A Needs Analysis of English for Banking Students at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait

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Abstract

At the College of Business Studies(CBS) in the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET), students enroll in business diploma programs such as Management, Banking, Computing, Finance, and Accounting. The English Department is a support unit that helps to provide students with the necessary courses, namely English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and General English (GE) required for their specific majors. In this paper, we will be addressing the English language needs of banking students.

The objective of this study is to delineate the communication needs of banking students, by analyzing several factors such as the needs, wants and lacks which contribute to their real learning experiences. Needs analysis involves identifying the learners' need and awareness for a successful learning. Among these factors, students' attitudes and perceptions towards language learning will also be examined. Additionally, implications will be discussed and relevant conclusions will be drawn. The sample consist of twenty students (ten females and ten males) who are pursuing a full time diploma program in the final semester of the 2018/2019 academic year at CBS. These respondents were selected because they are able to provide comprehensive feedback since they completed their practicum and are able to identity their language needs and problems faced during their work training.

The research is based on data collected by way of questionnaires. Based on the analysis of data, it is revealed that students faced major difficulties in the following areas: i)

poor speaking skills: lack of pronunciation skills and poor presentation skills, ii) writing: (different types of email) and reports, iii) listening: poor understanding of lecturer's explanations, iv) reading: poor understanding of technical terms and general vocabulary.

With regards to students' needs, there is a demand for a learner-centered course content that will better enhance their learning experience by utilizing the tools available. The students also expressed interest in enrolling in ESP courses to improve their English.

Keywords: Banking English, English communication, English for Specific Purposes.

Introduction

English has become the language for business globally. In today's business market, acquiring a proficiency of the English language is crucial. "As the fastest spreading language in human history, English is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide – that's one in every four of us " (Neeley, 2012)

"In any study or survey of business leaders, when asked what are the most important skills they are looking for today, English is invariably the underlying factor. In a 2018, a survey of 2,000 business leaders by LinkedIn, English was the foundation of the top three skills companies were looking for: leadership, communication and collaboration. In a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 73.4 percent of employers said they wanted job candidates with strong written communication skills. While the educational system has focused on science, technology, engineering and engineering and mathematics, 75 percent of employers stated that there should be a greater emphasis on written communication skills in college." (Weedmark 2019)

In the Kuwaiti working environment, employers seek fresh graduates who are able to communicate effectively in English in order to contribute to the local Finance and Banking Sectors that also function in an English language setting. Prospective employers expect fresh graduates to be proficient in the content area of their discipline in all English language skills, as well as to be socially and professionally competent in speaking and listening. Therefore, it is crucial that the college takes action to implement English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course in order to prepare students for employment upon graduation. It is essential for Kuwaiti banking students to be equipped with the necessary English language skills to function efficiently in their work environment.

"The English Proficiency Index 2018 revealed that Kuwaitis do not speak English well, as Kuwait ranked 78th out of 88 countries in the index, reports Al-Qabas daily, According to the index, Kuwait ranked sixth out of nine countries in the Middle East. Lebanon, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Syria ranked higher then Kuwait; while Oman, Saudi Arabia and Iraq ranked lower than Kuwait scored 45.64 percent in the index – a slight improvement in points within the two years. The report said that although the ministries' websites provide English language resources for students, teachers and citizens to study the language for 12 years; the performance of students in public schools is relatively poor. The report citied results of a study conducted in 2010, which attributed the poor performance to lack of preparation and proficiency among teachers recruited" (Arab Times 2019). The Education Ministry's recruitment deals only with the hiring of staff who are qualified in English as Foreign Language (EFL) and not in English as a Second Language (ESL).

ESP refers to the teaching of a specific genre of mainly scientific or technical English for students with specific goals, careers or fields of study. ESP meets the needs of mostly adult learners who need to learn a foreign language for use in the specific fields, such as science, technology, medicine or academic learning.

Basturkmen (2006:18) asserts that: in ESP, language is learned not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments.

This means that typically, ESP has functioned to help language learners cope with the features of language or to

develop the competencies needed to function in a specific discipline, profession, or workplace.

Finally, one can say that according to the above definitions, ESP is goal-directed, it is an approach to language teaching based on learners' goals and reasons for learning a language as summarized by Hutchinson and Waters (1978:19) who state, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning". (Assia)

A Needs Analysis Process is required in order to enhance the syllabus and materials provided within the ESP courses.

Rationale for the Study

This study arose from the strong evident linked between learning English language in the study plan towards a Diploma in Banking and the English requirements of banking institutions when selecting candidates for various job positions.

More specifically, its development is from an attempt to revise the students' study plan based on an authentic analysis of students' attitude which plays a significant role in the learning process. As stated by Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) , an ESP course differs from GE in that its goal is "to meet the specific needs of the learners", it is therefore crucial that we review students' attitude towards English in general and mostly towards ESP.

Hence, this study will encompass students' language use, attitudes and perceptions of ESP with regards to their needs and abilities.

Data and Methodology

Needs Analysis (also needs assessment) is the sum of the processes in collecting information about the learners' current and future language needs in order to develop a curriculum which will meet the specific needs of students in a particular

group (Brown, 1995, Brindley, 1989, Sylvia, 2010: Williams 2014).

Needs Analysis plays a significant role in the process of developing any language course, whether it is English for Specific Purpose (ESP) or General English courses and has been recognized by numerous scholars (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). What the students should know in order to function efficiently in the language classes are considered as the requirements. Lacks correspond to the gap between the target proficiency and the present proficiency of the students (Brown, 1995) .Students' wants represent a very important part of needs analysis.

To understand students' needs, the study will include the requirements, want and lacks of the students. For further analysis of these three factors, an attempt will be made to determine the students' attitudes towards English in general and ESP in particular. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1988), "the most effective method for studying the target needs of any particular group of students is to use methods like interviews, questionnaires and visits".

The compilation of this study was collected by interviewing twenty students enrolled in the Diploma of Banking Studies at the CBS. The research is based on data collected by way of questionnaires and was designed to extract data on the use of English for various purposes as well as the attitudes and needs of learning the English language.

The feedback attained from a needs analysis study will assist the lecturers and course creators to identify the program goals. It is also constructive in assisting the development of syllabus, teaching materials and teaching activities to meet the needs of the students.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are outlined and discussed, as follows:

Students' needs and use

Students' wants

Students' lacks

Students' attitudes

Students needs and use

Students were asked to state their learning preference with regards to enrolling in an ESP Course. The students' learning preferences were recorded and are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Students needs

Questions	Percentage
Would you like to enroll in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course? Yes No.	100% 0%
How often do you think should classes be held? Everyday Every two days 3-4 times per week Once a week	 4% 11% 20% 65%
How would you prefer to learn? Individually In pairs	92% 100%
In small groups (3 – 5 students)	100 %
In larger groups (more than 5 students)	87%

Based on the results presented in Table 1, all (100%) of the respondents stated that they would like to enroll in an ESP course. The majority (65%) prefer to have classes once a week, while the lowest (4%) of respondents would like to have the class every day. All (100%) of the respondents prefer to learn in pairs and in small groups of 3 to 5 students while 92% prefer to learn individually. The results indicate that the students prefer to have

a blended learning situation: individual, pair and group work for the ESP course.

The students were also asked how often they communicated in English with others. The results are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2 : English language use

Frequency of use of the English languages	Percentage
Always	38%
Sometimes	46%
Seldom	11%
Rarely	5%

As shown in Table 2, only 38% of students always use English to communicate with others. On the other hand, 46% reported using English sometimes, 11% seldom use English and 5% rarely use English to communicate with others.

Students Wants

Students were asked which English language skills they would like to improve on. The answers to this question were recorded and the results are outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Students Wants

Language Skill and Level of Improvement	Percentage
Speaking	
Strong Agree	74%
Agree	12%
Disagree	10%
Strongly Disagree	4%
Writing	
Strongly Agree	56%
Agree	24%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	6%

Reading	
Strongly Agree	58%
Agree	24%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	-
Listening	
Strongly Agree	52%
Agree	36%
Disagree	7%
Strongly Disagree	5%
Grammar	
Strongly Agree	52%
Agree	36%
Disagree	7%
Strongly Disagree	5%
Pronunciation	
Strongly Agree	72%
Agree	12%
Disagree	12%
Strongly Disagree	4%
Vocabulary	
Strongly Agree	53%
Agree	21%
Disagree	19%
Strongly Disagree	7%

Based on the results shown in Table 3, the majority 86% want to improve their speaking skills. 80% of the students wanted to improve their writing skills. Furthermore, 82% of the respondents want to improve their reading skills while 74% wanted to improve their listening skills. Likewise, the majority of the respondents want to improve their grammar (88%), pronunciation 84% and vocabulary 74% It can be concluded that students want to improve in all four language skills while incorporating grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

Students lacks

Students' lacks were recorded based on self-assessment of their language proficiency. The responses were based on a five grade scale in terms of key language skills. The results are detailed in Table 4a below.

Table 4a: Students lacks based on self-assessment of language proficiency.

Language Skill and Level of Proficiency	Percentage
Speaking	
Excellent	12%
Good	39%
Average	15%
Fair	22%
Poor	39%
Reading	
Excellent	14%
Good	56%
Average	12%
Fair	14%
Poor	4%
Listening	
Excellent	11%
Good	52%
Average	16%
Fair	13%
Poor	8%
Grammar	
Excellent	-
Good	28%
Average	**-**
Fair	14%
Poor	24%

Based on the results shown in Table 4a above, 52% of the respondents rated their listening skills as good, while 11% of the respondents rated their listening skills as excellent and 8% rated their listening skills as poor. In reading, 56% rated their

reading skills as good, while a low 4% of students rated their reading skills as poor. This could be because students have acquired basic reading skills. For writing, majority of the respondents (44%) rated their ability as good, 14% rated their writing skills as average, while 16% rated their writing skills as excellent. A low percentage (11%) of the respondents rated their writing ability as fair. Based on the table, the majority, 39% rated their speaking skills as good while 12% rated their speaking skills as poor. Only 12% of respondents rated their speaking skills as excellent. Speaking in English plays a significant role in the banking industry and employers seek to appoint graduates who are able to speak English fluently. With regards to vocabulary, 33% of the respondents rated their vocabulary skills as good while 18% rated their vocabulary skills as poor. Only 12% of the respondents rated their vocabulary skills as average. For pronunciation, the majority, 35% raged their ability as good, 12% as excellent and 14% as poor. In terms of grammar, 28% of the respondents rated their ability as good, while 24% rated their grammar skills as poor. Only 14% rated their grammar as fair.

Further, the students were asked about their perceived strengths and weakness in English language skills. The results were combined into two categories; 'Agree' and ' Disagree' and are provided in Table 4b below.

Tables 4b: Students perceived strengths and weaknesses

Statement	Agree	Disagree
I find it difficult to understand that lecture's Instructions given in English	78	22
I find it difficult to understand colleagues instructions given in English	75	25
I can differentiate between the English tenses used in sentences	20	80
I am able to speak English confidently	15	85
I find it difficult to understand written English reports	80	20
I am able to write English reports without the use of a dictionary	25	75

Statement	Agree	Disagree
I find it difficult to express myself in writing in English	80	20
I find it difficult to voice my opinions in English	75	25
I find it difficult to read documents at a fast space	70	30
I am unable to understand pronunciations of lecturers and colleagues	82	18
I make many spelling mistakes when writing in English	74	26
I need time to think of what to say in my mother tongue before responding in English	91	9
I am not familiar with many technical terms	90	10
I can't find the appropriate words to use while speaking in English	82	18
I can't find the appropriate words to use while writing in English	74	26
I tend to use words from my mother tongue when I speak or write in English	65	35

Based on the results shown in Table 4b, the students appear to have major difficulties in English. The most challenging area was speaking skills: 85% find that they could not speak confidently and only 15% agreed about their confidence in using the English language. This could be because students feel shy and are afraid of making mistakes. The majority (91%) of students agreed that they needed extra time to think in their mother tongue before responding in English. Only 9% disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, 65% of students agreed that they tend to use words from their mother tongue when they speak or write in English while 35% disagreed with the statement. This is likely because they do not have a strong command of the English language. 82% of students agreed that they can't find the appropriate words to use when speaking in English, while only 18% of students are able to choose the appropriate words when speaking in English. Moreover, 75% of students make a lot of spelling mistakes when writing in English while only 26% of students did not. Further 75% of students stated that they could not write reports

without the use of a dictionary while 25% agreed that they could.

78% of students agreed that they found it difficult to follow the lecturers' instructions in English. Only 22% were able to comprehend the lecturers' instructions. 75% agreed that they found it difficult to understanding their colleague's instructions in English and 25% disagreed with the statement. 82% of students agreed that they were unable to understand their colleagues and lecturers pronunciations while 18% did not face this issue.

In terms of reading, 70% of students agreed that they found it difficult to read documents at a fast pace while 30% disagree. 80% of the students found it difficult to understand written English reports, but 20% of the respondents did not face this issue. Meanwhile, 80% of the respondents could not differentiate the tenses in a sentence, while 20% had no problems differentiating tenses in a sentence. 90% of the students agreed that they were not familiar with many technical terms, while 10% disagreed with the statement. This could be due to the fact that the students lack knowledge on various business and banking terminologies.

Students Attitude

Attitude is generally defined as "a predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation"(Attitude). Numerous studies have been carried out to explore the link between attitude and language proficiency such as studies conducted by (Bachman, 1990: Coleman, Strafield & Hagan, 2003). According to Gardner (1985), attitude is as important as aptitude for a successful language learning. When entering a language class, students bring with them all their attitudes, beliefs and opinions of the language to their learning environment,.

A two part questionnaire was designed to collect information on students' attitudes towards English language as compared to their mother tongue (Arabic). The results were recorded and outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Response percentage of attitudes towards the English language.

Part 1

Question	Arabic %	English %	Both %
1. Which language do you believe is more attractive?	27	32	65
2. Which language is most useful for daily interactions at the college?	84	66	32
3. Which language do you use to express yourself more effectively?	84	66	32
4. Which language helps you carry out your study tasks faster?	92	30	48
5. Which language do you prefer to use at the College?	78	47	72

Part 2

Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Doubtful %	Disagree %
6. Use of English at the College is important	47	67	31	20
7. Arabic is the only language that should be used at the College	17	21	15	77
8. Using English shows prominence and sophistication	75	30	12	24
9. Using English enables better Communication with international institutions and abroad	85	14	18	7
10. Using English restricts the use of the Arabic language	0	21	12	62
11. Using English indicates a threat to Arabic language and the Arab culture	0	57	33	55

In general, the response in Table 5 suggest a positive attitude towards the English language. It is also evident from the responses to statements 6, 7 and 8 that students view the English language as an important means of communication. Questions 1, 4 and 5 suggest that students find English and Arabic equally relevant for use at the college. Students also

strongly agree with Statement 9: which states that English enables better communication with international institutions and abroad. Question 3 reveals that 92% of students believe they express themselves more effectively in Arabic than in English. This is understandable as Arabic would be the mother tongue of majority of the students as well as a representations of their culture and identity.

Conclusions and implications

The premise of this study was to identify students' needs, wants, lacks and attitude with regards to the English language, for the purpose of shedding some light on how to improve the English language skills of these students. Thus, this study could contribute towards preparing banking students for employment, where their professionalism would be largely dependent on their language proficiency.

It is clear that there was a connection between the challenges students face in using English and the skills they would like to improve on. There is a need for students to improve in the four major skills: speaking, reading, listening and writing. The findings of this study illustrate the importance of developing a comprehensive ESP course which focuses on areas that are relevant to the English language challenges and needs of the students.

There are several factors which affect a student's ability to learn a second language and to use it competently. Learning English is a challenge for the majority of Arab students because their mother tongue is Arabic. They lack confidence in speaking English for fear of making mistakes. They may not be able to express themselves clearly due to lack of adequate vocabulary. It is important to help students overcome these difficulties and create an environment in which they are encouraged to speak confidently and fluently.

Students are more aware of the need to be proficient in the English language. English as a lingua franca, and especially so, in the business world through global communication and interactions. It is also the standard language for leading and higher education for majority of learners worldwide.

There are few implications of this study in terms of how the study was conducted and data collected for analysis. This study is limited to one private college and does not represent all colleges and universities in the State of Kuwait. Moreover, the respondents of the study are limited to students who are enrolled in the Banking degree program only and not students of other disciplines. Furthermore, the sample size is limited to 20 Arab students and cannot represent the overall population of Arab students because they stem from different academic backgrounds and Arab cultures.

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