

English for Islamic Studies: Should I Learn English? – From the Eyes of Islamic Studies Students

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ABSTRACT

English for Islamic Studies or EIS is rather a new branch in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Currently there is no specific tailor-made syllabus and materials designed specifically in this field. It is important to take note of students' opinion in designing any new program. The focus of this paper is on the perspectives of Islamic Studies students on the importance of learning the English Language. 30 Islamic Studies students from an Islamic Higher Institution were given the needs analysis questionnaire. The data was analysed quantitatively. The result of this study shows that students have a positive perception to learn English Language. The result will be discussed in detail later in the paper.

Keywords: Islamic studies, English for Specific Purpose (ESP), syllabus

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has given the world a new worldview on how people should communicate. Different fields require different ways of speaking hence the usage of different vocabulary and discourse differ from one field to another. Realising the necessity of having different needs in every field makes ESP the most relevant course needed in every field of studies. Speakers must know how to use the language correctly or at least being proficient in the English Language. But knowing the rules of grammar per se is no longer necessary. Students should know the correct grammar forms to be used as well as the jargons needed in their specialised field.

In the context of Islamic Studies, students are hardly exposed to the English Language due to many reasons. One of it is the lack of awareness on how useful English Language can be for their field. Many Islamic Studies books and scholarly articles are written in English, for example the best translation of the Quran is in the English Language, which has been translated by Abdullah Yusof Ali in 1938. By having the language competence, students are more able to understand reading materials written in English by great Muslim scholars and correspondingly, they will be able to preach the knowledge of Islam to people from other religions and make them understand the beauty of Islam and correct their current misconceptions of this religion. This duty lies in the hand

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of the Islamic Studies students. Students often feel disinterested in learning English because they do not see the connection between the courses that they are taking with English Language.

Secondly, the usage of General English's (GE) syllabus does not meet the students' needs. How does it not meet the student's needs – explain here in 2 sentences or so. Thus, the reason why this research is carried out is to identify the needs of English for the Islamic studies students', which would later feed into the design of a syllabus and materials that can cater to their field of study, in this case the Islamic Studies programme. This course will later be called English for Islamic Studies that will teach the students all the four skills required in their context.

ESP should reflect the fact that many ESP teachings, especially where it is linked to a particular profession or discipline, makes use of a methodology that is different from the methodology used in the teaching of General English (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). ESP is classified into two branches. First, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), where we have English for Academic Medical Purposes, English for Academic Science and Technology Purposes and many more. Second is English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) like English for Business Purposes, English for Medical Purposes and others.

Few scholars agree that as the starting point of any LSP courses, Needs Analysis should be able to provide input for syllabi and materials design, and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place in a classroom (Higgins, 1966; Richterich in Trim in *et al.*, 1973/80; Strevens, 1977; Coffey, 1984).

Needs analysis requires a method that would be able to identify which subject is to be studied and what language level is needed. Instructors should also be sensitive to any study situations and related study skills relevant for their students. The method used also, should be able to assess students' current abilities in English and study skills in order to determine the students' gap and their needs in coming up with the best syllabus, materials or methodology used in all the LSP courses.

In a nutshell, needs analysis is an incorporation of different approaches such as wants, lacks, target situation analysis, present situation analysis, deficiency analysis, strategy analysis, means analysis, language audit and constraints, demands, necessities, likes, deficiencies, aims, purposes and goals as stated earlier by other scholars

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to investigate the perception of students from the Islamic studies programme towards English language. Therefore this study will answer the following Research Questions.

1. How do students perceive the status of English Language?
2. What kind of items need to be included in the syllabus for EIS?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample

The sample consists of 30 semester one Islamic Studies students randomly chosen from a total of 100. They are students from one of the Islamic Higher Institution in Malaysia. These 30 students are required to answer a set of needs analysis questionnaire on EIS and they have been exposed to the English Language since Matriculation and STPM level. They have also been introduced to various Islamic Studies terms and jargons in their content courses.

3.2 Data Collection

The Instrument used in this study is a set of needs analysis form. Most of the ESP courses begin its process with a needs analysis form. This is the most crucial stage because it will determine the students' needs and it is very important so that the students will be motivated to learn English. EIS is a new branch in the LSP world hence there is no particular sample that can be used. Nonetheless, this study adapted other needs analysis forms to guide the needs analysis form used in this study. The construction of questions and sections in this needs analysis are based on the framework used by Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) who suggested that any needs analysis form should incorporate the Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA) and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA). The needs analysis form is divided into four different sections. Section A pertains to respondents' personal information. Section B on the other hand, looks at the language information about the learners. Meanwhile, section C focuses on the language learning information and lastly section D aims to look at the professional communication information of the learners.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using SPSS version 22. The study used descriptive analysis whereby each item were analysed individually. The data collected will be presented in the form of tables and charts for better understanding of the responses given by the respondents.

4.0 RESULTS

This section will look at the data that has been analysed based on the respondents' responses. The data from section A, on students' personal information is not presented in the form of graphs. It will be discussed in the next section.

Section B: Language Information about Learners

Question 1:

Table 1 The first language or students' mother tongue

		First Language			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Malay	29	96.7	96.7	96.7
	Arabic	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the first language used by the students. A total of 96.7% used Malay as their mother tongue and only 3.3% used Arabic as the first language.

Question 2:

Table 2 Other languages that students normally used

		Other Languages			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	22	73.3	73.3	73.3
	Arabic	3	10.0	10.0	83.3
	French	1	3.3	3.3	86.7
	English and Arabic	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows the other languages used by the respondents other than their mother tongue. It clearly shows here that 73.3% of the respondents used English as their second language meanwhile 13.3% used both English and Arabic and the rest only used Arabic and French as their second language.

*Question 3:***Table 3** Opinion on the English Language

		Opinion on English Language			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	18	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Not Important	5	16.7	16.7	76.7
	Interesting	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 illustrates the respondent's opinion on their view of the English Language. Here, 60% of the respondents felt that English Language is important for them. 23.3% of the respondents found English Language interesting and the rest felt that learning English is not important for them.

*Question 4:***Table 4** Components in the English Language that students need more practice

		Components in the English Language that students need more practice			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	speaking and listening	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
	writing and listening	2	6.7	6.7	23.3
	reading and speaking and writing	3	10.0	10.0	33.3
	speaking and listening and writing	2	6.7	6.7	40.0
	ALL	18	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the components in the English Language that the respondents feel they need more practice in. 18 respondents (equivalent to 60%) felt that all components namely speaking, reading, writing and listening should be taught to them. The rest felt that they only need two or three skills either speaking and listening (16.7%), reading, speaking and writing (10%) speaking, listening and writing (6.7%) and lastly writing and listening (6.7%).

Section C: Language Learning Information

Question 1:

Table 4 Skills students think that is important to be learnt

English Skills	Most Important Skills (%)
Speaking	50.0%
Listening	40.0%
Reading	33.3%
Writing	13.3%

The table above requires the respondents to rate each skill from 1-5 based on the importance of learning each skills. Overall, 15 (50%) respondents felt that the speaking component is the most important skill to be learned followed by listening 12 (40%), reading 10 (33.3%) and lastly, writing with only 4 (13.3%) respondents.

Section D: Professional Communication Information

Question 1:

Table 5 Opinion whether by using the English Language will make the students understand their content subject better

Opinion whether by using the English Language will make the students understand their content subject better.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
NO	20	66.7	66.7	83.3
NOT SURE	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The table above shows the respondents' opinion whether or not the English being taught to them will make them understand their content subject better. Majority of them 66.7% disagreed, 16.7% felt unsure and 16.7% agreed with the statement.

*Question 2:***Table 6** Helpfulness of these resources to enhance students' understanding in learning EIS

Resources	Most Important resources
Role Play	30,0%
Islamic Related Articles	33,3%
Instructional Activities	16,7%

The table above clearly shows that respondents feel that Islamic related article is the most important resources to be used in their EIS class with 33.3% followed by role playing activities, with 30% and lastly, instructional activities with 16.7%.

*Question 3:***Table 6** Students' expectation in learning EIS

		Students' expectation in learning EIS			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SPEAKING	19	63.3	63.3	63.3
	KNOWLEDGE	6	20.0	20.0	83.3
	VOCABULARY	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This table shows that 63.3% of students are expecting to learn speaking in the EIS course. 20.0% said that they expect to increase their knowledge and 16.7% indicated that they would be learning more on vocabulary by joining this course.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings gathered by using the methods stated earlier. The discussion focuses on the two research questions of this study. The research questions are repeated here for easy referencing.

1. How do students perceive the status of English Language?
2. What kind of items need to be included in the syllabus for EIS?

Students of Islamic studies seem to have a positive perception in learning the English Language. They do feel that it is important to learn English as stated in Table 3 where 60% of them

agreed that English Language is important to them meanwhile another 23.3% felt that learning the English Language can be interesting. Though their mother tongue is either Malay or Arabic, as shown in table 1, they still feel that learning the English Language is important and as seen in table 2, 73.3% used English Language besides their mother tongue.

Though the response on the importance of English is on the positive side, sadly 66% of the respondents thought that by using the English Language, the learning needs and the target needs of the students who are pursuing this course will not be met if they learn English. This perhaps is mainly due to their weakness in mastering English Language which might hinder them from understanding the real meaning of Quran. In addition, they felt that Arabic Language is more important in comparison to the English Language. This is the challenge faced by many English language lecturers teaching Islamic Studies students. However, this study argues that it is possible to change their mindset if they are introduced to different types of Islamic related articles at the early part of their tertiary education and if the syllabus and the materials used by the teachers match with their need. When asked which component that they would like to practice more, 18 students (almost 60%) said that they needed more practice on all the four skills, namely speaking, writing, reading and listening. They felt that they are weak in English due to their difficulty in mastering all these components. The respondents stated that speaking is the most important skill to be acquired, followed by reading, writing and listening in order to enhance the use of the English language (refer to table 1). This can be attested in table 4 indicating that students expect to learn speaking more than any other component in the language skills. The reason behind this is simply because they prefer to become preachers. By having the real knowledge e.g. Islamic Studies, the respondents are aware that it is their responsibility to preach to other people around the world about Islam hence, they feel the importance to master spoken English.

In order to enhance the usage of the English Language in the classrooms, the respondents felt that the usage of Islamic related articles as their learning materials is most helpful tool for them to learn English. This is followed with role-playing activities and instructional activities (refer to table 2). This is an important factor that any syllabus designer or material developer should be aware of. Because the respondents clearly stated that they want to focus more on speaking and reading, material developers should bring authentic content materials that make use of jargons and terminologies from the particular specialized discipline into the classroom for the students. If their aim is to preach, then they should be able to speak in English by using the correct jargons and terminologies in their field. This will increase the motivation for students to learn the language or carrier content. Gabriela (2015), in her study which focuses on Target Situation Analysis, believes that the benefit of a syllabus based on Needs Analysis proves to be a motivating factor for ESP apprentices, who see its practical relevance, whereby they can get more actively involved in their learning process and eliminate their fear of foreign language barriers in real professional situation.

Needs analysis is conducted to identify which subject needs to be studied and what language level is needed. Instructors should also be sensitive to which study situations and related study skills that are relevant for their students. Needs analysis should also be able to assess students' current abilities in English and study skills in order to determine the students' gap and their needs in coming up with the best syllabus, materials or methodology used in all the LSP courses. Materials in ESP are tailored to meet the needs and interest of a specific group of learners. It is believed that using need

analysis as a method to gather data from the respondents is the best way in constructing materials for the EIS students as suggested by Sysoyer (2000). Sysoyer claims that taking into account the issue of centrality of the learner's needs analysis is said to be the main features that many authors in the field of materials design agree on (Sysoyer, 2000).

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research reports on a preliminary study that was performed to gather data on how the students viewed English Language and what they needed if they were given a chance to decide on the elements to be included in their syllabus. A simple needs analysis questionnaire was used to collect the data for this pilot study. It comprised of TSA, LSA and PSA to identify the students' lack, needs and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). From the findings it can be concluded that by conducting a needs analysis, a syllabus and material developer will be able to come up with a course that will cater to the students' lacks, needs and wants. This is very important because the goal of any LSP courses is to attract students' attention and interest, hence their needs if taken care of will assure the course developer of having a set of fully-motivated students. Students perceived that they needed to improve their speaking and reading skills because their aim is to preach about Islam. Hence, the material developer and syllabus designer should be well aware of this and include these important points when developing the EIS course and materials.

EIS is considered new and because of the lack of references and no LSP course in the field of Islamic studies, a new set of needs analysis form was developed and it is felt that this research has contributed a novel perspective in the LSP world. It is recommended that further research should be done to gain more data in order to produce various materials for EIS courses. Research on assessments on EIS too can be done once EIS is implemented.

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