Investigating Class Coherence and its Effect on EAP Course Evaluation: A Case Study of MA Students of Geography and Tourism

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Abstract: *In the practice of EAP, there are two parallel components of course design: Needs Analysis vs. Course Evaluation. Needs Analysis is carried out for estimating target level needs in contrast with the present level of proficiency. Course evaluation is conducted by the university administration to determine if the course has been responsive to the goals as assigned by the Ministry of Higher Education. However, perception of needs may cause conflicts between the practitioner, the students, and the administration. The students' perception of needs differs from the needs indicated by the university's selected syllabus and with the practitioner's perceptions. The mismatch causing the contrast may affect the reliability of evaluation results. the evaluation questionnaire containing fifteen items was discussed and examined first; then comprehensive needs analysis data were collected which aimed to reflect proficiency levels, attitudes, and perceptions of the students concerning EAP in their future study and professional needs. The differences between the students' perceptions leading to varying class coherence, the practitioner's perceptions, and the university expectations of target situation can lead to various levels of subjectivity in evaluating the EAP practitioners' work quality.*

Key Words: *EAP, Class Coherence, Needs Analysis, Evaluation, Administrative, Practitioner's, and Students' Perceptions.*

1. Introduction

English for specific purposes has established itself as one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching within the past few decades. M.A and PhD courses are currently dedicated to the growth and development of ESP courses (Robinson 1991). Despite such programs, the ESP instructional program does not yet have a proper outcome quality given the efforts devoted to promoting the quality of the outcome in Iranian Universities (Atayi 2005). This is believed to be due to the fact that ESP is believed to lack an underlying theory; and hence there are not independent research departments. The research is undertaken within English Language Teaching (TEFL) departments while the semi-EAP and fully specialized courses of EAP are administered either in content departments or in Foreign Language Teaching Centers of the university, a center which is in charge of the service without any incentive for research.

ESP is one of the offshoots of communicative approach to the study of language (Munby 1978); a linguistic development which has been applied in the field of language teaching. The communicative approach is based on the premise that maintains the functional aspect of language use taking into consideration learners' communicative needs rather than formal aspects (Richards and Rodgers 2002, Hutchinson and Waters 1987). In theory, nothing makes ESP differ, while in practice ESP needs research aiming at what generic or registerial variations of the English language is needed (Jordan 1997).

The most significant feature of an ESP course is that the content and aims of the course are determined by the needs of a specific group of learners. A definition of ESP embodies absolute as well as variable

characteristics. The absolute characteristics include meeting specific needs of the learners; making use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; being centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, Brinton et al 1989). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that ESP is an approach to language teaching in which "all decisions as to the content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning (p.19)".

As an application of communicative language teaching approach, EAP learning courses are tailored to learners' professional and study needs. According to Carter (1983) there are three features common to any ESP course: (a) authentic materials (b) purpose-related orientation, and (c) self-direction. According to Brown (2001), there are four major principles underlying content-based as well as theme-based instruction which are appropriate teaching approaches for most EAP courses: automaticity, meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation, and communicative competence. As for authenticity, ESP is similar to other communicative approaches concerning pedagogical activities and target language use tasks. Purpose-related orientation involves problem solving activities suitable for ESP students. Students' attention is drawn to the content of classroom activities rather than formal constructions. As an ultimate goal of ESP instruction, self-direction is about turning learners into users (Carter 1983, Hamp-Lyons 2001). ESP promotes learner-centeredness and learners' autonomy by teaching through developing learning strategies. Dudley-Evans and John (1998) address features of classroom practice in ESP courses and talk about four principles: Involvement, Interaction, Individualization, and Independence. These features are all compatible with communicative approaches which adopt a learner-centered approach to language teaching.

Given the above details of ESP administration, in reality there are difficulties surrounding actual class instructions: the practitioners do not possess any pedagogical insights for applying to their teaching practice, since they have learnt the conceptual content but not TEFL. Research can aim at issues which create a gap between what is currently being practiced and what is the ideal practice. The gap between pedagogical contributions and the practitioners' knowledge status is the major problem for most ESP courses currently practiced (Eslami-Rasekh et al 2011, Eslami Rasekh et al 2011, Eslami Rasekh et al 2008, Eslami Rasekh et al 2009, Eslami-Rasekh, et al 2004, Khajeie 1993, Gooniband 1988).

2. Course evaluation

Course evaluation, both summative and formative, is the ultimate measure in EAP both in terms of its function as well as sequence. It is an important stage of every ESP course together with syllabus, materials preparation, and methodology. Courses are evaluated for effectiveness as anticipated in the course of needs analysis. Evaluation can be done either implicitly, in a formative way, and explicitly, in a summative way. Implicit evaluation takes place during the term, when learners, by their grades, participation, and motivation, give clues to the teacher on how their learning is going on (Robinson 1995) This type is the most effective for the teacher's awareness. Summative or Explicit evaluation may take place at the end of the course for estimating the value of the expenditure consumed for the course. Using questionnaires, surveys, talks as well as interviews both informal and formal, etc. teachers ask the students to express their perceptions and attitude towards the subject matter, instructional methods, activities, the teacher's effectiveness and so on. Evaluation of the course is a step for checking the goals targeted at the beginning through conducting needs analysis. The evaluator may be the teacher; in this context, he should be open-minded in hearing and implementing learners' comments. It is known to teachers that it is an emotional issue and needs confidence for taking comments from the students.

EAP course evaluation is carried out as an ultimate measure and under good circumstances for making decisions on curriculum changes, documenting events, measuring cost effectiveness, estimating the needs for a teaching stuff, identifying unintended outcome, and clarifying the objectives. It is assessment for students, accountability for the administration, and awareness for the teacher. Summative evaluation is done

to examine all aspects of a program of instruction, i.e., cost effectiveness, administrative procedures, students' attitude and behavior, teacher's effectiveness and efficiency, etc (Robinson 1995). Different people have different interest in evaluation results. The teacher improves materials, method or the syllabus; the administration needs the information for assessing the overall impact and students' satisfaction, plus a view on how committed and skillful is the teacher.

The carrying out of evaluation is either by an outsider or insider each of which has advantages and disadvantages. The outsider may be objective, free from local prejudices; however the disadvantages include, in addition to others, the threat that it causes for the teacher and the hazards it may create for the students. The insider may do the evaluation; however, it is believed to be not reliable enough for administrative decisions. The best and most effective evaluation is the one that is done by the teacher himself in informal subjective ways. Like Needs Analysis, evaluation can be done by using questionnaires, check lists, rating scales, and assessment. Questionnaires need to satisfy the conditions for being a valid instrument of evaluation. There should be a match between the questions and the course contents. Evaluation list can contain yes/no questions, open questions, liker scaled short items. In addition to questionnaire and check list, observation, class interviews about all aspects of the course may be other ways of evaluating. It is of consensus that the results of evaluation can never be absolutely objective; there are varying degrees of subjectivity. To reduce the subjective nature of the results, triangulation is suggested: two or more techniques for the same target evaluation are advised by researchers of the field (Brindley 1989, Chambers 1997, Flowerdew and peacock 2001).

The results of evaluation are of use not only to the teacher of the course, but also to the administrative bodies who wish to examine the effectiveness of the teacher and the cost effectiveness of the course. The query is: are our courses producing the effects they are intended to? If not, how can we improve the course for better effects? It is said that students' comments of success or failure of the course components are illuminating. And it is because of this effect that in most higher education centers students' perceptions and views of the course quality are collected by the outsider evaluators who are to attend to the students' attitudes and perceptions (West 1994, Met 1991, Highland and Hamplyons 2002).

The goal of this study is to show that evaluation could be subjective to varying degrees; and under undesirable circumstances it could be counterproductive given the possible heterogeneity of students' attitudes, aptitudes, and their views of what is needed and motivating to them. The evaluation in Iranian EAP administration is carried out by outsiders who are expert employees assigned to do the task in the absence of the course practitioner; and it occurs end of the term with fifteen questions which will be discussed below. In such a context, there exist a few important pitfalls to watch for: a) how reliable are the students' judgments; b) how effectively it might appear to cause teacher's burn out and his relationships with the students who fill out the questionnaires; and c) how objectively the items can evaluate the practitioners' qualities. In addition to the above issues, evaluation results can determine the teacher's future promotion to higher academic positions. In Iranian educational system, teaching staff's yearly as well as academic promotions are based on a) research merits of the candidate teachers as well as the quality of their teaching service as reflected in good results in the evaluations. The current practice has become a major issue in teaching administration and is viewed as threat and intimidation to the teachers as the they should step out and be substituted by the outsider evaluator who brings the questionnaires to the class and supervises the completion of the questionnaires. The new version of the questionnaire contains fifteen questions while the previous versions contained twenty items most of which targeted the teacher directly. Below the items will be examined and discussed.

The coherence among the evaluating students, their degree of proficiency, motivation, commitment, and attitude are all variables which could contribute to the subjective nature of the evaluation results. We will first briefly introduce students' perceptions regarding different aspects of EAP practice; then the questions in the questionnaire will be presented, and finally arguments will be presented as for how much caution would be needed in using the evaluation results for administrative decisions. The assumption is that if evaluation is

done improperly and without due attention to surrounding circumstances the course and the students' subjective feelings, the outcome will be counterproductive to the goals of upholding the quality of the instruction.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of course evaluation in Iranian universities, in our case the postgraduate students of Azad University, Najafabad Branch (IAUNB) majoring in Geography and Tourism Planning. The question of the study focuses on showing how reliable are the results of the course evaluation carried out currently in all Iranian universities. Evaluation is an inevitable part of every teaching program and is widespread. It is and should be done for getting realistic estimations of what the courses of instruction are producing and whether they are creating the effects intended for them. However, the nature of the evaluation results, if triangulation is not done, might be likely to jeopardize efforts which are aimed to contribute to the bettering of the courses. Insights into the different aspects of the evaluation, how it is done, who does it, what is the subject of evaluation, and what sources of information are to be trusted constitute the effective components of evaluation and contribute to the enhancement of the programs of instruction. In addition to those concerns, class composite structure including students' status with regards to their attitude, motivation, commitment, as well as proficiency level on the one hand, and the individual subjective needs on the other are significant determiners which have to be taken into consideration. Below, we introduce the participants of this study, the procedures of data collection, and data analysis. We will then discuss the questions of the evaluation questionnaire and compare what the needs of the students are with what the teacher can offer as per planning expectations of the university administration to demonstrate possible conflicts between the two sides of the issue, the students' perceptions and attitudes and the teachers' dilemma in providing for the needs assigned by the university administration or stick to the students' wish for teacher's compliance.

4. Participants

Since specific academic disciplines are shown to affect the needs of the students (Ferris & Tagg ,1996), student's field of study was used as an important criterion for sampling, in our case students of Geography and Tourism Planning. As postgraduate candidates are accepted in relatively small numbers, the population constituted our entire postgraduate students composing of sixty who either had completed the course or were to start the course in the academic year of 2010-2011. Their biographical background, preferences, and characteristic qualities were examined through a set of questions they responded to; additionally, gender was not a variable, therefore, the participants made a mixed gender population.
Instruments
     The questionnaire contained various questions made by the researchers suitable for the specific context of the project. The target situation of needs is assumed to have been discovered by the material developers, but the present state of objective and subjective needs is an important part which is ignored by the current EAP practice. The questions included various aspects of not only attitudes, but also lacks, wants, and needs of the MA students. In addition to some demographic information, students' rank ordering of the importance of different language skills to their academic and professional goals, the preferred instructional activities in classes, and their perceived importance of problematic areas in current EAP practice were included in the questionnaire[1].   To ensure the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items, the researchers took part in collecting responses which were given in Persian[2].

The comprehensive questionnaire consisted of fourteen sections each with items targeting one aspect of the EAP needs, preferences, instructional problems, self-assessed proficiency levels, as well as attitude. The items were ranked on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 10 (most important). Part A contained items asking about participants' demographic information; part B contained fourteen sections with items which concerned language skills; section G1 concerned self-assessment of oral proficiency; G2 asked students' readiness for attending the EAP course; G3 asked how efficient they were in reading comprehension of their own field of study; G4 contained questions assessing students' proficiency levels based on IELTS criteria; G5 asked about the most desired of the four major skills; G6 asked students to rank order their skill in order of proficiency level in various tasks; G7 asked about the most difficulty area of language knowledge; G8 asked if students if they had attended various state and private language institutes; G9 asked preferences for the best teaching practice ; G10 asked inquired which strategies would be and have been most useful in learning; G11 inquired about the goals of the EAP courses they had or would have to attend obligatorily; G12 inquired about the reason/s why they should believe EAP would not be of any benefit professionally; G13 asked about reason/s of failure and their disappointment; G14 asked about the skills they thought were most preferable for them. The results of analyzing the elicited data are presented in parts as much as they are relevant to the goals of this study. The above sections concerned a) different preferred, practiced, or suggested instructional activities which either have been or should be used in classes ranging from 1(never) to 10 (always); also about the importance of different problems in the EAP programs based on the ranking scale. The problematic areas in EAP instruction in Iran were based on the findings of previous research (Atai 2000), informal interviews, classroom observations, and general discussions held in classes. The questionnaire was distributed to the students by the researchers and variable percentages of response rate were collected. The frequency of scores selected out of the maximal ten, and the percentage of students who selected each score in the scale of one to ten were estimated as presented below. In all cases, the measurement of variance (standard deviation) and mean comparison of the individual scores for each one of the sections was carried out for demonstrating the extent of differences among the students' views. Furthermore, for the complete list of questions, the measurements including mean, percentage, and SD were calculated to enable the researchers to discover degrees of homogeneity present.

5. Procedures of Data Analysis

The SPSS statistical software program used for data analysis could analyze the questionnaire data for the distributions of responses. Statistical procedures employed include descriptive statistics for various items on the survey to examine overall percentages, means, and standard deviations used to examine the degree of disparity. Mean differences as well as graphs would indicate responses upon which agreement was observed in viewpoints in contrast with those for which there was insignificant agreement.

6. Results and Discussion

Doing present situation analysis, we collected students' self-expressed judgments regarding their

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communicative as well as attitude. How efficient they feel they are in achieving simple communicative goals and how they think about the fate of their English learning. The responses which were given based on a scale of least to most are introduced below. The descriptive statistical measures of the mean score, frequency, percentages and the standard deviation (hereafter SD) are cited. The relevant graph is a representation of the responses in terms of either frequency or percentage of each one of the ten scores, useful for viewers who wish to examine the degree of cohesiveness among responses given. The numbers on the vertical column present the frequency of the scores and those on the horizontal present the scores given by the students. In the sections to come, we will briefly a) discuss the evaluation questionnaire items, and then b) compare students' perceptions elicited in the comprehensive needs analysis; however, for saving space, only sample quantitative data of needs analysis will be presented.

The questions in the evaluation questionnaire:

    Before comparing the students' views regarding various aspects of EAP course of instruction, we first introduce the newest, recently modified version of the evaluation questionnaire which contains fifteen items. This questionnaire is a new version of one which contained twenty questions. The refinements have been made to omit the items which were considered as inappropriate. The objection was that such items carried inappropriate presumptions about the teachers' personality. The ten items listed first examine the teacher's scientific and pedagogical qualities, while the last five items inquire about the teachers' social and characteristic qualities. In front of each question in the table, there are columns for the students' to choose from the lowest of twelve to twenty which is considered the highest. The students- teacher evaluation results are calculated by a computer software and a copy is sent to the teacher while other copies are filed in the teacher's background to be used for judging if any promotion type is to be granted.

    Below we will present the questions of the evaluation checklist and discuss the items in it. Items 1 to 10 aim at the teacher's capability in teaching and his knowledge, while items 11 to 15 relate to teacher's social behavior and scientific attitude. We first present a brief discussion of how rightly they can reflect students' perceptions of the specific qualities in question.

    Question one inquires about teacher's command over the subject matter of teaching, in our case EAP. This question is intuitively least subjective compared with a few which could be highly subjective. The English courses offered as part of the curriculum are general as well as semi-specific, administered by the Foreign Language Center; and there are fully EAP courses administered by content departments practiced by content teachers. In the case of general courses of English, the syllabus, materials, and course activities are decided by the English Language Service Center, for which the teacher does not usually have a say. The exams, both mid-term and final, are prepared centrally by the center and hence, students' judgments should be directed to the Language Center rather than to the teacher who does not have a say in this regard. Students issue judgments for how knowledgeable the teacher is which motivates the teacher to prepare previous to class attendance. Question two targets almost the same issue, students who are impressed by the teacher's work will give high scores to this item too. The only concern for the subjectivity will be the scores given by weak and unmotivated male and female students who come to university because of the prestige rather than their future professional needs. They usually come from wealthy families and they confess, whenever forced to work, that they wish to get the degree to impress those concerned, to make their parents happy, or to gain the social prestige. The weak female students, interview data revealed, would state they come to university not for a future career; rather the motive is they get a better chance of marrying if they get a university degree.

1. Teacher's command of the subject of teaching.
2. Teacher's general knowledge in the major of study.
3. Comprehensiveness and depth of teacher's discussions of various topics.
4. Ability to convey the teaching materials to the students
5. Having an appropriate syllabus containing comprehensively and cohesively related contents

Question three by what it conveys is subjective. How one's depth of knowledge may be soundly judged by the students who form a mixed and incoherent group with various attitudes? The only guess for the answer is students' attitude towards the teacher, the subject, and additionally, their sense of security for the end result of their work. In general English Courses, the teacher does not get any chance to demonstrate these qualities properly. Question four is about how well the teacher can convey ideas to the students. How eloquently the teacher presents concepts and ideas. The thing is that difficulty level might appear to be correlated with eloquence of discussions; and especially in English courses it is a matter of proficiency of the students. What may happen if the students who are weak do not follow or take breaks in the middle of class discussions? How can we examine the objectivity of such responses is a matter for dispute. Culturally specific to Iranian students, the students who are weak, unmotivated, with lack of sufficient commitment have to like the teacher in a general sense to score high in their evaluations. In such circumstances, the teacher who is threatened by the evaluation results, who fears for losing his job, has to employ strategies which do not necessarily serve the course quality. There is always the need for such items to be interpreted by the evaluation standards; or triangulation will be needed to lessen the degree of subjectivity.

Question five is about syllabus containing comprehensive as well as sequentially cohesive contents. One wonders, for general English and semi-specific English courses, which are supervised centrally, who should take the credit for the good evaluations. The only major cause of a good evaluation in this case is how much the teacher is liked by the students of the class. And this depends on various factors, which are irrelevant of the concerns of evaluation. The students, especially those in the BA degree, form incoherent groups with varying view points and commitment. The administration has to take these subjective factors into consideration; otherwise, as mentioned earlier, the efforts will be counterproductive for the administration, e.g. if fifty percent score high in contrast with the other fifty who score low, there will be a contradiction to be sorted out.

The existing evaluation practice has a major advantage: empowering the students who can potentially be susceptible to mental harm in a relationship which is unequal in terms of power, true in our cultural setting of teaching. The teacher is more experienced, has greater authority both in terms of knowledge as well as the decision on the quality of assessment. In such circumstances, one may say it is right not to leave the vulnerable students without defense. The empowerment of the students is a vital issue in our university teaching contexts. As for the teacher, the threat is a major concern. One who does not or cannot show the qualities expected in one's teaching strategies, having to face the threat of losing either one's job or the reputation of being a good teacher, has to be concerned about mainly the students' attitudes towards every aspect of the course. If the majority are not committed and motivated, the teacher has to decide to make it friendly and modify the syllabus according to the wish of the weak majority. And this is considered to be harmful to the course quality. Especially of concern is that triangulation which can be a guarantee against such ill effects is not used in Iranian evaluation practice; therefore, the likelihood of facing with unwanted effects is significant. The sad thing is that this kind of evaluation in Iran has some political aspects to it which have made inquiries and exploration into it a taboo. One who tends to question the degree of objectivity has the concern of being judged or accused of lack of potential.

6. Efforts for introducing novel issues of discussion and use of recent resources.

Question six is subjective by nature: how can one get an estimation for one's effort devoted to introducing novel issues of science through using up to date resources is a matter of approximation. And it requires scientific maturity for the students issuing such judgments. The problem here is, again, that what is judged by the students is an overall satisfaction with the events; or at times unrealistic expectations which could lead them to relatively false judgments. The weak students wish to have a course without concerns of failing and for the strong committed students, it will be a matter of different expectations from the weaker group. The overall effect of the content of the question can be less than objective; and the solution might be either triangulation or else, the results will be valuable for the teacher alone.

7. Compatibility of teaching strategies with the goals of the course

Question seven lacks the condition of relevance. In the case of English courses which are administered by the English center, with centralized assessment, materials, and syllabus, there appears to be no need for the teacher to introduce recent up to date resources, as the course content is limited and time could not be consumed for additional materials. In classes which are over-populated with students from various educational backgrounds, the teacher finds it challenging to employ a satisfying teaching strategy. In the case of applying teaching methodology, classes with more than forty students can hardly be easy to manage for the teacher who is to use a communicative approach of teaching through engaging students in tasks. This item would be more objective in the case of postgraduate courses in which the teacher enjoys freedom of choice and the students are few and mature. However, the university administration objects to the results of evaluation from postgraduate students by saying that the small number of students can make the evaluation results unreliable. The postgraduate teacher makes an impression if he introduces up to date sources for the MA degree EAP course. However, for BA level EAP courses, each student has to pass seventy courses to graduate compulsory in the curriculum of the Iranian universities; and in circumstances in which one teacher has to teach up to seven courses of instruction every academic term, one may expect less than an ideal teaching practice. A significant number of courses to be taken is time consuming for the teacher as well as for the students who have seven to ten to attend every term.

8. Use of appropriate methods of assessment in line with the goals of the course

Question eight, the same as other questions mentioned as irrelevant to the teacher of general and semi-specific courses, is not an issue for the teacher; the assessment is centralized. The difficulty of the exam can be an issue of dissatisfaction for the weak; and too easy tests are subject of criticism for the good ones. The teacher can choose appropriate strategies and give an exam which is satisfying to both groups; however, this type of decisions need skill and experience on the side of the teacher. Without a good strategy, the teacher may be subjected to criticism.

9. Encouraging students to participate in class discussions

Question nine is about using tasks involving students in communicative activities. The weak students normally do not wish to take part in tasks unlike the good ones who show the tendency. If the majority of the class is composed of the weak, participation for the committed students will be hard; as they may be accused of trying to show off. Weak students who face with difficulty doing tasks do not show cooperation and this adds to the challenge.

10. Creating incentive and desire for the students to study and research

As for question ten, subjectivity may be less compared with a few items above. The only reason for minor subjectivity is how the teacher is liked by the students. Those students who have been criticized, or told off, may show distorted judgments. Experience shows that smart students who have talent for learning happen to be noisy and naughty ones. Their responses might add to the subjectivity of the responses to the item.

11. Style of class management (order in being present and attending the class in time)

Question eleven is to elicit students' judgments as for how timely, orderly, and punctual the teacher is. Every teacher has experience of students who wish to end the class session earlier than the class time, most often insisting on having less materials for an easier to pass final exam; and this is a cultural issue. For a reader from a Western university, such issues may sound unlikely. This matter is cultural, compared with students in Western universities, Iranian universities feel free to bargain and insist in their wish for less rather than more. Students who feel often tired of so many classes and insist on cancelling them, trying to make the class time and materials shorter, judge the teacher's timely presence and orderly attendance. This, again, can potentially be subjective given the dominant culture among Iranian students.

12. Possibility of visits, availability, and face to face meetings out of the class.

13. Social behavior and manners of the teacher and mutual respect.

Question twelve inquires about teacher's accessibility for the students to visit. This question has to be skewed in the sense that when fifty percent differ significantly from the other fifty, one wonders how a teacher

is to be evaluated with respect to this item. Some questions are binary by nature, either yes or no. For questions with a binary answer, subjectivity is suspected if half chooses the low and the other half chooses the high score. Question thirteen aims to check on the teacher's treatment of the students. It can be turned into a subjective item if noisy and naughty ones are told off and given a harsh treatment. This is a current issue in the culture of our students. Students are not all well-behaved.

14. Logical and rational reaction to students' opinions, suggestions and criticism

15. Good temperament and showing respect for the students

Questions fourteen and fifteen could be problematic when some students raise questions to deliberately take time, to show off, or to try to entertain their fellow classmates. If the question is not relevant, and the teacher is not skillful in handling such problems, the results will appear in evaluation results which are given by such group of students.

What was discussed above was a skeptic conservative view to evaluation with data produced by students in various courses. Some arguments were related specifically to EAP and Semi-EAP and General English courses. It was meant to be radically skeptic, as important decisions are made based on the results. If there exists subjectivity, even to the slightest degree, one can be soundly concerned why the administration uses them in matters as important as promotions. The intentional skepticism was considered necessary, as even the suspicion of unreliability could ruin efforts which are made to promote rather than demote the quality of our courses.

7. Class Coherence Tabulated

Since evaluation results are correlated with class coherence, we compare, below, the collected survey data to show the fact that one's expectation of the evaluation should be conservative, limited to the context and the realities surrounding the data elicitation. In order to demonstrate the degree of coherence we compared students' views regarding the different aspects of the English course they were attending.

Below students' perceptions of which aspects of preferable EAP course content are compared. The aim of our comparisons has been to observe degree of agreement among them. Table one shows the degree of disparity among the students who participated in our data collection. The groupings of students vary across different preferences mentioned to them through options offered under each question. The more the mean scores get closer to ten, the better the situation is considered for an objective evaluation.

Statistics

		N11	N12	N13	N14	N15
N	Valid	49	48	47	49	46
	Missing	10	11	12	10	13
Mean		6.3061	6.8333	6.4043	5.2041	6.9130
Std. Deviation		3.27366	2.91243	2.78708	2.91533	3.27839

Table 1: Perception of students: Reading preferences: (N11: reading comprehension of general topics, N12: reading comprehension of academic topics; N13: reading comprehension of academic Journals; N14: reading comprehension of stories and entertainment; N 15: reading comprehension for library purposes, e.g. digital library sources).

Table two illustrates students' preference in speaking English involving in tasks including simulations, role play, and for the reasons mentioned below. The results show that the students are not similar in their preferences. Lack of a general preference indicates differences in views as for what is motivating and what is not to be done in class. The differences in views may be reflected in their way of evaluating.

Statistics

|		N41	N42	N43	N44	N45	N46
N	Valid	49	48	48	47	44	15
	Missing	10	11	11	12	15	44
Mean		7.0816	6.9375	6.0833	5.5532	7.2273	4.0667
Std. Deviation		3.06075	3.41091	3.14090	2.86515	3.08683	2.76371

Table 2: Speaking preferences: N41: conversing with foreign visitors, N42: for overseas trips, N43: conversing with colleagues in workshops of conferences, N44: presenting articles in conferences, N45: accuracy of pronunciation preferred, N46: other purposes.

Table three demonstrates views regarding the importance of or the preference for grammar. The scores show the absence of a general consensus for learning grammar as a preference. The skillful teacher of an EAP course has to be aware and ready for this diversity to face the challenge of teaching such a group, otherwise, the reflection will be unfair in evaluation and the teacher gets frustrated by failing to achieve the goals expected of the EAP course.

Statistics

		N61	N62	N63	N64
N	Valid	47	46	43	29
	Missing	12	13	16	30
Mean		5.0000	5.8913	5.0000	4.4483
Std. Deviation		2.88926	2.72624	2.82843	2.75922

Table 3: Perception of students: Preference of grammar: N61: very small proportion of the course, N62: grammar for everyday use sentences, N63: grammar for TOEFL and advanced writing, N64: grammar for other reasons if any.
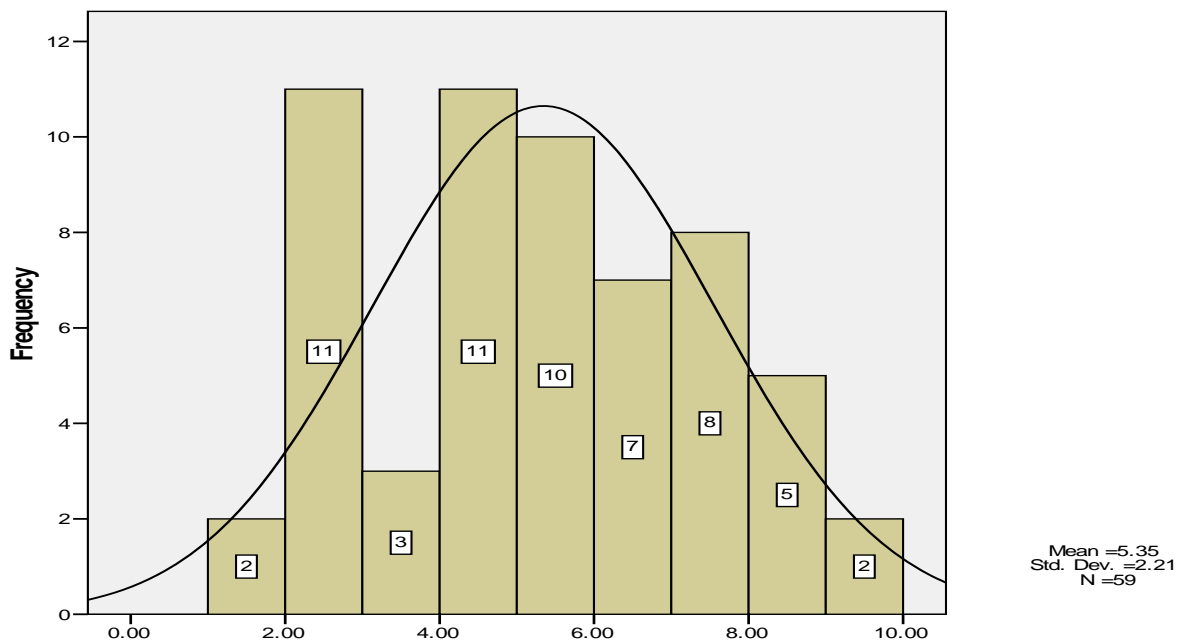
Figure 1: Comparison of mean scores: Students self-assessment of their proficiency level

Figure one shows the degree of difference among students' levels of proficiency. The majority of the participants are self-evaluated as moderate; and the most frequent score appears to be five and six out of ten. The desirable score for forming a good context of evaluation would be a figure close to ten. Figure two is a display of students' views regarding their interest in studying English and the degree of difficulty they face with. The results show that students are divided in their self-assessment. The results of the comparison show that a majority faces with difficulty studying English and a small group finds it moderately difficult.

C12
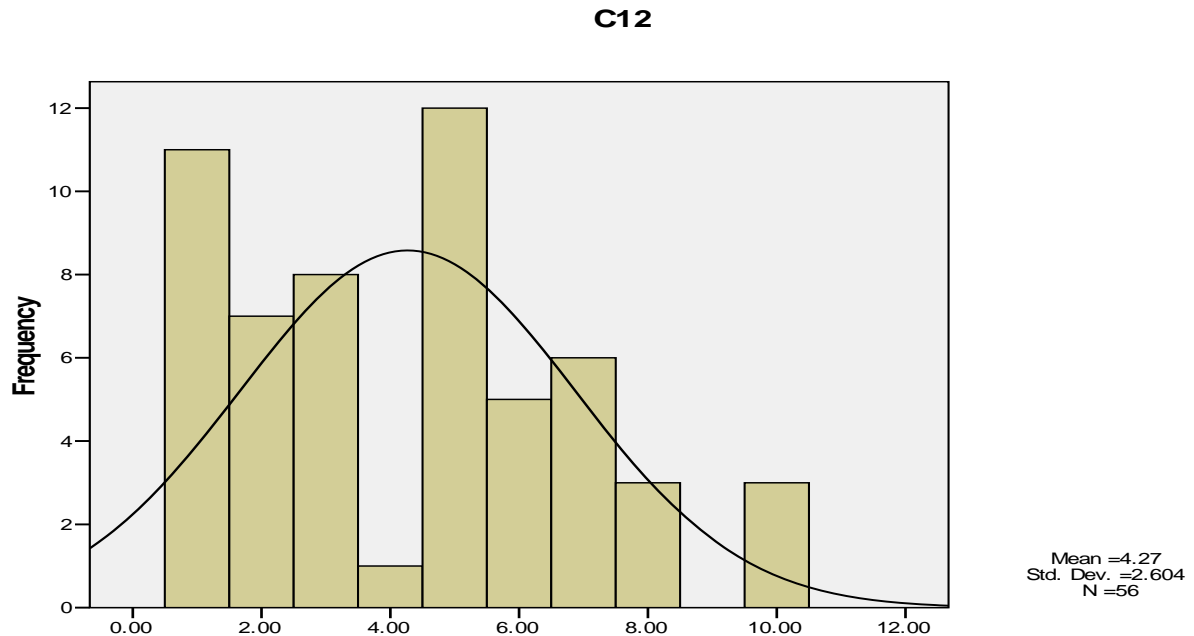
Fig. 2: I enjoy studying topics in English and I face no considerable difficulty

Figure three presents responses to the question aiming at discovering students' levels of listening proficiency. The distribution of the responses is greater than an ideal level for a class to be managed in an even and proper style.
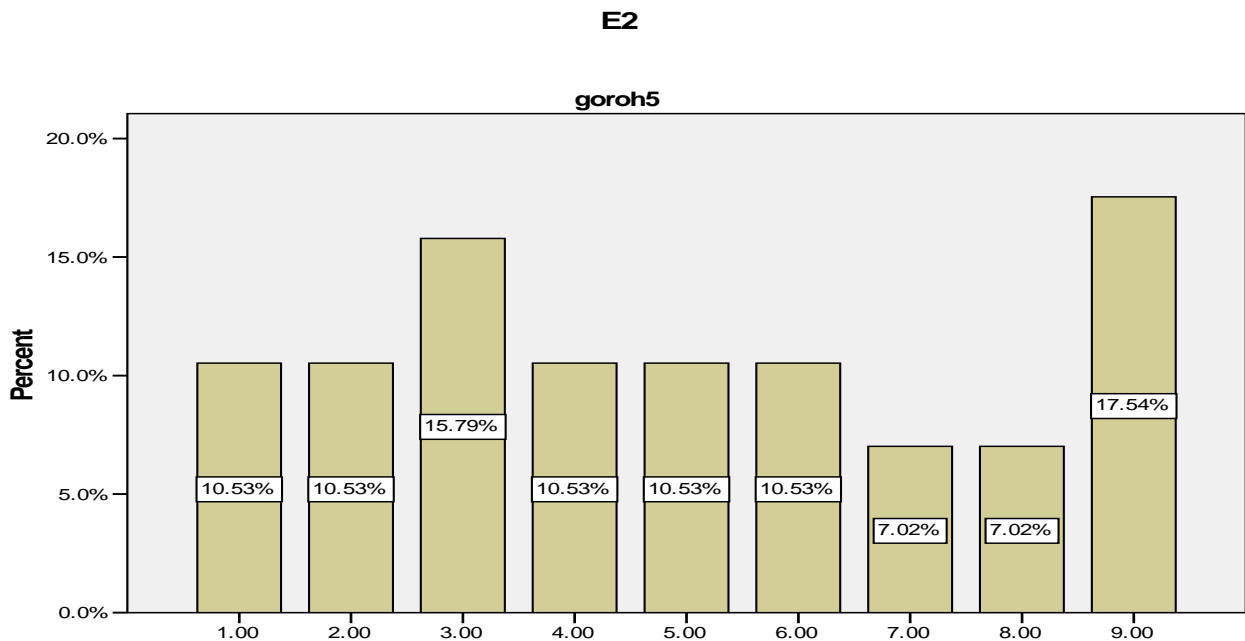
E2

Figure 3: Listening comprehension skill:

Figure four shows the distribution of students' knowledge of grammar. As is clear, most students have very little knowledge of grammar which makes it a challenge for the teacher. The more the weak students are present in class, the greater will be the probability of failure in teacher's choice of the level of materials' difficulty level.
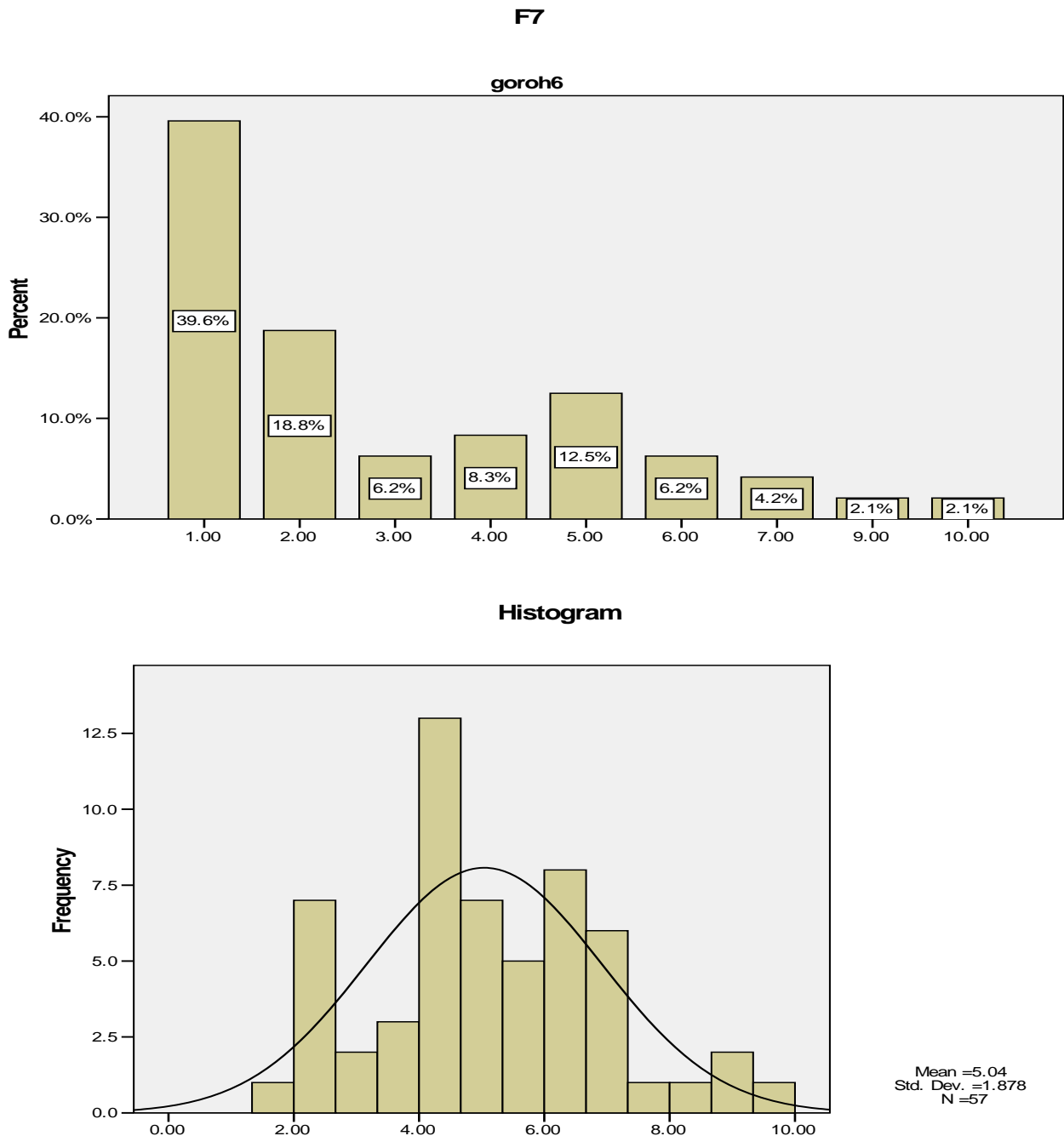
Figure. 4: Knowledge of Grammar

Figure 5: Comparison of English Proficiency: vocabulary, speaking, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, pronunciation skill and knowledge of grammar.

Figure five is a representation of the mean scores of English proficiency in terms of knowledge of different components of it. The results show which students are to attend the course assigned for them. The normal

distribution shown is not a desirable one, as class coherence depends on the majority of students to be either on the high or the low side of the figure.

H3
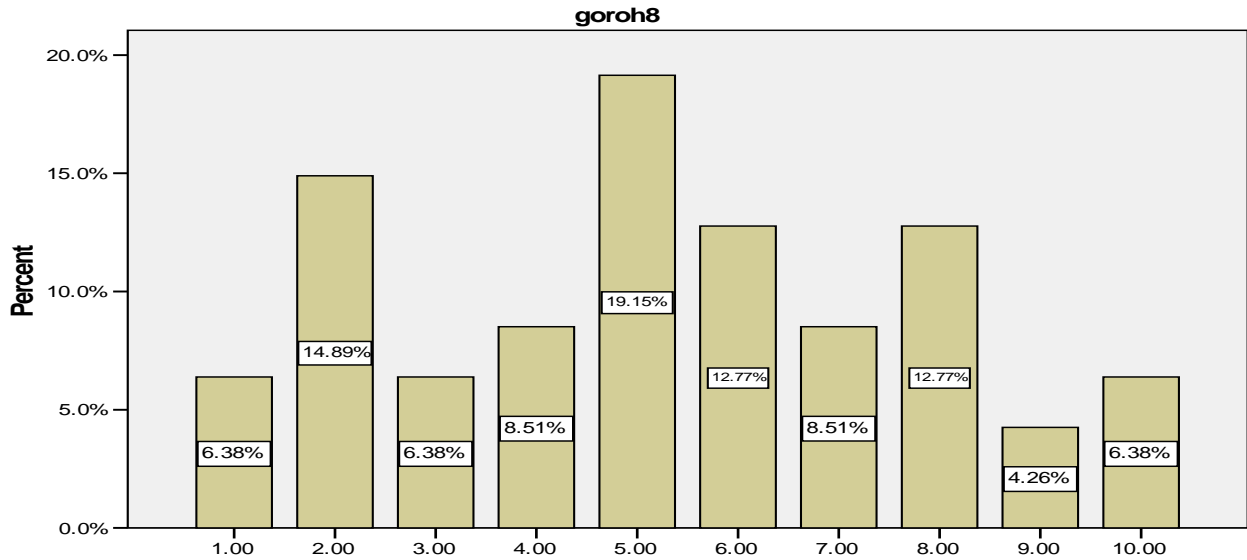
Figure 6: Learning English through attending university general and semi-specific courses.

Figure six presents students' learning in previous compulsory English courses they had passed in the university curriculum. The distribution of scores reveals how different the class is with regards to students' prior experience of learning English in university courses. The issue is that most classes of English language for general and specific purposes has a relative degree of individual differences; however, the efforts made in recognizing them could be of considerable help for the course practitioner.

J1
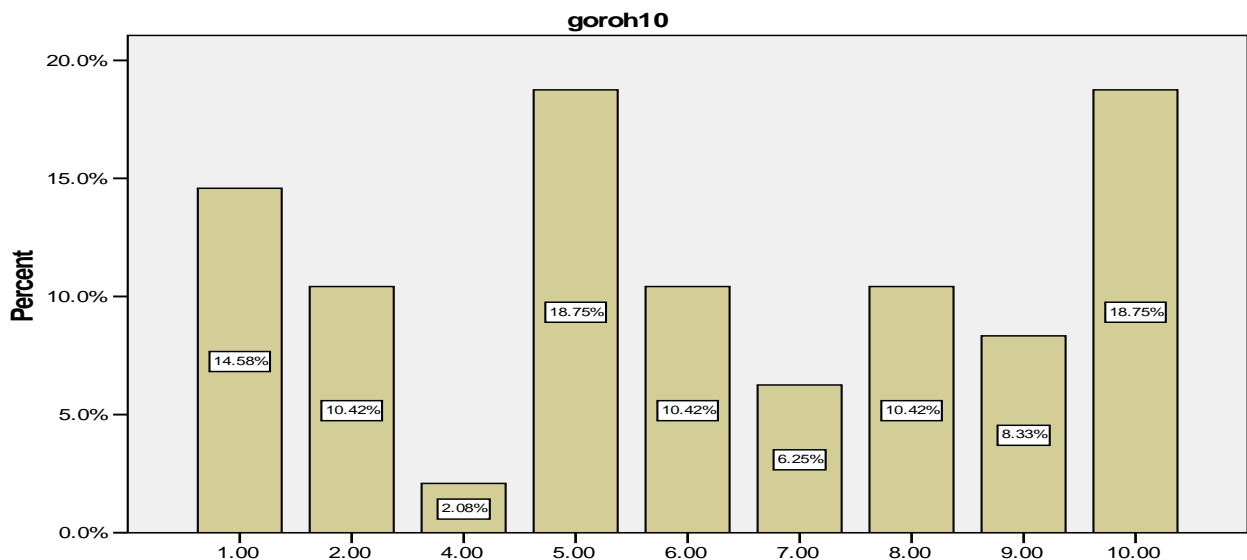
Fig. 7: Needs motivating students: occupational needs

How motivated students' are bears a lot of impact on the way they evaluate the course. The well-motivated students demand more serious challenging teaching, but the less motivated are rarely in favor of challenge.

As is obvious in Figure seven, the teacher needs to know about the degree of motivational coherence among the students. The outcome of this distribution has a significant impact on the EAP teacher's decisions on various aspects of the course.

J8
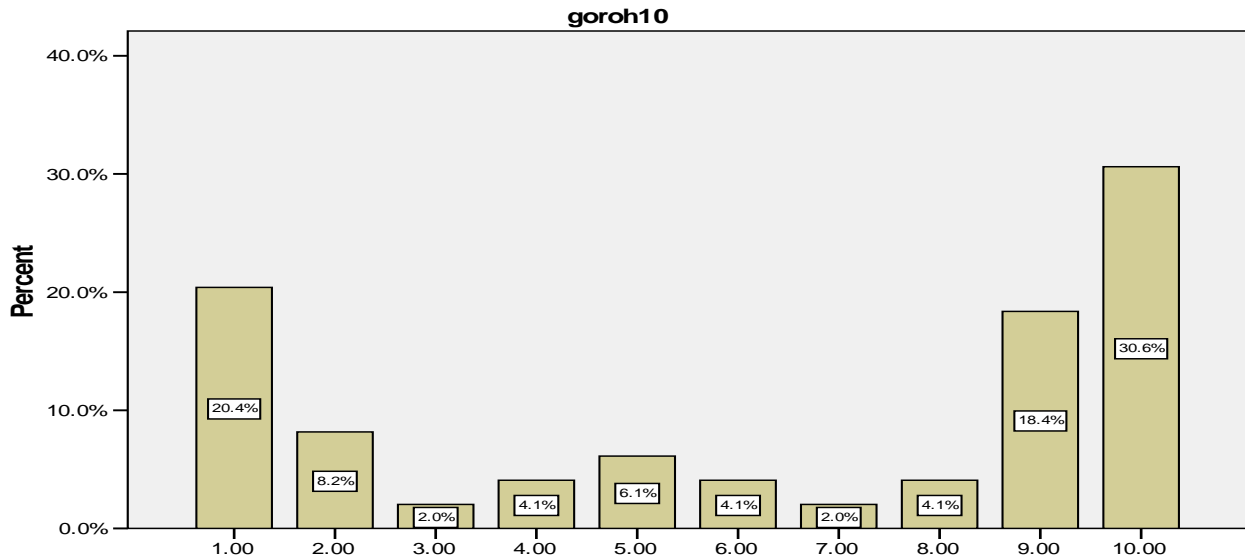
Figure 8: Motivators: Ability to continue postgraduate studies in overseas universities

Figure eight aims to compare students' willingness to study overseas. The distribution of the views tells us although a considerable majority tends to accept it as a motivator, the distribution is far from ideal.

M2
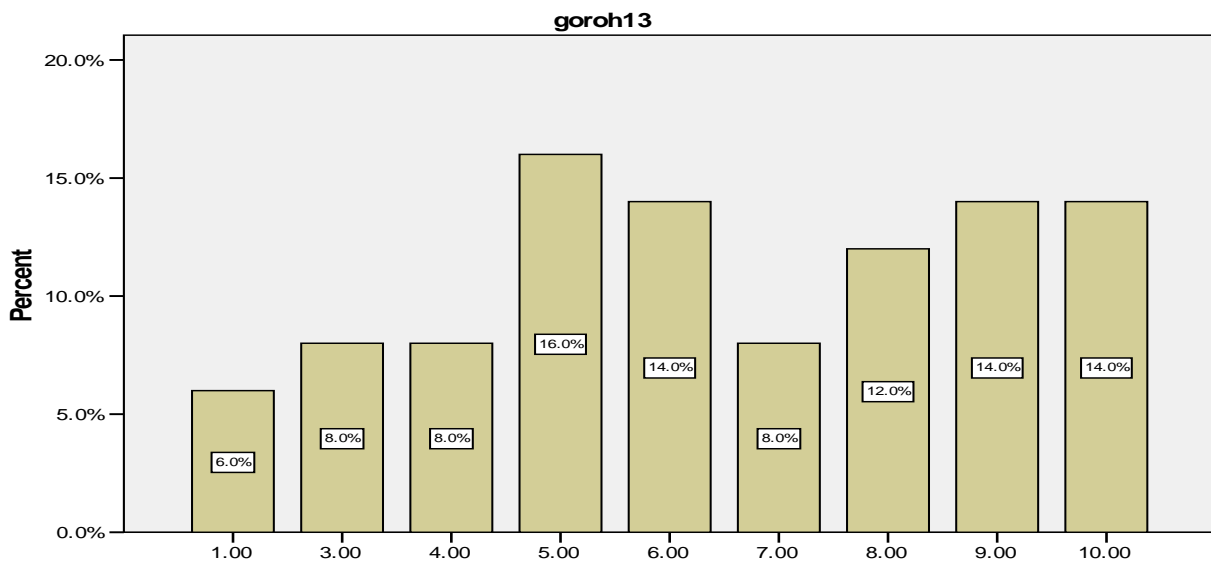
Figure 9: Reasons of failure in learning English: Teacher's choice of teaching method and his command on teaching.

Figure nine illustrates the results regarding the question attributing lack of progress in classes to inappropriate method of teaching and the teacher's competence to impress the students, students' responses

show how variable students are with regards to what they believe can be useful. The ideal distribution would be uneven; however, what we observe in Figure eight indicates an even distribution which demonstrates lack of agreement on the issue. The most number of students find the teacher's command on English moderate; and this is indicated by the score of five in the scale of ten. Approximately fifty percent have given scores of eight to ten showing a fair degree of satisfaction; but nineteen percent show they find the class management weak. Although the effect of a minority of nineteen percent leave a minor effect on overall evaluation results, awareness of it can be helpful to the teacher's choice of strategies of teaching.

O1
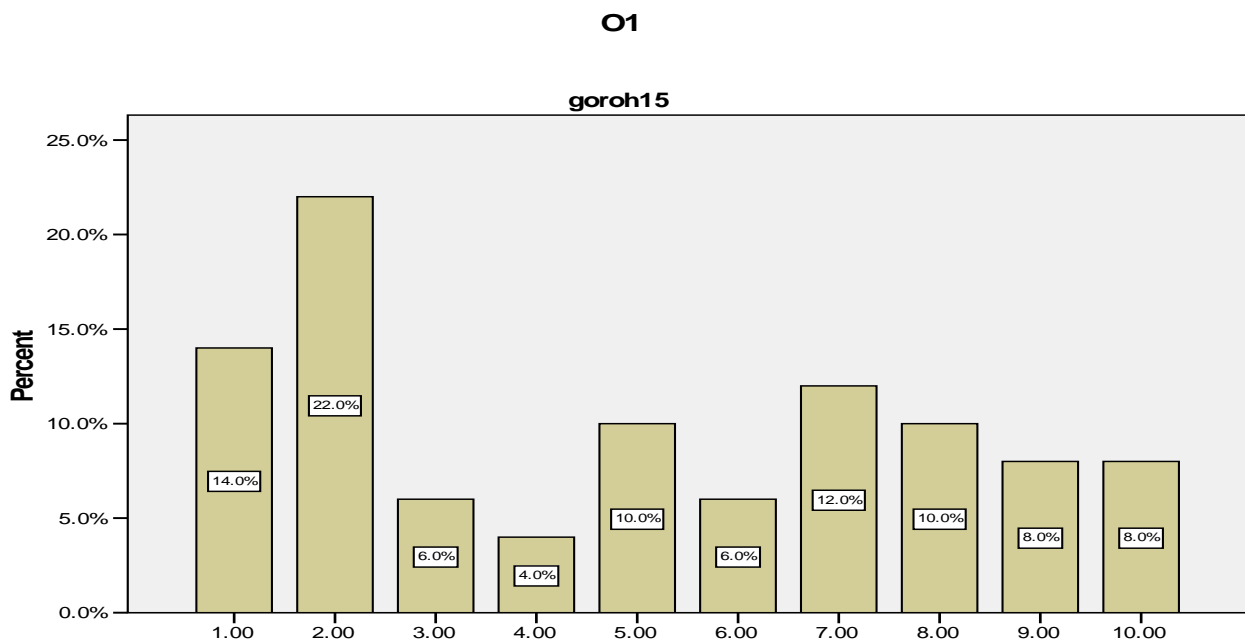
Fig. 10: Pair group activities in the form of oral tasks involving presentations, dialogues, and interviews: I need a lot of help, since they seem to be too demanding for me; I can't participate in oral activities.

Figure ten presents a comparison of the views regarding class management through showing their interest in taking part in pair group activities which form oral communicative tasks. The majority of participating students showed their incapability for taking part in communicative oral activities with a level of difficulty expected by the planning organization. As Figure nine shows, about fifty percent of the students gave low scores to this item indicating their difficulty with such a method; twenty six percent, however, indicated their willingness. These results show the degree of variance in the students' views and preferences resulting from their proficiency level. The undesirable distribution implies that applying tasks could be favorable to a group, while a large number of the other students have shown their concern for not being able to take part in them. The question is if the students who do not prefer such oral activities will understand the significance of applying them in class; if so, then we might conclude that employing tasks will be a reasonable decision for the teacher's choice of method.

O4
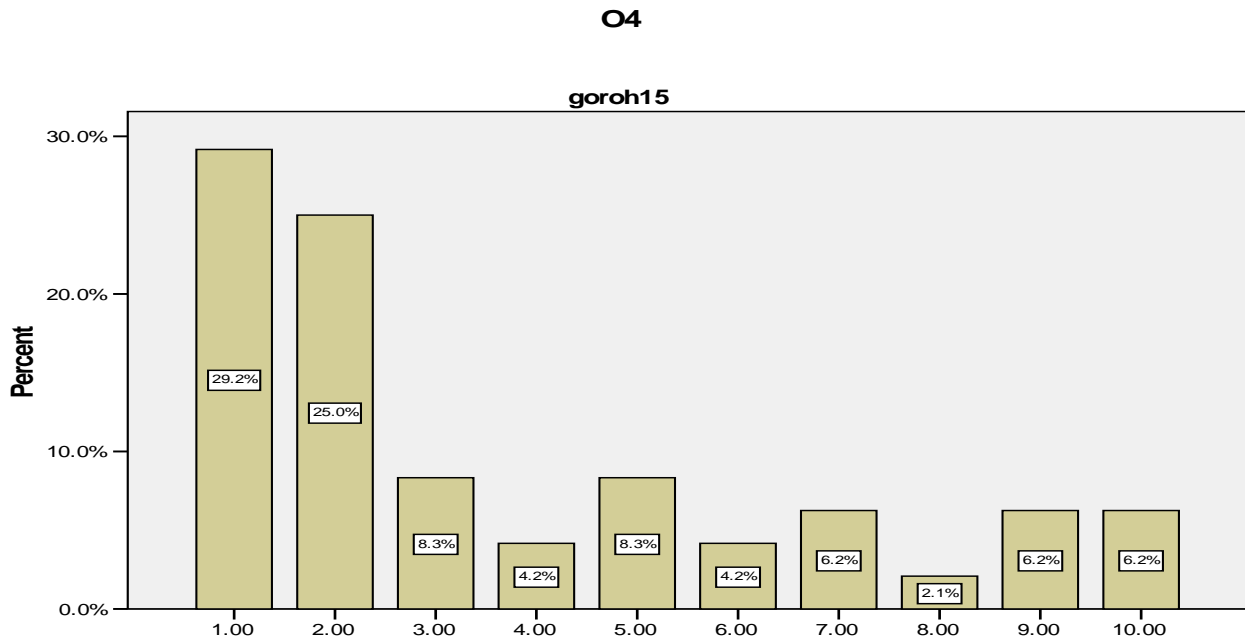
Fig. 11: Preference of oral tasks: I competent enough and I prefer oral pair group activities over other methods of teaching.

Figure eleven is a display of students' responses to the item which inquired about their sufficient communicative competence. If they are skillful enough, they choose a high score, but if they are not, they have to choose a low score. As the results show, about seventy percent indicated their insufficient proficiency for oral activities in the forms of dialogues, presentations, and simulated interviews with a level of difficulty expected in the assigned syllabus. This informs the teacher that such oral activities need to be chosen with concern about the difficulty level. The easier the oral tasks, the better they will be for students' satisfaction. Knowledge of this context is required for choosing communicative activities with an appropriate degree of difficulty in agreement with the seventy percent majority whose responses show that they are quite far from the present level proficiency needs.

8. Summary and Conclusion

The research work presented in this article aimed to investigate students' course evaluation of EAP courses for postgraduate students of Tourism Planning. The research question was whether evaluation results are objective enough for university administration to base promotions of the teaching staff on them. The motivation for this research was created through our observation that lecturers with lower knowledge status and degree often ranked higher than professors and associate professors who have gained a longer hand in teaching and research than their lecturer counterparts. Referring to our self-evaluation results which were presented in previous sections showing that students are judged to have a lower-intermediate proficiency level, we have a program of evaluation in which questions are to be answered by the students concerning the qualities of the course and the teacher. Of especial importance are such questions as those which ask students about whether the teacher has the ability to attract students' interest and getting them involved in discussing the topics of the course.

The contents of the questionnaire were presented and examined first to show that the contents might be either misinterpreted or skewed due to reasons not relevant to the aims of evaluation. The resultant discrepancy was shown and highlighted. The next section of analysis of data dealt with comparing results of a few parts of a comprehensive needs analysis questionnaire which aimed to reveal students' perceptions

regarding various aspects of the EAP course practice as well as their choices. The comparisons involved not only the preferences but also communicative abilities of the students leading to their preferences. The presumption is that evaluation should be carried out while the results should be interpreted with caution. A good evaluation does not mean necessarily that the course has been successful, neither can a low evaluation be interpreted necessarily as a low course quality. There might be various degrees of subjectivity in the results. In most cases we do not deal with absolute coherence and there are often variable degrees of agreement among preferences. The indications of our comparisons include claims that there is always some degree of subjectivity in every evaluation; however, due to cultural norms and contextual constraints, the degree might increase to the extent that the elicited results are good only for the teacher of the course who is the only one who knows and can guess what factors caused the results to be the way they are.

In a class with students having varying views and proficiency levels, one has to be cautious in interpretations. It appears that students who have a weak proficiency level cannot fully participate in class activities which are designed by the practitioner of the EAP course in compliance with the expectations of the course designers of the Ministry of Higher Education of Iran. The weak majority of students do not get the right impression out of the course content; consequently, they gain a lower assessment result from the teacher. On the other hand, if the teacher decides to design the course content in agreement with the expectations of the weak group of the students, the resulting effect will be to the dissatisfaction of the proficient group of the class. The proficient group will judge that advanced progressive discussions were missing from the course contents.

The variation existing in students' views can impact the evaluation results either in a positive or in a negative way. Motivated students, more competent ones, and those who enjoy mature perceptions are always among a population of a class and they differ in their preferences from those who do not enjoy such qualities. The resulting effect might be for the teacher to be aware of the degree of class coherence and for the administration to be cautious in considering the results for promotions.

The conclusion of this research is that although evaluation is vital for maintaining a high enough quality for the course as well as for supporting students who are susceptible to harsh treatments, the results are most useful for the teacher's own interpretation than for administrational decisions without necessary triangulation measures.

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