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# A Study on Needs Analysis of Chinese Vocational Non-English-Majored Undergraduates in English for Specific Purposes

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### **Abstract**

English for Specific Purposes (or ESP) is a part of college English. This paper aims to investigate Chinese vocational non-English-majored undergraduate students' needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). One hundred and ten first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students majored horticulture, landscape, tea science and, agricultural economy and management from Yangtze university as volunteer participates were in this study to answer the questionnaires about their needs in ESP classes. All the data from questionnaires students answered and the interviews were collected. All the data were analyzed by SPSS 17. The results showed that 1) The language skills (writing and speaking) should be more emphasized; 2) The students ranked the language skills (reading and listening) as the first importance; 3) The language sub-skills (understanding power point presentations, giving oral presentations, reading handouts given by teachers, writing fieldspecific report) were emphasized by the students in ESP classes; 4) There were significant differences on the language skills (listening and speaking) and the activity (Understanding power point presentations and Participating in discussions) in ESP classes between male participants and female ones; 5) The 80 interviewees had positive responses on their needs in ESP classes. Sixty-four (80%) students thought that ESP would be better for their English learning and major knowledge learning; 54 (67.5%) students thought reading as the most important language skill in the ESP classes and 60 (75%) participants would learn major knowledge through ESP classes; functions of learning ESP were to help them learn major-related knowledge, prepare for writing

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academic papers and learn vocational knowledge. Findings in the present study could be provided as implications for course designers and recommendations for future studies.

### **Subject Areas**

Education

### **Keywords**

Undergraduate Students, Needs Analysis, English for Specific Purpose

### 1. Introduction

According to the requirement of the Ministry of Education of the people's republic of China, college English as a compulsory course is required for students in colleges and universities in mainland China. College English in mainland China can be divided into three parts: General English (GE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and cross-culture communication. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be divided into two parts: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Before 2013, non-English-majored undergraduate students in many colleges or universities are required to learn GE. In 2013, many non-English-majored undergraduate students in many key universities (such as Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University) in Shanghai China chose to learn English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses as their new English-learning choices. After 2013, more and more non-English-majored undergraduate had their new choices to learn English: English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is focused-English learning and teaching situation in which teaching methods and learning environment were different from General English [1]. Needs analysis of ESP is an important step before ESP courses design, choosing ESP course textbooks etc. In this study, Needs analysis of ESP is an important method to gain first-year vocational non-English-majored undergraduate students' responses to their needs of ESP.

#### 2. Literature Review

# 2.1. Definition of Needs Analysis

There were different definitions for the term "needs analysis". The term, "analysis of needs" first appeared in the 1920's in the West Bengal, a province of India when Michael West introduced the concept of "needs" to cover what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation and how learners might best master the language during the period learning ([1], p. 25). Hutchinson and Waters [2] define needs as necessities, wants and lacks. Analysis is essentially seen as the exploration process of communicative tasks, that is, what the learners need to do with the target language [3].

### 2.2. Components of ESP Needs Analysis

ESP needs analysis could be classified as Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), mean analysis and language audits are the fundamental components for assessing language needs of learners ([1], p. 26).

Target Situation Analysis (TSA) centers on identifying the learners' language requirements in the occupational or academic setting, "The earliest TSA procedures were designed to determine 'how much English' was used" [4]. Robinson ([5], p. 8) said that "a needs analysis, which focuses on students' needs at the end of a language course, can be called a TSA (Target Situation Analysis)". Dudley-Evans & St. John ([6], p. 124) defined TSA as, "TSA refers to task and activities learners are/will be using English for target situation".

Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), referred to subjective, felt and process-oriented needs, was effective ways of learning the skills and language [6].

Dudley-Evans & St. John ([6], p. 124) stated that Present Situation Analysis (PSA) estimated strengths and weaknesses in language, skills and learning experiences.

Means analysis directed the environment in which a course would be run or the environment in which a project would take root, grow healthily and survive [6]. Piyanapa [7] stated that needs analysis was a means to identify what a learner received and helped to determine the ESP course they require.

"language audits, large-scale research in examining language needs, are executed for companies, regions or countries" [8].

Many scholars gave their ideas to the term "needs analysis". Strevens [9] (1980) thought that needs analysis was a necessary first step for specific purposes of language teaching; it is more concerned with the nature of scientific discourse. Hutchinson and Waters [2] argued, "any language course should be based on needs analysis". Robinson [5] thought of needs analysis as "needs analysis is generally regarded as critical to ESP, although ESP is by no means the only educational enterprise which makes use of it".

### 2.3. Studies on Needs Analysis

Many scholars in the world were interested in researches on needs analysis in ESP. In China, there were scholars' studies on needs analysis in ESP [10]-[16].

In other countries, there were scholars' studies on needs analysis of ESP [1] [17]-[22].

From the literature above, we can find that few studies were done on needs analysis of Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students in English for Specific Purposes. We wanted to investigate the needs of Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students in English for Specific Purposes.

The present study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1) What is the English language proficiency of Chinese first year non-Englishmajored vocational undergraduate students?

- 2) What are ranks of the language skills much emphasized in ESP classes for Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students?
- 3) What are the language skills and activities much emphasized in ESP classes for Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students?
- 4) Is there significant difference on the needs of ESP between male first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students and female ones?
  - 5) What are responses from interview students on the needs in ESP?

# 3. Methodology and Data Collection

### 3.1. Participants

One hundred and ten Chinese first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students majored horticulture, landscape, tea science and agricultural economy and management from Yangtze University were volunteers in this study. One hundred and ten freshmen were taught by the same male instructor, their age from 18 to 21 (their average age 18.755), Chinese as their first or mother language. They had similar level of education background, family background, personality and life experiences.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The instruments utilized in this study were questionnaires and interviews with some participants.

Questionnaire Questionnaires used in this study to gain responses from non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students majored horticulture, landscape, tea science and agricultural economy and management in ESP needs from revised Alsamadani's [20] questionnaire included two parts: background and language needs, total 26 questions translated from English to Chinese for participants to answer 26 questions better. Part one: background included personal information (name, age and field of study) and four questions (1 - 4) for the level of language skills' or components' (listening, speaking, reading and writing) proficiency based on a five-likert scale (1) excellent, 2) very good, 3) good, 4) fair, and 5) poor). Part two: language needs included general information (question 5 - 9) on language needs (listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar) and detailed information (question 10 - 26) on language needs (listening (question 10 - 13), speaking (question 14 - 18), reading (question 19 - 22) and writing (question 23 - 26)) based on a five-likert scale (1) very important, 2) important, 3) not important, 4) not applicable, and 5) applicable).

Interviews In order to gain more information of first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' needs in ESP, interviews were used in this study after questionnaires were answered by the participants, 80 participants as volunteers were invited to attend the interviews about their language skills' needs (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in ESP to answer the following two questions: 1) Do you think that which one (General English and English for Specific Purposes) will be better for you to improve your English learning and

major study? Why? 2) Do you think that which language skills' needs (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in ESP are the most important for your English learning and major study? Why?

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

One hundred and ten questionnaires were distributed to the participants to answer in 20minutes in the class. The author in this study explained how to answer the questions in the questionnaire before students answered the questionnaires. After 20 minutes, all the 110 questionnaires were collected. Among 110 questionnaires, 0 questionnaire (blank) was not used in this study. All the 110 questionnaires were input into SPSS17.0 to be processed and analyzed. Tools in SPSS17.0 such as Mean and T-test were used in this study to analyze the collected data.

#### 4. Results

# **4.1.** Results of Levels of the Students' English Language Skills Proficiency

**Table 1** showed first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' level of proficiency in language skills or components. Among first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' level of proficiency in language skills or components, the orders were Writing (M = 4.646, SD = 0.685), Speaking (M = 4.355, SD = 0.819), Listening (M = 4.346, SD = 0.828), Reading (M = 4.018, SD = 0.778). The participants' level of proficiency in language skills or components was higher than fair. And the students' level of proficiency in reading (M = 4.018, SD = 0.778) was higher than fair, the students' level of proficiency in writing (M = 4.646, SD = 0.685) was more close to poor.

# 4.2. Results of Students' Ranks on the Language Skills and Components Emphasized in ESP Classes

**Table 2** showed that first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' ranks on the language skills and components much emphasized in ESP classes. The orders of first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' ranks on the language skills and components much emphasized in ESP classes were Reading (M = 2.600, SD = 0.624), Listening (M = 2.564, SD = 0.516), Writing (M = 2.536, SD = 0.659), Speaking (M = 2.527, SD = 0.520),

**Table 1.** Results of level of proficiency on language skills.

	M	SD
Listening	4.346	0.828
Speaking	4.355	0.819
Reading	4.018	0.778
Writing	4.646	0.685
•		

**Table 2.** Results of students' ranks on the language skills.

	M	SD
Listening	2.564	0.516
Speaking	2.527	0.520
Reading	2.600	0.624
Writing	2.536	0.659
Grammar	2.482	0.617

Grammar (M = 2.482, SD = 0.617). The language skills (reading and listening) were most emphasized by the students, and grammar was least emphasized by the students.

# 4.3. Results of the Students' Language Skills and Activities Emphasized in ESP Classes

Table 3 showed results of the students' language skills and activities emphasized in ESP classes. From question 10 to question 26, all the language skills and activities in ESP classes were emphasized by first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students. Among all the students' language skills and activities emphasized in ESP classes, the language skill (writing) and the activity (Class quizzes and exams ) was the most emphasized in ESP; the language skill (listening), the activity(Understanding power point presentations) and the language skill (speaking), the activity(Participating in discussions) were the least emphasized in ESP classes.

# 4.4. Results of Difference on Participants' Language Skills and Activities in ESP Classes between Male Participants and Female Ones

**Table 4** showed that there were the significant differences: question 13 (T = -2.331, P = 0.022) on the language skill (listening) and the activity (Understanding power point presentations) and question 15 (T = -2.646, P = 0.009) on the language skill (speaking) and the activity (Participating in discussions) in ESP classes between male participants and female ones. And other language skills and activities in ESP classes between male participants and female ones showed no significant difference.

# 4.5. Results of Interviews from Students' Responses on Needs of ESP

The time: 14:00-15:00, March 25, 2019, 80 participants from 110 participants as the volunteers were invited to attend the interviews about their language skills' needs (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in ESP to answer the following two questions: 1) Do you think that which one (General English and English for Specific Purposes) will be better for you to improve your English learning and major study? Why? 2) Do you think that which language skills' needs (listening,

Table 3. Results of the students' language skills and activities in ESP classes.

	M	SD
Listening		
Question 10	2.682	0.888
Question 11	2.618	0.729
Question 12	2.518	0.554
Question 13	2.855	0.927
Speaking		
Question 14	2.873	1.033
Question 15	2.855	0.897
Question 16	2.709	0.860
Question 17	3.027	1.009
Question 18	2.964	1.004
Reading		
Question 19	3.282	1.166
Question 20	3.546	1.201
Question 21	3.555	1.028
Question 22	3.327	1.166
Writing		
Question 23	3.236	1.165
Question 24	3.082	1.085
Question 25	3.482	1.163
Question 26	3.882	1.038

**Table 4.** Results of difference on participants' language skills and activities in ESP classes between male participants and female ones.

	T	P
Listening		
Question 10	0.059	0.953
Question 11	-0.703	0.484
Question 12	1.439	0.153
Question 13	-2.331	0.022*
Speaking		
Question 14	0.391	0.696
Question 15	-2.646	0.009**
Question 16	-1.354	0.179
Question 17	-1.012	0.314
Question 18	-0.622	0.536
Reading		
Question 19	-0.580	0.563
Question 20	-1.314	0.192
Question 21	-0.675	0.501
Question 22	0.541	0.590
Writing		
Question 23	0.437	0.663
Question 24	-0.517	0.606
Question 25	1.816	0.072
Question 26	-1.937	0.055

<sup>\*</sup> $P \le 0.05$ ; \*\* $P \le 0.01$ .

speaking, reading and writing) in ESP is the most important for your English learning and major study? Why? 3) What are functions of ESP?

For Question 1, 64 students (80% of 80 students) told that ESP would be better for them to improve their English learning and major study because they could use English as the tool to learn and study English and their majors (horticulture, landscape, tea science, and agricultural economy and management); their majors' knowledge were seldom included in the General English, but included in English for academic purposes (EAP). Ten participants (12.5% of 80 students) said that they had no ideas on which one (General English and English for Specific Purposes) was better for them in English learning and major study because they did not have the experience in learning ESP classes.

For Question 2), 80 participants thought that all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in ESP were needed; 54 participants (67.5% of 80 students) thought the language skill (reading) as the most important language skill for them because they could read ESP books to learn English and study their major; 15 participants (18.75% of 80 students) thought the language skill (writing) as the most important for them because they wanted to write academic papers in English; 11 participants (13.75% of 80 students) thought the language skill (listening and speaking) as the most important because they needed to understand the ESP instructors in ESP classes and answer the questions.

For Question 3), 80 participants listed the functions of ESP showed in Figure 1. Sixty participants (75% of 80 students) said that the function of learning ESP was to help them gain the knowledge related to their majors; 10 participants (12.5% of 80 students) said that the function of learning ESP was to help them prepare for writing academic papers; 10 participants (12.5% of 80 students) said that the function of learning ESP was to help them learn vocational knowledge to prepare for application of vocational knowledge in the future.

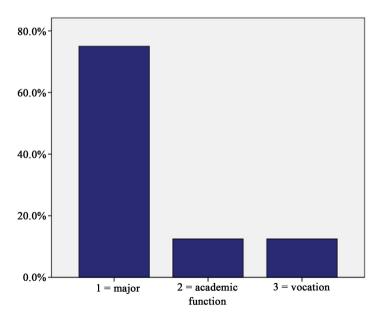


Figure 1. Percentage of functions of learning ESP.

### 5. Discussion

The authors in this study want to investigate the answers to the five questions. Question 1: What is the English language proficiency of Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students?

Question 2: What are ranks of the language skills much emphasized in ESP classes for Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students? Question 3: What are the language skills and activities much emphasized in ESP classes for Chinese first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students? Question 4: Is there significant difference on the needs of ESP between male first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students and female ones? Question 5: What are responses from interview students on the needs in ESP?

For Question 1, from Table 1, we could know that first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students' level of proficiency in language skills or components were medium. And the students' level of proficiency in reading (M = 4.018, SD = 0.778) was higher than fair, the students' level of proficiency in writing (M = 4.646, SD = 0.685) was close to poor. The means of students' level of proficiency in language skills or components were between fair (4) and poor (5). The results of the participants' level of proficiency in this study agree with the results of participants' level in Wu & Lou's [16] study. And the result of the participants' level of proficiency in reading in this study agrees with the result of participants' level in reading in Solak's [18] study, but the results of participants' level in listening and writing in Solak's [18] study are better than the results of students' level in listening and writing in this study. The results of the participants' level of proficiency in language skills in this study disagree with the results of participants' level of proficiency in language skills in Alsamadani's [20] study. The differences between the results in this study and the results in Solak's [18] study and Alsamadani's [20] study may be the different participants.

For Question 2, from Table 2 we know that the participants rank the language skills (reading and listening) as the most important in all the five language skills and components. The participants' level of language skill (reading) is just so-so and their level of language skill (reading listening) is not good, but students need to read academic books related to their majors and listen to ESP classes in English, therefore they rank the language skills (reading and listening) as the first order. The result of the participants' rank of the important language skill (listening) in this study agree with that in Wu & Lou's [16] study, but the results of the participants' rank of the important language skills (speaking, writing, reading and grammar) in this study disagree with Wu & Lou's [16] study. The results of ranking the important language skills (listening, speaking, writing and grammar) in this study disagree with Alsamadani's [20] study, but the result of the participants' rank of the important language skill (reading) in this study agree with Alsamadani's [20] study.

For question 3, from Table 3, we can know that the language skills (listening,

speaking, reading and writing) are emphasized by the students. First, the results of the importance of listening sub-skills as the order: understanding power point presentations, listening to lectures, understanding instructions and following question/answer sessions in this study disagree with Wu & Lou's [16] study and Alsamadani's [20] study. Second, the results of the importance of speaking sub-skills as the order: giving oral presentations, interacting with specialists in your field of study, participating in discussions and answering questions in this study disagree with Wu & Lou's [16] study, but the result of the importance of speaking sub-skill (giving oral presentations) agrees with that in Alsamadani's [20] study. Third, the results of the importance of reading sub-skills perceived as the order: handouts given by the teachers, articles in journals, instructions for assignments and reading field-related textbooks in this study disagree with Wu & Lou's (2018) study and Alsamadani's [20] study. Final, the results of the importance of writing sub-skills as the order: field-specific report, assignments and homework, taking notes in lectures and, class quizzes and exams in this study disagree with Wu & Lou's [16] study, but the result of the importance of writing sub-skill (field-specific report) agrees with that in Alsamadani's [20] study. The students in this study who are first-year chemical engineering and technology students have studied a few major courses, and they do not know what they need in ESP classes. The differences between the results in this study and the results in Wu & Lou's [16] study and Alsamadani's [20] study may be the different participants. The participants in Wu & Lou's [16] study are the first year non-Englishmajored undergraduate chemical engineering and technology students, but the participants in this study are the first year non-English-majored undergraduate vocational students. And the participants in Alsamadani's [20] study who are second-year engineering students majoring in industrial engineering and civil engineering at Umm Al-Qura University (Al-Lith, and Al-Qunfudah) have studied more major courses, they know what they need in ESP classes.

For question 4, there are the significant differences: question 13 (T = -2.331, P = 0.022) on the language skill (listening) and the activity (Understanding power point presentations) and question 15 (T = -2.646, P = 0.009) on the language skill (speaking) and the activity (Participating in discussions) in ESP classes between male participants and female ones. And there are no significant differences on other language skills and activities between male participants and female ones. Both male participants and female ones need ESP courses.

For question 5, we gain positive responses from the interview students on their needs in ESP classes. Sixty-four participants (80% of 80 students) said ESP would be better for them to improve their English learning and major study because they could use English as the tool to learn and study English and their majors (horticulture, landscape, tea science, and agricultural economy and management); their majors' knowledge were seldom included in the General English, but included in English for academic purposes (EAP). Fifty-four participants (67.5% of 80 students) thought the language skill (reading) as the most important language skill for them because they could improve their English

learning and major learning through reading ESP books, articles in journals; 15 participants (18.75% of 80 students) thought the language skill (writing) as the most important for them because they wanted to write academic papers and write field-specific report in English; 11 participants (13.75% of 80 students) thought the language skill (listening and speaking) as the most important because they needed to understand the ESP instructors in ESP classes, answer the questions and express their ideas in discussions. However, General English, usually, is not involved in students' major knowledge and is seldom used for academic study and their occupation. Usually, participants think ESP courses can be applied in leaning major knowledge (75%), preparing for their academic papers' writing (12.5%) and preparing for their occupations (12.5%) in the future.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Though the present study has investigated a survey of there are still some limitations in the study.

Firstly, only110 first year non-English-majored undergraduate vocational students as the participants from one university are in this study. More vocational participants from different majors are needed in further researches.

Secondly, the instruments used in this study to investigate the first year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students are questionnaires to gain answers and interviews to gain responses from participants on needs in ESP. The study would be much better, if it were combined with other instruments such as ESP needs interviews with major instructors. More instruments should be used in investigating the further researches.

Finally, participants in this study were the non-English-majored undergraduate students in only one university. The study will be better if more participants from different colleges and universities can participate in this study.

Despite the restraints of the study, we hope that it can offer some guidelines for further research on needs analysis in ESP.

### 6. Conclusion

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) combines English learning and academic study or occupational applications for learners. As Dudley-Evans and St. John [6] explain, the role of ESP is to: 1) meet the needs of a group of learners who require English skills related to a specific non-language discipline (e.g., business, law, medicine, academics, and so on); 2) make use of the underlying methodologies and activities of the discipline it serves; and 3) center on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of the grammar, lexis, register and discourse related to that discipline ([6], pp. 4-5). Needs analysis is a basic step for ESP classes such as ESP textbooks, course design, and course arrangement. This study wanted to investigate first-year non-English-majored students' needs information in ESP, 110 first-year non-English-majored vocational undergraduate students who majored horticulture, landscape, tea science, and agricultural economy and management from Yangtze university as volunteer participates

were in this study to answer the questionnaires about their needs in ESP.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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# **Appendix**

ESP students Questionnaires:

We want to investigate students' Needs in ESP Context. Please answer the following questions with circle the corresponding number according to your real situation. The data we collect are just for the teaching research.

Students' structured Questionnaire:

### I-Background

Gender: Male Female

Age:

\*What level of proficiency do you think you have in the following language skills or components?

1 = Excellent 2 = very good 3 = good 4 = fair 5 = poor
1) Listening
2) Speaking
3) Reading
4) Writing

### II-Language Needs

\*Rank the following according to their importance. Circle the most appropriate choice.

1 = not important 2 = important 3 = very important 4 = not applicable 5 =

applicable					
5) How important is listening skill?	1	2	3	4	5
6) How important is speaking skill?	1	2	3	4	5
7) How important is reading skill?	1	2	3	4	5
8) How important is writing skill?	1	2	3	4	5
9) How important is grammar?	1	2	3	4	5
Listening					
10) Listening to lectures:	1	2	3	4	5
11) Understanding instructions:	1	2	3	4	5
12) Following question/answer sessions:	1	2	3	4	5
13) Understanding power point presentations:	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking					
14) Asking questions:	1	2	3	4	5
15) Participating in discussions:	1	2	3	4	5
16) Answering the questions:	1	2	3	4	5
17) Giving oral presentations:	1	2	3	4	5
18) Interacting with specialists in your field of study	:1	2	3	4	5
Reading					
19) Field-related textbooks:	2	3	4	5	
20) Articles in journals:	1	2	3	4	5
21) Handouts given by teachers:	1	2	3	4	5
22) Instructions for assignments:	1	2	3	4	5
Writing					

23) Taking notes in lectures:	1	2	3	4	5
24) Class quizzes and exams:	1	2	3	4	5
25) Assignments and homework:	1	2	3	4	5
26) Field-specific report:	1	2	3	4	5