Research Article

The Effect of Employing Critical Needs Analysis on Iranian Intermediate Learners' Speaking Skills Improvement

Sara Zafari [1], Hossein Heidari Tabrizi [2*], Azizeh Chalak [3]

[1, 2, 3] Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
*Corresponding author: heidaritabrizi@khuisf.ac.ir
(Received: 2020/3/26; Accepted: 2020/9/29)

Abstract

English is taught all over the world either as a foreign or second language. It is taught as a foreign language in the Iranian educational system as well. However, it has always been the issue that EFL programs have been developed without conducting a systematic needs analysis from the learners' perspective. The present study examined the effect of employing critical needs analysis on the learners' speaking skills improvement. To this end, 128 Iranian intermediate learners from three language institutes were selected and assigned to two experimental and control groups. The learners' Necessities, Wants and Lacks through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview were investigated. The experimental group received treatment based on the results of the interview and questionnaire. The results of the inferential statistics showed that the students' highest mean score was in the Necessities sub-dimension, followed by the Lacks, and Wants sub-dimensions which revealed that the students' needs were mostly the items which were necessary for the learners' use of language. In contrast, the control group received treatment based on the pre-determined syllabus of the course. The results of an independent sample t-test indicated that in the post-test, the speaking scores of the participants in the experimental group were significantly higher than the scores in the control group.

Keywords: critical needs analysis, EFL, lacks, necessities, wants

Introduction

Speaking is one of the four basic language skills which are required to be developed by EFL learners to communicate efficiently and effectively in different contexts. Experts believe that since speaking is the main means of human communication, knowing the language is considered as the ability to communicate in that language (Lazarton, 2001). According to Lazarton (2001), the spoken language is a demanding task since it is almost always accomplished through interaction with at least one interlocutor. To evaluate their improvement in language learning, EFL Learners often assess themselves based on how well they have progressed in their spoken language proficiency. Scholars believe that learners' fluency in speaking is measured by his/ her proficiency in that language.

Now, the important issue is whether the current EFL courses are appropriate as far as the students' needs are concerned. Eslami (2010) argues that there has always been a problem that EFL programs have been developed without conducting a systematic needs analysis both from the students' and instructors' perspectives. So, the courses should be evaluated to understand whether or not these courses adequately prepare the students to function properly (Nor Aslah, 2009). Accordingly, the textbooks selected for students and the courses should be examined to meet the students' real needs and demands.

Many researchers have expressed their interest in employing critical needs analysis in the area of language learning. Discovering the necessary changes which should be performed to improve the curriculum utilizing content specification in the field of English language learning is one of the main purposes of conducting a critical needs analysis. As Cowling (2007) put it, gaining deep insights and clear understanding about the current and future needs of language learners from multiple perspectives, assisting in preparing well-advised decisions on the objectives and the goals that a new curriculum should address, and eventually ensuring that the curriculum content matches the students' needs as precise as possible are among the main purposes of conducting English language critical needs analysis for students.

Accordingly, Kaur (2007) states if EFL instructors do not have information about their students' needs, developing a curriculum gets a challenging and demanding task causing many problems in learning and

teaching the language. To prevent those problems, teachers' attention and effort should shift to needs analysis which is a process of collecting and analyzing information about learners to set goals and determine the contents of a language curriculum according to the needs of those learners (Richards, 2001). Needs analysis is an integral part of any course which is employed for designing the syllabus, developing materials, and determining teaching methods.

Although there are different approaches to need analysis, however, to interrogate the traditional support provided by needs analysis, Benesch (1996) proposed critical needs analysis. Critical needs analysis made room for English teachers and students to question academic assignments and pedagogy. Critical need analysis supposes that to achieve greater equity and democratic participation, the existing program should be evaluated. It gives the opportunity for students to consider their options rather than just fulfilling expectations.

As Benesch (2012, p.1) quoted, in critical need analysis students are considered as active agents who can interrogate course requirements and cooperates in preparing the curricula. It not only accepts that the students need help but it also believes that students should act as change agents within the system. Critical needs analysis follows Benesch's (2001) recommendations, focusing on power relations, democratic participation, and accepting students as active members of society. In this context, CNA is a component of critical pedagogy since it is being employed to identify inequalities and encourage learners to question and democratize their own learning process.

Scholars believe that materials designers may provide a range of probable input in order to offer flexibility in content. However, it is the responsibility of teachers who should examine the benefits of their course material planning for EFL learners and make their minds as to whether it is worth the time and effort. Based on this ideology, Eslami (2010, p.7) investigated the needs of Iranian EAP students from different disciplines and focused on the discrepancies between students' and instructors' perceptions of students' language learning needs and problems in EAP instruction and delivery. The results indicated that instructors may not always be the best judges of

students' needs and challenges. The students' and teachers' perceptions provided evidence for conducting critical needs analysis.

The findings from numerous studies (e.g., Aladdin, 2016; Jeong & Kim, 2012; Ratnah, 2013; Siragih, 2014) on conducting a needs analysis to design teaching materials reported that the identification of necessary components in planning course material can be determined through a need analysis.

A needs analysis survey conducted by Chowdhury and Haider (2012) used forty undergraduates and four EAP teachers and reached to the conclusion that the existing courses have major drawbacks in addressing learners' needs and in employing the acquired skills for both professional and academic purposes. Chowdhury and Haider (2012) recommended that by incorporating the relevant materials to subjects and by putting more emphasis on productive skills, the current EFL materials would be improved.

In another study, Moattarian and Tahririan (2014) studied ESP in the tourism management field and the results indicated that participants preferred integration of all four skills in the textbook of this course. It was also found that neither students nor teachers believed that current ESP courses address their specific needs.

In a similar study, Moiinvaziri (2014) investigated perceptions of students regarding their needs, objectives, attitudes, learning habits, and expectations in the 'General English' course in Iran. 171 undergraduate students participated in this study. The students' responses were analyzed employing descriptive methods of analysis (frequency distribution and the mean) and the independent samples t-test. The obtained results indicated that they considered speaking skills, especially pronunciation as the most problematic skill for them. Also, the learners were not satisfied with what was taught by their teachers.

Many studies have been conducted on the learners' needs analysis in the EFL context of Iran. For example, Nemat Tabrizi and Mojoudi Renani (2016) studied the perceptions of mechanical engineering students regarding their present and target situation academic language needs. They showed that the participants had problems with most language skills and sub-skills and that their professional needs in the target situations are not met.

Although several studies have investigated the effect of critical needs analysis on language learners, some issues have remained unexplored or under-explored. Some niches in the literature can be investigated to contribute to the body of foreign language acquisition. Previous studies have touched upon the issue, but there is no comprehensive study that has investigated the way teaching based on critical needs analysis can improve the speaking quality of intermediate EFL learners. Hence, to address the gaps in the literature, this study employed aimed to diagnose the speaking needs of Iranian intermediate learners. Unlike previous studies, in this study, critical pedagogy and critical thinking in education were addressed. Thus, the current study answered the following question:

RQ: Does employing critical needs analysis enhance Iranian intermediate learners' speaking skills?

Method

Participants

This study included a sample of 128 Intermediate learners and four English teachers in three institutes in Isfahan. The participants were both male and female intermediate students registered in the classes for the academic year 2019-2020. The participants' age ranged between 18 and 25. Then, they were divided randomly into experimental and control groups of 64 students in each group, all of whom were native Persian speakers.

Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect the data.

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

To have homogeneous participants, the OQPT placement test was administered at the first step of the study. OQPT is a standardized placement test in English, designed by Allan (1992). This test included sixty questions in a multiple-choice format which can provide an overall estimate of the proficiency level of the participants. By conducting the OQPT, the researchers could have a more clear view of what level the students were at.

Speaking pre- and post-tests

The speaking tasks in this study were taken from *Solution series, third edition* (Tim Fella & Paul A Davies, 2017). The speaking data for the pre-

and post-test was collected in the first and last three sessions of the semester by each teacher in the presence of the researcher. To gain the speaking scores in the pre- and post-tests, the teacher interviewed three students at the end of each session which took six sessions for each class to be completed. Finally, the teacher and the researcher assigned scores to the students' speaking while performing the speaking task. To estimate the inter-rater reliability for the achieved speaking scores, the Pearson correlation was employed. It was .82 which was high for inter-rater consistency.

Based on the results of the questionnaire and interview, the students received treatment during one semester of language learning which took 2.5 months. In the employment of the treatment, the necessities, wants, and lacks the students were considered. The control group was taught according to the pre-determined syllabus of the institute.

Researcher-made Questionnaire

A researcher-made questionnaire that was designed based on the relevant literature and previous studies (Al-Hamlan, 2015) was distributed among the participants. The questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale. The students were asked to rank each item using a 5-point Likert scale. A higher item score was the indication of a more favorable attitude. To ensure the comprehensibility and clarity of the items, the questionnaire has been piloted before the data collection phase.

The categorization of the questionnaire items was based on the Hutchinson and Waters' needs classification. Necessities are what is necessary for the learner's use of language, Lacks refers to what the learners lack and Wants are what the learners wish to learn. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for each sub-dimension was calculated. This was utilized via SPSS (version 16.00) to determine the internal consistency of the items. In terms of validity, two university teachers provided their feedback about it. Figure 1 shows Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs classification.
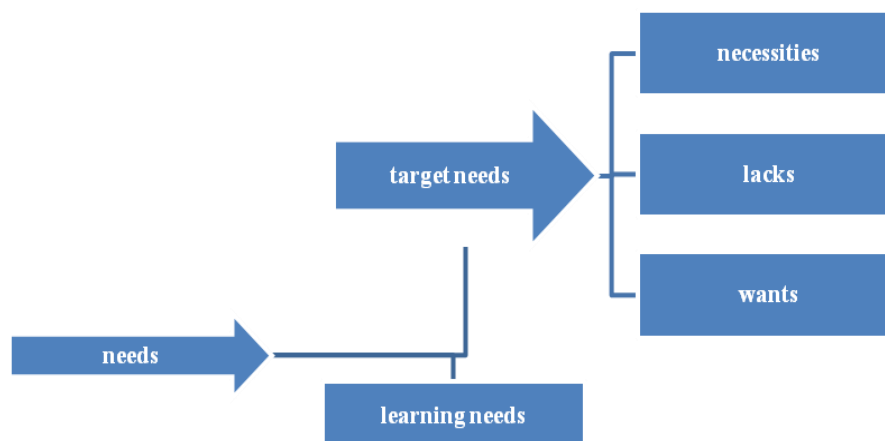
Figure 1. Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Needs Classification

Based on this classification (Figure 1), needs are classified into two categories of target needs and learning needs. Target needs are categorized into three individual parts: necessities, lacks, and wants.

Semi-structured Interview

Moreover, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with 28 students in both groups. The interviews with females and males were face-to-face. For interviews, the time commitment was no more than 15 minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews and subscribed them later for further analysis. The interview consisted of six questions regarding the speaking skill. To obtain the face validity, two university teachers provided their feedback about the interview questions. The face validity was achieved by verifying the interview questions to measure what they are intended to measure. The interviewer interviewed the students to gather sufficient data. The utterances were analyzed by another researcher inductively and inter-coder reliability of .78 was achieved. (For further information about the interview questions see Appendix B).

Research Design

The present study employed a mixed-method research approach (both qualitative and quantitative) to investigate the issue of critical needs analysis. The mixed method helps to analyze the data in all possible ways. It provides a deeper and greater insight into the study, which helps the

researcher gain a broader view of the fact. The participants of the study were assigned to the experimental and control groups randomly to examine the effect of critical needs analysis on their speaking gain scores. In so doing, a pre-, post-test design was utilized to examine the effect of the independent variable (treatment) on the dependent variable (gain score).

Procedure

The whole process of the data collection and treatment employment took four months. The data collection started with the Quick Oxford Placement Test which was administered by the researcher before the commencement of the new semester. The students were randomly assigned to two groups named as experimental and control groups based on the scores of QOPT in a way that both groups had the same level of students regarding the QOPT results. At first, at the beginning of the term, the questionnaires were given to the experimental and control group which consisted of twenty items about the learners' Necessities, Wants, and Lacks in learning speaking skill. In addition to the questionnaire, an interview concluding six questions was given to 28 students in both groups.

Between the pre- and post-tests, the participants received treatment that lasted for two and a half months. In the seven treatment sessions, in the experimental group, the instructor taught the speaking parts of the book based on the students' needs stated in the questionnaire and interview. The speaking tasks employed in this study were taken from the *Solution series* (Fella & Davies, 2017).

In the control group, the teacher taught the speaking part one session in a week. Each unit included the speaking part about a specific topic or situation which started with photo description. The teacher began the unit by asking students to look at the photo and expressed their idea about the question which was raised. The students worked in pairs to describe the photo meanwhile the students took notes and answered some questions following the photo. Then, the students raised their hands and expressed their opinions about the photo with what they wrote as the answer. In the next part, the students listened to an audio about the photo and they compared their answers. The teacher randomly asked the students to read their responses. The unit continued with the vocabulary part and the students completed some incomplete sentences with given vocabularies. The

next part included a box with some phrases and speaking strategies that students should have memorized. This section continued with the pronunciation part which the teacher played the audio and the students repeated the phrases. They copied the intonation and stress. The speaking part finished with a pair work exercise which asked the students to work in pairs using the phrases and vocabularies which they had learned in speaking part, they took turns and answered the questions. In this part, the teacher ran a group discussion and each student had a chance to express his/her idea.

On the other hand, in the experimental group, besides these speaking activities of each unit, the teacher employed some extra activities. The activities were selected according to their frequencies in the questionnaire and interview results. Due to the time limitation in the class, the attempt was made to select the feasible activities as well as the ones which could cover the other stated needs. The teacher used activities such as debating, role-playing, and watching video clips alternatively during the term. These activities could meet the students' needs concerning to their need in speaking. These activities took the last 15 minutes of the class time. To manage the class time for employing the aforementioned activities, the teacher skipped some redundant parts of the unit or asked the students to do some exercises at home.

One session in a week the teacher determined a controversial topic and asked the students to be prepared for debate. The teacher assigned the students into two groups and assigned a side of an argument. One group prepared the case in favor and the other against it. The students were supposed to search, find the related vocabulary, check their pronunciations, and make themselves ready to have a debate with their classmates. At the end of the session, two groups sat in two rows in front of each other. One group started the debate by presenting its view. After listening to their arguments, the teacher stopped the debate, returned to the next group to start their arguments. The teacher moved along the class, wrote the related vocabularies on the board, and monitored their performance. At the end of the debate, he provided feedback about their vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation. In the end, the teacher asked the students to read the words on the board aloud and ask their questions.

The next activity provided by the teacher was role-playing. To perform this activity, the teacher divided the students into groups of two. The teacher gave a topic to each group. The students created the dialogue in minutes. They practiced for a few minutes. The teacher asked each pair to perform the situation in front of the class while other pairs gave comments and suggestions. Finally, the teacher gave comments after all groups performed.

Playing video clips was another activity teachers employed in the experimental group. For this purpose, the teacher selected video clips from Ted talk. The teacher attempted to choose the daily topics and topics which the students were familiar with. Before playing the clip, the teacher set a goal for what the students were about to watch by writing some questions on the board for the students to answer at the end of the clip. The teacher paused the clip to give the students time to reflect. After watching a few minutes, the teacher paused the video to ask students to discuss what they just saw, wrote down reflections, or answered the questions that the teacher provided. Then, the teacher played the clip till the end. Finally, the teacher asked the questions and elicited the students' responses.

Results

To analyze the obtained data from the pre and post-test, a paired sample t-test was employed in addition to descriptive statistics to examine the students' speaking improvement after the employment of treatment. Furthermore, an independent sample t-test was used to examine the difference between the pre-test of the experimental and control groups in their speaking skill. Since there was no significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test, the independent sample t-test was conducted for two groups in the post-test. Additionally, to make sure about the scoring process of the pre-test and post-test in speaking task, in addition to the researcher, a teacher who was familiar with the scoring rubric assigned scores to the transcriptions, and inter-rater reliability was computed by the use of Pearson correlation.

The interviews' transcripts were thematically analyzed. The data underwent an inductive categorization procedure. The categories included sub-dimensions of the learners' preference, teacher's techniques, learners'

problems, techniques to improve skills, suggestions for better learning, and learners' expectations.

The questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS (version 16.00). The frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of the students' responses for each statement in the questionnaire were recorded. The speaking needs analysis questionnaire consisted of three sub-dimensions of Necessities, Lacks, and Wants with different questions in these three parts. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for each sub-division was calculated. This was utilized by SPSS (version 16.00) to estimate the internal consistency of the items. The Necessities sub-division with questions 1-6 had the reliability coefficient of 0.89 which indicated this part of the questionnaire had acceptable reliability. The reliability of Wants sub-division with questions 7-12 came out to be 0.84 and the Lacks sub-division with questions 13-20 was estimated as 0.84. Two teachers ensured the accuracy of the Persian translation by providing their feedback about it. Accordingly, before the questionnaire went live, some amendments had taken place.

As indicated in Table 1, the speaking questionnaire consisted of three sub-dimensions of students' Necessities, Wants, and Lacks. The students were supposed to rank each item using a 5-point Likert scale (SA: *Strongly Agree,* A: *Agree,* N: *Neutral,* D: *Disagree,* SD: *Strongly Disagree*). A higher item score indicated a more favorable attitude.

Table 1

Frequencies and Means of Speaking Questionnaire's Sub- dimensions

Category	Frequency					Mean
	StronglyAgree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**StronglyDisagree**	
Necessities	254	209	54	157	222	**3.13**
Wants	229	170	30	254	222	**2.93**
Lacks	184	184	77	166	157	**3.09**

Table 1 shows that the students' highest mean score was in the Necessity sub-dimension (3.13). Most of the students wanted to speak about daily subjects (4.00). This was followed by the need to have more opportunities to speak in class (3.89), the delayed correction of the teacher (3.39), the correction of mistakes by themselves (3.26), and to have more emphasize on

pronunciation (3.17). The students expressed their disagreement about speaking without regarding the pronunciation (2.18) and speaking without regarding the grammar (2.02).

The next highest ranked subdivision was related to students' Lacks (3.09). Mostly the students complained about their inability to speak when they had limited knowledge about the topic (3.95). The students complained about their lack of chance to speak in group discussions (3.41). They expressed their fear to make errors while speaking (3.40). The students did not feel shy about speaking English in the class (2.78). They believed the speaking activities were at the same level as the students' level (2.55). The students did not think that the speaking part of the class was boring (2.49).

The last sub-dimension was about the students' Wants (2.93). The students agreed that in group discussions they had more chances to speak (3.64). The students suggested having extracurricular speaking activities outside the classroom (3.56). The students preferred debates (3.55). The students wanted the teacher to be a facilitator (2.87). The participants did not agree with speaking individually (2.83). They did not like to use their native language while speaking in the class (2.73) or playing games in class (2.63). Figure 2 gives information about the frequency of provided answers by the students in each sub-dimension.
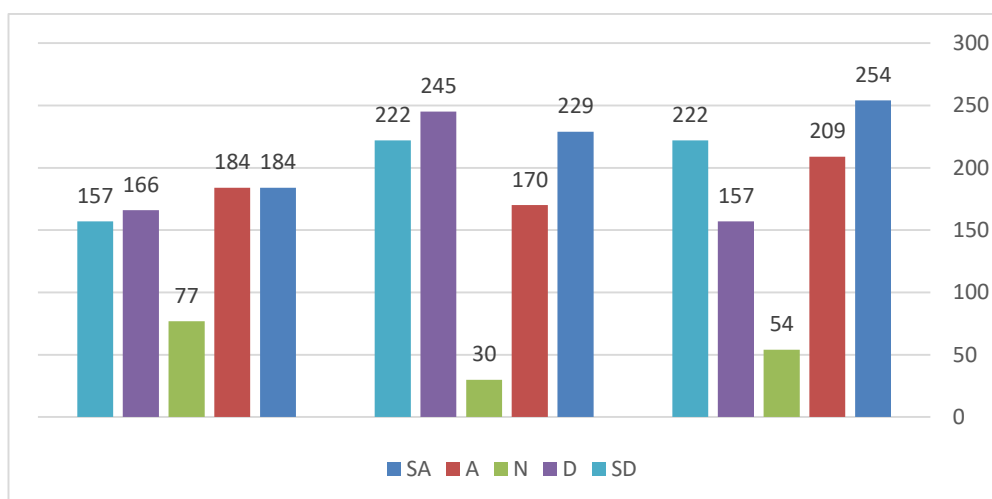

Figure 2. The Frequency of the Students' Answers in each Sub-Dimension

As it is clear in Figure 2, the students strongly agree with the items in necessities followed by lacks and wants sub-dimensions respectively.

Table 2 reveals the participants' perceptions of the interview questions. The results of the thematic analysis of the interviews indicated that there were some themes mostly stated by the students. As illustrated in Table 2, the learners' preference was the theme mentioned by most of the students in answering the first interview question.

Table 2

Frequencies and Means of Speaking Interview's Sub-dimensions

Category	Frequency
Learners' preference	68
Teacher's techniques	42
Learners' problems	65
Key techniques to improve skill	51
Suggestions for better leaning	57
Learners' expectations	55

Regarding the learners' preference, in their responses, the students reported that they preferred to learn to speak through watching native speakers' talking (64.29%), role-playing (50.00), listening to authentic conversations (46.43), speaking with native speakers (39.29), watching the news (28.57), and using language lab (14.29).

The next interview question (Table 2) dealt with the way the students preferred the teacher to contribute to speaking. They reported that they wanted the teacher to use video clips (53.57%), provide feedback on their speaking performance (42.86%), create interaction among the students (32.14%), and provide extra books (21.43).

Another theme mentioned by the students was their problems which referred to the third question. In their responses to this question, the students stated that they faced problems in speaking such as word pronunciation (64.29%), tenses (53.57%), sentence structure (46.43%), multiple meaning words (39.29%), and inability to answer questions (28.57).

The fourth interview question asked the students to express the key techniques to improve their speaking skill. In their responses to this question, the students claimed that the   key techniques to improve their speaking skill were giving summary (57.14%), speaking with native speakers(50.00%), studying more lessons to practice speaking (42.86%), learning English from an earlier age(17.86%), and doing more homework (14.29).

In response to the fifth question regarding the students' suggestions, the students provided answers such as: *I want to have debate in the class* (53.57%) *and apply technology in class* (46.43); *I need to communicate more with my classmates and the teacher in the class* (42.86%); *I wish to learn more new words in different fields* (35.71%); and *I want to have more lessons for this course* (25.00%).

The last interview question dealt with the learners' expectation from their instructor. The answers provided by the students were as follows: *I expect the teacher to care about his job* (60.71%), *to allocate specific time for questions* (53.57%), *to have high level of competency* (46.43%), and *to make the course interesting and entertaining* (35.71%).

As depicted in Table 3, the result of the independent sample t-test indicated that there was no significant difference in the pre-test between the two groups, t=.203, p<.05. It shows that the mean difference was not significantly high between the two groups (M=.295). That means there was no significant difference in the performance of two groups in the pre-test.

Table 3
Between Group Comparisons of Two Groups in the Pre-test

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	Std.Error Difference	-		
Experimental Control Group	Pre-test	.203	.193.295	.689	126	.492

As provided in Table 4, the result of the independent sample t-test indicated that there was significant difference in the post-test of the two

groups, t=11.02, p<.05.The mean difference in the post-test was significantly high between the two groups (M=2.375).That means there was a significant difference in the performance of two groups in the post-test.

Table 4
Between Group Comparisons of Two Groups in the Post-Test

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		-	
Experimental Control Group	Post-test	2.375	.193.215	11.02	126	.000

   Considering the students' needs in teaching the speaking skill was successful in improving the participants' speaking ability in the experimental group after receiving the treatment, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5
Within Group Comparisons of Experimental Group

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean		-	
Experimental group	Pretest-posttest	2.922	1.546	.193.193	-15.118	63	.000

   The result of the paired-sample t-test in Table 5 reveals that the post-test mean score of the students in the experimental group was significantly higher than their pre-test scores , t=-15.118, p<.05. The result of the paired-sample t-test indicated that the students outperformed in the post-test (M=2.922).
   As shown in Table 6, the results of the paired-sample t-test indicated that the post-test mean score of the students in the control group was not significant, t=-6.43, p<.05.

Table 6
Within Group Comparisons of Control Group

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		-	
Control group	Pretest-posttest	.734	.913	.114	-6.437	63	.000

The results in Table 6 indicated that the post-test mean score of the students in the control group was not significant comparing to their performance in the pre-test (M=.734).

Discussion

The present study was conducted to investigate the possible effect of employing critical needs analysis on intermediate learners' speaking improvement. As the results of this study showed, the involvement of the learners in the specification of the program by employing critical needs analysis, knowing about the students' necessities, wants and lacks, and finally, their application in designing the material and specification of methods employed by teacher in EFL class is of importance and can help improve their speaking performance. The results of the questionnaire analysis indicated that in necessities sub-dimension some items rated higher compared to others. One was topic familiarity. The students stated that they prefer to speak about daily and familiar topics. In the present study, it was shown that the more students were familiar with the subject, the more they were able to speak in the class. The results demonstrated that topic familiarity made statistically significant contributions to effective speaking performance. Concerning the effect of topic familiarity on speaking, the results of the study were in line with Shabani (2013).

The next highly rated item in necessities sub-dimension referred to the type of feedback provided by the teacher. Mostly the students believed that they wanted the instructor to correct them afterward. In other words, they preferred delayed feedback. They believed that the instructor's interruption when correcting them immediately distracted the students and as a result,

they could not speak fluently. As the results indicated, the type of corrective feedback employed by the teachers affected the students' speaking performance. Immediate correction intimidates students and makes them lose the train of thought and results in their discouragement. What this study suggested like the results of the study conducted by Rahimi and Dasjerdi (2012) was that correcting students' errors with delay can have greater impact on the intermediate EFL learners to enhance their speaking ability. As the teacher observed, when the students' errors were treated with some delay they had a lower level of anxiety in speaking performance. Additionally, the students stated that self-correction to be more beneficial in their speaking performance. In this way, they could take charge of one's learning. As Bhattaacharya and Chauhan (2012, p.24) state, when the students correct their performance, they feel a sense of achievement.

The next item in necessities sub-dimension which the students believed to be important in their speaking performance was their wish to have more pronunciation practice. James (2010) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) stated that speakers have understandable pronunciation when other persons can understand what they say and the speaker's English is good to listen to, that is, the speaker is *comfortably intelligible*. Therefore, teachers should encourage their learners to speak English clearly and understandably.

The second part of the questionnaire required information on the students' Wants. Among the activities which students considered beneficial, the debate, extracurricular discussions, and group discussions were rated higher comparing to other items. In Group discussions, debates and extracurricular activities each student had the opportunity to become more actively engaged in learning. The improvements in the students' speaking scores in the post-test were not the only thing showing the success of the treatment. Moreover, the improvements in the students' engagement and enthusiasm, experienced during the research were of importance as well. In a group, the students had more opportunities to use English among themselves and practiced speaking which increased their confidence. Additionally, learning in the group improved their vocabulary mastery. It gave students a non-threatening condition. The results of the students' performance in the post-test showed that, as Sebald's (2010) study revealed, the students who participated in

extracurricular and group discussions were more likely to have higher academic achievements.

The last part of the questionnaire dealt with the students' lacks. The most encountered problems were their inability to speak due to the lack of sufficient knowledge, lack of opportunity to speak in group discussions, and the fear of making errors. Ur (1996) proposed EFL learners' problems as inhibition, that is, the time when the students are anxious about making mistakes, they are fearful of criticism, or simply are shy, the next is when the students have nothing to say, and the last problem is low or uneven participation because of the large classes that some learners tend to dominate. The findings of this study were in line with the findings of Grengerson and Horwitz (2009), indicating that being afraid to make errors was among psychological factors affecting negatively students' participation in speaking class.

The results of the interview questions were corroborated by the questionnaire results. By the thematic analysis of the interview questions and classification of the themes, some issues were achieved. With regards to the learners' preferences in the interview questions, it was found that they desired activities such as using technology, speaking with native speakers, watching authentic conversations, listening to authentic conversations, role-playing, and watching the news. The second question in the interview dealt with the teacher's techniques. As the results indicated, the students expected the teacher to use video clips, create interaction among students, and provide extra books, as well as feedback.

To answer the third interview question, considering the problems learners faced, it was concluded that the students mostly believed they had problems in tenses, word pronunciation, sentence structure, and multiple-meaning words. Pronunciation plays a vital role in foreign language learning since it makes EFL learners more competent in communication. According to Morley (1991, p. 488): "intelligible pronunciation is a vital component of communication competence". Numerous studies (Alamri, 2005; Alharby, 2005) have emphasized the difficulties EFL learners face regarding their language skills as a common problems in EFL classes.

When the students were asked about key techniques to improve their speaking skills, they mentioned giving a summary, studying English from

an earlier age, speaking with native speakers, studying more lessons, and having more homework could have an overall positive impact on their speaking learning and improvement.

Considering the next question in the interview which asked for the students' suggestions, they commented: learning more new words in different fields, applying technology in class, telling stories, communicating with classmates and the teacher, and studying more lessons. This means that they had a positive attitude toward improving speaking skill. Thus, fluency in speaking and mastering this skill requires more practice to get the desired level. Many researchers (e.g., Liton, 2012; Read, 2008) addressed the benefits of using technology in improving the teaching methods for EFL learning. They stated technology can increase learners' motivation for learning, provide students with authentic materials, lead to entertainment in learning, give autonomy in learning besides the students can learn at their own pace. Also, the inclusion of stories in the curriculum is recommended by many scholars (e.g., Alamry, 2005; Alharby, 2005; Zaeri&Khalessi, 2011).

As the interview results indicated, salient learners' expectations from the teacher were: making the speaking part interesting in the class, caring about his job, allocating specific time for questions, and having a high level of competency. However, comprehensive reform in the curriculum, the teachers' roles, the institute, and the students' perception is needed to improve language learning in an EFL context since in most EFL contexts the curriculum is still far from the international standards of syllabus design (Dooey, 2010).

The results of this study were in line with the findings of numerous studies that provide suggestions on how to improve language skills. Liton (2012), Ereksoussy (1993), Alharby (2005), and Alamri (2008) have suggested that extra practice and extracurricular activities in language skills should receive much attention. Additionally, much attention should be paid to the use of technology in language classes, communication with classmates, and the increase in vocabulary size. The findings of this study, like the studies conducted by Atai (2000), Ferris and Tagg (1996), and Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) revealed that to prepare the students most efficiently for

the tasks and expectations that lie ahead of them, the investigation of the students' precise needs is important.

As it can be concluded from the obtained results of this study, the application of critical needs analysis provides the teachers with deep insight into students' Necessities, Wants, and Lacks in the learning process. Besides, it assists the teacher to have a clear idea about the techniques and strategies that can be employed to increase the students' benefit of the course syllabus. So, if the teacher wants to fulfill the students' needs, he should make some changes in the class materials. Making necessary changes in the learning process is impossible without the consideration of the curriculum. However, if a teacher wants to change the course material, he/she should make sure that the new changes correspond to the existing curriculum. So, it seems to be a very complicated task.

On the whole, it seems that administrators and instructors should not be considered as the only sources of curriculum design because their diagnoses of the learners' needs may not be precise. Also, since the learners have access to a great amount of information, their perceptions about what a good English course can be has gradually changed. There are a lot of factors that can influence the students' idea about what a good English course is and students should be encouraged to become involved in identifying their own needs and wants.

Declaration of interest: none

References

Al-Hamlan, S. A., & Baniabdelrahman, A.A. (2015). A Needs Analysis Approach to EFL Syllabus Development for Second Grade Students in Secondary Education in Saudi Arabia: A Descriptive Analytical Approach to Students' Needs. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research,* 5 (1), 118-145.

Aladdin, A. (2016). A Needs Analysis for the Course Materials Design of the Arabic Language Course, *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, *6 (6)*, 423- 426.

Alamri, A. (2005). *An evaluation of the sixth grade English language textbook for Saudi Boys' schools* (Master's thesis). Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: King Saud University.

Alharby, M.(2005). *ESP target situation needs analysis: the English language communicative needs as perceived by health professionals in the Riyadh area* (PhD dissertation). Athens, GA: University of Georgia.

Allan, D. (1992). *Oxford placement test.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Atai, M. R. (2000). *ESP revisited: A reappraisal study of discipline-based EAP programs in Iran.* (Unpublished doctrol dissertation). University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

Bhattacharya, A., & Chauhan, K (2012). Augmenting learner autonomy through blogging. *ELT Journal, 64*(4), 376-384. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq002

Benesch, S. (1996). Needs analysis and curriculum development in EAP: an Example of a critical approach, *TESOL Quarterly*, *30*(4), 723-738.

Benesch, S. (2001). *Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics and Practice*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Benesch, S. (2012). Critical English for academic purposes. In C. Chapelle (Ed.), *the encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wylie Online Library. Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0278/abstract.

Chowdhury, T. A., & Haider, M. Z. (2012). A need-based evaluation of the EAP courses for the pharmacy students in the University of Asia Pacific (UAP), Bangladesh. *Asian Social Science, 8 (15),93-107.* Doi:10.5539/ass.v8n15p93

Cowling, J. D. (2007). Needs analysis: Planning a syllabus for a series of intensive workplace courses at a leading Japanese company. *English for Specific Purposes, 26(4),* 426-442.

Dooey, P. (2010). Students' perspectives of an EAP pathway program. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9(3)*, 184-197.

Ereksoussy, M. (1993). *Evaluating the English language textbook studied in the first year at girls' intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Riyadh: King Saud University.

Eslami, Z. R. (2010). Teachers' Voice vs. Students' Voice: A Needs Analysis Approach to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Iran. *English Language Teaching, 3*(1),3-11.

Ferris, D., & Tagg, T. (1996). Academic oral communication needs of EAP learners: what subject matter instructors actually require. *TESOL Quarterly, 30*(1), 31-58.

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2009). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *Modern Language Journal, 86(4)*, 562–570.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

James, R. B. (2010). *Teaching Pronunciation Gets a Bad R.A.P: A Framework for Teaching Pronunciation.* Hankuk: University of Foreign Studies.

Jeong, M., & Kim, J. (2012). Needs Analysis and Development of Teaching Materials for Elementary English Underachievers. *English Teaching*, *67(3*), 365-394.

Kaur, S. (2007). ESP Course Design: Matching Learner Needs to Aims. *English for Specific Purposes*, *6(1), 25-37.*

Lazarton, A. (2001). Teaching oral skills. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed*.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 103–115). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Liton, H. (2012). Developing EFL teaching and learning practices In Saudi colleges: a review. *International Journal of Instruction, 5(2),* 129-152.

Mazdayasna, G., & Tahririan, M. (2008). Developing a profile of the ESP needs of Iranian students: The case of students of nursing and midwifery. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 7(4)*, 277-289.

Moattarian, A., & Tahririan, M. H. (2014). Language needs of graduate students and ESP courses: The case of tourism management in Iran. *RALs*, *5 (*2), 4-22.

Moiinvaziri, M. (2014). Students' voice: A needs analysis of university general English course in Iran. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, *14*(1), 57-75.

Morley, J. (1991) The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. *TESOL Quarterly 25(1)*51-74.

Nemat Tabrizi, A. R., & Mojoudi Renani, F. (2016). ESP Needs Analysis of Undergraduate Mechanical Engineering Students: A Case in Iran. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies, 3 (*2), 1696-1707.

Nor Aslah A., Samsiah B., Syazliyati I., & Kamaruzaman J. (2009). The Academic English Language Needs of Industrial Design Students in UiTM Kedah, Malaysia. *English Language Teaching*, *2*(4), 171-178.

Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2012). A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Pronunciation Learning and the Strategies for Instruction. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(3)*, 119-128.

Rahimi, A., & Dastjerdi, H. (2012). Impact of Immediate and Delayed Error Correction on EFL Learners' Oral Production: CAF. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. 3(1)* 45-54.

Ratnah (2013*). Developing English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course for Tour and Travel Students Based on Needs Analysis.* (Unpublished dissertation), Post Graduate program, State University of Makassar.

Read, J. (2008). Identifying academic language needs through diagnostic assessment. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 7*, 180-190

Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saragih, E. (2014). Designing ESP Materials for Nursing Students Based On Needs Analysis, International Journal of Linguistics*, Macrothink Institute*, *6* (4), 59-70.

Sebald, H. (2010). *Student participation in extracurricular activities, self-concept, academic self-concept, self-determination, and health habits during the middle school year and their impact on academic achievement (Order No. 3415641).* Education Database; ProQuest Dissertations and Theses A&I: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection.Retrieved http://search.proquest.com/docview/634434020?accountid=8554

Shabani, B. (2013). The effect of background knowledge on speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners. *International SAMANM Journal of Marketing and Management, 1(*1), 222-233.

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zarei, G., & Khalessi, M. (2011). Cultural load in English language textbooks: An analysis of interchange series. *Procardia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 294–301.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Table 1.
Frequencies of Speaking's Questionnaire Responses

	S	Statements		SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	Std. D	Rank
Necessities	1	I like the teacher puts more emphasize on pronunciation	F	38	27	5	35	23	3.17	1.543	10
			%	29.69	21.09	3.91	27.34	17.97			
	2	I like the teacher gives me the opportunity to correct my errors myself.	F	39	33	7	20	29	3.26	1.579	9
			%	30.47	25.78	5.47	15.63	22.66			
	3	I like the teacher corrects me afterward.	F	36	43	9	15	25	3.39	1.491	8
			%	28.13	33.59	7.03	11.72	19.53			
	4	I prefer to speak without regarding the grammar.	F	12	15	2	33	66	2.02	1.363	20
			%	9.38	11.72	1.56	25.78	51.56			
	5	I prefer to speak without regarding the pronunciation.	F	14	16	9	29	60	2.18	1.417	19
			%	10.94	12.50	7.03	22.66	46.88			
	6	I prefer to speak about daily subjects.	F	57	38	16	10	7	4.00	1.177	1
			%	44.53	29.69	12.50	7.81	5.47			
	7	I want more opportunities to speak English in class.	F	58	37	6	15	12	3.89	1.347	3
			%	45.31	28.91	4.69	11.72	9.38			
Wants	8	I prefer to speak individually in the class.	F	28	25	7	33	35	2.83	1.553	12
			%	21.88	19.53	5.47	25.78	27.34			
	9	Everyone gets to speak when we have group discussion.	F	44	48	3	12	21	3.64	1.451	18
			%	34.38	37.50	2.34	9.38	16.41			
	10	Sometimes we play and I think that develops my speaking ability.	F	25	21	5	36	41	2.63	1.547	15
			%	19.53	16.41	3.91	28.13	32.03			
	11	I like to use my native language when I don't know the word in English.	F	25	23	2	48	30	2.73	1.489	14
			%	19.53	17.97	1.56	37.50	23.44			
	12	I like to have extracurricular discussions in the classroom.	F	48	35	3	25	17	3.56	1.484	4
			%	37.50	27.34	2.34	19.53	13.28			
	13	I prefer to have debate activities in the class.	F	49	37	2	15	25	3.55	1.562	5
			%	38.28	28.91	1,56	11,72	19.53			
	14	I want the teacher to be the controller rather than facilitator in class discussions.	F	33	17	8	40	30	2.87	1.554	11
			%	25.78	13.28	6.25	31.25	23.44			
Lacks	15	I feel shy of speaking English in the class.	F	21	27	8	47	25	2.78	1.408	13
			%	16.41	21.09	6.25	36.72	19.53			
	16	I am afraid to make errors.	F	32	43	14	22	17	3.40	1.377	7
			%	25.00	33.59	10.94	17.19	13.28			

17	I can't speak when I have limited knowledge about the topic.	F	57	36	16	10	9	3.95	1.235	2
		%	44.53	28.13	12.50	7.81	7.03			
18	Every student doesn't have a chance to speak in group discussions.	F	36	40	12	20	20	3.41	1.439	6
		%	28.13	31.25	9.38	15.63	15.63			
19	The speaking activities are not the same level as the students' level.	F	20	17	15	35	41	2.55	1.468	16
		%	15.63	13.28	11.72	27.34	32.03			
20	The speaking part of the class is boring.	F	18	21	12	32	45	2.49	1.463	17
		%	14.06	16.41	9.38	25.00	35.16			

Appendix B.
Interview Questions
The following are the six interview questions which are categorized inTable 2 (Appendix 3) based on the students' responses:
1) Which way do you prefer to learn speaking skill?
2) Which way do you want the teacher to apply in teaching speaking?
3) What are the key problems you face in speaking skill learning?
4) In your opinion, what are the key things to improve your speaking skill?
5) What are your suggestions for better learning?
6) What are your expectations from the instructor?

Appendix C.

Table 2.
Frequencies of Speaking's Interview Responses

topic		percent	frequency
Learners' Preference	having English lab	14.29	4
	role playing	50.00	14
	watching native speakers' talking	64.29	18
	listening to authentic conversations	46.43	13
	speaking with native speakers	39.29	11
	watching news	28.57	8
teachers' techniques	employing video clips	53.57	15
	creating interaction among students	32.14	9
	providing extra books	21.43	6
	providing feedback	42.86	12
Learners' problems	tenses	53.57	15
	word pronunciation	64.29	18

	sentence structure	46.43	13
	inability to answer questions	28.57	8
	multiple-meaning words	39.29	11
key techniques to improve skills	speaking with native speakers	50.00	14
	studying English from an earlier age	17.86	5
	giving summary	57.14	16
	having more lessons for speaking	42.86	12
	doing more home works	14.29	4
suggestions for better learning	learning more new words in different fields	35.71	10
	applying technology in class	46.43	13
	Conducting debate in class	53.57	15
	communicating with colleagues and teacher	42.86	12
	studying more lessons for this course	25.00	7
expectations from instructor	making the course interesting and entertaining	35.71	10
	caring about his job	60.71	17
	allocating specific time for questions	53.57	15
	having high level of competency	46.43	13

Biodata

Sara Zafari is a PhD candidate of TEFL at English Department, IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Iran. Her research interests include language teaching methodology, second language acquisition, and foreign language acquisition.

Azizeh Chalak is an associate professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. She is the editor-in-chief of Research in English Language Pedagogy (RELP) journal published at IAU, Isfahan Branch and was selected as the top researcher of the English Department in 2017 and 2018.

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi is an associate professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. He has been teaching different courses at PhD, MA, and BA levels in TEFL, Translation Studies, and General Linguistics since 1994.