Needs Analysis in Language Curriculum Design and EAP at Tertiary Level

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ABSTRACT

Needs Analysis is a significant issue in language teaching programs, because English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are designed by examining students’ purposes and assessing their needs. This study attempts to analyze the Bangladeshi context of EAP, specifically for the students majoring in Arts, Humanities, and Legal Studies. The instruments used included questionnaire for students (n=100) of tertiary level; interviews with teachers (n=10) of two universities (one public and one private) of Chattogram. The study provides an overview of some important issues pertaining to EAP needs analysis in English as Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts. This research provides insights for language policy makers and the practitioners to increase the effectiveness of EAP courses at the tertiary level by through needs analysis.

Keywords: Needs analysis, EAP, ESL, EFL

Introduction

Needs analysis is the methodical data compilation and analysis of all subjective and objective information to depict curriculum goals that support the language learning needs of learners (Brown, 2006). In any EAP program, students’ needs are essential for dealing with academic practices in Arts,
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Humanities, and Legal Studies for which specific skills are necessary. According to Weddel and Duzer (1997):

Needs analysis is just like an apparatus used to scrutinize the kinds of English and literacy skills required by the learners. At the same time, it identifies the literacy contexts of the target language and the learners’ expectations from the instructional curriculum. It can be contemplated here that besides the recognition of the linguistic items, what the learners need to do in order to use those items and how to use those in the predicted milieu will be explored also in needs analysis.

Needs analysis is referred to “the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students” (Brown, 1995, p. 35). Cowling (2007) maintains that there is often a lack of responsiveness of the existence of needs analysis as a tool in EFL course design. The idea of EAP is derived from the understanding of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) practitioners that all tertiary level students hold different learning needs and this cannot be fulfilled by teaching them the identical type of English language. EAP is required not only for tertiary educational studies in countries where English is the native language, but also in the countries where English is the official language and medium of education in higher learning institutions (Jordan, 1997).

The plan and execution of any curriculum for any EAP courses should take into consideration the different language needs of the target learners. A strong groundwork pertaining to the whole idea of conducting the particular language course could be formed by determining learners’ language needs. The whole process of designing curriculum, starting from the construction of course objectives to the selection of course contents and learning activities, can be made easier. This could provide assurance in the quality of the courses especially in making the learners achieve the expected learning outcomes. A needs analysis has to be carried out to collect data on learners’ language requirements.

The objectives of the study are: (a) to explore the perceptions of students and teachers about English language needs for academic purposes; and (b) to offer some suggestions for English language curricula based on the survey results. Specifically, this study tries to address the gaps of the present EAP curriculum and registers some recommendations to be considered.
Literature review

Needs analysis has been the focus of a number of recent studies (e.g. Atai, 2000; Eslami-Resekh and Valizadeh, 2004; Khajeie, 1993; Gooniband, 1988; Mazdayasna and Tahririan, 2008). Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) look at the purposes of EAP as a course “to cover those educational activities in higher education, the purpose of which is teaching and learning of the English language required by the undergraduates, postgraduates and/or staff.” They require “English language and communication skills for access to subject knowledge or ‘content’, either prior to their studies or during them” (p. 25). The insertion of needs analysis in language curriculum design should be as early as possible where Keita (2004) suggests that it should be in the foremost step. This can be seen also in the methodical curriculum development model projected by Brown (1995):

![Diagram of curriculum development model](image)

Considering EAP as a prospective market for the students, White (2004) remarks that there is a “need for a combination of the consumers’ demands to the ‘productions’ offered by the educational institutions”. In this context, teachers are ‘the service providers’, students are ‘the consumers’ and the teaching-learning event is ‘the process’. He places emphasis on “avoiding any mismatch between the provider’s and consumer’s solutions to the latter’s

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problems by designing highly focused composite courses, combining professional/vocational needs, with EFL and new kinds of hybrid qualifications” (p. 35).

In the context of Bangladesh, Rahman (2007) states that “the syllabus needs to be revised and developed and the content of the syllabus needs to be outlined evidently”. He also endorsed the view that “the contents of the syllabus need to be rewritten keeping in mind the needs and demands of the students and before revising the syllabus a needs analysis could also be carried out to settle on student needs.”

A needs analysis survey conducted by Chowdhury and Haider (2012) in an Asian context (Bangladesh) using forty (40) undergraduates and four (4) EAP teachers found that the existing EAP courses have major drawbacks in meeting learners’ potentialities in using acquired skills for both academic and professional purposes. These students felt reading, writing, and speaking skills more important than listening. However, the teachers opined that students are unable to see the relevance of English course to their major areas consider it an obstacle which has to be removed. Chowdhury and Haider (2012) recommend improvement in current EAP materials through incorporation of materials relevant to core subjects and by giving more emphasis on creative skills i.e. writing and speaking.

In Bangladesh, the national language, Bangla is used in everyday life, and English is generally used in the education system of all levels. The objectives of EAP courses are to facilitate students in acquiring study skills in core subjects at the tertiary level. In this study, the English language needs of students of the Department of Persian Language and Literature and the Department of Law of two universities of Chattogram were assessed in order to increase teaching and learning effectiveness for students of these Disciplines. Understanding of such needs is required in order to aid EFL/ESL teachers to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach in EAP contexts.

**Methodology**

**Context**

The aim of this paper is to identify the drawbacks and gaps between the curriculums of the General English of tertiary level students and their previous curriculums. The study focuses on the curriculums of secondary
level, higher secondary level and the gap of continuation at tertiary level General English in both public and private universities. It is to note that in Bangladesh at tertiary level General English is taught mandatorily to the students of the different departments. This paper tries to address principal causes that hinder the continuation of EAP at tertiary level students in Bangladeshi universities. Data were collected from the students (n=100) through questionnaire survey from the Department of Persian Language and Literature and the Department of Law from two universities located at Chattogram. 10 (ten) English teachers from the two universities were also interviewed.

**Research Question**

What are the gaps between Language Curriculum Design and EAP at tertiary level in the two selected universities in Bangladesh?

**Data collection procedure**

The researchers undertook mixed approach to conduct the research to find out the holistic scenario of the existing curriculum. The departments and the teachers were randomly selected. Data were collected through face to face interviews with English language teachers; for the students (n=100) there was a survey questionnaire. The qualitative data generated insights that are related to the problems that the respondents face in applying EAP. The questionnaire addressed the barriers and possible solutions to the problems of EAP in the universities. The selected departments of the universities were physically visited by the researchers to interview and survey the respondents. In analyzing and presenting the interview data, the teachers were coded as T1 to T10.
Finding and analysis

Quantitative survey: Students’ perceptions

Statement 1: The existing curriculum does not meet the needs of four skills of English.

Figure 1 shows that among 100 participants, 50% of them thought that the existing curriculum does not meet the needs of four basic skills of English. On the other hand, 21% strongly opposed it; another equal number of participants disagreed with the statement. The number of participants who remained neutral is 8%. According to the above data, the present curriculum has not given much importance on four skills equally.

Statement 2: Selection of contents was not done based on learners’ communicative skills.

Figure 2
Figure 2 shows that 37% of the participants agreed that content selection had not been done considering learners’ communicative skills. In addition, 16% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. 28% of the participants disagreed with others whereas 19% of the participants remained neutral.

Statement 3: There is no mismatch between the course contents and learners’ academic and occupational needs and goals.

The data presented in Figure 3 show that 35% of the participants disagreed with the statement where 24% agreed with it. 17% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. 19% of the participants remained neutral in their opinions. The participants who strongly disagreed with it were 5%.

Statement 4: The English syllabuses do not have adequate diversity compared to the English curriculum at the secondary and higher secondary levels.

The data presented in Figure 4 show that 32% of the participants disagreed with the statement where 16% agreed with it. 4% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. 11% of the participants remained neutral in their opinions.
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According to the data shown in Figure 4, 37% of the participants opined that their English curriculum does not have enough diversity compared to English syllabuses of the secondary and higher secondary levels. 16% participants strongly supported the statement but 32% disagreed with it. The number of participants who remained neutral is 11%.

Statement 5: The textbook is not up to the mark to facilitate the needs and expectations of the learners.

Figure 5

Figure 5 shows that 32% of the participants thought that there is no relevant English text to facilitate the needs and expectations of the learners. 11% of the participants strongly supported the statement whereas 5% participants strongly disagreed with the statement. 26% of the participants remained neutral; and 26% disagreed with the statement.

Statement 6: The existing course contents are not crammed with unnecessary items.

Figure 6
The data presented in Figure 6 show that 49% of the participants opined that the present EAP curriculum is crammed with unnecessary items. 10% of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement. 27% of the participants agreed while only 2% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. 12% of the participants remained neutral in their opinions.

Statement 7: Changes of contents in curriculum are essential.

According to Figure 7, 48% of the participants agreed that the contents of the existing EAP curriculum should be changed. Besides, 25% strongly supported the statement. On the contrary, 15% of the participants disagreed with the statement. 11% participants remained neutral in their opinions while only 1% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Statement 8: Variety is absent in course contents and exercises.
According to Figure 8, 61% of the participants agreed that the contents and exercise in the existing curriculum appears to be cliché and monotonous. 10% participants strongly agreed with the statement while 16% of the participants disagreed with it. 11% of the participants remained neutral in their opinions. Only 2% of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement.

**Qualitative interview**

**Teachers’ perceptions.** The researchers interviewed the English language teachers who deal with the syllabuses and teach the students. Various gaps and drawbacks were explored in the interview. After taking interviews of English language teachers, the researchers could figure out the following mismatches in the current curriculum.

1. The teachers gave their opinions that the present curriculum is almost the repetition of SSC and HSC curriculum.
2. Most of the language practitioners opined that the curriculum does not meet the needs and expectations of the tertiary level students.
3. In the existing curriculum, coherence in content is missing and content selections are not based on real-life needs.
4. Evaluations from the students are not taken at the end of the year.
5. The teachers believe that the whole world is focusing on CLT that gives emphasises communicative competence. But the present curriculum is based on GTM where the main focuses are reading and writing.
6. There is no connection between the root department and English courses.
7. Feedbacks and outcomes of the curriculum are examined.
8. Both the universities do not have fixed and standard textbooks.
9. Allocation of marks for all the four basic language skills is not properly maintained.
10. In designing the curriculum materials, the occupational needs of the students are not premeditated properly.

**Teachers’ suggestions.** The teachers have given some suggestions for consideration.

1. The EAP curriculum of tertiary level must be upgraded and updated in contrast with SSC and HSC curriculum.
2. It should be standardized and implemented practically. If contents are based on real-life needs, they would be effective and interesting.
3. There should be appropriate topics and coherence in contents in curriculum.
4. At the end of the year, students should be given the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.
5. Four basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be given equal importance in EAP curriculum.
6. The contents of the curriculum should be planned, selected, and arranged keeping in mind the language policy and planning of the respective departments. There should be a relationship between contents and the root department.
7. Feedbacks and outcomes of curriculum should be taken from both teachers and students frequently.
8. Apart from curriculum development, upgraded textbooks are also essential to ensure effective teaching and learning. A particular text must be fixed for the learners at tertiary level.
9. There should be marks for viva-voce and listening test.
10. The EAP curriculum materials should be designed keeping in mind with the changing world and the job market.

Students’ perceptions. Based on the questionnaire provided to the students, the following gaps had been identified.

1. The students think that the four basic language skills must be taught.
2. In the existing curriculum, listening and speaking skills are not given equal importance like reading and writing.
3. The present EAP curriculum is not profession-oriented and it should be designed considering students’ future goals and prospects.
4. Students experience boredom studying the same topics again at their tertiary level that they had studied in their previous curriculum.
5. Lack of fixed textbook is a hindrance to facilitate their needs and expectations from the EAP course.
6. The contents in the curriculum are not well-planned and well-organized. They are not even related to the root department and therefore students do not pay sincere attention to learn English.
7. Curriculum is not updated regularly. It must be updated keeping pace with the changing time and needs of the current world.
8. The existing curriculum is not practical. The students believe that practical issues must be given priority over theoretical issues.
Conclusion

The General English at tertiary levels in Bangladesh needs to be examined and aligned with students’ needs. Specifically, the gaps between what is required and what is taught must be addressed properly. As the existing curriculum follows the conventionally established methodology, students tend to perceive General English as separate from their major area. One of the major complaints of teachers of English is that, even after twelve years of English language learning, most of the students entering universities possess low level of proficiency. Hence, General English curriculum at tertiary level should be made more effective to adequately meet the needs of the students.

References


Appendix
Demographic Information

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1) The existing Curriculum does not meet the needs of four skills of English.

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2) Selection of contents was not done based on learner's communicative skills.

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3) There is no mismatch between the course contents and learners' academic and occupational needs and goals.

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4) The English syllabuses do not have adequate diversity compared to the English curriculum at the secondary and higher secondary levels.

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6) The existing course contents are not crammed with unnecessary items.
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