0	5.1	61.4	33.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	7.8	18.9	49.9	23.4
Internet applications are best used in the classroom to promote students' analytical, creative and other high order thinking skills.	<i>Students</i>	0	7.8	48.5	43.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	1.1	11.8	37.3	49.8
Internet applications can be used in the classroom to provide alternative learning approaches for students who are having difficulty in learning.	<i>Students</i>	4.9	19.2	50.9	25
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	18.9	24.1	43.8	13.2

Through my teaching (learning) experiences, I was motivated to teach (learn) English by the use of the Internet.	<i>Students</i>	4.5	14.4	42	39.1
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	3.6	19.8	51.1	25.5
Through my teaching (learning) experiences, I improved my methods through the use of the Internet.	<i>Students</i>	7.8	13.4	56.5	22.3
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	12.4	21.1	49.5	17
Through my teaching (learning) experiences, Internet resources provided me more opportunities for good teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	0	8.5	50.5	41
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	9.8	11.1	44.3	34.8
Through my teaching (learning) experiences, I improved my communication skills and teaching (learning) methods by e-mailing or chatting with native speakers of English on-line.	<i>Students</i>	18.3	30.1	30.4	21.2
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	21.1	26.4	33.5	19
Through my teaching (learning) experiences, I was more attentive in Internet-assisted English language teaching classes.	<i>Students</i>	5.4	14	47.9	32.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	7.9	19.3	43.7	29.1
In my belief, the Internet can provide non-native speakers of English with a rich learning environment.	<i>Students</i>	11.7	21.5	44.5	22.3
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	19.4	30.4	36.7	13.5
The Internet is a useful tool for helping me achieve my future teaching (learning) purpose.	<i>Students</i>	9.1	17.2	29.4	44.3
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	10.5	25.7	50.6	13.2
In my belief, Internet resources can replace textbooks.	<i>Students</i>	4.7	19.5	38.1	37.7
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	26.6	52.4	15.7	5.3
I think I would like to use Internet assisted language learning materials and activities in my future EFL teaching as much as possible.	<i>Students</i>	0	12.6	45.8	41.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	10.7	24.9	43.7	20.7
I think I am competent to use Internet-based materials in my future teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	8.7	29.4	30.5	31.4
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	5.3	10.7	50.6	33.4
I think I need more technology training to improve my Internet literacy skills.	<i>Students</i>	9.8	16.4	58.2	15.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	10.7	20.9	48.1	20.3
I think I have to further learn how to integrate Internet resources into my future teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	4.8	14.6	25.8	54.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	5.3	10.7	55.3	28.7
I can get more current information from the Internet rather than from printed materials for better teaching.	<i>Students</i>	0	8.9	32.6	58.5
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	10.5	21.8	41.1	26.6
I feel confident locating the information I need on the Internet for my teaching.	<i>Students</i>	18.7	27.4	47.1	6.8
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	10.7	20.5	38.6	30.2
Teaching (learning) with Internet offers real advantages over traditional methods and instructions.	<i>Students</i>	4.8	12.7	25.3	57.2
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	0	10.7	41.8	47.5
Internet allows me to create materials that enhance my teaching (learning).	<i>Students</i>	0	12.6	32.8	54.6
	<i>EAP Instructors</i>	0	5.3	33.7	61

4 Discussion

4.1 General ideas

As depicted in Table 1, in the majority of cases, participants believe that internet applications are useful tools in EAP courses. The high percentages of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' clearly show that participants of the study see the internet applications as effective tools to improve teaching and learning activities in the classroom. However, there are some cases of 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree' that might be considered to be relatively significant. Although the number of such cases is small, they need to be explained. The following item is one of such cases:

"Internet applications can be used in the classroom to make learning interesting for all students"

Among EAP instructors, 24% of them disagreed with this statement. On the other hand, only 2% of students disagreed with it. Why do almost a quarter of EAP instructors believe that internet applications cannot be used to make learning more interesting? One of the reasons might be the unfamiliarity of instructors with the best resources that are available on the Internet. Almost every day, new resources are introduced into the Internet. If EAP instructors are going to use these available resources, they have to keep themselves up-to-date with these developments in technology. Another reason for a relatively high disagreement with the statement is that instructors have some information about such resources, but they really do not know how to use them in the classroom context. Here, we have to distinguish between knowing about the available resources and knowing how to effectively employ them in EAP courses. Since the Internet is available in almost all areas of Iran, the second case might better explain why some instructors disagree with the statement. In fact, some instructors might have tried to employ internet applications in their EAP classrooms. Failure or unsuccessful experiences can lead to negative attitudes toward using internet applications. It is a reality that past experiences of every instructor is a key factor in judging each statement. If an instructor has not had successful experiences in using internet applications in EAP classroom, it is very likely that s/he would disagree with this statement. They might disagree with the statement even if they see that other instructors have had successful experiences in using internet applications in EAP courses. In other words, personal experiences can play a key role in their judgments.

Among EAP instructors, 19.9% disagreed with the following statement: "Information obtained from ESL/EFL websites is useful"

One of the reasons behind this relatively high degree of disagreement is that most ESL/EFL websites focus on general English. Therefore, it is very difficult to find any specific information (particularly vocabulary) about EAP courses in such websites. Knowledge of technical terms is an important part of EAP courses. However, a quick look at most ESL/EFL websites shows that these websites mainly focus on general vocabulary, grammatical points, general reading comprehension, and general English listening. The lack of any specific information about technical courses can be one of the reasons behind the relatively high disagreement with the above statement.

Another case that needs to be explained is the following item:

“It is easy to locate useful information on the Internet”

Among EAP instructors, 29.1% of participants disagreed and 18.8% of participants strongly disagreed with this statement. However, these percentages were much lower for students (3.6% and 6.6%). These percentages show that a significant number of EAP instructors have difficulties to find useful information on the Internet. Not knowing the proper techniques to find intended information is perhaps the main reason behind a relatively high level of disagreement with this statement. Using proper keywords is very critical for finding right information about a particular subject. If proper keywords are not used, the information that is needed for a very specific case might not be found. This is a serious problem for many people who need specific information about technical subjects.

Participants' answer to the following item was another case that needs to be explained:

“The Internet is always my first choice for research or finding new methods”

Among participants of the study, 33.9% of EAP instructors disagreed with this statement. According to this value, one-third of instructors do not use the Internet as the first choice for research or information. There is no doubt that in the 21st century, the Internet is the quickest and the cheapest way for finding information. Despite these developments in technology, a significant number of instructors still do not use the Internet as the first choice. Many of these instructors had been trained during the time when access to the Internet was very limited, or even it was totally inaccessible. This might have created a habit among instructors to use resources other than the Internet. In fact, it is an issue that is related to the psychology of the teacher. Holding in-service training courses for instructors can help them to become familiar with new resources that have appeared in the world in the past two decades.

4.2 Practical ideas

As can be seen in Table 2, in the majority of cases, participants of the study agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. However, there are some negative cases that need to be explained. The following item is one of such cases:

“Internet applications can be used in the class to enhance the teaching of important skills”

Among EAP instructors of the study, 38.5% of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. These figures show that a significant number of instructors have a negative attitude toward using internet applications in EAP courses. One of the main reasons behind this relatively high level of disagreement is that many EAP instructors themselves are not at a high level of proficiency in some language skills. This is particularly the case with speaking and listening. Most EAP courses in Iran focus on reading comprehension. Reading comprehension texts are available in traditional sources such as books and journals. Therefore, a significant number of EAP instructors prefer to rely on the same traditional sources that have been popular in teacher training courses throughout the past decades. Another issue is the necessary tools. In many parts of Iran, the necessary tools for teaching language skills by internet applications are not easily available. This is a serious problem for many English

instructors. Even those instructors who prefer to use internet applications might choose not to employ them in their classroom because of such equipment shortages.

Level of disagreement with the following statement was also high:

“In my belief, Internet resources can replace textbooks”

Among EAP instructors, 26.6% of them strongly disagreed with this statement and %52.4 of them disagreed. These figures clearly show that EAP instructors do not see internet resources as a good replacement for textbooks. In fact, using textbooks as the main materials in EAP courses is an established tradition in Iranian universities. Changing this deeply-rooted tradition involves a lot of work. Designers of EAP syllabi have a key role to motivate instructors to employ internet resources. Designing internet-based activities as a part of EAP courses can be an effective option for solving this problem. Like everything else, changing the attitudes of people toward internet resources involves fundamental changes in tradition ways of conducting activities.

5 Conclusion

Results of this study indicated that although most EAP instructors and students have a positive attitude toward using internet resources in EAP courses, a relatively significant number of them have some kind of negative attitude toward them. Several reasons were suggested to be behind these negative attitudes. Lack of proper equipment and lack of proper training for using internet-based tools can be two serious obstacles in Iranian educational system. If EAP instructors are going to be fully prepared to employ internet resources in their courses, they have to become completely familiar with the opportunities that these resources can offer. Also, not being psychologically prepared to abandon traditional resources can be another reason behind negative attitudes. There is no doubt that any change needs some kind of psychological preparedness. It is the job of teacher educators, macro-planners, and policy-makers to prepare the ground for such fundamental changes in the educational system.

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