

Evaluation of Ready-Made ESP Materials Based on Iranian Instructors' Perceptions: The Case of SAMT Publications



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Citation

Asltaleb Maghferat, A., Ajideh, P., Behtary, Sh., & Shojaei, A. (2024). Evaluation of Ready-Made ESP Materials Based on Iranian Instructors' Perceptions: The Case of SAMT Publications. *International Journal of Language and Translation Research*, 4(2), pp. 45-68

Abstract

Available online

Keywords:

ESP, textbook evaluation, Instructors, SAMT

ESP or English for special purposes, emerged in the 1960s to cater to the specific linguistic requirements of learners in scientific fields and professional environments (Negro Alousque, 2016). Dudley Evans and St John (1998) assert that ESP is part of a broader trend in language instruction for specific goals. ESP textbooks are the primary and most important resources used for teaching English in academic settings in Iran. Assessing these resources can uncover their merits and drawbacks, thereby enhancing their overall quality. The objective of this study was to assess the quality of pre-made English for Specific Purposes (ESP) textbooks published by the Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities (SAMT), as perceived by ESP instructors in Iran. In order to achieve this objective, a total of 42 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) professors from five universities in Iran were selected to participate in the study using purposive sampling. We administered a 20-item questionnaire on evaluating ESP textbooks, which was created by Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020), to collect data. The results indicate that the participants had a positive evaluation of ESP textbooks published by SAMT in terms of practical concerns, compatibility with course objectives, skills and strategies, and content. However, they had a negative evaluation in regards to linguistic issues, subject matter, and layout. Concurrently, the textbooks were assessed impartially in relation to the activities they contained. Given the sections that received bad evaluations, we have also provided practical suggestions for revising or creating ESP materials.

ارزیابی مواد درسی انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه بر اساس نظرات مربیان ایرانی: مورد انتشارات سمت
ESP یا انگلیسی برای مقاصد خاص، در دهه ۱۹۶۰ برای پاسخگویی به نیازهای زبانی خاص زبان آموزان در زمینه های علمی و محیط های حرفه ای ظهور کرد (Negro Alousque, 2016). دادلی ایوانز و سنت جان (۱۹۹۸) اظهار داشتند که ESP بخشی از یک روند گسترده تر در آموزش زبان برای اهداف خاص است. کتاب های درسی ESP اصلی ترین و مهم ترین منابع مورد استفاده برای آموزش زبان انگلیسی در محیط های دانشگاهی در ایران هستند. ارزیابی این منابع می تواند محاسن و معایب آنها را آشکار کند و در نتیجه کیفیت کلی آنها را افزایش دهد. هدف از این مطالعه، ارزیابی کیفیت کتاب های درسی پیش ساخته انگلیسی برای مقاصد خاص (ESP) منتشر شده توسط سازمان تحقیق و تألیف کتب درسی دانشگاهی در علوم انسانی (SAMT)، مطابق با درک مدرسان ESP در ایران بود. به منظور دستیابی به این هدف، در مجموع ۴۲ استاد زبان انگلیسی برای مقاصد خاص (ESP) از پنج دانشگاه در ایران برای شرکت در پژوهش با استفاده از نمونه گیری هدفمند انتخاب شدند. برای جمع آوری داده ها، پرسشنامه ای ۲۰ سؤالی در مورد ارزیابی کتاب های درسی ESP که توسط وحدت نیا و صالحی (۲۰۲۰) ایجاد شده بود، اجرا کردیم. نتایج نشان می دهد که شرکت کنندگان ارزیابی مثبتی از کتاب های درسی ESP منتشر شده توسط SAMT از نظر دغدغه های عملی، سازگاری با اهداف دوره، مهارت ها و استراتژی ها و محتوا داشتند. با این حال، آنها از نظر مسائل زبانی، موضوع و چیدمان ارزیابی منفی داشتند. همزمان، کتاب های درسی در رابطه با فعالیت هایی که در بر داشتند، بی طرفانه ارزیابی شدند. با توجه به بخش هایی که ارزیابی بدی دریافت کردند، پیشنهادها عملی برای بازنگری یا ایجاد مواد ESP نیز ارائه کرده ایم.

کلمات کلیدی: ESP، ارزیابی کتاب درسی، مربیان، SAMT

Introduction

English has become a crucial factor in the success of individuals involved in academic and industrial settings across the world. This success can be attributed to some conditions, such as the lingua franca nature of English, its growth in trade and commerce, the intactness of English-speaking countries' economies after the World War II, the growth of computer industry in English-speaking countries, and the dominance of English language in academic journals. These conditions have led to situating English for specific purposes (ESP) in the world at large (Anthony, 2018).

ESP has existed since the 1960s as a response to learners' specific needs in scientific disciplines and professional settings (Negro Alousque, 2016). In this regard, Dudley Evans and St John (1998) stated that ESP is included in a general movement in teaching languages for special purposes. Furthermore, ESP has drawn a great deal of attention in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) reasoned that ESP should be regarded as an approach, not a product. It is neither a specific material for teaching nor a specific language or methodological procedure. It is clear from its name that it is meant to meet the specific needs of a particular group of learners in a particular setting. The materials developed and utilized are compatible with the learners' specific discipline. One of the most overriding issues in English for general purposes (EGP) and ESP contexts is to evaluate the books to discover if they are compatible with the objectives of the course. Concerning the importance of textbooks, AlMithqal (2019) highlighted that textbooks are the most important components used by teachers and learners. Moreover, Hasibuan and Fithriani (2022) mentioned that "course textbooks are very meaningful for teaching students how to communicate in the language of their field" (p. 290). Similarly, Alemi et al. (2021) observed that ESP textbooks are highly significant in contexts where English is used as a foreign language, like Iran.

Accordingly, considering the importance of textbooks in teaching profession, their evaluation can help curriculum developers, teachers, and learners determine the quality of their textbooks to meet their predetermined academic goals (Nguyen, 2023). Karimnia and Mohammad Jafari (2017) stated that "since textbooks are one of the integral components of the learning process, their evaluation is essential to improve their correspondence to the learners' needs and goals" (p. 219). According to Satriani and Resmini (2021), teachers should engage in textbook evaluation to determine the suitability of the materials to be taught in the classroom. In addition, they stated that

textbook evaluation is important on the grounds that textbooks accommodate learners' success in the process of learning/teaching. By the same token, textbook evaluation empowers policymakers and teachers to screen the ready-made textbooks on the market and choose the one that is suitable in a particular ESP context (Illes, 2009). From a perceptual point of view, Febriantini and Prayogo (2020) highlighted textbook evaluation, stating that it not only provides information about the content but also gives information on teachers' perceptions, which can also be considered evaluation.

Accordingly, it can be realized that textbook evaluation serves a crucial role in teaching and learning since selecting textbooks based on personal tastes or opinions does not lead to a successful course (Nguyen, 2023). Although the significance is highly clear, textbook evaluation has gained little attention since it is entirely new in ESP research (AlMithqal, 2019). Furthermore, in the context of Iran, ESP materials published by the Organization for Researching and Compiling University Textbooks in Humanities (SAMT) have been evaluated from the point of view of a single discipline (e.g., Ebadi & Naderifarjad, 2015; Karimnia & Mohammad Jafari, 2017; Khalili & Bagheri, 2023; Vahdatnia & Salehi, 2020). However, reviewing the literature makes it evident that no study has touched upon a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of ESP materials published by SAMT based on the perspectives of ESP instructors from a wide variety of disciplines. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate Iranian ESP instructors' perceptions towards eight different areas of ready-made discipline-specific materials (i.e., practical concerns, course objectives, linguistic issues, subject matter, skills and strategies, activities, layout, and content) published by SAMT in order to provide illuminating information to the pertinent stakeholders who use the materials.

Literature Review

Textbook Evaluation

Textbook evaluation is meant to discover the extent to which textbooks are valuable (Tomlinson, 2011, cited in Takrousta et al., 2020). This process involves determining to what extent textbooks that are utilized by stakeholders (i.e., students, teachers, and administrators) affect them. This could be carried out through the flexibility, credibility, and reliability of the textbooks used.

Generally, textbook evaluation is important since it provides information concerning the pros and cons of textbooks. Specifically speaking, this process helps stakeholders uncover their pertinency to particular teaching settings. Furthermore, by means of this, teachers can obtain information as to the textbooks, which in turn leads to changes in their teaching to make it congruent with the goals of the course and their learners' needs. Awasthi et al. (2006) observed that textbook adoption is typically accompanied by evaluation. Moreover, it provides the opportunity for stakeholders to recognize what important criteria they are to scrutinize in textbooks. The criteria help them adopt ready-made textbooks from a more critical point of view (Litz, 2005).

Approaches and Criteria for Textbook Evaluation

In textbook evaluation, there are various variables involved that determine the success or failure of a textbook in a certain teaching/learning context. Furthermore, in the course of textbook evaluation, evaluators need to consider different points, one of which is to opt for evaluation criteria. It is worth mentioning that each teaching/learning setting requires its own criteria based on the status quo (Takrousta et al., 2020). Charles and Pecoari (2016) mentioned two phases in their English for academic purposes (EAP) textbook evaluation. In the first phase, they mentioned that textbook evaluators should select the pertinent textbooks and then quickly go through their introduction, table of contents, and the publishers' description of the current textbooks in order to put aside the least favorable ones. In the second phase, the evaluators should have an in-depth review of at least two chapters of the selected textbook to finalize their evaluation. Similarly, Anthony (2016) proposed two stages for evaluating ready-made ESP materials. In the first stage, the evaluators should ask review questions on their suitability concerning introducing the target language setting, building learners' linguistic skills, the active engagement of the skills, encouraging incidental learning of the target language skills, developing learners' positive emotional reactions towards the target language skills, and supporting teachers. Afterward, if the mentioned criteria are perceived positively, the second stage of evaluation should be taken. In this stage, more in-depth review questions should be asked on the same criteria in order to examine the materials in detail before finalizing the decision. Finally, textbook evaluation could be carried out through different tools, such as questionnaires, interviews, checklists, and observations (Takrousta et al., 2020). In this study, we utilized a questionnaire developed by Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020).

Types of Textbook Evaluation

Ellis (1997) stated that there are two types of evaluation: predictive evaluation and retrospective evaluation. Predictive evaluation (pre-use) could be done in two ways. One way is to refer to textbook evaluation experts to understand what they have stated regarding their evaluation. However, it should be borne in mind that experts evaluate textbooks for general purposes, which makes their criteria for evaluating individual textbooks imprecise. Thus, the evaluation carried out by them should be taken cautiously. The second way is to conduct one's own predictive evaluation based on the criteria and directions in the literature. On the other hand, retrospective evaluation is used while a textbook is utilized (whilst-use) or after it has been utilized (post-use). This type is believed to be more objective and reliable since it relies on the feedback received by the pertinent users (Çakıt Ezici, 2006). As such, McGrath (2016) is in favor of this evaluation, stating that it is most reliable when it is based on the experiences of different stakeholders (i.e., teachers and students). The current research adopted the retrospective approach to evaluate SAMT ESP textbooks.

Related Studies on Textbook Evaluation

Hessamy and Mohebi (2014) investigated Iranian EFL teachers' and medical students' perceptions towards their EAP textbook. They also aimed to discover the possible challenges in their teaching/learning settings through using questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative results revealed no significant difference between the perceptions of the participants from both groups. However, there were some significant differences between their perceptions of the six criteria of the textbook. Furthermore, the qualitative data demonstrated that the main issues encountered by teachers and students included overcrowded classrooms, a lack of resources that are adequate for the needs of the learners, unclear objectives in the context of the EAP, and a lack of time. In conclusion, the majority of teachers felt that the textbook was insufficient for an EAP course, despite the fact that they had positive opinions about it. Additionally, they thought that their classes should have fewer students, EAP courses should have defined goals, and pertinent materials should be developed in accordance with those goals.

In a study conducted in Indonesia, Febriantini and Prayogo (2020) explored seven ESP teachers' perceptions of their textbook on English for communication science by using questionnaires and interviews. The results indicated that the teachers were satisfied with the book

in terms of its practicality, language use and content, tasks, and topics. Nevertheless, they were dissatisfied with its appropriateness to learners, skill command, pertinency to the syllabus, and design and organization. Furthermore, they believed that language use, content, and topics eased the process of teaching/learning.

In an Iranian study, Takrousta et al. (2020) evaluated an ESP textbook on English for banking purposes at Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) based on insights from two experts and 30 bank staff as learners. Questionnaires and interviews were used in the study. Both groups of participants perceived the textbook positively in terms of topics, language skills, tasks and activities, and layout. Furthermore, they believed that it was compatible with their linguistic needs. Nevertheless, they felt that some changes should be made regarding dispelling misspelled and ungrammatical sentences and supplementing the book with a glossary and genuine correspondences on business and banking. Finally, necessary modifications were made to the textbook based on the insights from the participants.

Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020) explored Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions towards an ESP book on English for chemical engineering. An adapted questionnaire was distributed among 11 ESP teachers and 110 students.

The results revealed that the students perceived the textbook positively in terms of its compatibility with course objectives, subject matter, skills and strategies, exercises and activities, and the suitability of its content. However, they had negative perceptions towards its practical concerns, linguistic issues, and layout. On the other hand, the teachers perceived it positively in terms of practical concerns, its compatibility with course objectives, subject matter, exercises and activities, and the suitability of its content. However, they had negative perceptions towards its linguistic issues, skills and strategies, and layout.

In another study carried out in Indonesia, Setyowati et al. (2023) described the needs analysis of psychology courses in ESP and evaluated the discipline-specific textbook from 20 students' points of view. Data were collected in the form of questionnaires and documentation. The results indicated that the students needed materials on language skills, resources on recent issues to talk about, access to journals and books on psychology, skills on writing scientific papers, lab documents, and reports.

Furthermore, the students had negative perceptions towards the textbook in terms of appearance, layout, visual design, and writing materials. Although some facets, such as layout, exercises, content, and speaking resources, met their needs, there was still a need for improvement in particular areas.

In another study conducted in Vietnam, Nguyen (2023) investigated 15 teachers' and 122 students' perceptions towards two ESP textbooks on business. Data were collected through questionnaires and focus group interviews. According to the results, the overall perception of participants was positive. However, the teachers had negative perceptions towards the textbooks' topics. Furthermore, the interview results revealed that both groups had positive perceptions towards the books' practicality concerns and supplementary materials such as videos for practicing listening. However, criteria such as activities, language skills, and content should be modified to improve the quality of the textbooks.

In a recent study conducted in Indonesia, Nurhidayah et al. (2023) evaluated the suitability of the English textbook for the students as well as the demands of the school in terms of ESP for the office administration program at SMK Setiabudhi Semarang. This study analyzed the data gathered from student surveys, teacher interviews, and document observations using a descriptive qualitative research methodology. The results showed that the English textbook chosen was thought to be suitable for fulfilling the demands of the students and the school. Specifically, the textbook met 87% of the student needs and 77% of the school needs on average.

Critically speaking, it is worth emphasizing anew that the above-mentioned studies as well as other ones (both in Iran and overseas) in the literature, while presenting important findings, have been centered on evaluating only one textbook or two. Especially in the context of Iran, ESP textbooks (the ones published by SAMT) have been evaluated from the point of view of a single discipline. As such, the findings can be applied to limited stakeholders who use the same textbooks. Therefore, prior to embarking on the current study, the researchers felt that there was a need for a comprehensive study on ESP textbook evaluation from the point of view of stakeholders involved in multiple majors. This provided a robust rationale for conducting the current study to bridge the gap in the literature.

Methodology

Design

Given that the primary objective of this study was to holistically evaluate ready-made ESP textbooks published by SAMT, a survey-based research design was opted for since questionnaires are usually utilized to gather promising information about the textbooks' features from the viewpoints of stakeholders.

Participants

In this study, 42 ESP instructors (22 males and 20 females) from five different Iranian universities (Tabriz University, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University, Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, and Islamic Azad University of Ardabil) participated. The sampling method was purposive as it is opted for when participants participating in a study enjoy some specific characteristics or expertise in line with the purpose of the study (Lopez, 2023). The specific characteristics of the participants were as follows: (1) those who were teaching any SAMT ESP books at the time of data collection, and (2) those who had taught the books during previous semesters. The age range of participants was 33-63 years. Also, 32 of the participants held a PhD degree and 10 were MA graduates. They were mostly seasoned ESP instructors with the mean experience of 21.73 years in teaching.

Materials

The textbooks to be evaluated were ready-made ESP textbooks published by SAMT Publications in Iran. According to SAMT (2021, cited in Taghadomi, 2022), this organization began to work in 1985 as one of the organizations affiliated with the Ministry of Research and Technology. It was aimed at publishing textbooks in the humanities. Currently, 36 groups of specialists are working under the supervision of the organization's research management with the purpose of producing academic materials in the fields of humanities and Islamic sciences. So far, the specialized groups have put a great deal of effort into publishing 2300 textbooks and 41 editions in academia. Moreover, one of the responsibilities of the organization is to publish discipline-specific textbooks in all academic fields. So far, the specialized group of foreign languages has authored and published 200 textbooks in the fields of basic sciences and engineering, medical sciences, humanities, arts, and non-English foreign languages. All in all, it has attempted to meet the specific language needs of the academic community as much as possible.

Instrumentation

From among several instruments on textbook evaluation in the literature, Vahdatnia and Salehi's (2020) questionnaire was adopted for the purpose of this study, which was the adapted version of Baleghizadeh and Rahimi's (2011) 20-item questionnaire, which itself was modified by Karimi (2006) based on Sheldon's (1988) model of evaluation. The adopted version used in the current study was cross-checked for expert validation by a competent professor in TEFL from Tabriz University. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *little* (2), *average* (3), *much* (4), and *very much* (5). The items were centered on eight main areas: *practical concerns (three questions)*, *course objectives (three questions)*, *linguistic issues (three questions)*, *subject matter (three questions)*, *skills and strategies (three questions)*, *activities (one question)*, *layout (two questions)*, and *content (two questions)*. As for its reliability, Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020) reported that Cronbach's alpha level was 0.81, which was an acceptable level of reliability.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

To begin with, the questionnaire's validity was cross-checked by a competent professor in TEFL from the department of foreign languages at Tabriz University. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.81, which allowed the researchers to move on to the next steps of data collection. After ensuring satisfactory levels of reliability and validity, the researchers set out to be responsible for collecting data from ESP instructors at Tabriz University, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University, Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, and Islamic Azad University of Ardabil. The researchers also referred to different faculties in person and got permission from the heads to collect data from the ESP instructors who were in charge of teaching discipline-specific language. The pertinent ESP instructors were met and briefed on the purpose of the study and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality, anonymity, and so forth. Nevertheless, most of the instructors said that they taught using either adapted or tailor-made materials. Based on these criteria, they were excluded from the study. The researchers made sure that only those instructors were to take part in the study who were teaching SAMT ESP textbooks at the time of data collection or had taught them during the previous semesters. The instructors were from formal sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities (i.e., soft sciences and hard sciences). Consequently, 50 copies of the questionnaire

were distributed among the instructors. The participants were supposed to fill out the questionnaires carefully in their free time and give them back to any of the researchers. Unfortunately, eight instructors did not give back the questionnaires. Therefore, the data collected from 42 instructors was prepared for further analysis. To this end, the data were entered into the SPSS software (version 27) to calculate descriptive statistics. Specifically, the percentages and means of each Likert-type item were elicited. A step-by-step indication of the above-mentioned procedures is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Step-Wise Representation of Data Collection and Analysis



Results

The first main area of the questionnaire was about practical concerns. In this regard, the first question was: *“To what extent is the book available?”* According to Table 1, 44.7% of the participants chose very much, 50% much, 5.3% average, 0% little, and 0% not at all. The second question was: *“Does the book have any accompanying materials (e.g., CDs or websites)?”* 0% of the participants chose very much, 4.8% much, 14.3% average, 21.4% little, and 59.5% not at all. The third question was: *“Is the textbook cost-effective?”* 31% of the participants chose very much, 38.1% much, 26.2% average, 2.4% little, and 2.4% not at all.

The second main area was concerned with course objectives. In this respect, the first question was: *“To what extent do the objectives of the textbook match the objectives of the course?”* 19% of the participants chose very much, 45.2% much, 33.3% average, 2.4% little, and 0% not at all. The second question was: *“To what extent does the textbook seem to be in tune with broader educational concerns?”* 14.3% of the participants chose very much, 23.8% much, 45.2% average, 14.3% little, and 2.4% not at all. The third question was: *“To what extent is the textbook*

appropriate for the audience?” 14.3% of the participants chose very much, 21.4% much, 57.1% average, 4.8% little, and 2.4% not at all.

The third main area was concerned with linguistic issues. In this regard, the first question was: *“To what extent does the textbook contain basic grammatical patterns and vocabulary?”* 19.5% of the participants chose very much, 19.5% much, 29.3% average, 24.4% little, and 7.3% not at all. The second question was: *“To what extent does the presence of structures and vocabularies move gradually from simple to complex?”* 2.4% of the participants chose very much, 21.4% much, 35.7% average, 19% little, and 21.4% not at all. The third question was: *“To what extent are new vocabularies and structures recycled in subsequent units for reinforcement?”* 0% of the participants chose very much, 10% much, 45% average, 22.5% little, and 22.5% not at all.

The fourth main area was concerned with subject matter. In this regard, the first question was: *“To what extent does the subject matter motivate and interest you?”* 17.1% of the participants chose very much, 9.8% much, 31.7% average, 22% little, and 19.5% not at all. The second question was: *“To what extent has the ordering of the material by topics been arranged in a logical fashion?”* 0% of the participants chose very much, 31.7% much, 36.6% average, 19.5% little, and 12.2% not at all. The third question was: *“To what extent has the content been graded according to the needs and background knowledge of the students?”* 0% of the participants chose very much, 26.2% much, 19% average, 35.7% little, and 19% not at all.

The fifth main area was concerned with skills and strategies. In this regard, the first question was: *“To what extent does the textbook teach the reading skill?”* 23.8% of the participants chose very much, 21.4% much, 33.3% average, 16.7% little, and 4.8% not at all. The second question was: *“To what extent does the textbook teach reading strategies?”* 2.4% of the participants chose very much, 23.8% much, 16.7% average, 47.6% little, and 9.5% not at all. The third question was: *“To what extent does the textbook make students capable of reading other similar specialized texts?”* 9.8% of the participants chose very much, 31.7% much, 29.3% average, 19.5% little, and 9.8% not at all.

The sixth main area was concerned with activities. In this regard, the question was: *“Are the exercises and activities varied enough to challenge the students?”* 9.5% of the participants chose very much, 19% much, 35.7% average, 33.3% little, and 2.4% not at all.

The seventh main area was concerned with layout. In this regard, the first question was: “*To what extent does the textbook appear attractive?*” 7.1% of the participants chose very much, 16.7% much, 19% average, 42.9% little, and 14.3% not at all. The second question was: “*To what extent do photographs and illustrations in the book motivate you to talk about the subject?*” 2.4% of the participants chose very much, 7.1% much, 16.7% average, 28.6% little, and 45.2% not at all.

The last section, the eighth main area, was concerned with content. In this regard, the first question was: “*To what extent are the materials related to your students’ major?*” 38.1% of the participants chose very much, 45.2% much, 14.3% average, 2.4% little, and 0% not at all. The second question was: “*To what extent has the content been graded according to the proficiency level of the students?*” 14.3% of the participants chose very much, 31% much, 28.6% average, 16.7% little, and 9.5% not at all. The results are summarized through percentages and means in Table 1.

Table 1

The Participants’ Evaluatory Perceptions of SAMT ESP Textbooks

No Statements		5 Very much	4 Much	3 Average	2 Little	1 Not at all	Mean
Practical Concepts	1 To what extent is the book available?	44.7%	50%	5.3%	0%	0%	4.39
	2 Does the book have any accompanying materials (e.g., CDs or websites)?	0%	4.8%	14.3%	21.4%	59.5%	1.64
	3 Is the textbook cost-effective?	31%	38.1%	26.2%	2.4%	2.4%	3.93
Course Objectives	4 To what extent do the objectives of the textbook match the objectives of the course?	19%	45.2%	33.3%	2.4%	0%	3.81
	5 To what extent does the textbook seem to be in tune with broader educational concerns?	14.3%	23.8%	45.2%	14.3%	2.4%	3.33
	6 To what extent is the textbook appropriate for the audience?	14.3%	21.4%	57.1%	4.8%	2.4%	3.40

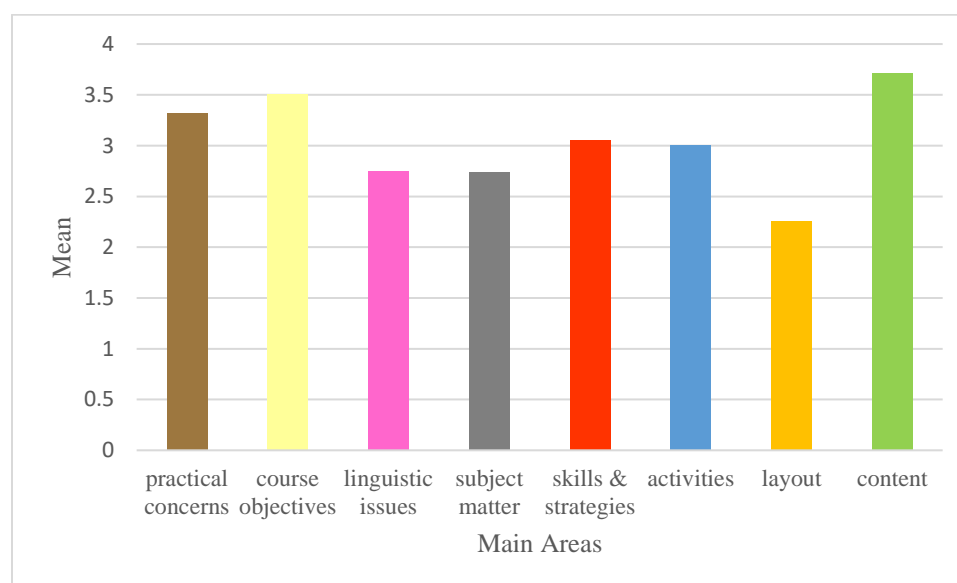
Linguistic Issues	7	To what extent does the textbook contain basic grammatical patterns and vocabulary?	19.5%	19.5%	29.3%	24.4%	7.3%	3.20
	8	To what extent does the presence of structures and vocabularies move gradually from simple to more complex?	2.4%	21.4%	35.7%	19%	21.4%	2.64
	9	To what extent are new vocabularies and structures recycled in subsequent units for reinforcement?	0%	10%	45%	22.5%	22.5%	2.43
Subject Matter	10	To what extent does the subject matter motivate and interest you?	17.1%	9.8%	31.7%	22%	19.5%	2.83
	11	To what extent has the ordering of the material by topics been arranged in a logical fashion?	0%	31.7%	36.6%	19.5%	12.2%	2.88
	12	To what extent has the content been graded according to the needs and background knowledge of the students?	0%	26.2%	19%	35.7%	19%	2.52
Skills & Strategies	13	To what extent does the textbook teach the reading skill?	23.8%	21.4%	33.3%	16.7%	4.8%	3.43
	14	To what extent does the textbook teach reading strategies?	2.4%	23.8%	16.7%	47.6%	9.5%	2.62
	15	To what extent does the textbook make students capable of reading other similar specialized texts?	9.8%	31.7%	29.3%	19.5%	9.8%	3.12
Activiti	16	Are the exercises and activities varied enough to challenge the students?	9.5%	19%	35.7%	33.3%	2.4%	3
Layo	17	To what extent does the textbook appear attractive?	7.1%	16.7%	19%	42.9%	14.3%	2.60
	18	To what extent do the photographs and illustrations in the book motivate you to talk about the subject?	2.4%	7.1%	16.7%	28.6%	45.2%	1.93

Conte	19	To what extent are the materials related to your students' major?	38.1%	45.2%	14.3%	2.4%	0%	4.19
	20	To what extent has the content been graded according to the proficiency level of the students?	14.3%	31%	28.6%	16.7%	9.5%	3.24

As Figure 2 illustrates, the participants had positive perceptions towards SAMP ESP textbooks in terms of practical concerns ($M = 3.32$), compatibility with course objectives ($M = 3.51$), skills and strategies ($M = 3.05$), and content ($M = 3.71$). However, they had negative perceptions towards such areas as linguistic issues ($M = 2.75$), subject matter ($M = 2.74$), and layout ($M = 2.26$). Also, they had neutral perceptions towards activities ($M = 3$). All in all, the participants had rather positive perceptions towards the SAMT ESP textbooks; however, their degree of positivity in the perceptions was not strong.

Figure 2

Participants' Overall Evaluatory Perceptions Towards Eight Main Areas of SAMT ESP Textbooks



Discussion and Conclusion

The significance of this study lies in the fact that this is the first holistic and comprehensive evaluation of ESP materials published by SAMT based on the perspectives of ESP instructors from a wide variety of disciplines. With this rationale in mind, the study aimed to investigate Iranian ESP instructors' perceptions towards ready-made materials published by SAMT. We witnessed that among the eight main areas investigated, practical concerns, compatibility with course objectives, skills and strategies, and content were evaluated positively, while linguistic issues, subject matter, and layout were evaluated negatively. Meanwhile, activities were evaluated neutrally.

Since the study was evaluative in nature, it is worth going beyond highlighting the overall outcomes of the study and scrutinizing the specific research outcomes along with possible interpretations, explanations, and practical suggestions to enhance the quality of ESP textbooks published by SAMT and other similar organizations.

The first main area, practical concerns, was perceived positively, which is in line with Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011), who found that both teachers and students had positive perceptions towards the practical concerns of their assigned ESP textbook. However, looking into individual statements in this regard revealed that ESP instructors evaluated the availability of SAMT ESP textbooks positively. It suggests that the textbooks are readily available on the market for stakeholders, probably because they are published by SAMT, which is a prominent organization in Iran. It can be realized that the availability of the textbooks is already fulfilled, as Joshi and Dangal (2020) remark that the availability of textbooks ensures students' access to essential learning materials and success in academia. Furthermore, ESP instructors evaluated the price of the textbooks positively. Similarly, it can be interpreted that the textbooks are published by a well-known domestic organization (i.e., SAMT), which does not require students to spend a lot of money on purchasing the textbooks compared to overseas textbooks. The organization publishes its textbooks at a fair price, as Gaston and Williams (2010) highlight that textbooks at fair prices offer accessibility to education for all students. However, the existence of accompanying materials (e.g., CDs or websites) was evaluated negatively. It can be interpreted that computer-assisted materials do not appear to be supplemented by SAMT, but it should be noted that in the era of globalization and technology, it is necessary to consult such supplementary resources at the

time of designing textbooks (Vahdatnia & Salehi, 2020). Thus, based on the above-mentioned points, a practical implication can be drawn for ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular. When it comes to preparing or revising materials for ESP students, technology-mediated supplementary resources should be incorporated, since the nature of today's technology-based era makes them a must in instructional settings.

The second main area, compatibility with course objectives, was evaluated positively. This lends support to Hessamy and Mohebi (2014), who found that medical students and instructors evaluated this area of their ESP textbook positively. Looking into individual statements revealed that ESP instructors evaluated the congruence of textbook objectives with those of their course and educational concerns positively. Although SAMT ESP textbooks do not appear to express the objectives explicitly, which could be due to the organization's policy, it seems that the textbooks are congruent with most educational and course objectives. The textbooks seem to observe that compatibility with course objectives is a crucial step in achieving learner satisfaction and potential learning outcomes. Another statement revealed that ESP instructors had positive perceptions towards the appropriateness of the textbooks for the audience. In this regard, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) mentioned that ESP materials should be chosen carefully to make a correspondence between them and the needs of the target audience (i.e., ESP learners). It can also be stated that, if this issue is not observed, there seems to be no difference between EGP and ESP. Thus, the textbooks seem to be fulfilling in this regard.

The third main area, linguistic issues, was evaluated negatively. This is compatible with Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020), who found that both instructors and students had negative perceptions of their ESP textbooks concerning linguistic issues. However, considering the specific statements in this regard revealed that ESP instructors were rather satisfied with SAMT ESP textbooks' coverage of basic grammatical patterns and vocabulary. This issue is crucial, as Ellis (2003) stated that linguistic content should be graded (from simple to complex) in order to enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness. Besides, it is presupposed that ESP students do not usually have as solid linguistic background as ELT students do. Thus, it seems wise to cover basic linguistic items in ESP courses. Concerning other statements, however, it was believed that although basic linguistic items are covered, there seems to be no justifiable transition from simple items to complex ones. This aspect of the textbooks runs counter to the above-mentioned statement

by Ellis at one hand and Pieneman's learnability hypothesis at the other, which posits that learners cannot learn a structural item unless they learn its prerequisite in the previous stage (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Concerning the last statement, it was revealed that the extent to which new linguistic items are recycled in the next units for reinforcement was evaluated negatively. This seems to be in contradiction to Schmidt (1990), who suggested that frequency of occurrence is one of the factors that helps learners notice and accept a subset of language as potential input. This issue does not seem to be observed by the textbooks. As such, two implications can be drawn for ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular. When it comes to preparing or revising materials for ESP students, it should be taken into account that linguistic items should move from simple items to complex ones in order to ensure learners' learnability and metalinguistic awareness. Additionally, at the time of grading linguistic items, it is suggested to use spiral approaches (say, A1 \Rightarrow B1 \Rightarrow A2 \Rightarrow B2, etc.) to maximize learners' outcomes of learning.

The fourth area, subject matter, was evaluated negatively. The results are incompatible with those of Langroudi and Behrozi (2015), who found that Iranian ESP students had positive perceptions of their assigned textbook. One possible reason for the incongruent results is due to the materials under evaluation. Langroudi and Behrozi (2015) investigated a book on *English for accounting students* published by Kumsar. However, the current study focused on a holistic evaluation of ESP textbooks published by a different organization, namely, SAMT. Thus, different organizational policies may have led to such a difference in the results. However, looking into some individual statements revealed that ESP instructors had negative perceptions towards SAMT ESP textbooks' extent of offering motivating and interesting subject matter, ordering topics logically, and grading content according to the needs and background knowledge of the learners. Although these issues are mostly taken for granted in language learning, it can be interpreted that they are not fulfilled by the textbooks in general. As such, some implications can be offered for ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular. First, topics could be plotted on an origin-destination continuum. When ESP students are in the origin, close or easily-fathomed topics would be suitable. What this means is that the topics should be familiar and anchored to their previous systematic or schematic backgrounds. However, as the students move towards the destination, the topics could be remote or challenging. What this means

is that the topics could be slightly over their heads and still accessible at the same time. Second, in order to have a motivating and interesting subject matter, it is suggested to consider the authenticity of texts and activities. This way, ESP students will be interested and motivated to move on their journey of learning since they can be assured that these are the terminal behaviors that they are going to encounter in specific target language use situations.

The fifth area, skills and strategies, was evaluated rather positively. This does not lend support to Vahdatnia and Salehi (2020), who found that ESP teachers evaluated this aspect negatively. Such a difference could be due to the nature of the materials evaluated. Although a SAMT ESP textbook was evaluated in that study, it can still be claimed that each author may have varying degrees of commitment to covering language skills. However, looking into individual statements revealed that ESP instructors had positive perceptions of SAMT ESP textbooks' coverage of reading skills. In this regard, Khoshsiman and Samani (2015) stated that in Iranian ESP classes, one or some of the language skills, especially reading, are the focus of instruction. This seems to be accomplished by the textbooks in academic contexts. Furthermore, they believe that since the focus of instruction is on reading skills, covering reading strategies is pivotal for text comprehension. However, the textbooks do not seem to consider the crucial role of strategies in ESP. Therefore, an important implication for ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular is that reading strategies (such as predicting the content, skimming, scanning, guessing the meaning based on contextual clues, making inferences, creating sensory images, etc.) should be taught in the materials so students can enhance their learning outcomes.

The sixth area, activities, was evaluated neutrally. That is, some ESP instructors had neither positive nor negative attitudes towards this aspect. This is incompatible with Khalili and Bagheri (2023), who found that dentistry stakeholders had positive perceptions of the activities of their assigned SAMT ESP textbook. This could have arisen due to the idiosyncratic differences between SAMT ESP textbooks for each discipline. It suggests that some of the textbooks cover activities and exercises well, but others seem to be neglecting these aspects. With respect to those textbooks that neglect such issues, a practical suggestion can be offered for ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular. In order to challenge ESP students, varying activities (say, fill-in-the-blank questions, multiple-choice questions, problem-

solving activities, cloze tests, essay questions, translation exercises, teamwork activities, etc.) could be consulted. It should also be noted that to the best of our knowledge, varying activities could enhance learners' motivation and achievement under different conditions.

The seventh area, layout, was evaluated negatively. In this regard, the individual statements asked about the attraction of SAMT ESP textbooks and their degree of covering photographs and illustrations were perceived negatively by ESP instructors. This is in line with Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011), who found that there were no illustrations or photographs in the SAMT ESP textbook they evaluated. In general, layout serves a key role in terms of being eye-catching, a motivation booster, and a dispeller of boredom among ESP students (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011). Moreover, the use of visual pictures conveys information effectively to learners (Purwaningtyas, 2020). Accordingly, we recommend ESP textbook developers and instructors in general and SAMT textbook developers in particular to increase the attraction of textbooks in terms of graphic illustrations and photographs. To this end, we suggest four measurements to be taken in future. First, pictures should be incorporated before texts in order to enhance learners' imagination. Second, web-based pictures should be incorporated into textbooks. Third, colorful pictures should be used to increase learners' sense of liveliness. Finally, different charts and diagrams should be incorporated to enhance learners' understanding of the points.

The last area, content, was evaluated positively. This is compatible with Febriantini and Prayogo (2020), who found that ESP teachers had positive perceptions towards the content of their assigned ESP textbook. In general, according to Yan and Jie (2014), ESP textbooks must align with specific discipline requirements. Moreover, according to Koenig and Guertler (2018), grading ESP content by proficiency level enhances relevance and effectiveness. Considering the individual statements in this regard, which asked about materials relatedness to students' major and the grading of content based on students' proficiency level, it was revealed that these issues were positively evaluated. This suggests that, in general, SAMT ESP textbooks fulfill the issue of content relatedness for ESP students.

All in all, based on the above-mentioned issues, it can be concluded that SAMT ESP textbooks fulfilled some criteria, such as practical concerns, compatibility with course objectives, skills and strategies, and content. However, other criteria such as linguistic issues, subject matter, and layout are perceived negatively by ESP instructors. Moreover, perceptions towards activities seem to be

neither positive nor negative. Last but not least, the danger of textbook evaluation is that the merits of a ready-made material may be ignored even when the material best suits the needs of a particular group of ESP students in a particular context. Thus, the current study does not aim to downplay the value of ESP textbooks published by SAMT Publications. No teaching material is perfect, and the overall perceptions of textbooks attempt to help ESP instructors be aware of what materials they need to choose for their particular teaching contexts.

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