

7. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS AT ADAMA SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

English plays an irreplaceable role in international businesses. According to the statistics, over 80% of international corporations use English as their working language (Zhang, 2007). It is now widely recognised that "...English has become the primary language for doing international business" (Estaban & Cañado, 2004, p.137). The purpose of this study was to investigate the English language needs of business students at Adama Science and Technology University. A survey method was employed for this study. To this end, questionnaires, interviews, teaching materials, evaluation checklists and model proficiency tests were designed based on the related literature reviewed. Then, the data gathered were analysed using mean scores and percentiles. Based on the results, findings were summarised in terms of the research questions. As the findings of this study pointed out, the target groups were not satisfied with the English courses being offered. There was a big gap between the English courses offered and the students' needs. There were also gaps between what the target groups could do and the language necessities in the target situations. Similarly, it was noticed that the target groups had limitations in performing specific tasks in English. On the other hand, the results of the target situations language needs analyses indicated that business graduates were expected to acquire special English language skills for different purposes. In fact, it was confirmed that employers want their workers to be proficient in specific English language skills.

Key words: needs analysis, business graduate, business English, ESP, world of work

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1. Background of the Study

Language training, we may say, sets out to provide knowledge of a restricted set of schemata, those frames of reference and rhetorical routines which characterise a particular area of language use. The objectives of a course of training will be directed at achieving just the aim, and any procedural capacity which develops and which allows the learner to go beyond the specified aim can be regarded as a contingent benefit (Widdowson, 1983, p. 80). What educational training will seek to do is to develop competence and capacity which enable the learner to deal with a range of different forms of work and study situations in the future. The more specific training is, the more it will be focused on the necessities of the learners and the situations in the future.

Over the years, English language programmes all over the world have undergone a paradigm shift as far as professional users and learners of the language are concerned due to the tremendous expansion that has taken place in the fields of commerce and technology. An increasing number of students from professional courses like Law, Business, Medicine and Engineering are now aware of the exigencies of their respective professions in the use English for effective communication. The emanation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) responds to these new 'demands' or 'needs' of the learners from specific professions. As such, successful design and implementation of an ESP programme will depend on the answers to the questions of needs and demands. As quoted above and very illustratively used by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the 'honest serving men' of Kipling may guide us to formulate a sound basis for the ESP course.

Ethiopia is not an exception to these paradigm shifts. English is used in Ethiopia in various sectors. Students start learning English as one subject beginning from grade one or even from kindergarten all over Ethiopia. It is used as a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels. Besides, the language plays a great role in the scientific, political, religious, cultural and business sectors. The growth of international communication and the introduction of the free market economic system in the nation have attracted a lot of foreign investors to the country. Today, there are many foreign investors in the construction, agriculture and service sectors in Ethiopia. Furthermore, a number

of tourists are drawn to the nation to visit both the natural and historical tourist attractions. The official language in most of the organisations where these people work and stay is English. Consequently, graduates of different disciplines are required not only to be able to use English effectively, but also to be proficient in specific language skills in their areas. These specific language skills can only be acquired if the courses are designed based on the demands in each area. In order to relate English to specific fields, the courses designed in colleges and universities should be drawn from assessment of target situations and learners' needs.

The English language programmes offered by the universities and other institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia, specifically at the preparatory level after the schools, are geared towards 'academic purposes' irrespective of their future professional fields of study. The English Courses, Sophomore English and Communicative English, prescribed by Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU), categorically point out that the students in different fields of study will need to read books, make notes, speak, listen to lectures and write assignments in English. Furthermore, the students are also required 'to form and express their own opinions about various issues in English'. This generalist approach more or less marks the overall English teaching scenario without any specific focus on individual groups of students, as a similar kind of Sophomore English programme is given to all the students. Though the present 'general' English programme is offered to 'develop basic language skills of English language', the course fails to attend to the possible demands of the professional target-situations, for instance, in engineering, banking, medicine or commerce.

Though Ethiopia is not an exception to the tremendous growth in the contemporary professional scenario, institutions of higher and professional learning are yet to engage in any comprehensive and systematic shift towards ESP in their English Language Teaching (ELT) plans. Barring the limited attempts to provide English language programmes oriented towards the basic language needs as mentioned above, there is no comprehensive needs-analysis conducted across the professional faculties to design any suitable ESP programme. It

is therefore felt worthwhile to look into the present response and perceived needs of learners, teachers and professions towards ELT programmes vis-à-vis any future prospects of ESP in the Ethiopian context.

A preliminary investigation on the target situation needs was conducted before this actual research in order to identify the target language needs of business graduates. An interview was prepared for employers and business graduate workers. The following companies were randomly selected for the investigation: Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Dashen Bank, Ethiopian Inland Revenue and Customs Authority, Adama Branch and Global Import Export Company. The preliminary investigation showed that organisations use English proficiency/aptitude tests to recruit and select workers. This is because one of their means of communications in these companies is English. As a result, they need workers who can communicate well in English. Nevertheless, as the preliminary investigation pointed out, business graduates have problems in using English at work. Workers mentioned that their daily tasks, such as communicating with foreign customers, preparing monthly progress reports, analysing data from tables and graphs and using English software, require special English language skills. Nevertheless, they are not competent enough in such skills. The problem is not because they had not taken English courses at university before they started their jobs; because the workers had not practised relevant language skills during their training, they could not communicate effectively in English with customers. They were asked whether the English courses in their universities could help them at their work. They pointed out that most of the tasks and activities, including tests, were related to general language knowledge and skills. In fact, they confirmed that the courses they had taken were identical with the courses given for students in the other fields of study. This shows that the English courses taught to business students are not designed based on the immediate needs of the target situations.

The researcher also observed that teaching materials used for the teaching of English to students in different fields of study at ASTU are similar. Though some of the course titles provided for students in different fields of study vary, the contents are almost similar. For example, 'Sophomore English' is taught to all university students studying in different fields.

2. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis was introduced into language teaching through the ESP movement. From the 1960s, the demand for specialised language programmes grew and applied linguists began to employ needs analysis procedures in language teaching and materials preparation. Thus, to design ESP materials in particular or when talking about ESP in general, needs analysis seems mandatory. It is, as scholars like Evans and John (1996, p. 45) assume, the backbone of ESP. It is useful because “It asks questions about students’ needs and wants, the expectations of the institution, the features of the actual teaching situation”. Needs analysis (assessment) has been defined in various ways by different researchers.

Essentially needs assessment is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about the students’ needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and making decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs. It is based on the belief that learning is not simply the matter of learners’ absorbing the pre-selected knowledge the teacher gives them, but a process in which learners and others participate (Graves, 2000, p. 98).

The above definition points out two important issues about needs analysis or assessment. On the one hand, needs assessment is not a one shot activity in the teaching-learning environment; rather it is a continuous process. On the other hand, it is not the job of the ‘experts’; rather it involves students as participants in the process of identifying their needs. Graves (2000, p. 98) states that when needs assessment is used as an ongoing process of teaching, it helps the learners to reflect on their learning, identify their needs, and gain a sense of ownership and control of their learning.

2.1 Rationale for the Needs Analysis

The growth of the need for learning English has been increasing following the fact that it has become the world’s soft connecting force. The need for excellence in its usage has become expedient in the language sector. Both companies and workers want special skills in English so as to get connected to the world at large and clients in particular. As a result, it is possible to deduce that it is difficult to separate needs analysis from the preparation of ESP courses (Habtamu, 2008, p.11). Long (2005, p. 19), states that there is an

urgent need for courses of all kinds to be relevant - and to be seen to be relevant - to the needs of specific groups of learners and of society at large. A lot of research has been conducted to come up with 'best' methods and strategies which might enable second or foreign language learners to be proficient in language skills and become competent in the market. Nevertheless, all the efforts of 'one size fits all approach' could not satisfy the needs. Just like the need for careful diagnosis of a patient's illness before the possible prescription, the solution to satisfy the demand of language learners requires deeper knowledge of language learners and the situational needs.

1.2.1 Previous Local Studies on Needs Analysis/Assessment

Needs analysis studies in Ethiopia are very recent phenomena, only about twenty years old, and not much research has been conducted on the subject. Some promising research efforts have been made at different levels. The researcher accessed some of the local research at Addis Ababa ILS Library. These theses were selected for review, as they were thought to be related to the present problem under investigation - language needs analysis.

Fitsum conducted a research on "Commerce Students' Communicative Language Needs Analysis: St. Marry College in Focus," in 2005. The study assessed the views of both instructors and students regarding the importance of language skills, and relevance of the English Courses. Besides, the researcher evaluated English Course Teaching Materials. Then, he concluded that:

- the majority of the students had 'perplexing' problems in using English for specific tasks
- students indicated their perceived needs of specific language practices
- more than half of the respondents showed interest in teaching aids for English courses
- the English Course Teaching Materials did not have interactive activities.

According to his argument, though some colleges offer ESP courses for business students, these courses are just 'prescribed'; none of the courses was prepared based on needs analyses (Fitsum, 2005, p. 4). However, this study failed to provide answers to the following question:

- What are the gaps between the students' perceived language needs and the target situation needs?

Tessema's study aimed at analysing the contents of English for Business and Commerce Course Material focusing on Addis Ababa Commercial College in 2005. This study aimed to assess if the English Course met the expected needs and goals of the students, whether necessary materials were included in the Course, if the registers, genres, discourse and text types or functions satisfied the needs of the target groups and whether the fields of studies or specialisations were represented in the Course proportionally. The researcher finally concluded that the Course Teaching Material contradicted the nature of ESP material. As he argues, the material failed to represent specialisation, as it had not been designed based on initial needs analyses (Tessema, 2005). However, Tessema's study failed to investigate the gap between target situation language needs and what the English Course offered.

Abebe assessed the writing needs of business students at Ethiopian Civil Service College in 2011. This study focused on investigating the appropriateness of the current English Course for students' writing needs, academic writing needs of the target groups and the writing difficulties students face. The study obtained the following major findings:

- students identified their own perceived writing needs
- the target groups indicated their writing difficulties in specific tasks
- the English Course lays less emphasis on the students' writing needs

However, the study did not assess the students' current writing proficiencies using model tests. It relied on the students' response regarding their perceived writing needs. Furthermore, the researcher could have explored the gap between what students believed they could do and the actual demands in the target situations.

While the researchers cited above assessed language needs targeting business students, the studies reviewed below were on language needs analysis for students in different fields of studies.

Tilahun conducted a study on “An analysis of the needs of Evangelical Theological Colleges in teaching English: With reference to Meserete Kirstos College” in 2003. Tilahun’s thesis focused on the English Language needs of the college. The study aimed at identifying the specific needs of the college to help future syllabus designers and material writers produce more appropriate syllabuses and materials, and the English language teachers to have a better understanding of their students. The instruments used to this end were questionnaires (to students and subject teachers), interviews (of English language teachers), and text analysis. The study showed that the students had average language proficiencies and the English Course could not satisfy students’ needs. On the other hand, the students showed more interest in receptive skills, but the Course Book laid emphasis on productive language skills. Nevertheless, the study failed to investigate the gap between the language needs in the target situations and what students can get from the English Course.

Belachew assessed the English language needs of construction students in Entoto Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College in 2008. Belachew used questionnaires, interviews and observation to gather data. According to the study, the students have challenges in using English for their academic purposes. For instance, the students pointed out that they had problems in oral presentations, in writing reports, term papers and essays. They also identified their preferred learning styles and skills to which they wanted to give priority. Like the above studies, this study did not explore the target situation language needs.

Habtamu conducted a study on “*English Language Needs Analysis of Fine Art Students at Mekelle College of Teacher Education*” in 2008. Habtamu’s study showed that Fine Art Students need much more English for academic purposes than for occupational purposes, as the students have poor language competences.

Similarly, Abebe conducted a study on “*The English Language Needs of Computer Science Students at Gondar University*” in 2008. Abebe stated that the target groups were found to be interested in field specific types of English

Courses. The graduates of computer science pointed out that students are expected to acquire special language skills related to Computer Science. Nevertheless, the study did not assess the gap between the target situation needs and what the English Course offers. Besides, the researcher used only self-rating to investigate the current language proficiencies of the target groups.

As shown in the literature review in this paper (pp.17-21), Hutchinson and Waters (1997, pp. 54-63) put “needs” into two broad categories: target needs and learning needs. Target needs are needs related to ‘purpose’ and learning needs are related to ‘learning situations’. However, in order to determine the gap between the necessities for the target situation and the current status of learners, the researcher needs to conduct an assessment of proficiencies using tests. These studies, however, relied on the data gathered from the target group using only questionnaires and interviews. There is no triangulation of the data from actual target situations and learning situations. On the other hand, Belachew’s study did not include the evaluation of teaching materials of English Courses. Habtamu and Fitsum did not conduct any assessment of the target needs.

In general, these studies failed to fill the following gaps:

- i. Is there any gap between what the English courses offer and students’ needs?
- ii. Is there any gap between what students feel they lack and their actual language proficiencies?

They could not confirm the drawbacks of the students using valid techniques. It is very difficult to make conclusions about the problems of students in English from the data gathered from questionnaires and interviews from the learners. A model proficiency test could have been used to identify the most serious challenges of the students. In the absence of this, the students can only point out their perceived lacks. For example, in the studies of the above theses, it was observed that there were differences of view on language competence of students between the data obtained from the learners and the English language instructors. There should be a reliable strategy to find out what students lack. For instance, there was a difference between the data gathered from the instructor and the students themselves about the current English language

competences of students. In most studies, the students rated their language proficiencies average, but the instructors rated them very low. As a result, it is very difficult to draw a conclusion about the needs of the students based on the questionnaires and interviews alone.

The current study is supposed to fill these gaps. On the one hand, it is timely to conduct a study on an English language needs analysis focusing on business students, as the researchers have not come across such a study conducted before at the Adama Science and Technology University. On the other hand, this study is not restricted to analysing the perceived English language needs of business students. The target situation English needs assessment has been conducted so that it is possible to compare what kind of tasks should be performed in English to satisfy what the current business students expect and the real practices in business areas. Besides, a proficiency test adapted from 'Cambridge University Certificate of Proficiency in English, TOEIC Sample English Tests, CPE Practice Tests and Transparent Language Self-Evaluation English Test (<http://kukuhsilautama.wordpress.com/englishproficiencytest.html>), was administered to business third year students in order to compare and contrast the students' language communicative competences with the needs in the target situations.

The Study

As we have seen, there is a wide gap between the target-situation English language needs and the English language programme offered in ASTU. Therefore, this study was designed based on the following specific objectives:

- to investigate the present English language proficiencies of business students of Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU)
- to identify the perceived English language needs of business students of ASTU
- to examine to what extent the English course offered addresses the business students' language needs
- to discover the specific English language skill needs of business target situations
- to suggest possible recommendations for materials development based on ESP language experts' recommendations.

Methods of the Study

The study was not supposed to provide findings of judgment or evaluation. For this reason, there was no need to apply an experimental or co-relational study approach. Data was gathered through self-report of the target group using different tools from the samples. An inference of the total population was then made based on the findings from the sample. To this end, a survey method was employed to assess the needs of the students.

This study was conducted at Adama Science and Technology University. The target respondents in this study were business students, English instructors of business students, deans and departmental heads in the school of business at the Adama Science and Technology University, and employers and previous graduates working in the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Dashen Bank, Ethiopian Customs Authority- Adama Branch and the Global Import Export Company. There were eight departments under the Business School at the Adama Science and Technology University. These are: Accounting and Finance, Marketing, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Economics, Management, Business Information Systems and Tourism as well as Development and International Trade and Investment Management.

As it has been mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this study was to identify the specific English language needs of business students at Adama Science and Technology University. This study did not rely only on the data gathered from the students' themselves. In order to triangulate the data gathered, various data collection instruments were used. They were: a questionnaire, interview, text evaluation and proficiency test. The contents of the instruments were prepared based on the results of the preliminary investigation and articles reviewed.

2. Findings

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the English language needs focusing on business students at ASTU. Based on the specific objectives set, six guiding research questions were formulated. Findings were summarised based on the analyses conducted. The summaries were done based on each research question.

Research Question #1: To what extent are business students of Adama Science and Technology University satisfied by the English Courses provided to them?

Table-1: Students' responses regarding difficulties they face while working on tasks using English

No.	Activities in English	Mean scores		Gap
		Students	Graduates	
1.	Presenting project reports/term papers orally	4.58	3.01	1.57
2.	Acting out simulation tasks/interviews/ role plays/ dialogues ...	3.6	2.9	0.7
3.	Participating in group discussions	3.99	3.0	0.99
4.	Wording what you want to say quickly enough	2.83	2.80	0.03
5.	Pronouncing words correctly	2.71	3.15	-0.44
6.	Taking notes from lectures by listening	3.72	3.00	0.72
7.	Understanding conversations of people in various accents	3.97	4.40	-0.43
8.	Understanding lectures in class	3.30	2.35	0.95
9.	Analysing diagrams, charts	3.61	2.65	0.96
10.	Reading texts quickly and getting main points	3.00	3.50	-0.50
11.	Guessing the meanings of new words from the contexts.	2.53	3.20	-0.67
12.	Writing sentences with correct punctuation, spelling and grammar	2.78	3.15	-0.37
13.	Organising ideas and developing paragraphs	3.11	2.90	0.21
14.	Making notes from books, texts, articles, table data	3.16	2.75	0.41

15.	Preparing summary of detailed reports/notes	3.64	3.75	-0.11
16.	Writing memos, reports, business letters	2.89	3.00	-0.11
Grand mean		3.11	2.94	0.17

As their responses show, students are not satisfied with the English courses offered. Students indicated their difficulties in specific tasks. They rated “Some difficulty” and above for all tasks presented to them. This indirectly means they have a feeling of ‘dissatisfaction’ regarding the course. The results of their ratings for general statements indicate their dissatisfaction. The participants were given statements for which they had to rate their views regarding the courses. For the statement: “The English course book is well prepared to help business students”, they rated 2.10= 2 (disagree), for “Most of the activities in language class are performed by the students, they rated 1.82=2 (disagree), and for the statement “The English teacher uses various materials to assist the students, they rated 2.14=2 (disagree). Furthermore, the target groups showed their interests for special methods and contexts in their language classes. Nevertheless, English Teaching materials are not prepared to accommodate these kinds of needs.

The students showed their preference for learning words related to business, visual aids in learning concepts, and practising pronunciation from English speakers and writing on topics related to their field of study. However, the English Courses do not satisfy these needs. For item 9, they were asked whether the English courses were sufficient for their needs. Almost all of them (96%) responded “NO” and suggested improvements. Their response for item 12, regarding the topics included, was that 63% said “Boring and Useless”. Items 3,4,5,6, and 7 on the focus group discussions were set to investigate students’ views about the relevance of the English course in general. They felt that the English courses were not related to their interests and needs. According to their views, learning English was essential for their academic and professional needs, but they still lacked the necessary skills to compete in the area of business.

Research Question # 2: What English language skills do the business trainees lack?

Students themselves admitted their lacks. The target groups were asked to rate their own difficulty while working on some selected activities in English. As we can see from the responses, the mean score of “presenting project reports/term papers orally” is “4.58=5”, which means “very great difficulty” and “acting out simulation tasks/interviews/role plays/dialogues, participating in group discussions, taking notes from lectures by listening, understanding conversations of people in various accents, analysing diagrams, charts and preparing a summary of detailed reports/notes” received a mean score of ‘4’, which means great difficulty.

The students were also asked to rate the importance of some selected language skills on four scales. Meanwhile, they were asked to evaluate their own competence for each skill. As can be observed from students’ responses, it seems that students are not confident to rate their proficiencies as ‘Very Good’; all the skills received a mean score of “3”, which means “Good”. However, instructors disclosed that students had very serious deficiencies in some specific language activities. The responses of the teachers showed us that students have very serious problems in taking lecture notes, understanding lectures, presenting reports/term papers, analysing diagrams, charts, tables, data, graphs etc., summarising something read, making notes from books, understanding business manuals, writing field /lab reports and writing essays / term papers. Besides, the test results showed that students’ writing and spoken skills need improvement. Students themselves indicated they want to improve their language skills in the future.

Research Question # 3: Is there any gap between students’ needs and what the course books offer?

The study indicated that there was a big gap between the students’ needs and what the English course books can offer. In order to find this gap, students’ perceived needs, their current language competence levels and necessities with regard to academic and target situations were assessed.

As the participants’ responses show, “being able to ask and answer questions in meetings related to business, being able to join discussions in job-related meetings, being able to speak on the phone with foreign customers, being

able to conduct interviews in English during worker selection, being able to arrange appointments with foreign guests/customers in English, report writing, writing memoranda and notices, and writing CVs and application letters received an average score rounded to “4”, which means “very important.” Meanwhile, they rated their competence levels as “Good” as they felt that they need some more improvements in those specific language skills. Besides, the students listed some of their opinions to improve their English language learning manuals.

In their view, the teaching materials needed to incorporate activities related to the business field; there must be teaching aids such as audio CDs and videos; vocabulary related to the business field have to be practised and field practices related to their professions have to be conducted. Students’ language needs were also assessed through interviews with instructors and model tests. The results showed that the students have serious problems in applying English language skills. Finally, the target situations’ needs were analysed through workers’ questionnaires and employers’ interviews. The workers’ responses indicated that business graduates need special language skills in order to perform tasks in the target situations and contexts. The managers also confirmed that business graduates are expected to be proficient in the functions they perform, using English for specific purposes.

Nevertheless, when we assess the English teaching manuals, they do not satisfy these needs. It has been mentioned in the evaluation of the textbooks that the English courses provided for the students in the universities are similar. They focus on building up students’ general English language skills. The dean made it clear that the courses were not proposed based on the needs of the students; rather they were designed as ‘national requirements’. The courses do not contain specific language practices other than activities on four macro skills, general grammar and vocabulary.

Research Question #4 and #6: Is there any gap between students’ language needs and their current competence? Is there any gap between their perceived needs and target situation needs?

The study also tried to assess the gap between the students’ language needs and their competence. Their responses showed that though students’ self-ratings for competence were exaggerated, they pointed out that there are still

gaps between students' view on the importance of language skills and their self competence. This can be summarised as follows:

Table 2: Gap between perceived needs and competence for four macro language skills

Language skill	Mean score of ratings for importance of the skills	Mean score of self competence ratings	Gap
Listening	4.46	3.84	0.62
Speaking	4.47	3.63	0.84
Writing	4.68	3.81	0.87
Reading	4.57	4.16	0.41
Grand mean	4.51	3.86	0.79

Though the students were unwilling to tell their real language competence levels, there was still a clear gap between their perceived language needs and competence levels. They rated all of the language skills as 'very important' but the grand mean score of their self ratings for their language skills competence level is '3.86=4', which means 'Good'. Their responses denote that there are gaps between students' perception about the importance of language skills and what they can do.

As the results show, students admitted their difficulties in some specific tasks which require special language skills. In item 5 of the questionnaire (students' and workers') both the students and the workers were asked what they feel about the importance of some selected sub language skills, and they were then asked to rate their own language competence for each skill. The students' replies for some skills indicated important gaps between their ratings for importance and their competence.

Table 3: Gap between students' ratings for the importance of skills and for their language competence

No.	Skill	Rating for Importance (Average)	Self-Rating of Competence	Gap
1.	Being able to ask and answer questions in meetings related to business.	3.64	3.06	0.58
2.	Being able to join discussions in job-related meetings	3.56	2.90	0.66
3.	Being able to speak on the phone with foreign customers	3.63	2.92	0.71
4.	Being able to conduct interviews in English during worker selection	3.50	2.93	0.57
5.	Being able to arrange appointments with foreign guests/ customers in English	3.46	2.94	0.52
6.	Writing CVs and application letters	3.62	3.04	0.68
7.	Report writing	3.69	3.08	0.61
8.	Writing memoranda and notices	3.46	2.94	0.52

As it is depicted in the table, there were gaps between students' perception of the importance of some sub language skills and their self-ratings for their own competence. Though the ratings for importance and competence for the language skills are not so much dispersed, we can see that students themselves were aware of their own deficiencies (lacks) in some specific language skills. In addition to the assessment of the perceived needs, an attempt was made to

assess students' language proficiencies using a model proficiency test and an interview with instructors. The summary of the test result shows the target students need specialised English language skills practices. This has also been confirmed from the instructors' structured interview.

On the other hand, the target situation needs assessment illustrated that business graduate employees are expected to be able to use special language skills for daily activities in target situations. For example, the responses demonstrated that activities such as preparing reports, (sales, meetings, etc.), writing business letters, dealing with claims, receiving an order, briefing and reading articles, magazines or books related to the job are among activities which have to be performed daily. However, the students' (Table-3) proficiency assessments pointed out not only the lack of such special language skills, but the lack of even the basic language skills of writing and speaking. The results pointed out that there were gaps between what students need and their current language competence levels.

Research Question #5: Which English language skills do they want to be emphasised?

Students' ratings for the importance of language skills showed that they wanted writing and reading to be given more emphasis. The results portrayed the students' emphasis for specific language skills. They also reflected their interest in emphasis to be placed on these skills during the focus group discussion. The students' ratings pointed out their preferences for specific language learning contexts, materials and strategies. For example, students indicated their interest in learning pronunciation from the speakers. The majority of them rated 'most preferred' for writing on topics related to business. They also preferred to learn vocabulary related to their field. All these responses pointed out that the students wanted language skills which are related to their fields and needs.

This study was begun with guiding objectives and research questions. As it has been portrayed earlier, the study came up with important hints about language needs of business students at ASTU. In summary, the findings are summarised as follows.

- o Present Situation Analysis Results:

- o It seems that business students have strong beliefs about the importance of the four English macro language skills; they rated all of them as ‘very important’. Furthermore, they pointed out that they wanted writing, reading and speaking skills to be emphasized more by giving high ratings - 4.68, 4.57 and 4.47 respectively.
- o On the other hand, students showed bias in rating their own language competence; students rated their language competence level as ‘good’ with a grand mean score of 3.86. However, the results of the model test and instructors’ interview showed that students had serious problems in using English effectively.
- o It was observed that students had difficulties in using English for specific tasks for different purposes; students indicated their great difficulties in skills application in some tasks such as acting out simulation tasks/interviews/ role plays/dialogues, participating in group discussions, taking notes from lectures by listening, understanding conversations of people in various accents, analysing diagrams and charts, and preparing summaries of detailed reports. These results can serve as indicators of students’ perceived language needs. In addition to the perceived needs by students themselves, deficiencies (lacks) were identified in the result of the test and instructors’ interview.

- o It seemed like students were not well aware of the importance of some specific English language skills; business graduate workers’ grand mean ratings for the importance of language skills were 3.65, which means “Very important”, and rated their competence as “Good”; however, students’ grand mean score for these skills was 3.42, which is “moderately important”. This may be because students had limited information about the actual target situations. Hence, they showed some reservation in identifying the skills they are expected to acquire in target situations as necessities. On the contrary, the workers gave high values, as they knew the language needs at the actual situations (necessities). The discrepancy between students’ mean score for importance of the skills and for

their competence was 0.3, whereas the workers' was 0.75. From this we can deduce that workers had a better knowledge of their competence level. This was because they had passed through the real test of skills at work.

- o There was a gap between ratings of perceived needs of students and workers. Both participant groups rated their difficulty levels in tasks based on their experiences and knowledge. Students rated high for those tasks which are to be performed daily, but low for tasks which they don't have enough information on, or that they do not work on.
- o Students need English for academic purposes (EAP). As the responses of the students indicated, all major course tasks, except reading reference books, were rated as "frequently" and "very frequently". These students were aware of their English learning needs while they are studying at the university.
- o The result of the text evaluation revealed that the English courses for the target group had not been designed based on needs analysis. This implies that the courses did not satisfy the needs of the students:
 - Similar courses were being offered for all students in different fields of study; most importantly, there was a gap between what students wanted and the courses offered
 - Contents of courses indicated an emphasis on the development of basic language skills
 - Students pointed out their dissatisfaction
 - Deans and instructors admitted that the major purpose of the courses was to help learners acquire general language skills and that these courses were not based on needs analyses.
 - It seemed that students enjoy different learning contexts and modes. Students showed their preferred learning methods and modes by giving high values. According to the ratings, students preferred to work on activities related to their field of study, they wanted their teachers to intervene reasonably, they had an interest in using authentic materials, and they also showed their interest for a variety of activities. This implies that course designers had to

take the students' learning styles into consideration whenever they assessed the needs for syllabus design.

- o Students showed their strong motivation to learn English in general
- o Nevertheless, they indicated their disagreement with some statements related to the appropriateness of the English lessons. This denoted that students' poor skills in using English was not because they did not have an interest in learning and improving, but because the course did not motivate them to do so.
- o Both the instructors' interview and the students' proficiency test pointed out that the students did not perform well in English.

• **Target Situation Analysis Results**

- o It was learnt in the analysis that English was used in target situations in different channels such as fax, e-mail, telephone and letters.
- o Most business area activities which have to be shared with others, including foreigners, are performed in English.
- o Some professional activities such as report writing, demanded special language skills.
- o English language skills were the prerequisites for a business graduate even to compete for a job. This implied that the target situation demanded students to acquire special English language skills for daily activities.
- o It can be inferred from the aptitude test result that business graduates may not complete their studies with the necessary English competences. This implied that English courses offered at universities were not integrated with students' major areas.

In general, the study pointed out significant needs which have to be considered when designing English courses for different students at university.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn based on the findings summarised above:

- The needs of business students of Adama Science and Technology University were not met by the English Courses offered; students' responses and the text evaluation results confirmed this.
- The target groups had drawbacks in performing specific tasks using English; students themselves and instructors identified the students' English language skills limitations. Moreover, the writing and speaking test evaluation results indicated these problems.
- There was a big gap between business students' English language needs and what the English courses offer. The participants pointed out their perceived language needs, while the test results indicated students' language deficiencies. Besides, target situation analyses pointed out the language necessities of the target groups. However, the assessment of English courses offered for these groups showed that the courses cannot meet the students' needs.
- It can be learnt that there were gaps between what students can do and their needs. Students themselves confirmed these gaps; there were gaps between their perceived needs and language competences. The assessment results of target situations displayed the language needs in the target situation necessities, but the responses of instructors and proficiency assessment results revealed that students had serious problems in using English for specific tasks.
- The target groups pointed out the language skills which needed to be emphasised. They identified special language contexts, vocabulary and skills they wanted to work on.

3.2. Recommendations

The objective of this study was to come up with identified English language needs of business students. While this study does not claim to have identified all the English language needs of the target groups, it has been able to identify some of the English language needs. Based on these generalisations, the following possible recommendations are proposed:

- Syllabus designers and teachers in general have to consider their students' priorities; students rated the importance of language skills differently, so pre-course/lesson plan assessment of students' interests should be conducted.
- English language teachers have to conduct pre-lesson assessments in order to know their students' language background.
- Syllabus designers have to conduct needs assessment using tests and gather information about students' language deficiencies or lacks. Assessment of perceived needs is not enough for syllabus or course design. Course designers have to assess target situation needs/necessities together with stakeholders who may have better information about the demands of the target situations.
- English courses have to be integrated with other fields of studies, business fields in this case. The contents, strategies and tasks in the English teaching manuals have to be designed based on the immediate academic and professional needs of students.
- English teaching materials should not be prescribed; rather they need to be proposed for comments and approval. The real contexts, needs and interests of students have to be assessed beforehand.
- Teaching materials have to be prepared enriched with variety so that they can accommodate the different learning styles of students.
- English course and syllabus designers have to conduct needs assessment in target situations; in this case, they should assess the English language needs in business areas.
- Stakeholders from the target situations have to participate in the process of course design; managers and employers can give relevant inputs regarding the focus areas.
- Orientations have to be offered to students regarding the real situations in their future careers.
- Some of the practical tasks such as project work in English lessons

have to be integrated with the target situations so that students can have experience.

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