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BUSINESS ENGLISH SYLLABUS DESIGN: PUTTING STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST

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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that Needs Analysis functions as a useful tool syllabus designers use to gain insights into their students' target needs. It reports the findings of a Needs Analysis survey used to help determine Business students' academic and professional needs at Al-Ain University of Science and Technology (AAU) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The main objective of this paper is to identify the academic and career needs of business students in the College of Business and to build on these in developing an accurate Business English course. The paper is divided into four sections. Section One provides a theoretical framework for needs-based syllabus design and highlights the most fundamental issues related to Needs Analysis. Section Two provides the methodology the research project was based upon. Section Three shows how the syllabus of the needs-based course was designed, and Section Four provides insights in relation to the limitations of the proposed syllabus.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the status of English as an International Language (ELL), there emerged an awareness on the part of teachers and materials writers that the many purposes for teaching and learning in special contexts ought to be investigated. As ESP programs are commonly known to be needs-driven, students' specific needs for studying the language must thus be considered in the shaping or reshaping of teaching and learning materials destined for the ESP market. It has been acknowledged by many ESP specialists, teachers and material designers alike, that Needs Analysis (NA) constitutes the core basis for identifying learners' needs (Robinson, 1991; Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001; Harding, 2007) and for designing effective ESP courses (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Bargiela-Chiappini and Zhang, 2013). Needs Analysis processes involve a number of well-established models designed to identify the exact learning needs of particular groups of learners and converting those needs into relevant ESP course content. The nonexistence of a direct 'link' between Needs Analysis and English for Special Purposes (ESP) course design in the College of Business at Al Ain University of Science and Technology in the United Arab Emirates triggered the necessity to carry out the design of the present study with the aim of tailoring an ESP course to suit the English academic and professional needs of the College of Business students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ever since the emergence of NA as a major language theory within the field of ESP, attempts have been made to arrive at a common definition of the term. Nunan (1988) perceives needs analysis as a procedure for gathering information about the learners, their learning needs and about language-use purposes (communication needs) required for developing a language course proper for an ESP context. He believes that the build-up of a dialogue, be it formal or informal, between teachers, learners and stakeholders will automatically lead to needs identification and to explicit content specification. Thus, applying a needs analysis can help course designers measure the discrepancy between present learners' needs and their future needs as well as planning their courses according to set priorities (West, 1994) defines needs analysis as the identification of "what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training" (p. 1). Bachman and Palmer (1996) claimed that "Needs analysis or needs assessment involves the systematic gathering of specific information about the language needs of learners and the analysis of this information for purposes of language syllabus design" (p. 102). Graves (2000) states that in any needs analysis process information about students' needs and preferences is gathered and interpreted, and only then decisions are made as to how learners' immediate and future needs ought to be met. Brown (2004) sees needs analysis as "the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of the particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation" (p. 102). Johns (1991) considers needs analysis to be the first step in course design and assumes that it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities. From these perspectives, it could be argued that student needs analysis can give course designers three kinds of input; student prior input, student immediate input, and student future input. The first reflects learners' previous experience including their levels of aptitude, their reasons for joining the course, and their expectations of the language teaching and learning process. The second corresponds to why do learners want to learn and what do they want to achieve, and the third refers to the specific language needs to be addressed while developing an ESP focused course including the teaching methods and the learning strategies.

Prominent ESP scholars (Graves, 2000; Hyland, 2006) mention the use of three essential approaches for identifying learners needs, namely: Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), and Present Situation Analysis (PSA).

2.1. Target Situation Analysis

Considered to be the starting point of what came to be known as Needs Analysis, Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was first introduced into the ESP arena by Chambers (1980) in his state-of-the art article *A re-evaluation of needs analysis* as a means of investigating the contexts in which the target language will be used. Although this was not new to ESP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987); (Chambers, 1980) used the term TSA for the first time in his attempt to clarify the confusion of terminology showing that the goal of any language teaching is to enable students to "communicate in the target situation" (p. 29). West (1994) argues that Target Situation Analysis focuses on identifying the learners' language requirements in the occupational or academic situation they are being prepared for. In other words, TSA refers to tasks or activities learners will use to achieve a communicative purpose in a particular setting. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) see target situation as the context or situation in which language learners will be using the language they are targeting. They claim that the target situation needs are "in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards the situation of various participants in the learning process" (p. 59). They propose the following framework for analyzing students' learning needs:

1) Why is the language used?
2) How will the language be used?
3) What will the content areas be?

4) Where will the language be used?

5) When will the language be used? (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Hence, TSA centers on identifying the learners' target goals at the end of a language course including their language wants (what the learners think they need), necessities (what the learners have to know to function effectively) and lacks (what the learners do not know) needed to function efficiently in an academic or professional setting. This was referred to by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) as "objective, perceived and product-oriented needs" (p. 124). Thus, TSA is primarily concerned with tasks and activities for which learners are/will be using English; what the learners should ideally know and what they should be able to do in the target situation. Munby (1978) brought the needs analysis debate a step forward with his Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claim: "With the development of the CNP it seemed as if ESP had come of age. The machinery for identifying the needs of any group of learners had been provided: all the course designers had to do was to operate it" (p. 54). CNP describes the participants' identity, language proficiency, a profile of communication needs and specific language skills (Munby, 1978). Proponents of the model considered CNP to be the most developed tool for accurately categorizing learners' needs (Nunan, 1988) and a more systematic and very influential model (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). Nevertheless, the model drew some criticism from teachers and course designers because it ignored areas such as teaching methods, learning strategies, and material selection. Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) aims to remedy these limitations.

2.2. Learning Situation Analysis

Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) is concerned with the learners' views of learning as it tries to determine how learners wish to learn rather than what they need to learn, i.e. learners' "subjective, felt and process-oriented needs" (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). In this sense, LSA's primary objective is to explore the means of moving the learner from the starting point to his planned destination. In other words, it helps identify the means as to how to make learners acquire what is 'necessarily' needed and develop courses and materials which apply learners' favored learning style or style (s). Hence, LSA enables teachers, course designers, and materials to writers identify how learners wish to learn, rather than what they need to learn (West, 1994). In other words, the process of learning and motivation should be equally considered in addition to the fact that different learners learn in different ways (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). As such, this should take into account different kinds of teaching methodologies, learning tasks and activities. Allwright (1982) asserts that the investigation of learners' preferred learning styles and strategies gives us a picture of the learners' conception of learning. Finally, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) propose the following framework for analyzing students' learning needs:

1) Why are the learners taking the course?

2) How do the learners learn?

3) What sources are available?

4) Who are the learners?

2.3. Present Situation Analysis

The term Present Situation Analysis (PSA) was first posited by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). In this approach, the three main sources of information are the students themselves, the teaching establishment and the user-institution, e.g. place of work (Jordan, 1997). PSA attempts to establish the current English proficiency level of learners at the commencement of their language course by investigating their strengths and weaknesses in language, skills and learning experiences. This can be obtained by means of established placement tests or through learner's background information. PSA is known as the starting point of any English for Special Purposes (ESP) course development and is, thus, bound to inform both teachers and materials writers about learners' present abilities. As a result of a placement test or a learner's background information gathering procedure, the type of

necessities the learner may lack in the target setting can thus be predicted to some extent (Robinson, 1991; Hyland, 2006). If Target Situation Analysis tries to establish what the learners are expected to be like at the end of the language course, Present Situation Analysis attempts to identify what they are like at the beginning of it. As Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state, "a PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, learning experiences" (p. 125). PSA is sometimes perceived as a complement to TSA (Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997). If the destination point to which the students need to get to is to be established, the starting point has to be defined first, and this is provided by means of PSA. It is a well-known fact that Needs Analysis is a prerequisite in the stages of development of any language course that befalls under the umbrella of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Remache (2013) states that "The students' needs may consist of achieving a sufficiently high standard of the English language quickly and economically in order to pursue a course of academic study" (p. 39). Accordingly, in order for any ESP course to be successful, learners' needs and purpose for learning must be identified first, then clear objectives are drawn and course content is devised, implemented and assessed. When needs are clearly identified and objectives are equally expressed and the whole is converted into the content of a course, then and only then that the ESP course is assured to reflect learners' needs and is bound to achieve its goals. If TSA tries to establish what the learners are expected to be like at the end of the language course, PSA attempts to identify what they are like at the beginning of it and estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, and learning experiences (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). From the authors' viewpoint, the preeminent way to design a Business English course that can best serve learners' interests and needs is to follow the PSA/LSA/TSA route.

The objective of this study is to ascertain the effectiveness of using a needs analysis approach with the aim of establishing a clear picture of the immediate and long-term perceived needs of the College of Business students as learners and as language users. The purposes for applying this needs analysis procedure were to identify:
- Students' English language proficiency level;
- Students' prospective academic needs;
- Students' prospective professional needs.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current research gains its importance from the UAE national aspirations. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is leading the Education reform through better preparation, greater accountability, higher standards, and improved professionalism. In addition, a rote instruction is being replaced with more interactive forms of learning. Moreover, 'The National Agenda also aims to transform the UAE into one of the best destinations in the world in the field of entrepreneurship by unlocking the potential of its nationals and making them a driving force in the UAE's economic development through their active participation in small and medium enterprises in the private sector'. These factors fuse together and stress the importance of preparing graduates of the College of Business at Al Ain University of Science and Technology to be capable of performing highly and effectively in their professional field locally, regionally, and internationally. At present, students have more chances to use English because of the number of international companies that are established in the United Arab Emirates. Besides, Dubai has now become one of the world's most popular business hubs. Although these students are taught the four integrated traditional skills, the English syllabus is not based on the students' needs and wants. Therefore, the syllabus needs to be reconsidered and its design be based on a formal needs analysis. This study, therefore, attempted to carry out a formal need analysis to help determine the requirements of the Business English course. The findings will then serve as a guideline to develop a Business English course at Al Ain University of Science and Technology.

To guarantee the validity of the work presented in the present research study, the researchers have attempted to accomplish what Creswell (2003) refers to as 'argumentative validation' and 'ecological validation'. Argumentative validation is established through presentation of findings in such a way that conclusions can be followed and tested. Ecological validation is established through carrying out the research in the natural

environment of the students and faculty members, which is the library, the classrooms, the cafeteria and the faculty members' offices. By choosing research instruments that are suitable and significant for the study purpose, the researchers are also achieving 'internal validity'. One of the suggested ways of achieving a higher degree of validity is the use of triangulation of data and methods. According to Cohen *et al.* (2001) "Triangulation techniques in social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint" (p. 233). Out of the principal types of triangulation used in research, the present study used data, and *methodological* triangulation. The current research study adopts the "Mixed Method Approach" to seek triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data.

3.1. Data Collection

The following data instruments were used in the study:

A)   A pre-coded questionnaire for the students;

B)   A questionnaire for the faculty members, which included both pre-coded and open-ended questions.

A) The pre-coded questionnaire for the students: Apart from the background information section, the items of the questionnaire were grouped in the following areas:

- Students' perception of the need for the English language and reasons for studying it;
- Students' perception of the academic needs of the English language in their field of specialization; their favored language skills, tasks and activities that would enable them to function effectively in their academic studies.
- Students' perception of the professional need of the English language in their career.

B)   The faculty members' questionnaire: The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The items of the questionnaire are rated on a 1-to-5 Disagree-Agree response scale, concluded by an open-ended question to give respondents the chance to answer in their own words. The purpose of the first section was to elicit the faculty members' opinions towards:

- The extent to which the current course meets the students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their academic studies;
- The extent to which the current course meets the students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their target career;
- Whether English instruction in the university should focus on General English or Business English.

The second and third sections of the questionnaire presented a number of suggested academic and professional course objectives that could be considered when designing a Business English course. The participating faculty members evaluated the priority of these objectives on a 1-to-5 Likert scale ranging from 'Not a Priority' to 'Essential Priority' and adding any other that they see of relevance.

The Participants:

A. Students: The students' samples for this investigation were chosen on a random basis. A total of 100 students from different departments in the College of Business in Al Ain University of Science and Technology took part in this study. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 30 years. As table 2 illustrates, the respondents were mainly relatively young: almost a third were aged 25 or less and only 11 were aged above 30. Female respondents (64) comprised nearly more than double the number of male respondents (34). Their level of English language proficiency ranged from poor (4) to excellent (11). Table 2 illustrates the participants' sample.

Table-1. Study Major of participating students.

Accounting	Finance	Management and Banking	MIS	HR Management
16	13	27	22	22

Source: Students' Questionnaire

Table-2. Participating Students background information.

Age	18-21	22-25	26-29	30 & above	
	42	32	15	11	
Gender	Male		Female		
	36		64		
Level of English proficiency	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
	4	0	53	36	7

Source: Students' Questionnaire

B. Faculty Members: The study was conducted on 10 faculty members teaching at different majors in the College of Business. The sample of the faculty members included Assistant professors, Associate Professors and Full professor of both sexes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data derived from the questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistical methods in order to stress the unique strengths of the type for research which is explanatory (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Percentages for all items of the questionnaires were obtained and results were interpreted. The collected data of the questionnaire were sorted out, and the percentage of respondents offering the same answer was computed. The questionnaires were tabulated to record the responses from each participant for each option of the questions. Typically, throughout the data analysis processes, according to Creswell, the researchers "seek to identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participant(s), then attempt to understand and explain these patterns and themes" (Creswell, 2003). The following tables sum up the frequency of responses to the areas of the questionnaires. For easier data analysis and interpretation; both 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' will be summed up. Similarly, 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' will be jointly discussed. The outcome is expressed as a list of objectives that can be the basis for a Business English course.

4.1. Faculty Questionnaire
Section One

In the first question, the respondents were asked to what extent does "the English course at the University meets my students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their academic studies"? 40% of the respondents agreed while 50% of them disagreed. 10% of the respondents chose the 'Neutral' option (See Table 3).

Table-3. Does the English course at the university meet students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their academic studies?

Choices	Answers	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	1	40%
Agree	3	
Neutral	1	10%
Disagree	4	50%
Strongly Disagree	1	

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

Half of the faculty members reported that the current English course at the university does not meet the students' academic requirements. It is anticipated that the participants were concerned about the suitability of the content, which affects the effectiveness of the teaching-learning situation. So, while preparing the content of Business English, the designers must choose topics, situations, and themes that are relevant to the students' academic needs.

The second question asked faculty members whether the 'English course at the University meets students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their target career'. In answer to this question, only 20% agreed, while 50% disapproved and 30% replied with the partial option. (See Table 4)

Table-4. Does the English course at the University meet students' language needs to function satisfactorily in their target career?

Choices	Answers	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	2	20%
Agree	0	
Neutral	3	20%
Disagree	3	60%
Strongly Disagree	2	

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

The response of more than half the participants (60%) of the faculty members highlighted the unsuitability of the current English course. The positive responses here (20%) affirm the appropriateness of the current course design on a miniature scale. Considerably, the overall responses suggest redesigning the English course to fulfill future workplace needs.

The third question investigated the faculty members' opinion on whether the 'English instruction in the University should focus on Business English'? The vast majority of faculty members (90%) ratified the notion of students studying a specialized Business English course oriented for better learning outcomes and more effective workplace communication. The remaining (10%) of the participants disapproved the idea (See Table 5).

Table-5. Should the English course at the university focus on Business English?

Choices	Answers	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	5	90%
Agree	4	
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	1	10%
Strongly Disagree	0	

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

In the fourth question, faculty members were asked whether English instruction in the university should focus on General English?' 80% of the participants thought this should be the case, while 10% rejected and the remaining 10% chose the neutral opinion. See Table 6.

Table-6. Should the English course at the university focus on General English?

Choices	Answers	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	3	80%
Agree	5	
Neutral	1	10%
Disagree	1	10%
Strongly Disagree	0	

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

The presence of positive responses to this question should not be regarded as a contradiction to the notion presented in the third question. However, it should be considered as complementary. Data suggest that faculty members underscore the importance of having a specialized English Business course, but also maintaining General English content.

Section Two and Three

These two sections determine the objectives needed to be addressed by the Business English course. The objectives are divided into two categories: academic, (Table 7) and professional, (Table 8).

The objectives in each category have been ordered based on their importance and priority according to faculty members' perception. The importance of these two sections derives from the fact that the central piece of any comprehensive syllabus is the selection and articulation of course learning goals or objectives. As Howard (2012) points out this process of selection allows course designers to identify a focus for the course, in our case both academic and professional needs of students.

Table-7. Faculty members ranking of the academic needs that should be fulfilled by the Business English course.

Course objective	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential priority
To understand and use the technical vocabulary in all four skills of the English language	0	0	0	8	2
To follow lectures and understand explanations given by the teacher	0	0	0	5	5
To write term papers, business reports using the required writing techniques	0	0	1	4	5
To express business ideas correctly both orally and in writing	0	1	0	3	6
To make brief notes of essential points of a lecture	0	0	2	5	3
To understand and practice the English reading strategies	0	0	3	4	3
To understand the meaning of the business texts published in English	0	0	3	3	4
To have conversations on subject-related topics	0	0	3	3	4

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

It is not surprising that the majority of teachers considered top priority the academic needs that should be fulfilled by the specialized English business course. As can be seen from the table above, 8 in 10 teachers viewed understanding and using the technical vocabulary in all four skills of English language as high priority and 2 in 10 saw it of essential priority. In the same time an equally significant high number of teachers considered following lectures and understanding explanations given by the teacher as a high priority (5 in 10) and as an essential priority (5 in 10). Writing term papers and technical reports using the required writing techniques were considered of essential priority by 5 in 10 teachers whereas 4 of them see it of high priority. It is quite common to see ESP teachers address the aspects of technical writing in their classroom as they consider it important to train students to be able to communicate within an evolving technical and professional context (Schneider, 2005).

Table-8. Faculty members ranking of the professional needs that should be fulfilled by the Business English course.

Course objective	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential priority
To understand, read and write short business letters, reports, emails, or memos in English	0	0	1	4	5
To use business terms in my everyday professional communication	0	0	1	5	4
To understand any spoken or written instruction in English related to my profession	0	0	2	4	4
To convey information or instructions to colleagues in a precise manner	0	1	1	5	3
To read and understand printed materials connected to my profession	0	1	1	6	2
To follow professional development training courses conducted in English.	0	1	3	3	3
To deliver a speech related to my profession in English	0	1	4	3	2

Source: Faculty Questionnaire

Likewise, the vast majority of teachers (6 in 10) viewed expressing business ideas correctly both orally and in writing as an essential priority and 2 in 10 see it as a high priority. At the same time, 5 in 10 teachers identified

making brief notes of essential points of a lecture as a high priority, while 3 of them thought that it was of essential priority. Likewise, 4 in 10 teachers thought it should be an essential priority to teach understanding and practicing the English reading strategies, while 3 in 10 considered it as a high priority. Seemingly, 4 in 10 teachers reported that understanding the meaning of the business texts published in English is an essential priority and 3 in 10 saw it as a high priority. Finally, 4 in 10 teachers agreed that having conversations on subject-related topics is a need of essential priority and 3 in 10 teachers considered it of high priority. This is true in the sense that students will need advanced academic or high conversation skills required for classroom interaction and for most jobs.

4.2. Students' Questionnaire

Besides the background information obtained on all students, these were also asked to rank both the academic and professional needs of the English Business course. Tables 9 and 10 respectively represent the students' perceptions of the academic and professional objectives of the proposed course.

Table-9: Students' ranking of the academic needs that should be fulfilled by the Business English course.

Course objective	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential priority
To understand and use the technical vocabulary in all four skills of English language	2	7	35	44	13
To follow lectures and understand explanations given by the teacher	2	2	29	44	24
To make brief notes of essential points of a lecture	2	13	20	46	19
To express business ideas correctly both orally and in writing	4	7	27	40	22
To understand and practice the English reading strategies	6	4	30	41	20
To understand the meaning of the business texts published in English	2	7	24	42	25
To think and talk on subject-related topics in new ways	2	7	31	35	25
To write term papers, business reports using the required writing techniques	2	9	35	31	24

Source: Students' Questionnaire

The overall view presented in Table 9 reveals that the academic objectives of the proposed course were important for the students' academic studies. 44% of the participants considered understanding and using the technical vocabulary in all four skills of English language as high priority while 13% see it as an essential priority. That could be an opportunity to integrate and enhance the technical vocabulary through both the receptive and productive skills. Following lectures and understanding explanations given by the teacher were considered as high priority by 44% of the participants and essential priority by 24% of them. More importantly, 46% of the participants regarded making brief notes of essential points of a lecture as high priority and 19% as essential priority. This leads us to the idea of integrating notetaking in the syllabus as it is recognized as an important activity which enhances learning (Nakayama *et al.*, 2016). Expressing business ideas correctly both orally and in writing (high priority40%/essential priority/22%) and thinking and talking on subject-related topics in new ways provides opportunities to enrich the technical repertoire of Business English, whereas understanding and practicing the English reading strategies (high priority41%/essential priority/20%) and understanding meaning of the business texts published in English (high priority42%/essential priority/25%) hints to the necessity of emphasizing the development of reading skills. Interestingly, writing term papers and technical reports using the required writing techniques has a lower percentage than the other skills as only 31% considered it of high priority and 25% as an essential priority. To a large extent, this can be explained because of the dominance of the communicative approach in language teaching and learning in the last decades where little attention was given to writing processes.

Table-10. Students' ranking of the professional needs that should be fulfilled by the Business English course.

Course objective	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential priority
To understand, read and write short business letters, reports, emails, or memos in English	0	9	36	29	25
To use business terms in my everyday professional communication	2	13	27	35	24
To understand any spoken or written instruction in English related to my profession	0	7	27	36	29
To convey information or instructions to colleagues in a precise manner	0	9	29	45	16
To read and understand printed materials connected to my profession	0	15	25	44	16
To deliver a speech related to my profession in English	0	5	38	29	27
To follow professional development training courses conducted in English.	0	5	33	40	22

Source: Students' Questionnaire

When asked to rank the professional needs that should be fulfilled by the Business English course, the answers reveal that students stress as important those objectives usually conveyed by the traditional skills. To the objective 'understanding, reading and writing short business letters, reports, emails, or memos in English', for example, 29% of the respondents gave it a high priority while 25% stated that it was of essential priority. Interestingly enough, the speaking skill seems to be the most prioritized by the respondents as 35% considered using business terms in their everyday professional communication of high priority whereas 24% saw it of essential priority; understanding any spoken or written instruction in English related to my profession (high priority36%/essential priority/29%); conveying information or instructions to colleagues in a precise manner (high priority45%/essential priority/16%); convey information or instructions to colleagues in a precise manner (high priority44%/essential priority/16%); delivering a speech related to my profession in English (high priority29%/essential priority/27%). Similarly, following professional development training courses proved to be of paramount importance as 40% of the respondents considered this objective to be of high priority and 22% said that it was of essential priority.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this present investigation can be discussed in the following points.

1. The Academic Needs that Should Be Fulfilled by the Business English Course

In academic contexts, all four skills play a major role in the learning process. The results of this study reveal that, in business contexts, the integration of the four primary English skills in the teaching-learning process be it for academic or professional purposes is of utmost importance. In support of this evidence, Tratnik (2008) argues: "Special attention in ESP teaching should be focused on ways of promoting skills, which encourage and enable learners to respond to different day-to-day situations and react properly in special circumstances." Following on from, the Business English syllabus will help ensure students build their reading and understanding texts strategies as well as their technical vocabulary skills. In that regard, it is claimed that "ESP helps to understand and increase technical vocabulary related to general science and technology, computer science, general mechanical engineering, and building construction" (Chen, 2006). Findings in the current study show that speaking was rated as the second most needed skill. Prioritizing the speaking skill is an indication that students are aware of the necessity of having to enhance their conversational communication skills, to express business ideas orally and to talk on subject-related topics in new ways, thus hoping the new syllabus will enhance their ability to express their thoughts orally through the use of appropriate business terminologies. As far as listening is concerned, the respondents rated it as the third most needed skill. As listening is generally considered a weak point among English skills, there is a necessity to meet the students' goal by expanding their understanding of the various business topics they will hear. The writing was ranked lowest importance. This is indicative of the fact that students are unaware of the importance of having to write term papers, business reports using the required writing techniques. To put it another way, they don't

seem to have a precise idea of the weight of writing business reports and term papers in the curriculum. However, this can be adjusted through an appropriate and well designed skill-based syllabus.

2. The Professional Needs that Should Be Fulfilled by the Business English Course

As shown in table 1, most students rated all four skills as important for their professional needs, although they considered writing a low priority. A potential explanation for this may be due to the fact that the UAE has now become the business hub of the Midlle East, and since English has established itself as the main language in which global business and commerce take place, students think it is necessary to develop their communicative ability utilizing the four skills. Therefore, it could be said that they will need the four skills to fulfill their study requirements and to be able to utilize conversational skills in a work environment. The results also showed that most students perceived speaking as the most important skill as they need to convey information or instructions to colleagues in a precise manner, to deliver speeches related to their profession in English and to use business terms in their everyday professional communication. Reading is rated as the second most needed skill. This clearly explains that students aspire to be proficient in reading as this skill is known to be indispensable for understanding short business letters, reports, emails, or memos in English and for understanding printed materials connected to a profession. Thus improving students' communication skills will help them face the future challenges both as college students and as future businessmen. The respondents rated listening as being the third most important. Listening is often given a low priority when it comes to the development of curricula in business education (Lynch, 2011) although business professionals see it as a 'highly desirable workplace skill' (Flynn *et al.*, 2008). Therefore good listening skills are highly needed they develop within the students to ability to understand any spoken instruction in English related to their profession. The results of the present study support the studies conducted by Gray and Murray (2011) who identified listening as a highly sought-after skill in the business sphere and thus constitutes an essential element in professional practice. Interestingly, the respondents viewed writing to be the least important skill. This may be due to the fact that writing received little importance at schools as teachers adopting the communicative approach fostered reading, speaking and listening in learning at the expense of writing. This result is consistent with several previous studies which rated writing as a low priority skill (Boonyawattana, 1999). Nonetheless, one should not wholly neglect writing as it is equally essential to learning and to advancing students in both academic and professional contexts. By comparing both faculty members' and students' prioritization of the objectives; it becomes clear that despite the fact that some students regarded the objectives as of 'no' or 'low' priority to them either academically or professionally; yet the majority of the students' agreed with the faculty members on being of paramount importance. It must also be noted that none of the objectives were totally regarded as of no priority by either the faculty members or the students.

In this paper, the researchers examined the need of a Business English course based on statistical data analyses and revealed the following points:

- Unsuitability of the current course. 60% of the faculty members underlined the fact that the existing English course is not tailored appropriately according to the students' needs in the workplace.
- Irrelevant current course materials. The current English course content does not address the students' present academic needs and future career needs.
- The need of a pragmatic Business English course. (90% of faculty members as well as students backed the idea of designing and implementing a Business English course. The course should be oriented for better learning outcomes and should consider the learners' needs in the workplace which have been presented in the current paper. The technical terms and terminologies related to Business Studies and corporate organizations should be introduced.

- The need of skills integration. The new course should concentrate on listening, speaking and writing skills respectively to secure the learners' communicative competence leading to more effective workplace communication, which is a 21st century skill and a main concern of employers.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tailoring syllabi to best meet the needs of Business English students carries several implications for teachers in determining learners' prior English knowledge, identifying their language needs and wants and developing an appropriate curriculum accordingly. Results from this research indicate the significant importance of needs analysis in Business English syllabus design. The findings also provide teachers, course designers and researchers alike with a reliable, efficient and usable needs analysis procedure for the development of Business English syllabi. It is an opportunity for Business English teachers to conduct a similar thorough needs analysis to better design courses that meet their learners' specific language needs. Maximizing students' input in syllabus design decisions carries several implications for teachers. Establishing what should be taught in a course starts by identifying students' language needs, wants, desires and expectations. Business students need to develop specific language skills in order to fulfill academic and professional goals. Needs analysis functions as a tool teachers use to determine their students' target needs. In fact, the procedure is so accurate that it can pinpoint the key English language skills students need to develop for both study and career purposes. The results from the needs analysis survey carried out among business students guided us towards identifying their academic and professional needs and to build on these in developing an accurate Business English syllabus. In particular, the focus needs to be laid upon developing reading strategies, listening and note-taking, communication skills, business vocabulary, presentation and seminar skills, and technical report writing. At the same time, the results will help build a new and effective learning environment that we hope will pave way for learner competencies in their future target situations. In addition, this research was a great opportunity for students to express what they really need to learn in their business course; thus, their expressed needs facilitated the researchers' eliciting of a Business English syllabus tailored towards learners' immediate needs and expectations as well as their future professional careers. All in all, the current study discloses certain effective implications emerging from the survey results and analyses. A pragmatic Business English course should be designed in keeping with learners' future academic and workplace needs with special emphasis on communication skills like listening, speaking and writing. By introducing such an effective workplace needs driven Business English course to the students, there will be a higher guarantee of success in their future professional environment. The researchers of the present paper will continue to provide information to the course designers and students of the College of Business to ensure effective teaching and learning. The authors recommend that future studies could investigate the pragmatic needs of employers to be included also in the course design.

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