

**A NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH TO ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC  
PURPOSES (ESP) BASED SYLLABUS DESIGN IN BANGLADESH  
VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (BVTE)**

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**Abstract:** This paper describes the initial phase of a needs analysis which is developed in the context of Bangladesh Vocational and Technical Education (BVTE) with the aim to identify the needs of a target group of learners and introduce English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design. Although the compulsory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses have been used at various programs of BVTE since 1996, they were not based on any systemic Needs Analysis nor have they been subjected to any evaluation. The paper also aims to conduct a Needs Analysis to obtain data which will be used to develop a meaningful, useful and beneficial, common core ESP programme for Bangladesh Vocational and Technical Board (BVTB) students. This process takes into account the needs of the various stakeholders involved including the policy makers, decision-makers, subject and language teachers and prospective employers. It mainly will make use of Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Learning-centred approach, Holliday and Nunan's (1988) Needs Analysis description for conducting the Needs Analysis and specifying the content for a common-core ESP course. A mix method is adopted with questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and document study being the main data gathering tools, in order to ensure triangulation of data.

**Keywords:** *Needs analysis; Learner's needs; Syllabus design; ESP; BVTE;*

## INTRODUCTION

English Language teaching and learning has been widely recognized as a global problem. In many developing countries this problem constitutes a serious obstacle to development and modernization. Globalization and development factors have made English the language of power, opportunity, status and prestige. After the 2nd world war, English is flourishing internationally as the language of communication, trade and economic advancement, and has gained worldwide prominence since technological and scientific developments have become more widespread in the English speaking world. To catch up with the momentum of such developments, most third world countries are putting their best efforts in learning the English language in order to penetrate the world of science and technology. In Bangladesh, a monolingual nation state which does not need a second

language for internal communication, English is now in much demand (Choudhury, 2001).

However, this nation is now expending a considerable proportion of its limited resources to improve the teaching of English. Educational institutes are re-introducing English as a compulsory subject. English has made a comeback (Khan, 2000). Now most educational institutes are re-introducing English as a compulsory subject so that young Bangladeshis can be more proficient in the language and participate in global activities (Choudhury, 2001). The duality in the Bangladeshi situation of a zealous protectiveness of the mother tongue and of the avid promotion of English education is typical of post-colonial responses to English. This ambivalence is manifest in the double vision of English simultaneously being “enriching and inevitable, even necessary” and “imperialistic and damaging” (Canagarajah, 1993:624).

At present, Bangladesh needs skill human resources to support rapid industrial growth and earnings remittance. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the only source in Bangladesh by which we can have economic developments. We need to make our manpower with having global competitiveness. We need to introduce courses to match industry need and opportunities of demographic dividend to be harnessed. A large number of people of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schooling group is out of Schooling. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is one and only educational mechanism to convert these populations to employable workforce to contribute to develop the national economy of our country. But having inappropriate methods of teaching methods and materials for the learners have made the situation a bit difficult in last decades. It's high time to evaluate the curriculum and more introduce ESP courses to walk along with the advancement of the world.

The status of English as an International language (EIL) and the growing demand for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in Vocational and Technical education in Bangladesh have highlighted the need for investigating into various aspects of teaching and learning in the particular context with the aim to optimize learning opportunities regarding the ESP courses provided. The absence of formal needs analysis procedures in ESP course design at the Department of Engineering in Vocational and Technical education, Bangladesh has provided the stimulus for the design of the study which has been conducted in order to deal with the issue of ESP courses which have not been tailored to the needs of a target group of learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A mixed research method is adopted for this evaluation study. The purpose of this study is to explore the needs of ESP course design in Bangladesh Vocational and technical education. Most specifically, it aims to explore how the students learn from their ESP course during their technical and vocational education period. The participants involved in the study were 10 students, recently graduated different Engineering programs of Bangladesh Vocational and Technical Education. 06 of them were male and 04 of them are female. Their age range was 20-22 years old. Also, their level of English language

proficiency ranged from beginner to upper intermediate and advanced. There were also 4 language teachers who are interviewed for greater understanding the situation.

Triangulation of sources and methods (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Long, 2005) was also attempted in order to secure the validity and reliability of the research. Data were collected through the students' questionnaire, which included closed- and open-questions and semi-structured interviews were conducted with these students in an attempt to gain meaningful insights into the situation. There were no formal interview sessions with the teachers. They are interviewed indirectly via an informal online chat to clarify grey areas.

The data derived from the questionnaires were analysed by using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages for all items of the questionnaires were obtained. The verbal data of the semi-structured interviews were analysed qualitatively.

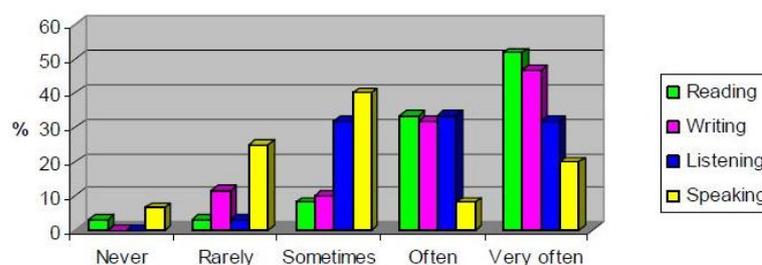
## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Frequency counts and percentages are used to describe the finding and the data is presented in table form for easy reference.

### The students' questionnaire

#### 1. The learners' needs for using the English language

##### a) Skills use Frequency

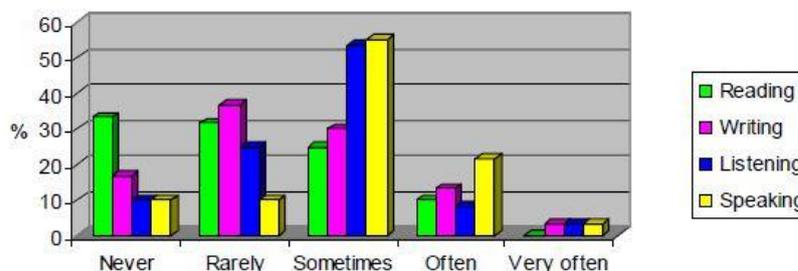


**Figure 1. The frequency that the students are expected to use the language skills in their course of study.**

Figure 1 shows that out of the 14 students 9 (90%) claimed that they "often - very often" used the reading skill in their course of study. 8 (80%) respondents indicated they "often-very often" used the writing skill. Similarly, 06 (60%) respondents indicated that the listening skill is used "often-very often". Surprisingly only 03 (30%) respondents indicated outright that speaking was "very often" used in their course of study. Since English is the medium of instruction in their course this latter finding is unusual as the students are expected to use English all the time; classroom observations did not corroborate this finding since both students and teachers communicated in English. From the findings it appears that the students are aware of the academic importance of English; but they use the receptive skills (listening and reading) more frequently than the

productive skills (writing and speaking). Classroom observations contradicted these findings since simultaneous and extensive use of all four skills was noted.

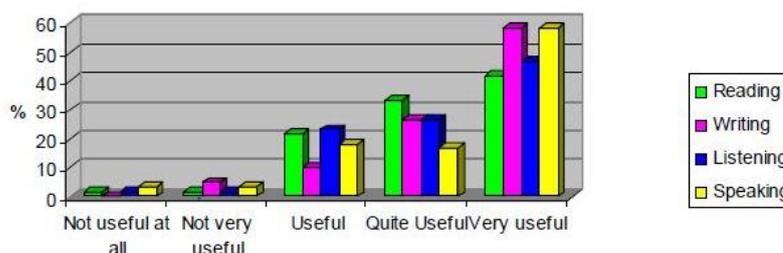
b) Difficulty faced in the language skills



**Figure 2. The frequency of difficulty faced by students in using the English language skills.**

According to Figure 2 only 2 (20%) students claimed they "often" had difficulty with reading and 3 (30%) students stated they "sometimes" had difficulties. For the writing skill, 2 (20%) students claimed that they "often" faced difficulty; and 3 (30%) students stated that they "sometimes" did; 5 (50%) students stated that they "sometimes" faced difficulty in listening; 02 (20%) students claimed they "often" faced difficulty in speaking; and 05 (50%) students claimed that they "sometimes" faced difficulty in speaking. Apparently reading, writing and listening are not perceived as difficult; but as reading and listening are not formally evaluated perhaps they are unable to perceive the difficulty. Speaking appears to be the most difficult skill. The teachers' findings support these students' findings to some extent as most teachers perceived the students as "average" in all the skills except for speaking in which most teachers' perceived students as "weak".

c) Perceived importance of the skills for academic success

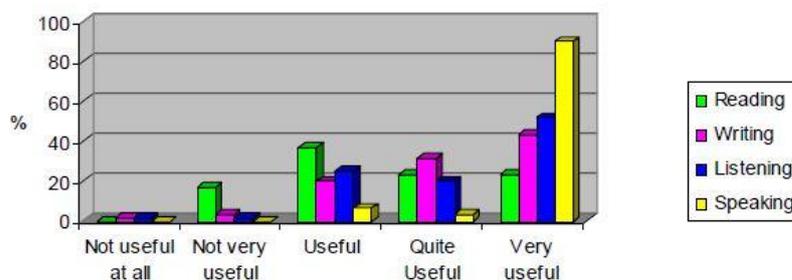


**Figure 3: Students' perception of the importance of the skills in relation to academic success**

According to Figure 3, 9 (90%) students perceived reading as a "useful - very useful" skill. For writing, 9 (90%) students stated it was "useful - very useful". Regarding listening, 4 (40%) students indicated that it was "useful - very useful". For speaking, 9 (90%) students stated it was "useful - very useful". From the findings it seems that students attach a lot of importance to all four skills in relation to academic success, particularly since the medium of instruction in this faculty is English, in addition all hand-outs, texts, examinations and lectures are in English. The teachers' findings support this

finding as most teachers opined that English was important for the students' academic success.

d) Importance of skills after graduation



**Figure 4: the students' perception of the importance of the language skills after their graduation**

According to Figure 4, 8 (80%) students indicated that reading would be "useful-very useful" for them after their graduation. For writing, 9 (90%) students indicated it would be "useful-very useful" for them. Regarding listening, 9 (90%) students indicated listening would be "useful-very useful". For speaking, all of the students 10 (100%) stated that it would be "useful-very useful" for them. The findings indicate that the students believe the receptive skills as well as the productive skills will be very important for them after their graduation. Oddly a small percentage (about 10%) of respondents stated that the skills would "not be useful"; this maybe because these students have not yet developed ideas about employment requirements. The employers' findings highlighted the importance of all the skills for employment.

## 2. The focus of the needs-based course

The learners' needs were largely influential in establishing the focus of the needs-based course in terms of skills at the macro- and micro-level. In particular, concerning reading skills, the need for "reading subject-specific magazine or newspaper articles" (50%) and "reading textbooks or manuals" (40%) was established by a significant percentage of the participants. At the micro-skill level an important percentage of the participants (60%) indicated the need for practice in "reading a text for gist". On a similar line "reading to check information" received a significant percentage (50%), and "identification of basic messages" gained 50%.

As far as writing skills are concerned, the most popular task to be included in the ESP syllabus was writing "notes, memos, e-mails" which received a significant percentage, 50%. "Analysing graphs" was ranked next with an equally high percentage 50% while "report writing" (30%) and "formal and informal letter writing" (30%) were also highly regarded. The learners also stated their need for practice in the underlying processes of written discourse such as: "developing arguments" (50%), "linking sentences and paragraphs" (60%), "producing well developed paragraphs" (40%), "developing introduction and conclusion" (50%), and "organizing information" (50%). In addition,

practice in the use of “appropriate vocabulary” (50%) and “grammar” (40%) in producing written texts was considered of major importance.

Moreover, regarding listening in the target language the students considered of primary importance to be trained in “comprehending presentations and seminars” (50%) and “comprehending recorded materials” (40%). The ability to “listen and follow instructions” (30%) was also highly valued. Furthermore, the vast majority of the participants highly valued practice in terms of “understanding main points” (60%), “identifying specific information” (60%), and “keeping notes” (50%). Significant percentages were also assigned to “evaluation of speaker position” (40%) and “comprehending speakers with different accents” (30%). In relation to oral production and communication, “job related communicative tasks” accumulated 60% and “giving a presentation” 60%, and were indicated as the most important tasks by the learners, along with the need for development of “oral fluency” (50%) and “grammar and vocabulary” (50%). With respect to the learners’ deficiencies in grammar and skills, “writing” was stated as the most difficult skill and received 40%; “oral communication” followed with 20%; “grammar” was ranked third with 20% and “listening comprehension” and “reading comprehension” fourth and fifth with 10%, and 10% respectively.

### **3. The learners’ preferred learning methods**

In dealing with unknown vocabulary, a significant percentage of the participants, 40%, expressed the wish to be provided with “translation by the teacher”, while another 30% to be given the chance to “explain vocabulary in context”; another 30% stated willing to attempt to “make sensible guesses and explain unknown vocabulary”.

Moreover, considering vocabulary acquisition their first preference is to “connect new vocabulary with already known” (20%), the second one being “memorizing vocabulary items” (20%); “organizing vocabulary in thematic categories” and “using a dictionary” were ranked third and received equal percentages (30%). It is interesting that at this point “translation by the teacher” seems to be the least favoured choice (20%).

It should also be emphasized that almost unanimously 90% of the target population acknowledged the nature of the language course, stressed the need for a “subject-specific” engineering course and highlighted the following as the most efficient sources for ESP materials: “the Internet” (40%); “subject-specific textbooks” (30%); “accountancy related magazines” (20%); and “materials from engineering firms” (10%).

Finally, with respect to the use of mother tongue, a considerable percentage, 40% of the participants wish the Bangla language to be “often” used in the ESP classroom while 30% “sometimes” and another 20% “always”.

### **4. The students’ expectations and suggestions**

The data from the students’ interview highlighted the significance of the ESP course for the learners’ present and future needs and revealed the mismatch between the learners’

expectations and the present situation establishing the need for redesigning the ESP curriculum in a way that it would effectively meet the needs of the target group of learners. Among the issues raised by the learners is the need for an ESP course which encompasses the learners' subject-specific and academic needs, involves authentic, challenging ESP materials, encourages productive learning in a relaxed atmosphere, focuses on language skills development, and caters for any deficiencies of the learners. Also, it needs hardly be argued that the role of ESP teacher should be reconsidered as well.

## CONCLUSION

The data from the students' questionnaire and interview have illustrated a number of issues which need to be considered as they offer significant implications for introducing ESP course design. First of all, the findings of the study revealed the need for setting up a language course with a clear focus on English for Specific Purposes and on the target discipline, engineering. In addition, there is a call for a highly specific ESP course to be implemented in the experimental needs-based syllabus document as part of the curriculum renewal process (Richards, 2001). It was also indicated that the present situation arrangements are not at all in agreement with the "identified needs" (Long, 2005) of the target group of learners.

Furthermore, the fact is stressed that the participants have different expectations with respect to their need to use the target language, for study or professional purposes, which highlights the merits of needs analysis concerning the identification of the learners' needs. On this basis, certain differences among the responses in terms of ranking the students' reasons for using English can be justified. As such, the need is stressed for an ESP course, which addresses the learners' immediate needs as students in the context of BVTE.

Moreover, it was indicated that the participants need a flexible approach to ESP syllabus design which provides practice in both the receptive and productive skills. Consequently, the needs-based syllabus document is expected to reflect their needs in terms of skills at the macro- and micro-level, by selecting and grading "authentic materials" (Cowling, 2007). The responses of the participants indicate the need for exposure to an integrated skills approach; however, due to time constraints, it is inevitable to prioritize the practice provided in each skill.

To conclude, although the complexity of adopting a needs-based approach to ESP cannot be ignored, needs analysis as a decision making process which informs course design specifications (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002) is regarded as an indispensable component of any ESP course (Long, 2005).

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