Exploration of EAP Learners' Views Toward Using Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs)

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ABSTRACT

The research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) and Vocabulary Teaching Strategies (VTSs) has mainly focused on the quantitative approach and EFL learners in face-to-face classrooms. The present study, however, addressed learners of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to probe into their views toward teaching and learning vocabulary in online and offline contexts. Through structured interviews, the study used a qualitative approach. A total of 22 undergraduate Iranian EAP students (humanities, engineering, and medical sciences) provided qualified responses to contribute to filling the research gap. After analyzing, categorizing, and organizing the data, themes, and sub-themes emerged through coding. The transcripts and codes were rechecked to verify the data and ensure the validity of the research. Interpretation of the data indicated that instruction of EAP vocabulary can be deepened by raising learners' consciousness of VLSs, training teachers for EAP courses, adding activities, exercises, and tasks for the improvement of all language skills, and the use of technology for meeting the needs of EAP learners. The results also provide implications for improving EAP materials and promoting the learners' motivation, autonomy, and independence.

INTRODUCTION

Learning and teaching vocabulary in a foreign language has ever been of the main challenges for both learners and teachers. Nation (2013) has defined second language (L2) vocabulary knowledge as the primary component of learning English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it strongly affects language skills such as reading and writing. According to Teng (2014), it is extensively confirmed that vocabulary acquisition is a necessary factor in mastering a language, and text comprehension or production requires vocabulary knowledge. Achieving language learning success requires obtaining an extensive vocabulary. Language learners usually report a lack of words as the major obstacle impeding successful communication. Hence, vocabulary knowledge is vital for EFL learners because they demand good vocabulary knowledge before comprehending what they have read or heard. Despite the ample research on the area of vocabulary learning and its importance in all language learning dimensions, it still needs to be investigated in terms of various factors such as learners' idiosyncratic characteristics, potentials, experiences, attitudes, strategies, and capacities which are certainly different in the study context.

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

Gu (2018) asserts that learning vocabulary is long and challenging. The language learning process starts by learning the essential words and phrases, and developing vocabulary never stops until the highest level of proficiency. He argues that the challenging essence of the task makes strategic learning indispensable because the choice and deployment of appropriate strategies act as a pivotal factor in determining if vocabulary learning has been effective and pleasing or unsuccessful and disappointing. He also believes that strategic learning is a purposeful, dynamic, and iterative process for coping with a learning problem, enhancing the learning speed, or creating an efficient, effective, and pleasant learning process. Using a self-report online questionnaire, Kulikova (2015) indicated the significant role of vocabulary in studying a foreign language and the complexity of the vocabulary acquisition process. The participants believed that words and phrases should be carefully studied and then practiced in context. Moreover, descriptive analysis of vocabulary learning strategies showed the frequent use of rehearsal strategies, especially repetition in addition to the active use of a dictionary, guessing, and note-taking strategies by all participants. Although Asian learners of English value memorization and repetition, Western learners seem to devalue the role of repetition in the vocabulary acquisition process.

Learners can develop a proactive plan for their learning; strategic learning is mainly an intrinsic problem-solving process. It means that in the case of a new or challenging task, a learner can analyze the task, his resources for learning, and the context of learning to create a plan for overcoming the learning complications. Finding a way to take the responsibility for learning might help the learners to cope with difficulties. Put differently, the autonomy of the learner acts as the crucial block in language learning and vocabulary learning in particular (Ghafournia & Khodaparst, 2015). Moras (2001, p.36) argues that "the most important aspect of vocabulary teaching for advanced learners is to foster learner independence so that learners will be able to deal with new vocabulary items and expand their vocabulary beyond the end of the course". The use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs in education systems in general and learning English, in particular, has been effective. As a multidimensional computer instrument, language teachers have applied CALL to facilitate learning and teaching processes (Cummins, 2008). Online, offline, and blended approaches have been tried to instruct EFL students in vocabulary (Ghafournia & Khodaparst, 2015).

EAP IN IRAN

English for academic purposes (EAP) has emerged out of the broader field of English for specific purposes (ESP), defined by its focus on teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). EAP courses play a crucial role in developing proficiency in English and improving the learners' academic and career prospects. English is widely used around the world and learning English encompasses several advantages, including opening up potential networking opportunities, having immense career prospects, being eligible to apply to the best universities around the globe, and exploring rich and varied types of literature. In line with the developments around the world, Iran has also westernized its society and industry as a leading country to adopt English as its foreign language (Foroozandeh, 2011) as well as joined the camp of ESP (Swales, 1985). Briefly, empirical findings on Iranian EAP courses have revealed that content-specific teachers help the learners to study academic English through reading skills and to translate the texts into Farsi (Atai et al, 2018). Studies on the perspectives of Iranian EAP learners also show their tendency for communicative activities not focusing on grammar-based instruction (Eslami et al, 2007). They have expressed their needs in listening, speaking, and writing (Ranjbar & Soodmand-Afashar, 2021). ESP learners call for meeting their communicative needs which are not provided by ESP courses when they start postgraduate studies (Mostafavi et al, 2021). According to the literature, the four skills need to be included in Iranian EAP courses along with considering communicative skills and designing communicative materials (Zand-Moghaddam et al, 2018).

VLS WITHIN EAP

Like other foreign language learners, EAP learners have difficulty with committing bags of foreign words to memory. They encounter various texts, particularly texts in an academic setting. They have to construct meaning based on their prior knowledge. That's why they need an adequate academic vocabulary to pass the exams and to communicate effectively in class. The prominence of vocabulary learning strategies plays a pivotal role in English for academic purposes situations (Al-Omairi, 2020). Haghi and Pasand (2013) reported that EAP learners should

study and comprehend a good deal of written texts in the English language. Therefore, VLS use facilitates EAP students in dealing with and comprehending the texts. Wanpen et al. (2013) concluded that in the area of EAP/ ESP, vocabulary learning is a significant aspect of learner attainment in learning academic English.

Numerous studies have focused on the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among EAP students. Hashemi and Hadavi (2015) surveyed the use of VLSs among Iranian medical sciences learners. They reported guessing and social strategies as the commonly used strategies, whereas dictionary strategy, note-taking, and autonomy were less frequent among the participants. Afshar et al. (2014) also studied 173 Iranian undergraduate learners and reported insignificant differences in the choice and use of VLSs among the groups, but significant differences in the use of some individual strategies. Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) suggest that Iranian EAP learners employ a limited repertoire of vocabulary acquisition techniques. Hence, the need for training vocabulary learning strategies is tangible. Strategy training acts like a teaching technique that should be viewed and integrated into classrooms as an essential part of the in-class routines (Rashtchi & Rezvani, 2011). Ostovar-Namaghi and Rajaee (2013) indicated that vocabulary strategy training enhanced the experimental group's vocabulary knowledge.

In the Iranian context, EAP is taught by both language and content teachers. In the study by Atai et al. (2017), the principles of teaching EGP and EAP are the same for language teachers. However, EAP teachers need more preparation before the class, compared to EGP teachers. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that there is no difference in the underlying principles of ESP methodology and ELT methodology, and "there is nothing specific about ESP methodology" (p. 142). Atai (2006) also reported similar principles for the basis of EGP and ESP/EAP methodology. However, the content teachers of Atai et al. (2017) asserted that teaching EAP and teaching EGP are quite different due to the degree of emphasis on specialized language with specialist terms having different meanings in EAP courses. Rosenthal (2000) and Atai et al. (2017) also pointed out that content teachers may have little information about the linguistic needs of students. As Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) reported, EAP instruction should respond to the student's needs, that is speaking rather than reading, and should replace lecture-based instruction with discussion-based instruction. Belcher (2009) argued that need analysis is an essential part of EAP course design and teachers should implement it as part of their teaching. Ranjbar and Soodmand Afshar (2021) also reported that needs analysis can be regarded as a requirement for EAP since designing courses in favor of the wants and wishes of different stakeholders addresses their needs. In addition, Zand-Moghaddam et al. (2018) realized that the four skills do not draw suitable attention in EAP courses. Further, the inclusion of writing tasks seems to be a requirement in EAP educational environment. Due to the ignorance of writing skills in ESP classes, students may experience real problems such as committing a lot of lexical and structural mistakes, writing run-on sentences, and incoherent paragraphs (Ostovari-Namaghi et al, 2021). Atai et al. (2017) realized students' displeasure with the methodology as the teachers emphasize translation (without motivating students and involving them in any activities), use only L1 to teach, and cannot manage the class well. Ranjbar and Soodmand Afshar (2021) also figured out that Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is used by 93% of the EAP instructors in the Iranian context. Tamimi Sa'd and Rajabi (2018) also reported that teachers utilize certain types of VTSs. Teachers should both teach the students the way to learn the vocabulary and use more VTSs to manage vocabulary instruction effectively. Furthermore, Sharker (2018) confirmed the strong impact of certain teaching strategies on the motivation of the students in the classroom. The overview provided by Boudersa (2016) demonstrates the significance of teachers' training: Traditional-based teaching that is mainly based on theoretical educational processes should be shifted to research-theory-based teaching that informs and inspires teaching practices. This might provide a deep implication in education reflecting the fact that teachers need to be in constant contact with research for possible future teaching innovations and utilizing new research findings in their teaching practices to enhance learning and guarantee high-quality teaching.

Teachers' professional training and development are essential for supporting innovative and effective teaching. The covid-19 pandemic raised the need for online teaching and led to a subsequent major impact across global education systems (Al-khresheh, 2021). Apart from the circumstances caused by the pandemic, EAP teachers should notice that they are not just merely teaching EAP. They are dealing with web generation. Hence, improvement of EAP instruction requires teachers to present materials using modern technology such as blog-integrated writing in EAP (Asoodar et al., 2016), online EAP classrooms (Keshtiarast et al, 2021), and interactive whiteboards because the contemporary generation learns best through technology. Due to the development of technology and the availability of computers and their diverse usage in specialization, teaching through technology will be very beneficial and motivating for at least the modern generation (Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2021). Similarly, Clark (2013) recommends teachers provide learning environments that focus on oral language skills to develop

vocabulary and include technological tools. He also believed that to boost language acquisition, ELL students need supplemental or modified activities using available technological resources. Chen (2020) confirmed the key role of the Internet in education and reconstructed the organization and service system of education so that blending online and offline education has become a trend.

As materials are the main blocks in the language teaching process, authors have also shone a critical light on course books. Textbooks carry a great deal of importance so that they are called the "visible heart of any ELT program" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237), and the basis of input for language learners in EFL contexts (Mishan & Timmis, 2015). Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) reported that there is a wide variety of materials, particularly textbooks, for EAP courses. However, an experienced and motivated teacher tries to find his golden mean in using the textbook and enriches his classes with other materials to react, persuade and assure the learners' immediate learning needs.

The literature is also replete with evidence on the role of EAP students in their learning and achievement. Successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner (Van Lier, 2008). There are several aspects of learner agency with the utmost practical value in understanding the development of learner variables (Mercer, 2012). According to Mercer (2011), learner variables are composed of two main inseparable but helpful dimensions for coding and analytical purposes: the learner's sense of agency which concerns how agentic an individual feels both generally and regarding particular contexts, and the learner's agentic behavior in which an individual chooses to exercise his agency through participation, action, or deliberate nonparticipation or non-action. The agency is concerned with both observable and non-visible behaviors, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. All of the behaviors must be understood concerning the various contexts and affordances from which they cannot be abstracted. Accordingly, Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) criticized the status quo and argued that EAP learners are more concerned with how to pass the tests rather than improving their language skills.

Therefore, due to the pivotal role of EAP, the importance of vocabulary, and the significance of using strategies for vocabulary acquisition, the present study was conducted to enhance the body of literature through the following research questions:

RQ1: What are Iranian EAP students' beliefs about using VLS?

RQ2: What would Iranian EAP students like instructors to do in class to make vocabulary instruction more effective?

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

This is a qualitative study based on the perceptions of 22 undergraduate students (8 humanities, 7 engineering, and 7 medical sciences students) who shared their experiences of learning vocabulary in EAP courses. They were selected following a purposive sampling procedure to choose participants who can provide the researcher with rich data. The participants were studying at different universities in Iran and were members of Telegram groups. The data was collected during the Fall 2021 semester. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were studying EAP courses in online classrooms.

INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

Structured interviews through audio files on the Telegram application were used to collect data. The researcher shared her voice in Telegram groups to explain the purpose and rationale of the study. She invited the students who could provide the research with rich data. She typed the interview questions (Appendix) in Persian to ensure that all the participants understood the items. Thus the interviews were counted in Persian. The researcher wanted them to ask their questions, if there were any, before responding to the interview questions. Finally, using audio files, the participants sent 22 qualified responses to the researcher's private chat. Two experts immediately transcribed verbatim and translated the interview recordings from Persian into English. Despite the absence of sensitive and personal data in the interview questions, the researcher assured the participants that no third parties would have access to their data.

This is a paper extracted from the researcher's Ph.D. dissertation. As a mixed-method approach was applied to the dissertation, a VLS survey (extracted from Kulikova's VLSs questionnaire, 2015) was run in the quantitative section. Therefore, the respondents had a VLS background.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly. Thematic analysis was conducted through a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. For coding, she went through the transcript of every interview and highlighted everything that jumped out as relevant or potentially interesting. Highlighting all the phrases and sentences that match these codes, the researcher could add new codes as she went through the text. All the data were assigned into groups identified by codes. These codes allowed gaining a condensed overview of the main points and common meanings that recur throughout the data. Finally, the transcripts and codes were rechecked to examine the validity of understanding and verify the date. Thus, the researcher could establish the trustworthiness of the findings already arrived at (Sarantakos, 1998).

RESULTS

Despite narrowing down the study on VLSs, border concepts emerged, affecting all aspects of learning/teaching EAP and even EGP. According to the students' perceptions, the gaps are mostly rooted in teaching techniques, teachers' insufficient preparation to implement EAP courses, and inadequacy of the materials. However, learners also play a role in the failure to learn vocabulary. Analysis of the learners' perspectives revealed teacher-related themes, materials-related themes, and student-related themes. What follows reflects an abstraction verified by the participants.

TEACHER-RELATED THEMES

One of the interview questions addressed EAP students' views toward the techniques teachers use in teaching vocabulary. The below sub-themes were identified, signifying the teacher's role in facilitating vocabulary learning and language proficiency.

VLSs ARE IGNORED BY TEACHERS

All of the respondents agreed that EAP teachers rarely instruct and even present vocabulary learning strategies. Indeed, the participants desire explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies by both content and language teachers. Interestingly, the interviewees thought teachers (whether content or language teachers) may lack awareness of VLSs. A student of engineering said:

> *I got a clear picture of vocabulary learning strategies once I participated in this project. I used some of these strategies to learn EAP vocabulary, but unconsciously. I did not realize that I was using a specific strategy or I didn't know that learning takes place in several phases. The VLS survey suggests that vocabulary learning should be systematic and through a three-phase process: to get the meaning of a new word, to study new vocabulary, and to make the new vocabulary part of my repertoire.*

Therefore, as self-reported by EAP learners, they were unaware of the VLSs until they participated in this study. The learners attributed such unawareness to the teachers as they expected the teacher to present and train the strategies. A medical sciences learner explained:

> *If we noticed these techniques before, we would learn more difficult words more easily, better, and faster. So, we would achieve more linguistic and academic success. In my opinion, teachers can explicitly present and instruct techniques and strategies. To teach strategy is more effective than teaching vocabulary.*

Out of 22 respondents, 18 students argued that EAP teachers only apply certain types of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies (VTSs). In the other words, they ask content and language teachers to provide them with a variety of strategies.

TECHNOLOGY IS NOT A TEACHER'S PRIORITY

Due to the spread of Covid-19 and the development of online classes, students' views on the role of technology and the Internet revealed noteworthy findings. Their comments highlight the effectiveness of Information Technology (IT) in studying and learning vocabulary. A student of humanities said:

> *Even in online courses, the EAP teacher mainly applies the same practices used in face-to-face classes. They don't optimally use the potential of technology to teach and practice new vocabulary. Technology and the Internet may result in learning with fun, and learning harsh academic words would be enjoyable, easy, and effective.*

The participants expect the use of abundant potentials of the Internet for more and better learning. They insisted on the wide utilization of technologies and advancements in the educational system, not only in times of crisis such as the corona pandemic but all the time. A student of engineering articulated:

> *It looks strange that some teachers are not interested in using the options and facilities that emerged from the Internet and technology. They still prefer traditional and face-to-face classes. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, online courses severely lacked quality and some teachers did not want to teach online. The tools were insufficient for online classes. Later, the situation got a little better. Teachers and students adapted to the status quo and the use of technological context so that some teachers and students preferred virtual classrooms to face-to-face classes.*

It needs to be noticed that Iranian students and teachers were not initially ready for the new urgent conditions. However, it is expected that teachers should be able to take advantage of the stunning technologies for the benefit of themselves, their students, and the educational system; hence, they might require training to notice the most recent trends or developments. A student of humanities said:

> *Virtual classrooms have numerous advantages like saving and managing time and the possibility of reviewing educational materials and videos for more and better learning. "You aren't stuck in heavy traffic to get to the university; you are present at the virtual class from home, job, or wherever."*

However, the respondents thought that pure online classes relay leads to learning. The usefulness of face-to-face classes is incontrovertible. A medical sciences student stated the below:

> *Undoubtedly, pure virtual context cannot replace face-to-face classes. No one can deny the benefits of attending the class. I think it is better to use both environments to get the best results from the advantages of online and offline contexts.*

The respondents ask for a combination of online and offline contexts to learn vocabulary better. They wondered why they don't use the available facilities for teaching and learning and why traditional techniques are still used. According to them, advancement and technology are not reflected well in the educational system.

INSUFFICIENT CONCERN FOR NEEDS ANALYSIS

The participants also believed that vocabulary is not taught under the principles and by professional teachers:

> *Teachers only use some limited and old methods. The teacher only reads the new word and translates it into Persian. Then and whether in class or out of class, students practice vocabulary only within technical texts and boring tasks in course books.*

The students are not satisfied with the EAP program and claim that it does not meet their needs. All of the respondents complained about the traditional practices used by the teacher both in online and offline contexts. They wondered why traditional teaching still runs despite the variety of techniques and tasks offered by technology. They articulated:

> *Traditional approaches don't meet our needs. Smartphones, the Internet, and diverse applications have changed our perspective on educational issues. We expect to use the infinite world of technology for educational purposes and ultimately academic and career success. We need to use technology to satisfy our learning needs.*

It means EAP students' needs are neglected. They have e tendency to employ IT to meet their needs. They suppose the teacher is responsible for meeting their needs, they call for professional teachers who know the principles of teaching vocabulary. Technology and the Internet may enhance EAP teachers' capacity to respond to the student's linguistic needs. The learners have a liking for having interactions with their classmates and the teacher. They desire discussion with the use of academic words. A student of engineering said:

> *I think discussion-centered activities would also provoke EAP learners' motivation. To have a discussion using discipline-specific vocabulary excites the feeling of being a true practitioner of the discipline. It is very motivating.*

Thus, EAP instruction should also respond to the students' speaking needs with discussion-based instruction. Their needs have to be concerned and analyzed by EAP teachers and course designers so that improvement of EAP learners' communicative skills would draw attention. Further, the inclusion of writing tasks seems to be a requirement in EAP educational environment. A medical science student articulated:

> *I believe that writing facilitates learning. In EAP classes, there is no writing task based on academic vocabulary. Many students do not know how to write because the writing rules are not instructed.*

The importance of including writing activities complements the argument on the significance of needs analysis. The participants strongly emphasize that writing exercises would help them to learn vocabulary and productive skills. So, they need instruction on writing rules in EAP classrooms.

DISPLEASURE WITH METHODOLOGY

The respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with teaching practices adopted in EAP classes, whether online or offline. They agreed that teaching and practicing techniques in online classes are the same as in face-to-face classes. However, the virtual space has a lot of potential for better teaching and learning. The methodology used by the teacher has been criticized by the students who describe the teacher's vocabulary presenting/teaching practice as boring and demotivating. The following is an abstraction of the respondents' comments:

> *The summary of vocabulary teaching goes like this: the teacher simply reads the new words from the material and gives an equivalent or a brief explanation in Persian. Then s/he usually asks the students to read the text or do the relevant exercise in the course book. The process of teaching vocabulary almost ends here, without enough practice and repetition. This happens in both online and offline contexts.*

In the Iranian context, EAP is taught by both language and content teachers. The interviewees' statements imply that both groups of teachers use the same techniques and principles in teaching vocabulary. Although the experience of learning English for General Purposes (EGP) was not taken as an intervening variable in this study, the students' remarks indicate that they have already studied EGP. Therefore, they can notice the similarity of methods used by EAP and EGP teachers. In addition to the method, students also criticize language teachers' knowledge of academic vocabulary. They argue that language teachers lack mastery of academic words. A humanity student commented:

It has happened many times that EAP students looked for a tutor, but rarely can you find a teacher who can perfectly teach both EGP and EAP. EAP teachers, language or content, mainly teach by the expired translation method.

From the students' statements, language teachers may undertake training courses to get familiar with academic content and terminology, and content teachers may require training to notice the importance of diversity of principles, techniques, and practices in teaching vocabulary and satisfying EAP learners' expectations.

MATERIAL-RELATED THEMES

It should be noted that drawbacks of EAP teaching/learning are closely associated with EAP materials. The second component of Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK) pertains to teachers' cognitions concerning the selection and organization of the materials (Grossman, 1989). The teachers implement EAP classes based on the available materials. The tasks, activities, and exercises are prepared by material designers, but it is the teacher who ultimately chooses the material. Regarding materials, a medical sciences student explained:

Teachers introduce materials according to their preferences. The material mainly includes specialized texts containing technical words. Teachers often ask the students to read the texts and whenever they encounter a technical word, EAP teachers translate the word into Persian. Students also write the meaning in the textbook above the word. The text is typically followed by two or three exercises for understanding the text and filling in the blanks with the new words.

According to the respondents, EAP materials are mainly designed based on reading tasks with technical words. Such materials seem to be monotonous, tedious, and demotivating for EAP students. They wish for incentive materials, tasks, exercises, and even homework. One of the engineering students believed:

I've passed EGP courses. The textbooks and consequently the teacher apply various tasks for any component of language including vocabulary. I think it would be better if EAP materials include a variety of tasks because the exercises and activities of EAP materials are boring, and technical content is inherently difficult. Good material may motivate the students.

However, it is the teacher who selects EAP materials. Therefore, materials and teachers are partly interrelated. Before introducing the material, the teacher should carefully go through the textbook or handout and select the most appropriate one, the one which is capable of meeting the learners' multiple needs. Thus, again, the role of a professional teacher in EAP courses is manifested.

STUDENT-RELATED THEMES

As mentioned in teacher-related themes, the students claimed that VLSs are not explicitly presented. The learners also believed that if they notice and use VLSs, they will utilize them in online and offline contexts for deep vocabulary learning. However, the participants' statements imply that the insufficient interest and motivation among some students is a drawback, not related to materials or teachers but the students themselves. The following abstraction was obtained regarding the role of interest and motivation among the Iranian EAP learners:

Some EAP learners are not interested in English at all as they believe learning English is difficult. For some of them, content, words, teacher, techniques, tasks, and material are not a matter of concern because they merely want to pass the exam.

The participants acknowledged the role of motivation in learning. They frequently pointed to the boredom of methodology and materials; i.e., techniques, practices, tasks, exercises, activities, and course books. They explicitly call for motivating classes-whether online or offline. The learners are dissatisfied because they think the difficulty of academic vocabulary is mainly due to the lack of an environment for provoking interest and enthusiasm among the students. It means they seek the type of classes, teachers, and materials to help them overcome the roughness and difficulty of technical words. In sum, they need

motivation. However, others said that many students are not interested in studying and learning. A summary of the comments follows below:

> *No one can deny the role of English as an international language. Academic accomplishment, higher levels of education, a good career, and work/educational migration all depend on the mastery of EGP and EAP. A student who pursues a goal and plans for his studies must work hard to learn English well and deeply.*

In addition to the role of teacher and materials, the EAP learner is responsible for his learning and acquisition. An interested student tries to learn well, but the one who doesn't attempt to go through the steps of vocabulary learning shouldn't excuse or complain about teachers and materials.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing EAP students' views toward teaching/learning VLS and their recommendations for improving EAP courses, the following themes were raised iteratively:

TEACHER-RELATED THEMES

VLSs ARE IGNORED BY TEACHERS

According to the respondents, they didn't know much about vocabulary learning strategies since teachers don't provide them with the techniques useful for getting the meaning of new words, studying the new words, and keeping them as a part of their repertoire. This finding, in line with the study by Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021), suggests that Iranian EAP learners employ a limited repertoire of vocabulary acquisition techniques. Hence, the need for strategy training in how to acquire vocabulary is tangible. Strategy training acts like a teaching technique that should be viewed and integrated into classrooms as an essential part of the in-class routines (Rashtchi & Rezvani, 2011).

As the respondents agreed that EAP teachers mainly apply a few practices to deal with vocabulary, the teachers need to use a variety of techniques to teach words. This is similar to the findings of the study by Tamimi Sa'd and Rajabi (2018) in which the participants asserted their teachers utilize certain types of VTSs. Teachers should not only teach the students the way to learn the vocabulary, but also they should use a larger number of VTSs to effectively manage vocabulary instruction.

TECHNOLOGY IS NOT A TEACHER'S PRIORITY

The respondents' comments highlight the effectiveness of IT in studying and learning vocabulary. Such effectiveness is supported by scholars of any field of study. The covid-19 pandemic raised the need for online teaching and led to a subsequent major impact across global education systems (Al-khresheh, 2021). Apart from the circumstances caused by the pandemic, EAP teachers should notice that they are not just merely teaching EAP. They are dealing with web generation. Hence, improvement of EAP instruction requires teachers to present materials using modern technology such as blog-integrated writing in EAP (Asoodar et al, 2016), online EAP classrooms (Keshtiarast et al, 2021), and interactive whiteboards because the contemporary generation learns best through technology. Due to the development of technology and the availability of computers and their diverse usage in specialization, teaching through technology will be very beneficial and motivating for at least the modern generation (Ostovar-Namaghi et al, 2021). Similarly, Clark (2013) recommends teachers provide learning environments that focus on oral language skills to develop vocabulary and include technological tools. He also believed that to boost language acquisition, ELL students need supplemental or modified activities using available technological resources.

INSUFFICIENT CONCERN FOR NEEDS ANALYSIS

Based on the results, limited and old methods seemingly act as an obstacle to vocabulary acquisition. Respondents of the present study provided numerous examples of their needs for various tasks, exercises, and activities, not merely the boring routine of translation and reading-based activities. Similarly, Boroujeni and Moradian-Fard (2013) argued that due to the use of traditional approaches to teaching in the classes, ESP courses are not satisfactory in Iranian universities and do not lead to learning the language. It means EAP students' needs are neglected. Rosenthal (2000) and Atai et al. (2017) also pointed out that content teachers may have little information about the linguistic needs of students. As Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) reported, EAP instruction should respond to the student's needs, that is speaking rather than reading, and should replace lecture-based instruction with discussion-based instruction. Belcher (2009) argued that need analysis is an essential part of EAP course design and teachers should implement it as part of their teaching. Ranjbar and Soodmand Afshar (2021) also reported that needs analysis can be regarded as a requirement for EAP since designing courses in favor of the wants and wishes of different stakeholders will address their needs. In addition, Zand-Moghaddam et al. (2018) realized that the four skills do not draw suitable attention in EAP courses. A similar result was found in the present study and the respondents reflected their tendency toward interactional activities with their classmates and teachers. Analysis of their perspectives revealed that providing materials concerning communicative skills needs to be noticed. Further, the inclusion of writing tasks seems to be a requirement in EAP educational environment. Due to the ignorance of writing skills in ESP classes, students may experience problems such as committing a lot of lexical and structural mistakes, writing run-on sentences, and incoherent paragraphs (Ostovari-Namaghi et al, 2021). Accordingly and in response to the needs of EAP learners, if the EAP teachers instruct the principles of writing and present appropriate tasks for practice and evaluation, notable results might be obtained in favor of acquiring vocabulary.

DISPLEASURE WITH METHODOLOGY

The dissatisfaction with teaching practices adopted in EAP classes -whether online or offline- appeared as the next category from analyzing the interviews. Atai et al. (2017) came up with a similar displeasure with the teacher's methodology as they only emphasize translation (without motivating students and involving them in any activities), use only L1 to teach, and cannot manage the class well. Ranjar and Soodman Afshar (2021) also figured out that Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is used by 93% of the EAP instructors in the Iranian context. In the Iranian context, EAP is taught by both language and content teachers. In the study by Atai et al. (2017), the principles of teaching EGP and EAP are the same for language teachers. However, EAP teachers need more preparation before the class, compared to EGP teachers. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that there is no difference in the underlying principles of ESP methodology and ELT methodology, and "there is nothing specific about ESP methodology" (p. 142). Atai (2006) also reported similar principles for the basis of EGP and ESP/EAP methodology. However, the content teachers of Atai et al. (2017) asserted that teaching EAP and teaching EGP are quite different due to the degree of emphasis on specialized language with specialist terms having different meanings in EAP courses.

From the students' statements, teaching academic vocabulary requires training teachers. The overview provided by Boudersa (2016) demonstrates the significance of teachers' training: Traditional-based teaching, mainly based on theoretical educational processes, should be shifted to research-theory-based teaching that informs and inspires teaching practices. It might provide an implication in education reflecting the teachers' need for constant contact with research for possible future teaching innovations and utilizing new research findings in their teaching practices to enhance learning and guarantee high-quality teaching. Teachers' professional training and development are requisite for supporting innovative and effective instruction.

MATERIAL-RELATED THEMES

Although the role of the material was not included in the interview questions, it was reflected as one of the major factors affecting vocabulary acquisition in EAP courses. Numerous authors have shone a critical light on course books. For example, textbooks are the main blocks in the language teaching process. They carry a great deal of importance so that they are called the "visible heart of any ELT program" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237) and the substantial basis of input for language learners in EFL contexts (Mishan & Timmis, 2015).

The Iranian EAP materials are primarily reading-based textbooks, but the students seek materials covered with the tasks and exercises for all language skills. Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) have pointed out the wide variety of materials, particularly textbooks, for EAP courses. They argue that an experienced and motivated teacher tries to find his golden mean in using the textbook and enriches his classes with other materials to react, persuade and assure the learners' immediate learning needs. Thus, EAP teachers may eliminate the learners' dissatisfaction with the materials by finding appropriate course books which meet the learners' needs. The importance of need analysis is to the extent that Atai et al. (2017) inferred though some teachers are creative with the available materials, they do not consider students' needs and proficiency levels in selecting the materials.

STUDENT-RELATED THEMES

Students' perspectives on VLSs revealed some psychological variables of the learners themselves. They suppose learning English is difficult, vocabulary acquisition is demanding, comprehending technical texts with rough terminologies is exhausting, and they just want to pass final EAP exams. This is in line with the findings of Ostovar-Namaghi et al. (2021) who stated that EAP learners are more concerned with how to pass the tests rather than have improved language skills. Like other learners, the EAP learner is responsible for his learning and acquisition so successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner (Van Lier, 2008). However, it seems the learners of the present study need to be stimulated by motivation through the use of diverse VTSs and VLSs. In the same vein, Sharker (2018) has confirmed the strong impact of certain teaching strategies on the motivation of the students in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

According to the results extracted from the EAP students' beliefs, the followings were concluded.

RAISING LEARNERS' CONSCIOUSNESS OF VLSs

From the attitudes of humanities, engineering, and medical sciences students, we came up with the need for instructing VLSs. As a serious concern, they seek explicit VLS training. Vocabulary acquisition occurs over a process. Getting the meaning of new words, studying new vocabulary, and revising vocabulary to keep them in the repertoire need several strategies. Teaching vocabulary in the classroom- whether online or offline contexts- only contributes to getting the meaning. The student has to undertake the responsibility for the next steps (to study and to keep the new vocabulary in their repertoire). But, according to the respondents, EAP learners are not conscious of such strategies; they use VLS unconsciously and ineffectively. Therefore, the teacher should present VLSs and teach how to use the strategies so that they can go on the journey of vocabulary learning step-by-step and in an organized manner.

TRAINING TEACHERS FOR EAP COURSES

According to the participants' statements, it seems necessary to train teachers for EAP courses, who are familiar with EAP and EGP methodology. Teachers need to be blessed with various techniques and strategies for teaching to have active and dynamic EAP classes. The use of only a few limited traditional teaching methods lessens learners' enthusiasm and motivation, leading to failed learning ultimately. Therefore, before holding an EAP course, the teacher must be provided with the knowledge and skills to manage the class. Language teachers require knowledge of content subjects. A lack of mastery over the content and terminology of any EAP field eliminates the usefulness of EAP classes. The teacher's inability to recognize the meaning and usage of specialized terms impedes the presentation of the technical content, causing challenges to the successful teaching of EAP courses.

Selection of proper materials and assigning appropriate tasks are considered critical responsibilities of EAP teachers. A skillful teacher can select the most appropriate material for the course following the learners' needs. The role of material designers is also undeniable; though, it is beyond the scope of the current exploration.

THE EFFECT OF TASK TYPES ON VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

EAP students' dissatisfaction with the tasks provided by the teacher or the materials is perceived as a serious problem followed by inattention to needs analysis. The inclusion of diverse tasks, exercises, and class activities can contribute to the effectiveness of EAP courses and the learners' motivation. The use of traditional techniques and activities does not meet their needs. Therefore, the practitioners of English for Academic Purposes in the Iranian context have to analyze and satisfy the student's needs. Further, EAP learners' interest in discussion-based classes indicates their willingness to have interpersonal interaction while attempting to learn vocabulary. Also, their demand for writing-oriented tasks and learning vocabulary through writing skills imply that EAP students seek to improve all language skills while learning vocabulary.

ENRICHMENT OF EAP INSTRUCTION

Beliefs about teachers' insufficient concern for online sources and platforms reflect students' interest in the educational potential of IT. Over the Covid-19 pandemic, the online platform has yielded a good deal of advantages such as the possibility of studying when schools and universities are closed, recognition of different aspects of online education for future situations, programming and using educational apps, improvement of students' independence and autonomy, the realization of student-centered education, and free tasks with easy access. Therefore, EAP instructors should benefit from the educational advantages of technology and the Internet to meet the needs of students in line with global changes. The combination of online and offline contexts may contribute to the enrichment of EAP.

To sum up, our results imply that the instruction of EAP vocabulary can be deepened by raising learners' consciousness of VLSs. Moreover, strategy training enhances learners' independent and autonomous learning, leading to the development of taking responsibility for their learning (Shi, 2017). Furthermore, the effectiveness of task types on linguistic skills and vocabulary knowledge, enrichment of EAP instruction using technology and the Internet, training teachers, and modification of EAP materials provide evidence for the significance of needs analysis in implementing EAP courses.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) How important is it for you to learn English vocabulary? Why do you think this way?
2) People have different ways of learning vocabulary. What is your style?
3) What are your views about vocabulary learning strategies?
4) What is the difference in vocabulary teaching/learning considering the education platform (online/offline classrooms)?
5) What are your perceptions of the techniques EAP teachers use in teaching vocabulary?
6) What are your suggestions and recommendations for improving the quality of EAP courses?