

An Evaluation of Classroom Activities and Exercises in ELT Classroom for General Purposes Course

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Abstract

It is through effective implementation of activities and exercises which students can be motivated and consequently lead to language learning. However, as an insider, the experience of teaching English for General Purposes (EGP) course indicates that it has some problems which need to be modified. In order to evaluate the EGP course, questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations were used. The results of the study indicate that since the students' needs and objectives are not fulfilled they hold low attitudes toward this course. Also, since the emphasis is on reading and doing exercises, students do not like to participate in performing activities and exercises. Task-based activities, communicative use of language and pair and group work are missing. Reading passages and exercises are presented without any practice and free production. The only skill which is used is the reading and consequently speaking, listening, and writing skills have been ignored and forgotten which ultimately bores most of the students. This study can be useful for language teachers who want to gain hands-on experience of executing classroom activities and exercises.

Keywords: Program Evaluation, EGP Course, Activities, Exercises

1. Introduction

Evaluation is a process of inquiry in which data are gathered through different instruments and from different sources. This information is interpreted to make important decisions based on the research results. These decisions might require a change and effect a drastic alteration in the outline and process of a language program instruction. All these efforts are made to the betterment of a course of study and bringing about satisfactory results. Therefore, "Program evaluation is a form of enquiry which describes the achievements of a given program, provides explanations for these, and sets out ways in which further development might be realized" (Kiely, 2009, p. 99). Program or course evaluation should be one of the main components of any curriculum. It is usually conducted because of internal motivation to see whether the course is functioning as it was planned in the first place. Also, it might be carried out in order to satisfy external pressure and justify its value to funding agencies. Meanwhile, a course might be evaluated by an insider who has a deep experience of the setting, or by an outsider who brings in fresh look to it. However, it can be done through the partnership of both insiders and outsiders which each one has its own merits and demerits. Evaluation can yield "useful information about a program's implementation and effectiveness" (Llosa & Slayton, 2009, p. 35). Also, it "can contribute to understanding and improving language teaching practices and programs" (Norris, 2009, p. 7). Kiely (2009, p. 99) argues that evaluation tries to ensure "quality assurance and enhancement" and creates "a dialogue within programs for ongoing improvement of learning opportunities." Evaluation can contribute not only to learning process but also to teacher change and development. Harris (2009, p. 55) remarks that evaluation can "generate productive debate and effective remedial action" and contribute to "critical decisions on language policy and educational practice."

2. Review of Literature

The field of program evaluation is gaining renewed recognition and is "moving from a more or less exclusive focus on program outcomes to routinely encompass investigations of program processes" (Elder, 2009, p. 15). Yang (2009, p. 77) contends that in its early days, the focus of evaluation was on experimental designs and analysis of quantitative data. However, in recent decades, the importance of qualitative approaches has been recognized and widely endorsed by researchers. It is through qualitative approaches that we can gather different types of data about the effectiveness of a course. Figures and numbers are abstract entities which barely reveal anything about a course. However, a description of what is actually happening inside a classroom can assist us to investigate how learning and teaching processes are taking place and study their strengths and weaknesses. As Nunan (1999, p. 136) states, "teaching does not equal learning." We need to study students' and teachers' attitudes and find solutions to their problems.

A rather long-scale evaluation was conducted by Peacock (2009, p. 259) who investigated a teacher-training program. He states that the program had some strength “including the teaching of pedagogic skills and promoting reflection and self-evaluation.” Also, it had some shortcomings which needed to be improved including “the amount of practice teaching and ... input” (ibid.). Also, Kiely (2009, p. 99) carried out an evaluation and explored “three aspects of program development: innovation, teachers at work, and the quality of the learning experience of students.” However, he does not elucidate the results of his study. A study was conducted by Millroad (2002, p. 131) and merits and demerits of the program were evaluated. Millroad (ibid.) concludes that learners had the following weaknesses: “poor communicative skills, low language competence, and knowledge-processing problems.” A large-scale evaluation was carried out by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009, p. 66-7) in which they studied the following factors: “learning contents and materials, teachers’ competence and teaching styles, inadequate school facilities, lack of intrinsic motivation, and test scores.” The result of their study indicated that “learning contents and materials and test scores” were the factors which demotivated many students who studied at high school. Meanwhile, a study was conducted by Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) in which they explored students’ “needs, wants, and lacks.” They came to the conclusion that the objectives of the course were unrealistic and serious measures had to be taken to solve them. In another study Kita (2006) investigated students’ “attitudes, motivation, and perceptions.” Kita emphasized the necessity of ongoing needs analysis in order to cater for the students’ changing needs. In a study which was carried out by Coleman (1996) “the objectives, attitudes, materials, and needs analysis” were investigated. Coleman suggested that in order to contribute to the betterment of the course a “study skills” course was needed to be offered to the students. The studies mentioned here reveal that each of them explored different elements of curriculum or course. It depends on the objectives of the study and experience of researcher what to evaluate. Every researcher has his/her own particular preferences and for this reason opts for the aspects that think is important in the destiny of a course. The variety of the curriculum elements illustrate that the teaching-learning endeavor is not a straightforward process; rather it is complex and requires close attention.

3. The Study

The reason I intended to evaluate the English for General Purposes (EGP) course was that the students were inefficient in applying their linguistic knowledge to interactive language use. Therefore, it was decided to investigate the activities that were carried out in the classroom. This study was carried out at the University of Tabriz, Iran. This university was established around 1950s and is a public university with a student body of 12,000 students. It is situated in the city of Tabriz, Northwest of Iran and each year about 2500 students enter it through passing the University Entrance Examination. In order to enter and study in Iranian universities, students have to take the University Entrance Examination each year. The University of Tabriz is a top institution in the district and competition to study in it is high. The researcher is one of the full-time staff of this institution and has taught the English for General purposes (EGP) course for more than twelve years. The EGP course is taught by the language lecturers and is coordinated by the English Language Department. The EGP course is a 3-hour-per-week course (17 weeks) which is offered to new undergraduate students either at the first or second semester. Then, after the students took and passed it they could be eligible to take their ESP course which is taught by the subject lecturers. In this study, I wanted to evaluate the classroom activities and exercises. The reason that I selected this aspect for investigation was that most of the students took the EGP course, studies it for one semester and then obtained a pass mark. However, as an insider teaching the EGP course, I have seen that the students could not put their linguistic knowledge into practical use either in spoken or written discourse. Therefore, I chose the teaching element for this study. Brown (1995, p. 20) suggests five elements of curriculum for evaluation: “objectives, needs analysis, teaching, materials, and testing.” Since it was difficult to investigate all of these aspects of the EGP course, I only focused on the teaching element which consists of classroom activities and exercises. Also, in order to implement the process of evaluation, I chose Lynch’s (1996, p. 4) seven steps of program evaluation: “audience and goals, context inventory, preliminary thematic framework, data collection design/system, data collection, data analysis, and evaluation report.” This study is a formative one because the focus is on the process of learning rather than outcomes. In summative studies, the focus is usually on the neat product or test scores. But in formative studies the whole aspects of a course are evaluated, such as students, teachers, syllabus, resources, context and so on.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

The participants consist of undergraduate students ($n= 240$) and language lecturers ($n= 12$). The students were selected through stratified random sampling from the 12 faculties of the University of Tabriz. The University of Tabriz consists of 12 faculties, therefore, from each faculty 20 students were selected: ten male and ten female. The students’ age ranged from 19 to 22 with an average of 20. However, the language lecturers were selected through non-probability sampling, i. e. purposive sampling. The reason that 12 lecturers were selected was that each of these

lecturers taught the EGP course at one of the faculties of the University of Tabriz. Therefore, from each faculty one lecturer was selected: seven male and five female, and five Ph D and seven MA. The lecturers consisted of full-time (n= 4) and part-time (n= 8) staff who had 16 years of teaching experience, with an average of eight years.

4.2 Instruments

The instruments that were used in this study comprised questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations.

4.2.1 Questionnaires

In order to elicit standard, accurate, and consistent answers, an identical questionnaire was distributed to the students (n= 240) and lecturers (n= 12). The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended and one open-ended item. It was made of a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD=1), disagree (d=2), unsure (U=3), agree (A=4), and strongly agree (A=5). The students' questionnaire was "group administered" (Brown, 2001, p. 6), i.e. I distributed the questionnaires to the students without the presence of their lectures. In this way, I could clearly explain the items and elucidate any unclear points. Direct contact with the students was a good opportunity to elicit their opinions on the last open-ended item and the overall attitudes of them about the activities and exercises. However, the lecturers' questionnaires were given to them either at their offices or sent through email. The following items represent the questionnaire that was administered to the students and lecturers:

1. The EGP course is useful for students to fulfill their academic requirements and learn English language.
2. The students' objectives are compatible with the EGP course.
3. The time allocated to the EGP is enough to perform classroom activities and exercises.
4. The teaching methods are more important for learning than the content.
5. An eclectic approach is more preferable for implementing classroom activities than a specific method.
6. A specific teaching methodology is followed to carry out classroom activities.
7. Classroom activities are almost determined by our textbook.
8. Language of instruction and classroom activities are determined largely based on students' discipline.
9. The materials are first presented, then practiced at length, and ultimately result in language production.
10. Different techniques are used to implement classroom activities.
11. The proficiency level of the students in the class is alike and homogenous.
12. The number of students in the class are small enough to carry out different types of communicative activities.
13. It is the teacher who can make a difference and facilitate the learning process for the students.
14. The EGP class is controlled and managed effectively to conduct classroom activities and exercises.
15. Different teaching aids are used to help ease the learning process.
16. The classroom activities and exercises are carried out through pair and group work.
17. We speak English language in the class.
18. We perform a large range of tasks in the class.
19. The purpose of activities and exercises are clearly explained to the students.
20. We carry out various types of communicative activities in the class.

4.2.2 Interviews

In order to triangulate the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 students, i.e. ten percent of the participants (n= 240). The interviewees were selected through stratified random sampling: 12 male and 12 female. Meanwhile, all the 12 lecturers who filled out the questionnaires were interviewed. The following items represent the interview questions:

1. What is your overall attitude about the EGP course?
2. Do the students' objectives and needs match the EGP course's goals?
3. What types of methods are used in the class?
4. Is the students' discipline considered in implementing classroom activities and exercises?
5. Are there opportunities for students to interact in English and produce language both in spoken and written form?
6. What types of techniques are used in implementing activities and exercises?

7. Are classroom activities and exercises carried out through pair and group work?
8. Do you make use of tasks, projects, role plays, and simulations in the class?
9. Are different types of communicative activities performed in the class?

4.2.3 Classroom Observations

Meanwhile, in order to obtain first-hand experience of what is happening inside the classes, I selected six classes randomly and observed each of them for three times. The classroom observation data were captured through different types of notes.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed directly by the researcher to the students and lecturers. Also, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The close-ended items of the questionnaire data were analyzed by the use of SPSS. However, the open-ended item of the questionnaire, the interviews, and classroom observation data were analyzed manually in the form of thematic and interpretative analyses. The written data first were organized, and then they were divided into relevant themes, categories, and patterns. Meanwhile, the raw data were reduced and coded and finally the required themes were deduced (Blaxter et al., 2006). Finally, the data collected through the three instruments were compared and contrasted in order to make decisions and report them.

5. Results and Discussions

The results of the questionnaire are displayed in table 1.

As questionnaire item no.1 illustrates, only about 40 percent of the students and lecturers agree that the EGP course is useful. During the interview, most of the students stated that they were doubtful whether the EGP course could be of any use in helping them to tackle their academic and occupational needs. They were of the opinion that they learned it superficially and only tried to pass it to fulfill graduation requirements. They emphasized that they neither learned the form nor the function of the language in the classes. They stressed that their lecturers did not try to use the language in the class. It is for these reasons that most of the students hold negative attitudes toward the EGP course and as Jordan (1997, p. 137) argues, “attitudes tend to be somewhat deep-seated and enduring.” Therefore, the lecturers need to try hard to change the students’ attitudes and lower their affective filter because positive attitudes and motivation are determining factors in language learning.

The result of the questionnaire item no.2 reveals that about 50 percent of the students and 33 percent of the lecturers disagree that the EGP course’s and students’ goals are compatible. During the interview, it was noticed that there was a general confusion about the objectives of the EGP course. Some of the lecturers believed that the goal was to teach reading skill in order to prepare the students to deal with their disciplines’ requirements. Some other lecturers maintained that the EGP course’s aim was to teach communicative use of language. Yet, others insisted that the four language skills need to be taught to the students. However, during the interview, most of the students stated that they wanted to learn language more communicatively and be able to use it not only inside the classroom but also outside it. But the students emphasized that the lecturers only focused on covering their textbooks and implementing their drills and exercised. I could not find any syllabus or objective of the EGP course in the English Language Department. Therefore, it is necessary that the objectives of the EGP course to be prepared by the Ministry of Education, and of course, based on multimodalities of modern trends in language teaching and learning, students’ objectives and needs, educational and occupational requirements, and so on.

Based on the result of the questionnaire item no.3, all the lecturers (100%) and nearly most of the students (63%) disagree that the time allocated to the EGP is enough. The EGP is offered for three hours per week for 17 weeks (plus one session dedicated to final exam) during only one semester. During the interview, most of the lecturers stated that because of the shortage of time they only read the reading passages of their textbook and did the exercises. Therefore, they reasoned that they could not save enough time for communicative activities.

One of the important factors of implementing classroom activities is through the adequate use of appropriate methods. The result of the questionnaire indicates that most of the students and lecturers believe that methods of teaching are important than content and they prefer diverse types of methods instead of one particular method. Robinson (1991, p. 46) maintains that methodology is “what goes on in the classroom” and what the students and lecturers have to do. In the main, methodology has to take care of lesson plans, coursebooks, materials, language skills, and procedures for teaching them. Emphasizing method over content, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 183-4) encourage “a method of work that involves initiative, the sharing of ideas and a focus on the how and why of investigation than on the what.” However, Long (2001, p. 180) argues that “method is an unverifiable and irrelevant construct ... and it may actually do harm by distracting teachers from genuinely important issues.” He further

maintains that methods might overlap and there is no such thing as a method. Therefore, lecturers need to remember that there is no best method and that they can fine tune their methods based on the students' disciplines, needs, and course objectives. It is also better to try to use innovative techniques to arouse the students' interest and impede boredom. We need to consider the students' styles and the particular situation in order to help students to acquire language effectively.

However, as the result of the questionnaire shows and as I noticed it during classroom observations, most of the class activities were dominated by the textbook. It was the textbook which determined what the lecturers and students do in the classroom. There was barely any innovation on the part of the lecturers to create diversity in the classroom activities. Some of the lecturers consider teaching materials as concrete manifestations of methods. It can be argued that a textbook imposes an organization of content on the student. But we cannot ensure that the teaching content will lead to language learning. During classroom observations, I noticed that most of the lecturers tried to cover the materials and the textbook was the center of attention. However, as the teachers' competence increases, so their reliance on the materials decreases. The important point is the purposeful and meaningful implementation of classroom activities because "Different approaches will be appropriate in different settings" (Bunch, 2006, p. 299).

The results of the classroom observations reveal that many of the lecturers do not consider the students' discipline while presenting and practicing materials. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 183) hold that the activities must be based on "behavioral objectives of the learner's special purpose and be practicable." Huang (2003, p. 17) suggests that the teaching techniques should match "the needs of the students." The lecturers at the University of Tabriz act based on their "theoretical rationale" (Brown, 2000, p. 201) and the principles of language teaching influence them how to "orchestrate the interaction between learner, teacher, and subject matter" (Breen et al., 2001, p. 473). Every discipline is unique, so "the language of instruction and curricula vary from" subject to subject (Mercer, 2001, p. 243).

During classroom observations, I realized that the materials were mostly presented to the students without any practice and free production. As Harmer (2002, p. 82-3) points out, it is through the production stage in which a teacher can see where students have problems and try to improve them. It was clear that the forms of language were presented to the students without considering their function in the actual use (Nunan, 2001, p. 193). Skehan (1998, p. 94) emphasizes that presentation, practice, and production is an optimal way for language learning. It is through these three Ps (presentation, practice, and production) that various techniques can be used and students can be encouraged to practice language for themselves. Johnson (2001, p. 265) argues that it is in the production stage that students are engaged in communicative activities.

Based on the results of the questionnaire and classroom observations, the lecturers rarely used diverse types of techniques in order to practice language. Therefore, I noticed that in most classes the students got bored and lost attention. Richards and Rodgers (2002, p. 26) argue that "teaching activities that focus on grammatical accuracy" are different from communicative skills. So, the lecturers need to make use of both grammar exercises and ensure that they are used in meaningful interactions in order to motivate the students. Richards (2001, p. 168) maintains that "teaching is not static or fixed in time but is a dynamic interactional process." The lectures need to "offer a variety of activities within class period" (Harmer, 2002, p. 309). Therefore, they can make use of different "tasks, activities, and exercises" (Jordan, 1997, p. 56) based on the students' discipline. In order to create diversity, the lecturers can use different types of techniques for presenting materials and activities, such as: demonstration, explanation, discovery learning, reproduction, creativity, and check questions. Lee (2006, p. 692) proves that teachers can benefit from display questions and "organize their lessons and produce language pedagogy as courses of action." Millroad (2002, p. 131) emphasizes "the importance of homework, memory and structure drills, and rehearsal performances in the classroom." Also, Huang (2003, p. 26) suggests that teachers can use a "content topic" and in this way build different types of activities in order to provide opportunities for students to practice language functions. Walsh (2002, p. 3-4) believes that a classroom ought to be considered "as a context in its own right, or rather a series of interrelated contexts" in which a wide range of activities can be implemented. The fact is that if teachers want to motivate students to learn language, then, they need to attend to both "social and pedagogic demands" (Senior, 2002, p. 397) of their learners.

The questionnaire item no.11 and classroom observation results indicate that most of the EGP classes consist of different proficiency level students. Therefore, this creates problems both for students and lecturers. As Millroad (2002, p. 128) puts, "A heterogeneous class ... is a challenge for teachers." Also, Senior (2002, p. 398) argues that "no two classes are alike." The researcher's experience shows that the EGP classes usually consist of three levels: beginner, lower intermediate, and intermediate. The intermediate students have usually attended private language institutes and learned language through communicative activities. Meanwhile, I have noticed that the humanities and social science students are the weakest students, the science students are average, and engineering students are

intermediate. Therefore, it has been experienced that “lower levels tend to be much more dependent on the teacher” (Garrett & Shortall, 2002, p. 44). Furthermore, I was noticed that the intermediate students were bored and did not see any enjoyment from teacher-fronted activities. Certainly, the lecturers need to give learners “space and time” (Garton, 2002, p. 52). Also, the lecturers had better develop a collaborative relationship between the students and encourage more student participation, involvement, and initiative in classroom activities.

As the result of questionnaire item no.12 illustrates, one of the main problems of the EGP course was the large number of students in each class. For this reason, many of the students had “a noninteractive or passive approach to learning” (Dubinson, 2001, p. 206). Also, the atmosphere of classes was fragmented and lacked cohesion. During the classroom observations, it was obvious that because of large number of students the lecturers had hard time to control the classes and implement activities. In this regard, lecturer no.5 remarked that “It is really a dilemma for me to teach a class of 45 or 50.” The EGP classes usually consist of 40 to 60 students.

During the interview, some of the students stated that their lecturers were indifferent to them. The students maintained that they could not establish a mutual relationship with their lecturers. The students felt that their lecturers were like robots that were programmed to teach predetermined materials. As the questionnaire item no.13 indicates, most of the students and lecturers believe that the teacher is the main facilitator of language acquisition. During classroom observations, I noticed that some of the lecturers were aloof and distant. Consequently, the students could not open up and have interaction or discussion. As Walsh (2002, p. 5-6) points out, it is the teachers who can provide “patterns of communication” and encourage negotiation of meaning. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009, p. 58) maintain that the main problems that students face are the incompetence of teachers and “confusing and/or boring lectures, unfair testing, and information overload.” By filling out the gaps, the lecturers can create a smooth-flowing classroom exchange but they cannot guarantee learning process. Therefore, the lecturers need to carry out needs analysis at the commencement of the course and investigate what the students feel, speak, experience, and know. Senior (2002, p. 397) argues that teachers should maintain “a learning community within the classroom” in order to encourage learners to learn. Cadman (2005, p. 361) emphasizes that “connecting through humor is the key” to successful maintenance of a good relationship between students and creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

During classroom observations it was noticeable that one of the main problems of lecturers was to control and manage the students’ behavior. The reasons for the “unruly behavior” (Mercer, 2001, p. 243) were numerous: large classes (40-60), mixed-ability students, heterogeneous classes, lack of diversity in classroom activities, boredom, and incompetence of some of the lecturers. Richards (2001, p. 170) insists that having “Good managerial skills ... are essential component of good teaching.” Lacorte (2005, p. 388-9) suggests that teachers had better reprimand, make changes in seating arrangements, study disciplinary books or institutional guidelines, seek advice from a supervisor or colleague in professional workshops and so on. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 167) hold that “If people are having fun, they are far less likely to complain.” Meanwhile, Harmer (2002, p. 54) remarks that “We need to provide them [students] with a variety of subjects and exercises to keep them engaged.”

The questionnaire item no.15 and interview results prove that the EGP classes suffer from lack of teaching aids. When interviewed, the lecturers stated that the classes lacked any video projectors to display power points. As Harmer (2002, p. 134) stresses, teaching aids are used “to explain language meaning and construction, engage students in a topic, or as the basis of a whole activity.” Visual aids play a vital “role in lowering the linguistic demand on the students” (Huang, 2003, p. 20-1) and they facilitate the learning process. Teaching aids, especially appropriately prepared power points, can create a context which can ease the process of learning and teaching.

As the result of questionnaire item no.16 indicates, most of the lecturers and students hold that pair and group work are not used in conducting classroom activities. When interviewed, some of the lecturers pointed out that during pair or group work students used their mother tongue rather than English language, so they did not use group work and instead preferred individual work. However, Garton (2002, p. 51) argues that “recourse to L1 is the most natural solution to any difficulty in comprehension.” Also, some other lecturers claimed that during group work students deviate from doing activities and talk about irrelevant and unrelated topics. However, Hedge (2002, p. 62) believes that group work establishes “positive rapport” and pushes shy students to participate in negotiation for meaning. Garrett and Shortall (2002, p. 27) maintain that group work have the following advantageous: “more language practice, more learner involvement and concentration, more learner security (less anxiety), and more mutual help among learners.” Also, Nunan (1999, p. 83) argues that small group work increases “student output, improves student talk, promotes positive affective climate, and increase student motivation.” Meanwhile, Harmer (2002, p. 114) emphasizes that small group work “allows teachers to gauge the mood of the class ... and get a general understanding of student progress. Also, Hedge (2002, p. 14) stresses that group work reduces student “dependence on teachers.”

The six classes that I observed, only in three of them was the English language spoken. In other classes it was mostly the Persian language which was used by the students and lecturers. When interviewed, the lecturers believed that students dreaded to converse in English. However, the students who participated in the interview were not happy with the situation and preferred to use English in class. Senior (2002, p. 400) believes that even the shy and slow students “do not want to maintain a low profile ... and want to contribute to the collective learning of their class groups.” However, the lecturers emphasized that students lacked everyday expressions and their self-confidence was low, so that they could not speak in English. During observations, I noticed that because of the tight control of the lecturers over the activities and exercises very little interaction took place. The lecturers dominated the classes and talked in the class. There was no time for students to interact and use language for negotiation. Since Iran is an EFL situation and actually no body speaks English out of the class, the students and lecturers rarely see any immediate pay-off and do not use it. As Hedge (2002, p. 25) argues, absence of English in the community “creates greater ... challenges for teachers.” Gil (2002, p. 275) emphasizes that classroom interaction consists of two modes: “the pedagogic and the natural.” Therefore, it can be observed that in our EGP classes neither the pedagogic nor the natural interaction takes place. The focus is largely on the form and there is barely any focus on meaningful interaction and communication. Bunch (2006, p. 299) stresses that “conversational” English is as important as “academic” one and teachers need to foster both of them.

Another hidden problem that I noticed during classroom observations was the lecturers’ lack of motivation to converse in English. When interviewed, many lecturers pointed out that students only need to acquire the reading skills and strategies to tackle their academic requirements. However, this is not an acceptable excuse for downgrading the importance of oral or written skills. Mainly, the lecturers can use a range of techniques to promote oral use of the language in order to motivate the students. Lee (2006, p. 691) proposes questioning as “one of the most familiar forms of teacher talk.” Garton (2002, p. 48) suggests that teachers can benefit from “learner initiative” which results from their interests and needs. Meanwhile, Nunn (2000, p. 169) argues that since in large classes there are rarely any opportunities for student interaction, it is better to use group work to encourage “practice in spoken interaction.” Also, Robinson (1991, p. 51) insists that oral presentation “can in fact involve all the language skills.” Oral presentation is an optimal opportunity for interaction among the students because interesting and lively topics can stir heated debates. It is the lecturers who need to develop “non-threatening classroom atmosphere, in which students feel comfortable enough to interact readily with others in the target language” (Senior, 2002, p. 398).

As questionnaire item no.18 shows, only 30 percent of lectures use task-based activities in their EGP classes. Also, during classroom observations, I noticed that very rarely were tasks-based activities used either inside the classroom or assigned to be performed as homework. Most of the lecturers merely followed their textbooks’ exercises and activities. The lecturers and students’ roles were determined by the textbook. When interviewed, some of the lecturers claimed that because of the shortage of time they did not use tasks-based activities. Also, some others stated that since during tasks-based activities the students spoke in their mother tongue or talked about irrelevant things, they did not assign any tasks inside the classroom. However, Harmer (2002, p. 87) argues that “the tasks-based activities implies a shift away from some traditional teacher roles.” Also, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 184) maintain that in tasks-based teaching “the role of the teacher becomes one of guide and advisor rather than omniscient source of knowledge.” Jordan (1997, p. 250) believes that tasks-based activities “are highly relevant” in EAP classes because they can be used “at any given level” (Richards, 2001, p. 170). Also, Brown (2000, p. 172) emphasizes that “an eclectic blend of tasks” can be used “for particular group of learners.” Mainly, Nunan (1999, p. 87) stresses that tasks need to be “built up from simple to complex” and the benefit of tasks-based approach is that “a variety of skills are integrated.” Meanwhile, the lecturers can ask the students to choose tasks based on their interests, needs, and objectives. Senior (2002, p. 399) suggests that teachers can make use of “both social and pedagogic” tasks. When students are engaged in performing tasks, they mobilize both their linguistic and communicative resources. Also, tasks have the potential of being carried out collectively as well as individually.

Based on questionnaire item no.19, there is a gap between the students and lecturers’ answers. While, 66 percent of the lecturers state that the purpose of exercises and activities are explained, only 19.5 percent of the students agree with it and 70 percent disagree. During interview, most of the students stated that in performing exercises they only ticked, selected, and circled correct answers without knowing their purposes. However, when interviewed, the lecturers stated that students should discover the meaning and goal of the exercises for themselves. Huang (2003, p. 26) argues that “an understanding of the purpose of and activity is necessary if the students are to engage in it and fulfill the original instructional purposes.” She then continues that explicit instruction is necessary if we intend to gain optimal learning. Dudley-Evans and St John (2000, p. 178) maintain that “We should also make learners think when they do an exercise.” Consequently, student motivation increases and their retention improve tremendously.

As questionnaire item no.20 indicates, only about 40 percent of the students and lecturers agree that they perform different types of communicative activities. During interview, the students stated that they prefer to have more communicative activities instead of focusing on reading and doing mechanical exercises. However, the lecturers emphasized that because of shortage of time and students' low level of communicative competence they could not do communicative activities. However, Brown (1995, p. 5) stresses that teachers should create situations in which students "be able to express their intentions." Also, Hedge (2002, p. 71) argues that communicative language teaching provides meaningful context and students "rehearse language as it is used authentically in the world outside the classroom." When students are involved in communicative activities, they put their linguistic, discourse, pragmatic, and strategic competence into use. Johnson (2001, p. 254) believes that communicative activities are message-focused while drills and exercises are form-focused. However, both of them are necessary for successful learning of language.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The results of the study indicate that the EGP course needs to be overhauled drastically. Students like to learn English language and want to use it in oral interactions. However, the lecturers only emphasize covering their textbooks and reading the passages and doing exercises without carrying out any tasks or using language communicatively. In his evaluation, Walsh (2002, p. 4) observes that teachers have under control every aspect of the classroom activities which is also true of this study. The results of the study indicated that only lecturers talked, managed interaction, dominated classroom, decided who participate, controlled both content and procedure, and asked questions. The results of the interview imply that students are keen to learn English language; however, they hold quite low attitudes toward the EGP course. It is because after even obtaining a good grade and passing EGP course, they are barely able to produce language in spoken or written form and comprehend what they read or hear. Therefore, it is necessary that the hours dedicated to the EGP to be increased from three to eight hours per week in order to practice the four language skills simultaneously. Also, instead of one semester, it would be better to offer the EGP in four semesters. Also, the objectives of the EGP should be determined based on students' aims, needs, wants, and lacks and based on multimodalities of modern academic and workplace requirements. It is necessary that the teaching methods to be based on the students' discipline, e.g. chemistry students need different methods of language teaching and classroom activities than history students. Also, the lecturers need to reduce their dependence on the textbook and come up with innovative methods and techniques of teaching. More importantly, the lecturers should not only try to present language but also attempt to make the students to produce it. It is only during production stage that the students can put their passive knowledge into active use and know where they have weaknesses. Also, it is during writing and speaking that the lexical and structural knowledge are activated and lead to learning. Meanwhile, in order to increase the students' use of language, the lecturers had better encourage group work inside and outside the classroom. Also, in order to stimulate the students to produce language, the lecturers can encourage them to give oral presentation of their work. Furthermore, in order to put language into actual use, the lecturers can use a wide range of tasks which are chosen either by themselves or by the students. It is better that the lecturers explain the purpose of the activities and exercises to the students. Also, based on the students' interview results, the lecturers sometimes need to explain the grammatical structures in order to make students conscious of the forms of the language. Clearly, without explicit knowledge of form the students cannot make any meaning. Meaning requires form and it is through actual use and appropriate context that language is acquired. This study can barely recommend a particular method or classroom activities because as Robinson et al. (2001, p. 347) contents, to generalize to other contexts requires familiarity with "learner variables such as cultural background and L1, and institutional constraints such as program goals and resources." Each classroom and institution is unique and demands its own particular approaches, methods, and techniques of teaching and learning. However, the important issue for every lecturer is to make their students responsible for their own learning. When the students developed "skills of self-reliance" (Harmer, 2002 p. 115), they could be able to select their own methods, techniques, and activities and monitor their progress and evaluate their outcomes. As Garrett and Shortall (2002, p. 26-7) argue, "learners ultimately progress from being consumers of language courses to become producers of their own learning program."

This study can be helpful for language teachers who want to implement classroom activities and exercises more potently. The language teachers need to be sensitive to the students' needs, wishes, and objectives. It is ultimately the students who receive our methods and techniques so we need to consider them and satisfy their tastes as far as possible. By fulfilling our students' wishes, we can provide a positive climate in the classroom and encourage them to learn language effectively. Finally, as Yang (2009, p. 78) contends, it is hoped that "the evaluation process and findings should be used" in order to improve the EGP course.

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Table 1. Students' and lecturers' answers to the questionnaire

Item	Students						Lecturers					
	SD	D	U	A	SA	M	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
1	17 7%	32 13.3%	89 37%	98 40.8%	4 1.6	3.1	- -	3 25%	4 33.3%	5 41.6%	- -	3.1
2	26 10.8%	94 39.1%	91 37.9%	29 12%	- -	2.5	- -	4 33.3%	5 41.6%	3 25%	- -	2.9
3	27 11.25%	127 52.9%	48 20%	251 10.4%	13 5.4%	2.4	4 33.3%	8 66.6%	- -	- -	- -	1.6
4	4 1.6%	48 20%	29 12%	152 63.3%	7 2.9%	3.4	- -	2 16.6%	2 16.6%	7 58.3%	1 8.3%	3.5
5	3 1.25%	14 5.8%	62 25.8%	159 66.25%	2 .83%	3.6	- -	3 25%	1 8.3%	8 66.6%	- -	3.4
6	- -	172 71.6%	19 7.9%	45 18.7%	4 1.6%	2.5	- -	9 75%	- -	3 25%	- -	2.5
7	3 1.25%	34 14%	12 5%	184 76.6%	7 2.9%	3.6	1 8.3%	2 16.6%	- -	9 75%	- -	3.4
8	8 3.3%	73 30.4%	57 23.75%	98 40.8%	4 1.6%	4.3	- -	4 33.3%	- -	7 58.3%	1 8.3%	3.4
9	10 4.1%	78 32.5%	43 17.9%	109 45.4%	- -	3	- -	6 50%	- -	5 41.6%	1 8.3%	3
10	4 1.6%	68 28.3%	30 16.25%	126 52.5%	3 1.25%	3.2	- -	2 16.6%	- -	10 83.3%	- -	3.6
11	14 5.8%	178 74.1%	34 14.1%	14 5.8%	- -	2.2	2 16.6%	9 75%	- -	1 8.3%	- -	2
12	7 2.9%	162 67.5%	27 11.25%	44 18.3%	- -	2.4	3 25%	7 58.3%	- -	2 16.2%	- -	2
13	6 2.5%	19 7.9%	71 29.5%	139 57.9%	5 2%	3.5	1 8.3%	1 8.3%	2 16.6%	7 58.3%	1 8.3%	3.5
14	11 4.5%	96 40%	36 15%	87 36%	10 4%	2.9	- -	3 25%	- -	8 66.6%	1 8.3%	3.5
15	46 19.1%	187 77.9%	7 2.9%	- -	- -	1.8	5 41.6%	7 58.3%	- -	- -	- -	1.5
16	49 20.4%	108 45%	12 5%	66 27.5%	5 2%	2.4	- -	8 66.6%	- -	3 25%	1 8.3%	2.7
17	14 5.8%	161 67%	- -	42 17.5%	23 9.5%	2.5	- -	10 83.3%	- -	2 16.6%	- -	2.3
18	7 2.9%	153 63.7%	17 7%	47 19.5%	16 6.6%	2.6	- -	8 66.6%	- -	4 33.3%	- -	2.6
19	5 2%	164 68.3%	24 10%	47 19.5%	- -	2.4	- -	4 33.3%	- -	7 58.3%	1 8.3%	3.4
20	11 4.5%	91 37.9%	35 14.5%	95 39.5%	8 3.3%	3	- -	7 58.3%	- -	5 41.6%	- -	2.8

Students' average mean= 2.8 and overall SD= 0.60

Lecturers' average mean= 2.8 and overall SD= 0.66