
The Effect of Negotiated Syllabus on the Reading Comprehension of ESP Students

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Abstract

Negotiated syllabus addresses learners' needs and assists them in developing their own on-going syllabus through shared decision-making in the classroom. Many studies focus on the effect of this learner-centered syllabus on language learning. However, few studies exist on its effect on the reading ability of language learners, especially in the area of English for specific purposes (ESP). To address this gap, this quasi-experimental pre-test post-test intact group design examined if negotiated syllabus has any significant effect on developing the reading comprehension of ESP students. To this end, 32 students in the experimental group were given the choice to design a negotiated syllabus through collaboration while 39 students in the control group received a pre-designed syllabus. The data analysis showed that the ESP learners in the experimental group outperformed their counterparts in the control group on the reading post-test. The results of this study have implications for authorities in higher education, educational policy makers, and teacher professional development in ELT and ESP in particular which are discussed in detail in the paper.

Keywords: Curriculum; ESP; Higher education; Negotiated syllabus; Reading comprehension

Over the last decades, by shifting learning theory from cognitive to social perspectives and emphasizing critical pedagogy, negotiated syllabi have received much attention from a variety of disciplines. Negotiated syllabus questions the validity of pre-designed syllabus and encourages teachers and policymakers to revise their thinking about teaching and learning by empowering students in transferring what learned from the classroom to the outside world (McAdoo & Manwaring, 2009). The

major focus of negotiated syllabi is the construction of the syllabus (Nation & Macalister, 2010). It is conceptualized as "the discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organized (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, p.1). These types of syllabi which are based on humanistic methodologies put learners and their needs at the center of attention and argue that learners play a central role in determining how the language is learned (Clark, 1991).

Negotiation in the classroom enhances a learner's power of learning when appropriate. Negotiation involves freedom with discipline.

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Collaborative decision-making needs balancing of an individual agenda with everyone else's. In the classroom group genuine autonomy should be exercised in an interdependent way (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

There is growing concern that not involving learners in the decision-making process and predicting their needs may negatively influence students' achievements and slow down the learning process or their learning motivation (Boon, 2011; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). The positive effect of negotiated syllabus on learners' motivation (Rahmanpanah, 2015), self-awareness (Nunan, 1998), speaking and writing (e.g. Abbasian & Malardi, 2013; Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2011; Nguyen 2011) is well established. Nonetheless, only one study exists on the effect of negotiated syllabus on reading comprehension skills (Khademi Shamami, 2004) and, to the best knowledge of the researcher(s), no study has been conducted on the reading comprehension of ESP students. This is surprising because ESP students struggle with reading comprehension (Farhady, 2006; Ghaemi, Dafatirifard & Shirkhani, 2011; Rezaei, Rahimi & Talepasand, 2012). Most of the available studies have just listed some of the problems of ESP or identified the cause of ESP failure including the absence of learners' professional needs analysis (Atai, 2002; Moattarian & Tahririan, 2014) and learners' lack of interest in reading passages (Behafarin & Mahdavi, 2010), and the failure of tasks in engaging students in the process of learning (Farhady, 2006).

According to Yarmohammadi (2005), the major problem is that "language teaching in Iran does not follow any specific purposes, i.e. it can be characterized as a language for no specific purposes" (p.4). Apart from the researchers, there is a constant complaint by ESP students that their needs and challenges are overlooked by teachers (Eslami, 2010) or their role in syllabus designing has been marginalized and the syllabus being practiced has not accommodated their personal experiences, ethnic background, interests, and knowledge an even their learning style (Ahmadi & Hasani, 2018). To address the highlighted

problems, we conducted this study to understand how reading interventions based on a negotiated syllabus can improve ESP learners' reading comprehension. By examining this effect, it is hoped that this study serves as a guide for teachers and teacher educators to see how to re-design ESP courses to improve their students' reading performance and comprehension.

RELATED STUDIES

Literature distinguishes the term syllabus from curriculum. "Syllabus is a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning" (Breen, 1984, p.47) and it focuses on the way the contents are chosen and graded (Nunan, 1988) while "curriculum" is concerned with how education programs are designed, implemented, assessed, managed, and delivered (Nunan, 1988). Curriculum is very broad and syllabus is a smaller part of curriculum (Hosney, 2013). Throughout the history of language teaching, many syllabi have been designed based on different methods for instance Structural Syllabus, Notional or Functional, Task-based Syllabus and etc. What differentiates each syllabus from another is the selection and gradation of the content. For instance, in a functional syllabus, the organization of the content is based on the language functions. In a negotiated syllabus, the content is entirely unknown prior to its creation (Clark, 1991) and the focus is not just what to be included into syllabus but how the syllabus should be designed (Öztürk, 2013).

Literature also makes distinction between negotiated syllabus and pre-designed syllabuses. A pre-designed syllabus is developed only by teachers and barely addresses the different aspects of language learning. Teachers' lack of awareness of the needs of students and their way of learning results in a syllabus on which can delay language learning process and affect the motivation (Boon, 2011; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

Researchers have long attempted to understand what negotiated syllabus is and how it can contribute to learning or meeting the students' needs. The impetus behind negotiated

syllabus is addressing learners' needs and helping them to create their own on-going syllabus through negotiated decision-making in the classroom (Breen, 1987 cited in Ma & Gao, 2010) by promoting cooperation between students with teachers during discovery (Brown, 2000), making students' voices heard and helping them to practice joint decisions about learning and teaching (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018).

Negotiated syllabus is underpinned by social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and negotiation for meaning theory (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999). According to the theory of constructivism, learning is an active process which requires learners to be engaged in social interactions because knowledge cannot be received or transferred and needs to be constructed. The quality of teacher-learner interactions is important. Quoting Brook and Brook, Kim (2005) explains the features of a constructive school as follows: Curricular activities are mainly based on the main sources of data rather than textbooks, curriculum moves from whole to part, teachers attempt to understand students' idea to consider them in following lessons, and appreciate students' questioning. In addition, the evaluation of learning is part of teaching and therefore teachers constantly observe students while working and gather data about learning through portfolios.

Nguyen (2011) believes that the idea of negotiated decision-making in the classroom stems from Bertrand Russell and John Dewey's liberal schooling agenda with its stress on "collaborative responsibility" and "choice" as opposed to "competition" and "coercion" in the early twentieth century (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, p. 14). Following Russell and Dewey, Freire discussed that learners should be given the opportunities "to negotiate learning outcomes" and "to cooperate with teachers and other [learners] in a process of discovery" (Brown, 2000, p. 90). Carl Rogers also considers the learner as a whole person, and the teacher as a facilitator (Brown, 2000). In addition, research in the second language acquisition area during the 1970s and the 1980s have led to considering the importance of interac-

tion and negotiation for meaning in the language acquisition process. On the other hand, negotiation for meaning theory argues that

"When learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities they are compelled to 'negotiate for meaning,' that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way which permits them to arrive at a mutual understanding. This is especially true when the learners are working together to accomplish a particular goal . . ." (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999, p. 122).

In applying the above-mentioned theories which underpin this study, teachers need to engage students in knowledge construction and provide them with opportunities for negotiation of meaning, their needs, and interests while designing the syllabus. According to Uztosun (2013), implementing student negotiation does not mean giving the students the role of decision makers of classes. Conversely, it is a way of synthesising teacher's and students' beliefs considering that learners may not be aware of their needs and may ask for classroom procedures unrelated to their needs. Classes designed by solely depending on students' views may not be useful for improving students' special skills. To avoid this, teachers should take part in decision-making as well and make a balance between students' beliefs and their own beliefs. Clark (1991) believes that the extent to which learners are able to involve themselves in decisions concerning syllabus content, the materials to be utilized, the methodology to be used, and the testing and assessment devices, will depend upon their cultural norms and their state of cognitive development.

Because in our universities the students are used to an imposed syllabus, the teacher has a difficult responsibility to create a place where students' different comments are heard, value (Allahyar, 2015). Moreover, students need to be empowered to make a decision about the curricular activities through the negotiation of

ideas with teachers and their peers. The growing interest in how negotiated syllabus contributes to language learning has resulted in many researches framed by constructivism. In a mixed-method study, Nguyen (2011) investigated the effect of the negotiated syllabus on the students' listening and speaking and motivation in the Vietnamese context. Data were collected through classroom observation, the documents (e.g. the students' homework and materials, the course-evaluation questionnaire, and IELTS listening and speaking pre- and posttests). Participants of the study were Bachelor's English students whose English levels were intermediate or advanced but they were not good at speaking. The negotiated decisions were related to different aspects of the course (e.g. ordering activities, inclusion or exclusion of activities or materials) as well as tasks (e.g., preferences of the students for working in pairs, groups or alone, the time allowed for an activity, the students' preferences for the evaluation). The data analyses showed a wide range of positive effects and the students' enthusiastic acceptance of the approach. Some problems arising during the process were also discussed.

Uztosun (2013) carried out an action research study to understand how the negotiation of students in designing classroom activities can improve the speaking ability of Turkish university EFL students. Data collection occurred through interviews, questionnaires, and observations over eight weeks. Data analysis showed that the alignment of the negotiation syllabus with students' needs increased their self-esteem and motivation to participate in the class and decreased anxiety and in turn enhanced their speaking ability.

In a mixed-method study, Abassian and Seyed-Hendi (2013) attempted to understand how negotiated syllabus can influence speaking ability. Data were collected through Key English test, interviews and attitude-motivation questionnaire. Using Key English Test, 54 male participants at the intermediate level were recruited and were randomly placed into two groups. The students in the experimental group received a treatment based on

the explicit negotiated syllabus for 14 sessions while the ones in the control group received conventional instruction. Following the post-test, the participants were asked to write a protocol and explain their idea about negotiated syllabus. Comparing the data collected in the pre-test and post-test phases and analyzing them through a t-test showed that the students in the experimental group gained better scores in speaking than the ones in the control group.

Abbasian and Malardi (2013) also examined to see if negotiated syllabus can improve learners' writing ability and self-efficacy. Data for this study were collected through the Preliminary English Test, writing self-efficacy questionnaire, and writing tests. To this purpose, 62 translation students at University of Applied Sciences were recruited for this study. The treatment lasted 10 sessions. Students in the control group practiced conventional writing instruction while the ones in the experimental group received the negotiated syllabus. The goals of the course, the content of the materials, the ways of teaching and assessment were also negotiated. Comparing the scores of pre-test and post-test showed that writing of the experimental group was improved after receiving the negotiated syllabus. However, the negotiated syllabus had no effect on language proficiency or self-efficacy of the experimental group.

Similarly, Baghbaderani and Afghari (2015) used a quasi-experimental design to compare the effect of negotiated-based instruction on the writing ability of 104 adult and young students. The target sample of the study was selected using a stratified sampling method placed into four groups: two control groups and two experimental groups. Results of the study showed that negotiated syllabus improved the writing ability of both adults and young learners but adults in the experimental group had a better performance on the posttest of writing compared to the young ones.

Though reading is one of the most important language skills through which ESP learners can gather information on specific topics (Atai & Nazari, 2011), not much exists on the effect of negotiated syllabus on the

reading comprehension of ESP students. The only existing research, to the knowledge of the authors, is conducted by Khademi Shamami (2004) on general English learners. The data were gathered from 61 female learners at the intermediate level of proficiency. Participants were randomly placed into two experimental and two control groups and the interest areas of experimental group were identified using a Likert-based survey while the areas of interest were not negotiated with the students in the control groups. The results of the study showed no difference between the reading performance of experimental and control groups.

It should be mentioned that the reviewed studies have some limitations. First, most of the studies have focused on the general English proficiency or writing, speaking and listening ability of the learners. Second, the participants of the studies were Bachelor English students or students in language institute who are different from ESP students in terms of motivation and language proficiency. Third, the authors have not explained in detail what teachers negotiated with learners and how negotiation took place. The syllabi were mainly determined and the negotiation of decisions were limited. Results from the samples of the reviewed literature may not be generalizable to the Master's students who have to attend compulsory (ESP) courses at the university level. Though ESP courses have gained popularity in Iran and many universities offer ESP courses, the courses have failed to address the students' needs. As a result, a majority of ESP students are still too incompetent to use English for professional purposes (Akbari, 2014). Teachers often complain that ESP students are generally passive and dependent (Ghodrati, Ashraf & Motallebzadeh, 2014) and less motivated (Akbari, 2014). More interestingly, the ESP courses at universities have mainly focused on reading (Farhady, 2006) but still students have a major problem reading ESP texts (Rezaei, Rahimi & Talepasand, 2012). Since improving reading skills of ESP students has usual-

ly been a major concern for EFL learners, based on the literature, we assumed that implementation of a co-constructed negotiated syllabus would improve the reading comprehension of students.

METHODS

This present study examines the effect of negotiated syllabus on the development of the reading comprehension of ESP students by answering the following question:

1. Does negotiated syllabus have any significant impact on developing reading comprehension of ESP students?

Participants

Seventy- one ESP students were chosen from Islamic Azad University (Semnan Branch) in Iran through a convenience sampling method. Participants were 25 males and 46 females with the age range of 25 to 40 at the time of data collection. Participants were doing their Masters' degree in Psychology. They had also passed at least 5 English language credits during their bachelor degree. These students were at intermediate level.

Instruments

The data were collected through OPT and reading comprehension tests.

OPT

In order to homogenize the two groups, Oxford Placement Test (2001) was administered to all learners. This is a reliable and valid test which comprises of three sections: vocabulary, cloze passage and grammar. All these questions were accompanied by multiple choice items. The internal consistency reliability of OPT was measured using Kuder-Richardson (KR-21) and this value was .81.

Reading Comprehension Test (pre-test, post-test)

A multiple-choice reading comprehension test developed by the researchers was used to evaluate the reading ability of the experimental and control groups as a pre-test and

post-test. The content validity of the test was assessed by careful examination of two English teachers who had at least ten years of experience in teaching English to university students. This test included three reading passages followed by multiple choice items. The items in each passage tested recognizing the main idea, vocabulary knowledge, inferencing and referencing. The test was also piloted with a similar group of students and the internal consistency reliability of the reading test using (KR-21) was .78. After item analysis, two misleading items were modified. The reliability of the main study at the pre-test was .72 and at the post- test it was .74

Procedure

The data for this study were collected by the first researcher at Islamic Azad University, Semnan Branch. After obtaining permission from the board of the university where the researcher is teaching, the research process started. The researcher administered OPT and reading pretest prior to the experiment to be sure about the homogeneity of the participants in experimental and control (imposed) groups. A total of eight reading comprehension lessons were administered once a week for a period of one semester. All lessons were prepared through negotiation between the teacher (the first author) and the experimental group during the course. The whole process was according to negotiation cycle suggested by Breen and Littejohn (2000). At first students in the experimental group were informed about the negotiated syllabus and received training on how to choose texts, design tasks, and assess their outcome to meet the negotiated goals. Then there was an oral discussion about their expectations, their English leaning experiences and their suggestions. Following the training, the class was divided into groups of five and there was a heated discussion about what topics should be selected and how the learning procedures should be carried out. The group leaders presented the results to the class and explained why they chose those topics. Finally, the whole class reached an agreement on the topics which need to be covered in the course.

They made the choice of the topics based on their own interest, their ability and needs.

Since the students were supposed to bring texts according to their interest and the objectives of the class, the teacher introduced the related sources for gathering psychology reading texts and each group had to bring texts for the chosen topics and share with the class. The passages were chosen with negotiation in the following session. For guiding students to design tasks for these passages, the teacher gave them some sheets with an example (as prompts). Each group was given a responsibility to design cloze , gap formation, multiple choice comprehension questions, etc for the selected texts through negotiation with their teammates and present it to the whole class to receive the teachers' and others' feedback. This required the students to use the dictionary and familiarize themselves with different reading strategies presented by the teacher like skimming, scanning, inferencing , etc. All the groups were receiving teachers' help and her guidance while they were preparing their assignments and then the designed tasks and their sequence were also negotiated and edited in the class by sharing their work.

This co-constructed syllabus consisted of 8 units which covered different aspects of psychology such as stress, CBT, anxiety, mental disorder, Schizophrenia, etc. Students were repeatedly evaluated by their participation in their preparation for class activities in the class. Each student was evaluated by their group members and the whole class. The teacher imposed this prepared syllabus to the control group and there was no chance to decide about the syllabus. In this class the same texts, tasks and strategies were applied with no negotiation and decision making process.

It is worth mentioning that this quantitative study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test intact group design and the above-mentioned data collection procedure and methodology were examined through a pilot study with 20 psychology students at the same university to check the feasibility and appropriateness. After the treatment, the researcher re-administrated the same reading test to the exper-

imental group and the control group to measure if (negotiated) syllabus improved the reading comprehension of the experimental group.

RESULTS

To examine whether negotiated syllabus has a significant positive effect on reading comprehension, the hypothesis that negotiated syllabus

does not have any significant effect on developing reading comprehension of ESP students was tested.

First, to make sure the students in the control and experimental groups are homogeneous in terms of language proficiency, an independent t-test was run and their means on the OPT was compared.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics; OPT by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OPT	Experimental	32	28.63	7.308	1.292
	Control	39	26.74	9.377	1.502

Table 2.
Independent Samples t-test; OPT by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.167	.146	.927	69	.357	1.881	2.030	-2.168	5.931
Equal variances not assumed			.950	68.841	.346	1.881	1.981	-2.070	5.833

The results of the independent t-test ($t(69) = .927, p > .05, 95\% \text{ CI} [-2.16, 5.93]$, Cohen's $d = .222$ representing a weak effect size) (Table 2) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the OPT. Thus it can be claimed that they enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency prior to the main study.

The negative 95 % lower bound confidence interval of -2.16 indicated that the difference between the two groups' means on the OPT could have been zero. Thus the above mentioned conclusion as no significant difference between the two groups' means was correctly made. It should also be noted that the assump-

tion of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's $F = 2.16, p > .05$). That is why the first row of Table 2, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

Next, an independent t-test was run to compare the experimental and control groups' means on the pretest of reading comprehension in order to prove that they enjoyed the same level of reading comprehension ability prior to the administration of the treatments. Based on the results displayed in Table 3 it can be claimed that the experimental ($M = 9.44, SD = 3.70$) and control ($M = 9.23, SD = 4.20$) groups had close means on the pretest of reading comprehension.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics; Pretest of Reading Comprehension by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest of Reading Comprehension	Experimental	32	9.44	3.706	.655
	Control	39	9.23	4.208	.674

The results of the independent t-test ($t(69) = .217, p > .05, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.69, 4.20]$, Cohen's $d = .053$ representing a weak effect size) (Table 4.7) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the pretest of reading comprehension. Thus it can be claimed that they enjoyed the same level of reading comprehension ability prior to the main study.

The negative 95 % lower bound confidence interval of -1.69 indicated that the

difference between the two groups' means on the pretest of reading comprehension could have been zero. Thus the above mentioned conclusion as no significant difference between the two groups' means was correctly made. It should also be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's $F = 2.78, p > .05$). That is why the first row of Table 4 i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

Table 4.
Independent Samples t-test; Pretest of Reading Comprehension by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.783	.100	.217	69	.829	.207	.952	-1.692	2.106
Equal variances not assumed			.220	68.626	.827	.207	.940	-1.668	2.082

The next step was to run an independent t-test was run to compare the experimental and control groups' means on the posttest of reading comprehension. As can be seen in Table 5,

the experimental group ($M = 14.72, SD = 3.57$) has a higher mean than the control group ($M = 10.44, SD = 4.86$) on the posttest of reading comprehension.

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Reading Comprehension by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest of Reading Comprehension	Experimental	32	14.72	3.576	.632
	Control	39	10.44	4.866	.779

The results of the independent t-test ($t(69) = 4.08, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} [2.28, 6.28]$, Cohen's $d = 1.00$ representing a large effect size) (Table 6) indicate that the experimental group has

significantly outperformed the control group on the posttest of reading comprehension. Thus the null-hypothesis of this study is rejected.

Table 6.
Independent Samples t-test; Posttest of Reading Comprehension by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Differ- ence	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.083	.047	4.143	69	.000	4.283	1.034	2.221	6.345
Equal variances not assumed			4.269	68.247	.000	4.283	1.003	2.281	6.285

As the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not met (Levene's $F = 4.08$, $p < .05$). "Equal variances not assumed" was reported.

DISCUSSION

The potential effect of negotiated syllabus on improving different language skills (e.g., Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2001; Baghbaderani & Afghari, 2015; Uztosun, 2013) is well documented. However, knowledge about the effect of negotiated syllabus on reading comprehension in ESP is limited. We contributed to current knowledge by examining this effect on reading comprehension of Iranian ESP learners through reading interventions. For this purpose, 71 students were recruited through convenience sampling. Thirty-two students in the experimental group negotiated their choices while designing a negotiated syllabus through collaboration. However, 39 students in the control group had to work on a pre-designed syllabus. The mean scores of both groups on the reading post-test were compared with those of the pre-test.

Analysis of the data showed a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group who co-constructed a negotiation syllabus and control group who received the pre-designed syllabus on a reading comprehension test. This means that negotiated syllabus has a significant impact on reading ability. The finding of this study lends support to the findings of previous studies (Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2013; Abbasian & Malardi, 2013; Baghbaderani & Afghari, 2015; Uztosun, 2013) which have found that negotiated syllabus has a positive effect on

writing and speaking ability of university students in Iran.

However, this result is in contradiction with the results of Abbasian and Malardi (2013) who have found no relationship between the negotiated instruction and language learning. The differences in the results may have been caused by the interplay of different factors such as learning strategies, students' emotional status, and time limitation. This result is also in contrast to the results of Khademi Shamami (2004) who investigated the effect of the negotiated syllabus on general English language learners. The reason for the contrast can be associated with the major shortcoming of Khademi Shamami's method. In Khademi Shamami's study, the freedom given to the students in decision making was limited because the only negotiated element was the selection of the topic of interest. In fact, students did not really engage in negotiation. Negotiation for meaning theory argues that negotiation for meaning occurs when students attempt to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way which permits them to arrive at a mutual understanding. The same reason could be true about Khademi Shamami (2004)'s study. In addition, Khademi Shamami (2004) stated that the efficient number of reading comprehension exercises in both control and experimental groups could have counterbalanced the effect of the negotiated topic of interest.

CONCLUSION

We carried out this research in response to the scarcity of research on the effect of negotiated syllabus on the reading comprehension of ESP learners in Iran. The main aim of this study was to gain more insights about the experiences of ESP learners to inform teacher professional development.

The result of this study shows that negotiated syllabus plays a key role in enhancing the reading performance of ESP learners. This highlights that ESP students' reading difficulties may be much associated with their marginalized role in syllabus designing and lack of attention to their personal experiences, ethnic background, interests, and knowledge and learning style (Ahmadi & Hasani, 2018). Findings of this study suggest that for improving reading comprehension of ESP learners, teachers should involve their students in the on-going process of decision making and make the syllabi more negotiable and open to discussion in terms of content, objectives, and assessment. According to (Rahmanpanah & Mohseni, 2017), Understanding engagement in learning context is crucial for language teachers as they can create positive learning outcomes from the learners.

In doing this, teachers can recognize their students' needs, interest, and problems.

Negotiated classes are Student-dominated in which teachers teach less, but students learn more. . Learner centered classrooms are fruit of the self-regulated learning principle. (Mohseni & Satariyan, 2017). Moreover, making a creative atmosphere in the classroom will improve language teaching and learning. (Runco, 2004 cited in Marashi and Khatami, 2017)

Teacher training programs can raise teachers' consciousness about the way negotiated syllabus can improve language learning. To this purpose, teacher trainers need to involve teachers in reflection and equip them with different essential skills in promoting classroom discussions and group works. Having such skills, teachers can better engage their learners in the shared decision-making process.

The results of the study can help curriculum designers to understand the interpretation of learners about negotiated syllabus and examines how it relates to the learning process. Based on this information, designers can address students' concerns while designing ESP language materials. The results of the study can provide policy-makers and authorities in higher education with new perspectives concerning learning and encourage them to set a better platform for teachers and students to negotiate different aspect of learning.

This study has also some limitations in terms of context, sample, and data treatment period. Only 71 Psychology students at Islamic Azad University (Semnan Branch) were considered as the sample of this study. Target population was from the psychology department and was selected through convenience sampling. Compared to probability sampling, this sampling technique is subject to bias (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Despite the above-mentioned limitations, we believe this study could serve as a springboard for more research on the effect of negotiated syllabus on different aspects of language learning.

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