EGAP or ESAP? Towards Meeting the Academic English Language Needs of Undergraduates

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**ABSTRACT**

“Needs analysis” is an important stage in language curriculum design as learners’ language needs in the target literacy contexts can be determined. Nonetheless, many higher learning institutions overlook this component and hastily jump into designing a language course on an ad hoc basis due to the hassles of conducting it and a lack of awareness of needs analysis as a tool in curriculum development. The findings of this study offer a potential solution for institutions with similar contexts. Drawing upon two comprehensive needs analysis approaches – Target Situation Analysis and Present Situation Analysis, this study investigates the academic English language needs and language ability of the pre-university students at The University of Selangor, Malaysia. Data from multiple perspectives: students, ESL (English as a Second Language) lecturers and subject lecturers were collected via three sets of questionnaires. Empirical evidence indicates that the students had greater difficulty with the language rather than the content of subject matters. Besides that, another interesting finding is the differing opinions between the ESL and subject lecturers regarding the students’ ability in handling writing and listening tasks. The results also indicate that English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses are more suitable to fulfil the students’ current learning needs as compared to English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses. These findings have implications on curriculum planning and review, materials development and implementation of teaching methods.

**Keywords:** English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), Needs analysis, Curriculum design
ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

At the tertiary level, there are three types of English language courses which are commonly offered to students – general English proficiency courses, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. In the discussion of curriculum development for EAP, which is also the focus of the present study, “needs analysis” or assessing students’ language needs is always considered a crucial component and is fundamental to an EAP approach to course design (Tajino, James & Kyoichi, 2005; Jordan, 1997). Nonetheless, many institutions are lacking awareness of or have overlooked this important component in course design (Cowling, 2007) and due to this reason, Jordan (2002) criticised that the language support that is provided to university students tended to be on an ad hoc basis. Hamp-Lyons (2001, cited in Tajino et al., 2005) articulated that “EAP begins with the learner and the situation, whereas General English begins with the language” (p. 27). It is understood that the nature of EAP courses is different from other types of English language courses. Thus, institutions or course developers should consider the users’ voices (both lecturers and learners) when deciding on the course content.

The growth of EAP is derived from the awareness of ESP practitioners that all the tertiary level students possess different learning needs which is hardly to be fulfilled by teaching them the same type of English language (Soo & Tam, 2011). This view is in line with Sabariah and Rafik-Galea’s (2005) claim that the development of EAP is a result of dissatisfaction with the lack of generalizability of ESP courses. In a study conducted in Hong Kong to find out tertiary students’ English language needs, Evans and Green (2007) found out that most undergraduates actually need language support that is oriented towards academic rather than general English. Thus, the value of EAP cannot be ignored as it is closely associated with students’ academic success. There are two sub-strands under EAP - English for Specific Academic Purposes’ (ESAP) and ‘English for General Academic Purposes’ (EGAP) (Blue, 1988a cited in Jordan, 1997). The difference between ESAP and EGAP is that ESAP courses focus on the actual tasks that students have to carry out while EGAP courses select more general contexts (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). To be specific, ESAP is the language required for a particular academic subject such as medicine and engineering, and its contents include the language structure, genres, vocabulary and the particular skills needed for the area of study. Whereas EGAP selects a more common or non-subject-specific type of language elements such as study skills and its main objective is to equip learners with the necessary skills to complete tasks in a general academic setting (Jordan, 1997).

With reference to what should be focused in needs analysis, Wei and Flaitz (2005) perceived it as something which is subjective as learners’ needs in several skills or only a specific skill can be examined. They also reported that in conducting needs analysis to identify students’ academic language needs, researchers can collect data to identify the tasks students will encounter in university content classrooms and also to analyse the skills the students need to perform those tasks successfully. The latter focus is actually concerned with the student learning styles and strategies which is seen as an important aspect in needs analysis by Kavaliauskiene and
To look more closely into this issue, Dooey (2006) speculated needs analysis as a very practical and the most effective way of identifying specific English language needs. It is considered practical because it is context specific and therefore the information used to design the curriculum is reliable which will then definitely match with the real needs of the learners. Additionally, it is considered an effective way of assuring the value of the language programme because both students and lecturers will contribute in the needs analysis and this step could provide a more complete and comprehensible picture when deciding on the language course content. Therefore, the designing of any language programmes with needs analysis being conducted will help both instructors and learners to clear some doubts on the effectiveness of the language course.

After being aware of the fact that every individual, in the process of language learning, has certain needs to be fulfilled, institution or to be more specific the language course developers should not take things for granted by just putting in their own assumptions only to predict what might work best for the students. It is believed that the hassles that one might face while conducting needs analysis is the main reason that cause those involve in programme design abandon this important step. Although it is less time consuming and could develop and implement a programme in a shorter time, they will foresee a lot of other important aspects which are not possible to be predicted by any party except the target users. With such a concern, needs analysis is a good platform to elicit information on what the students want, need and already know using their perspectives. Due to this reason, Liz Hamp-Lyons (2000, cited in Jordan, 2002) noted that needs analysis is “fundamental to an EAP approach to course design and teaching” (p.74).

In view of the above, the purpose of this study is (1) to identify the difficulties encountered by the students in using English language in their learning tasks with regard to listening, reading, speaking and writing skills, and (2) to seek the views on the degree of importance of the various language skills in helping the students to learn.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical aspect of this study is based on the Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and Present Situation Analysis (PSA) approaches (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). The TSA approach is used to determine the learners’ academic English language requirements and the PSA approach is applied to assess the learners’ strengths and weaknesses in different language skills.

Subjects
Three groups of respondents participated in the study: 93 first year undergraduates, 10 ESL (English as a second Language) lecturers and 8 subject lecturers. This is in line with the
suggestions that needs analysis should use multiple sources to increase its reliability and validity (Brown, 1995; Long, 1999; Witkin & Ashtschuld, 1995; Keita, 2004). The students of this study were the second semester degree students from three faculties of the University of Selangor, Malaysia, and all of them were also post-foundation students in the same university. The inclusion of both ESL and subject lecturers in the study is considered important as their respective demands and needs pertaining to the students’ language needs could be different. Therefore, this is an additional dimension to overcome the gap of responses derived from both lecturers as the use of multiple sources such as learners, teachers and domain experts (Long, 2005) can ensure that a wide variety of data can be gathered and compared.

Instrumentation
Questionnaire was selected as the instrument for the study because it can be used to collect data with large numbers of people and it is easy to administer and analyze if possible response are structured (Faiz, 2005). It is also the least consuming ways of collecting information, and this is why learners’ needs are usually specified through questionnaires which enable researchers to determine long-term aims and short-term objectives (Kavaliauskiene & Uzpaliene, 2003).

In developing the questionnaires, several related studies on needs analysis were referred to, including Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Deutch, 2003; Saraswathy, 2003; Muhammad Nadzri, 2004; Banerjee and Wall, 2006; Evans and Green, 2007 and Cowling, 2007. Besides that, the researchers’ own experience in teaching EAP courses in the university also contributed to the construction of the questionnaires. Although a number of questionnaires from previous works were used as reference, it had to be modified in a way where it can fulfil the objectives of this study especially after considering the focus of the study, institutional setting and more importantly the respondents of this study. A few shortcomings were detected in those questionnaires, for instance, the choice of language and terminologies used in the questions which were considered inappropriate and hardly understood by students who are not from language education or linguistics background. Three different questionnaires were used to collect the data for the study, one for the students, one for the ESL lecturers and a parallel one for the subject lecturers. These survey questionnaires consist of 71 close-ended questions or items and 8 semi close-ended questions. As Creswell (2008) states that semi close-ended question has all the advantages of close and open ended questions and while it also provides limited open-ended information to encourage responses, it does not overburden the researcher with information that needs to be coded. As these questionnaires were developed for the purpose of this study which was based on the specific need of the present research context, no assumptions were made about either the dimensional structure or internal consistency of the items. Instead, each statement or item was analyzed individually.

Pilot Study
The student questionnaire was piloted on 34 students who were in their third semester and the lecturer questionnaire was piloted on 4 ESL lecturers and 2 subject lecturers. The students were chosen for the pilot study because they had undergone the same courses as the respondents of this study in an earlier semester. On the other hand, the lecturers were selected based on their
experiences of teaching the students. They were invited to comment on the questionnaire layout, content, item wording, instruction and the constructions of questions in the survey. This was to test the comprehension of the items in the questionnaires and to eliminate misunderstanding and ambiguities when answering the questions. From the pilot study, it was found that the students faced problems in understanding some of the technical terms such as ‘subject matter’, ‘organization of texts’, ‘abbreviations’, ‘supporting details’ and ‘scanning’. Besides that, they had problems in distinguishing the meaning conveyed by some of the questionnaire items. With the feedback, the researchers removed some of the difficult or technical terms and replaced them with simpler words. The researchers also combined similar items and rephrased them.

Data Collection and Analysis
The student questionnaires were administered and completed by the students while they were attending lectures in the classroom. Permission was obtained from the lecturers in advance before collecting the data. The researcher gave an explanation of the objective of administering the questionnaires and the way to answer the questions. The researcher was present throughout the session to help the students if they were facing any problems in answering the questionnaires and this was also to ensure the return of all questionnaires distributed. For the lecturers’ questionnaires, it was sent to the lecturers by the researchers. They were briefed on the objective of the study personally and the importance of their involvement in the study. Descriptive statistics were used to report the analysis. The responses from the questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Students’ English Language Proficiency
Judging from the emerged responses, the students showed much more confidence in their receptive skills (reading and listening) than in their productive skills (speaking and writing), which reported higher percentage of students with average and lower proficiency level. The ESL lecturers, on the other hand, seemed to have negative perceptions of the students’ ability in all the four skills. In their opinions, the students had only achieved average or lower level of proficiency in the four skills. The subject lecturers’ responses were also relatively similar with the ESL lecturers’ responses. In their view, the students seem incredibly weak in writing and speaking as compared to listening and reading skills. However, despite the strict feedback given by the ESL lecturers, there was still an obvious agreement between them and the students that the students’ reading skill was better than the other skills and writing was the most serious problem among them.

English Language Ability in Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing Skills
Although a greater number of students expressed some degree of ease in most of the reading sub-skills as compared to the others, they do face difficulties also in certain sub-skills such as to understand difficult words in reading texts, reading quickly to get the general meaning of reading texts, identifying main points and supporting details. The problem of understanding difficult words, which was claimed difficult by most of the students (44.1%), could be the main factor that
directly causes them to face difficulties in other sub-skills. As Coady and Huckin (1997) believe that vocabulary acquisition is the central and the most primary in language learning. Thus, it could be inferred that their lexical competence has an impact on reading ability. The ESL lecturers also found that the students had difficulty (a lot and some) in sub-skills like understanding the content of textbooks, identifying main points and supporting details and skimming to get the general meaning of reading texts. Of all these, having to understand the content of reading materials like textbooks and journals was identified as the students’ most serious problem. One lecturer commented in the questionnaire that “the students will normally take a long time to finish reading just one-page long text”. Besides that, one lecturer also wrote that “without an English-Malay dictionary, I don’t think they can survive” while another mentioned that “they feel bored whenever I ask them to do reading comprehension exercise”. Thus, there is a need to strengthen students’ reading sub-skills.

In terms of listening, having to understand lecturers who speak fast in English was considered as their major difficulty (having a lot of difficulty and some difficulty - 53.8%). This is followed by difficulty in taking lecture notes (34.4%) and getting the important points of lectures (33.3%). In comparison with the students’ responses, the ESL lecturers reported that the students experienced the most difficulty in following a classroom discussion which is conducted in the English medium and in understanding lecturers who speak fast in English. For the first problem, it was perceived that the students struggled to understand the content of the discussion. One ESL lecturer wrote in the questionnaire that, “It is hard to have classroom discussion with students especially when the issue discussed are beyond their existing knowledge” while another also commented that “It is hard to get them to respond in classroom discussion as they always look blur...in fact they are not clear of what is going on”. However, the subject lecturers generally felt that their students did not face serious problems in most of the listening sub-skills.

As for speaking (Table 1), the students perceived that they faced a lot of and some difficulties in almost all the speaking sub-skills. At the top of the list is the ability to use correct pronunciation (58.1%). This is followed by difficulty in using suitable words and sentences (54.9%), getting ideas to speak (52.7%), speaking confidently (51.6%), speaking fluently (49.5%) and giving presentation in class (49.5%). This finding lends support to those presented by Evans and Green (2007), whose subjects reported that they find it difficult to speak accurately, communicate ideas fluently and present information orally. On this matter, Evans and Green advocate that students’ development in fluency and accuracy is probably impeded by the fact that subject lecturers place greater emphasis on content rather than other criterion.
Table 1: Students’ perceived difficulties when speaking and communicating in English (N=93)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking sub-skills</th>
<th>A lot of difficulty</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Little difficulty</th>
<th>No difficulty</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using correct pronunciation</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking fluently</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking confidently</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting ideas to speak</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the right words and sentence patterns</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving presentation in class</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking and answering questions</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in small group discussions</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in large group discussion</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with friends in English outside the class</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Comparison of ESL and Subject lecturers’ perceptions towards the difficulties faced by the students while speaking and communicating in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking sub-skills</th>
<th>A lot of difficulty</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Little difficulty</th>
<th>No difficulty</th>
<th>EL (ESL lecturers N=10)</th>
<th>SL (Subject lecturers N=8)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using correct pronunciation</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking fluently</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking confidently</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting ideas to speak</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking grammatically correct English</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the right words and sentence patterns</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving presentation in class</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking and answering questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in small group</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in large group discussion</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with friends in English outside the class</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EL – ESL lecturers (N=10); SL – Subject lecturers (N=8)
As shown in Table 2, while some of the students rated themselves as facing only a little or no difficulty, all the ESL lecturers reported that all of their students, in fact, had either a lot of difficulty or some difficulty in all the speaking sub-skills. On this matter, some of them commented that “the students are too shy to speak in front of the class”, “they are lack of confidence to present … dare not to project their voice”, “they are unable to construct proper sentences and always use back the same words”, “they will never speak English with friends and the worst is they continue speak Malay to me although I only use English with them” and one lecturer even wrote that “when I ask them to speak in English, they always reply me by saying ‘tak pandai’ (not capable of). The comments demonstrate that, besides having problem to speak grammatically correct English, the students are also not confident in using the language to communicate. Moreover, five of them also commented on the students’ poor pronunciation such as “they pronounce English words just like their mother tongues” and “some of the students cannot pronounce or differentiate certain sounds like [th], [e] and [ae]”.

Similarly, one subject lecturer stated that “the good ones are ok and not so bad, but the weak ones will always use English with Malay” while the other one wrote that “they can’t present and talk smoothly if they don’t refer to papers”. Apart from this, one of the lecturers realized that although the students were able to give a presentation but they were unable to organize and deliver their ideas or points clearly. He wrote that, “The way the students present are so not organized… they love to jump from one point to another without linkage…sometimes I also can’t get what they mean”. Overall, the above findings are borne out by Jordan (1997) who speculates that the most persistent problem encountered by the students (in most of the surveys conducted) is the lack of ability to express themselves adequately in the spoken language. Moreover, participation in academic discussion has also been noted by him as an area of major difficulty especially in comprehension of spoken English (e.g. when speakers speak too fast and use difficult vocabulary), the pressing need to formulate a contribution quickly (e.g. cannot think of what to say) and inability to formulate an idea in English. In conclusion, the students need be given more opportunities to practise group discussion in order to acquire good oratory skills.

Table 3 below demonstrates the students’ difficulties in writing skills. Among the major difficulties (either a lot or some) encountered by the students are writing grammatically correct sentences, using a variety of sentence patterns and words, using correct punctuation, writing bibliography, writing body section, organizing points and getting ideas to write. The findings, similar to those in Evans and Green (2007), suggest that the students perceive themselves as experiencing greater difficulty with the language rather than the content or structure of academic texts. One of the ESL lecturers commented that “the students have serious problem in planning for writing...there is no flow in their writing”. Another lecturer also added that “It is hard for the weak students to think of idea to write and elaborate points”. Besides that, one of them stated that “the students always use direct translation from Malay or Chinese language in composing” and the other one mentioned that “they use the same function words throughout... they are very weak in using tenses, subject-verb agreement and preposition”.

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Table 3: Comparison of students and ESL lecturers’ perceptions towards the difficulties faced by the students when writing in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing sub-skills</th>
<th>A lot of difficulty</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Little difficulty</th>
<th>No difficulty</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using correct spelling</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using correct punctuation</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using suitable words</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using varieties of words</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing grammatically correct sentences</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a variety of sentence patterns</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking sentences in a paragraph</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting ideas to write</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing points/ information when writing</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing introductions</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing body sections</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing conclusion</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewriting other’s ideas using your own words (citation)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using suitable format in writing e.g. letters and reports</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing bibliography / references</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S – Students (N=93); EL – ESL lecturers (N=10)

Contradictory to what the students and ESL lecturers had perceived, surprisingly, all the subject lecturers reported that their students did not face a lot of difficulties in most of the writing sub-
skills except for citation. A plausible reason for this is that they only require the students to achieve sufficient level of communicative competence or only focus on the subject matter or content and not so much on the writing skills or style of writing. This is affirmed by Weir (1988, cited in Jordan, 1997) where the subject tutors are more concerned with content than with mechanical accuracy features, and their criteria of assessing written work are on the relevance and adequacy of the subject content, the clarity of message and the arrangement and development of written work. On the same matter, Jordan (1997:48) criticises that “the subject tutors are often linguistically unaware and cannot always distinguish a poorly conceived idea from an idea that is expressed through inadequate English”.

**English Language Needs**

Generally, most of the students (around 90%) and all the subject and ESL lecturers seemed to indicate support for the relative importance of all the listening tasks as they ranked all the listening tasks as either very important or important to the students. This is closely matched with their perceptions with regard to the students’ listening ability discussed above. The important tasks were listening to understand lectures, to follow discussions, to follow instructions, to understand social conversation and to understand presentation. With regard to this, one ESL lecturer stated that “the students have to deal with different people such as lecturers, peers and officers from different departments to solve different kind of academic and non-academic matters”. Similarly, another lecturer also wrote that “In learning, the students have to engage in various conversations with individuals of different background especially in obtaining information”.

More than 80% of the students ranked all the speaking tasks as ‘very important’ and ‘important’. The responses, following the degree of importance, were participating in discussion, communicating with lecturers inside and outside of the classroom, presenting written assignments, making suggestions, communicating with other students inside and outside of the classroom and communicating with people in different social situation. Similarly, the ESL and subject lecturers’ responses towards the importance of various speaking tasks were also quite parallel. All the speaking tasks were regarded as either very important or important by them especially in the need to communicate with people in different social situation. In addition, a few lecturers suggested the inclusion of negotiation skills in the English language course.

Similar to the responses gained pertaining to aural and oral needs, an impressively high number of students also viewed the identified reading tasks as being ‘very important’ and ‘important’. These include reading lecture handouts, reading and making own notes, reading newspaper articles and reading technical materials such as journal. According to the perspectives of the ESL lecturers, all the reading skills were considered either ‘very important’ or ‘important’ and the subject lecturers placed the greatest emphasis on the task - reading and understanding technical material where all of them rated it being ‘very important’ to the students.

Overall, the students mainly had the same perceptions when judging the importance of various writing tasks where most of the tasks were ranked ‘very important’ and ‘important’ to them. Topping the list of the perceived important writing tasks is taking lecture notes. This is followed
by project-writing, summary-writing and report-writing. According to the results, writing daily journals and writing proposals were given the least emphasis. This was probably due to the perception that these tasks were not relevant to their course of study. Conversely, unlike some students’ responses, the ESL lecturers considered all the writing tasks as ‘very important’ and ‘important’. In contrast with the ESL lecturers’ opinions, writing daily journals was deemed as the least important writing skill by the subject lecturers. The same responses were also obtained from the students. Besides that, the subject lecturers also did not see the importance of summary-writing and presenting visual data.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has identified first year undergraduates or post pre-university students’ difficulties in performing various language tasks and perceived needs in EAP learning. This is predominantly helpful to the students as English is the main medium of instruction in most of the courses conducted in the Malaysian higher learning institutions and different demand of the language is required in their learning. The findings of this study in part concur with those revealed in Muhammad Nadzri (2004), Siti Hamin and Ismie Roha (2005), Evans and Green (2007) and Yeoh (2006). It appears that the students encounter a number of serious problems in the four language skills. Although most of the sub-skills are covered in the present English courses conducted in the university, the responses revealed that they were still not proficient enough in using the language in their study. In this regard, the current syllabus of the language courses should be enhanced or improved so that the students can be exposed to sufficient input of language. With the recommendations to revise the current syllabus, the mismatch between the EAP courses and the students’ actual learning needs could be reduced. In other words, designing an EAP course which can cater for the students’ real learning needs and the development of learner ability to transfer language knowledge (Kavaliauskiene & Uzpaliene, 2003) would be the current implication for successful EAP teaching and learning.

Some implications with reference to the conduct of needs analysis were also drawn from the current study. The nature or the type of English language courses which are to be offered to the concerned groups of students has to be studied at a wider level where a joint effort should be initiated among the related stakeholders. Most of the previously conducted needs analysis was the initiation of the English department. Although some of the researches involved both the students and the content instructors in giving responses or feedback, they, especially the content instructors, were excluded when writing the language course syllabus. In most situations, the syllabus was written by the English language instructors based on the generalization made from the responses obtained. As a consequence, some important insights which could be derived from the mismatch or discrepancies in opinions might be ignored.

As students’ academic language needs should not be restricted to only a specific learning situation (Kavaliauskiene & Uzpaliene, 2003; Wei & Flaitz, 2005), it is also vital to look at the possibility in which the students will engage in any activities or functions that require them to use the language in the institution. This will, then, determine the design of the needs analysis
Some recommendations pertaining to the design of academic language tasks and EAP course delivery are made based on the findings in this study. At the course level, more listening activities that involve taking down notes, identifying main points, understanding social conversation and following a classroom discussion should be carried out in the language class as these are the major listening difficulties encountered by the students. In addition, the ESL lecturers should always be alert of their speed of speaking in class as most of the students and ESL lecturers stated that the students had difficulty in understanding the lecturers when they speak fast in English. Furthermore, as the majority of the ESL lecturers stated that the students had a lot of difficulties in understanding the content of discussion, it is recommended that pre-tasks such as brainstorming should be conducted before the real listening task as it could provide an overview of the issue discussed and also to trigger the students’ schemata. Besides that, short pauses and recapitulation by the language instructors in between the session would also be helpful to recover the students’ memory load. This is rather helpful especially for the low proficiency students.

More speaking activities and time should be allocated in the language class in order to boost the students’ confidence to speak in English especially to overcome their language anxiety. The students also need to be given more opportunities to involve in group discussion in order to acquire good oratory skills. In addition, the finding also suggests that the students need to be exposed to some training in phonetic transcription so that they are able to discriminate between consonants, vowels, homophones, etc. The students need the knowledge of how letters and combination of letters are to be sounded as the students perceived that they faced the most problem in using correct pronunciation. Besides that, there is also a need to enhance the students’ negotiation skills and ability to converse in different social contexts. This can be done by involving the students in drama activity such as simulation and role-play where the students will engage in various conversations with people of different situations and events. This is also a good method of training students in decision-making.

The establishment of a programme for vocabulary enrichment is another strategy to help the students to expand their vocabulary. The content of the programme could be worked out with the cooperation between the language instructors and content experts. This is in line with the students’ major difficulties in understanding difficult words and the content of textbooks. It is believed that the programme could also help the students to improve on other language skills. As Coady and Huckin (1997) believe that vocabulary acquisition is the central and the most primary in language learning, thus, it could be inferred that lexical competence has an impact on learner’s overall language ability.

The finding also suggests that ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) courses are more suitable in fulfilling the students’ current learning needs as compared to EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) courses. This is confirmed as the majority of the respondents expect the students to learn the language in a content-based environment where the instructional
materials used in the language class should be relevant to the students’ course of learning. With 
this, it is strongly recommended that, when assigning the students into language classes, they 
should be streamed according to their respective programme or academic department.

The findings of the needs analysis are predominantly helpful in developing an understanding of 
the students’ learning preferences and provide implications in the process of course development, 
classroom preparation, curriculum planning and review, material writing and implementation of 
teaching methods.

One limitation of the present study lies in the research instrument. The data of the needs analysis 
was obtained using the questionnaires administered to the students, ESL lecturers and subject 
lecturers. The researchers did not use a combination of methods to collect the data. Besides that, 
there was no classroom observation and investigation into the materials used in the current 
language courses. Thus, the outcomes of the needs analysis were fully relied on the perceptions, 
comments and suggestions of the respondents. Additionally, the present study also did not 
incorporate any form of tests to examine the students’ real ability of handling different language 
sub-skills. Their strengths and weaknesses in various sub-skills were identified via the 
perceptions given by the stakeholders in the questionnaires administered. Besides that, the study 
also did not analyse to what extent the students’ level of proficiency in the four language skills 
were actually matched with their perceived ability in performing the sub-skills. Lastly, more 
valuable data pertaining to the students’ language needs may be attained if all the students and 
more subject lecturers were involved in the study.

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