

An Analysis of the Needs of English Language of the Students of National University

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Abstract

This research study aimed to investigate the extent to which English courses at the National University of Bangladesh cater to the needs of learners. Although the university introduced English as an introductory course for several first-year honors programs and acknowledged the value of learning the language, research indicates that the English language curriculum may not have been created with learners' needs in mind. A small-scale study was carried out to address this problem using a mixed-method approach, which included a questionnaire and focus group discussions with students and teachers. The study found substantial gaps between the course content described in the syllabus and the needs of the learners. The study suggests that the English language curriculum be reviewed and revised to ensure that it meets the needs of the students, which will ultimately help them become more proficient in the language. The National University of Bangladesh needs to know the study's results to improve its students' English language proficiency and support their success in both academic and professional settings.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, English Language Skills, National University, Curriculum, and Foundation English

Introduction

Knowledge is critical to a country's economic growth and competitiveness in the modern world. People with knowledge can better survive in the cutthroat global market (Harvey, 1990). English proficiency is essential to "global literacy skills" and a requirement for thriving in the cutthroat global marketplace. Bangladesh is no exception when prioritizing the English language's ability to improve its citizens' global literacy skills. English is now part of the first-year Honors syllabus for BBA, CSE, ECE, and Economics at the National University (NU), keeping with Bangladesh's forward-thinking efforts to develop its citizens' literacy skills globally. However, according to Report No. 65, South Asian Human Development Sector, A Study on National University and Affiliated Colleges in Bangladesh, January 2014, there is a growing gap between the education provided in Bangladesh's colleges and the needs of the labor market. Despite initiatives to encourage English proficiency, it might be necessary to review the current curriculum to ensure it still meets the shifting demands of the labor market.

Aziz (2009, p. 58) further observes that no Need Analysis (NA) is carried out among students before designing the syllabus for the appropriate level, indicating that the English language needs of NU students have not received much attention as a research issue. This study aims to find out if the National University's English course meets the English language requirements of NU students. There is a growing gap between the skills taught in colleges and those required by the labor market. The National University's over two million students are enrolled in 2254 affiliated colleges throughout Bangladesh, where curriculum evaluation is not regularly or systematically done (Report no. 65, p. IV). By identifying the actual needs of NU students, this study seeks to close this gap.

The main goal of this study is to ascertain whether the English language courses specified in the prescribed syllabi satisfy the English language requirements of National University tertiary-level

students. Learners at this level have specific demands of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the study aims to evaluate how well the current syllabus satisfies tertiary-level learners' expectations. This study is significant because it seeks to shed light on the English language requirements of NU students. The results can guide future syllabus design and curriculum evaluation, helping to create a skilled workforce that can compete in the job market.

Literature Review

Numerous academics have emphasized the importance of needs analysis (NA) in creating language curricula. According to Valdez (1999) and Shank and Terril (1995), learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) requires NA. Valdez (1999) emphasizes the significance of setting goals and objectives for language courses through NA by this. Similar to how NA is important in determining the structure and content of a language course, Aziz (2009) and Rahnuma (2009) agree.

Additionally, Munby (1978) mentions NA as the driving force behind the creation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Nunan and Lamb (1996) contend that all language programs should begin with NA-derived goals and objectives. NA is described by Brindley (1984) as tools and processes for assessing students' language learning and content. He also stresses the significance of conducting a systematic needs assessment to pinpoint discrepancies between expected and actual student performance, which should guide curriculum revision.

Nunan (1999) proposes that NA research or process can be used to infer two types of needs: content needs and process needs. Therefore, NA should be conducted before developing any language syllabus to determine learners' needs. NA is a crucial component of effectively learning the English language, as stated by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). Jordan (1997) highlights the significance of using NA as the foundation for creating curricula, courses, materials, and teaching and learning methods.

In conclusion, NA is an essential part of creating a language syllabus because it aids in determining learning objectives, enables teachers to comprehend students' learning styles and linguistic profiles, helps choose, order, and grade content and methodology, and makes assessment and evaluation easier. Therefore, NA must be conducted before creating any language curriculum.

Ways of Analyzing the Needs of the Students

There are numerous ways to examine the needs of language learners. NA research is most appropriate, by Valdez (1999), when students struggle with similar problems. Richterich and Chancerell (1987) stress that the results of NA research should only highlight a few problematic components. Instead, the issue should be the primary focus, followed by a discussion of the student's needs and expectations and an effort to find a solution that will ultimately be to their benefit.

Richterich & Chancerel (1987) advises conducting a thorough needs analysis to identify discrepancies between anticipated and actual student performance. She suggests getting information from students, teachers, and stakeholders and starting with perceived needs to understand learners' needs. They emphasize that a thorough NA must go beyond gathering perceptions and involve extensive data collection through multiple means of assessment, including empirical observation, inventories, predictive instruments, and tests, to understand learners' needs thoroughly.

Holt (1995) asserts that beginners can aid in acquiring knowledge about fields, languages, and resources. Teachers can use this information to gather data on unmet needs and preferred learning styles and create the best teaching and learning environments for their students. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) advise adopting a balanced strategy regarding the sources of information gathering for students' needs, considering language teachers, students, administrators, institutions, learners' diaries, and teachers' notes.

Robinson (1991) recommends using case studies in addition to tests, observations, questions, interviews, and actual tests. Jordan (1997) suggests several methods for gathering information for NA research, including preliminary documentation, language tests taken at home, language tests administered upon entry, self-assessment, observation and monitoring, surveys, structured interviews, learner diaries, case studies, final tests, evaluation or feedback, follow-up research, and prior research.

A thorough NA should involve extensive data collection through multiple means of assessment to gain a thorough understanding of the needs of the learners. The needs of language learners can be analyzed using a variety of techniques.

Some Related Researches

For the benefit of teachers and students alike, conducting needs analysis (NA) research is essential for choosing or designing a syllabus, establishing goals for a teaching program, and developing a curriculum (Aziz, 2009; Rahnuma, 2009). Numerous studies have been conducted in this area, such as Zhu and Flaitz's (2005) examination of the language requirements of students at a public university in the United States, which revealed weaknesses in speaking and writing relative to reading and listening abilities.

At Bilkent University in Turkey, Akin and Gucer (2001) evaluated the course materials and discovered the recently adopted ones needed more theoretical and left little room for student participation. At Kuwait University, Basturkmen and Al-Huneidi (1996) conducted a study on the needs of teachers and students. They found over 60% of teachers' students struggled with English language proficiency. Finally, Rahnuma (2009) emphasized the value of NA for ESL students by illuminating its efficiency in syllabi design, course material selection, testing procedures, and anticipating students' needs and expectations.

A NA on the English language needs of humanities students at Dhaka University was conducted by Aziz (2009), who found that the students needed more proficiency and had particular problems meeting the teachers' expectations in certain areas. The study recommended that decision-making processes be improved by taking into account the needs and perceptions of teachers and students, and in their study on English listening skills among students at private universities, Abedin et al. (2009a & b) suggested creating appropriate listening and reading materials, boosting practice motivation, and requiring listening skill tests as part of the curriculum.

Similarly, Alam and Sinha (2009) found that tertiary-level students in Bangladesh needed to place more emphasis on listening skills and advised including listening skills in the curriculum. Khan (2000) examined the English Foundation Course required for thirteen departments of the Arts Faculty

at Dhaka University. He found that the syllabus's content needed to match the needs of the students and suggested that the syllabus be revised and expanded.

For students to become proficient in all four language skills, Jahan and Jahan (2008) stressed the importance of developing good presentation skills. They also suggested improving teaching strategies and highlighting the advantages for both academic and professional life. It is necessary to address NA's significance in future research because it is a crucial factor in teaching-learning situations to raise the language education standard in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Methodology The current study uses qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques as part of a mixed-methods research design. The participants were 100 Honors Part IV (8th semester) students from a college affiliated with NU. who were randomly chosen from BBA, CSE, ECE, and Economics disciplines. The same method was used to choose ten English teachers from the same college.

The students were given a questionnaire with four multiple-choice questions that sought information pertinent to the study's topic. In addition, the study used a focus group discussion (FGD) to gather in-depth information, with two agendas: one for teachers, "The teachers' perception regarding the usefulness of the English language course," and one for students, "The usefulness of the English course in developing students' English language skills." A mobile phone recorder was used to capture the FGDs. The study also examined the BBA, CSE, Economics, and ECE curricula to determine the student's language learning topics.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Techniques We administered a questionnaire to 100 randomly chosen students to collect data on the study's topic. The questions sought to identify the English language abilities prioritized during testing and examinations in the classroom. To ensure complete data collection, the questionnaire included checkbox responses. In addition, we randomly chose 30 students from the original 100 students for three focus group discussions (FGDs) to further investigate their perspectives. Three groups of 30 students were formed, and an FGD was scheduled for each group. Ten English teachers from the same college participated in an FGD that we also held. We examined the course syllabuses for these courses to determine whether learners in the four different disciplines needed exposure to the English Course's course content. The appendix includes the FGD results from teachers and students to understand the study's findings better.

Results

Findings from the questionnaire survey among the students have been shown in the following table:
Table 1: Findings from Questionnaire

Questions	Response			
	Whether English course facilitates their (students') further study	Yea, -0 (0%)		No-95 (95%)
The English skills that got focus on classroom learning	All the skill (0%)	Reading and Writing-100 (100%)	Speaking and listening-0 (0%)	The mixture of the different skills -0 (0%)
English skills that got focused on	All the skill	Reading and	Speaking and	A mixture of the

in the testing/exam	0 (0%)	writing-100 (100%)	listening -0 (0%)	different skills-0 (0%)
Whether they think that four skills of English should get focused on in the syllabus and testing	Yes -100 (100%)		No-0 (0%)	

Findings from Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire survey asked four questions to the students. The first question asked if their English course helped them understand their further studies. Of 100 students, 95 (95%) responded negatively, while only 5 (5%) said it sometimes helped them. The second question inquired about the English skills emphasized in classroom learning, and all 100 students responded that only reading and writing skills were focused on in their classroom learning. Similarly, the third question asked about the English skills emphasized in examinations, and all 100 students mentioned that reading and writing skills were emphasized in the testing process. Lastly, the students were asked whether they believed all four language skills should be stressed in the syllabus and examinations. Again, all students (100%) indicated that the syllabus and examination content should emphasize all four English language skills.

Based on the questionnaire survey, the students felt that their English course did not facilitate their further studies, with most (95%) responding negatively. Additionally, it was found that the classroom learning and testing/examination focused solely on reading and writing skills, with no emphasis on speaking and listening skills. However, the students unanimously believed that the syllabus and examination content should emphasize all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

Findings from Teachers' FGD.

The feedback from the FGD session with the teachers highlighted several essential points. Firstly, the teachers emphasized the significance of developing all four English language skills and expressed dissatisfaction with the current syllabus. They also pointed out that the syllabus needed to be more appropriate and effective in improving students' reading and writing skills, even after completing the English course.

Another concern raised by the teachers was that, as a non-credit course, English loses its importance and needs to be given the attention it deserves. This has become a significant concern for both students and teachers. The teachers also noted that students generally struggle with speaking and listening skills and that presentation skills are essential.

The teachers expressed their motivation to develop learners' speaking and listening skills and the importance of including them in the syllabus and testing. They also highlighted the need for a public speaking course and the importance of clearly written course objectives in the syllabus.

Furthermore, the teachers shared their problematic experiences with limited time and pressure from authorities to complete the English syllabus quickly for good results. They also pointed out that they need to teach content included in the examination. The findings suggest an updated syllabus focusing

on all four language skills and incorporating effective teaching strategies to improve student's language proficiency.

The teachers unanimously agreed on the importance of developing all four English language skills but expressed dissatisfaction with the current syllabus's effectiveness in enabling students to achieve this. While the syllabus provided good options for reading and writing skills improvement, most students needed to be more competent in these areas after completing the course. In addition, the teachers noted that only a few students were serious about the course, and most were only concerned with passing. Surprisingly, students avoided comprehension-based questions that tested their reading skills despite carrying a significant proportion of marks. The teachers attributed this behavior to the English course being a non-credit course.

The teachers identified a need for more emphasis on developing English speaking and listening skills, particularly among students in disciplines such as BBA, CSE, and ECE, who would need these skills for future presentations. They noted that the required current syllabus made more provision for these skills, and the examination focused only on reading and writing skills. Despite this, the teachers believed that students could be motivated to practice speaking and listening skills. However, limited time and pressure to produce excellent results made it challenging to focus on these skills.

The teachers suggested significant changes to the syllabus to cater to the learners' needs, emphasizing the importance of global literacy skills and the need to incorporate content to facilitate the development of speaking and listening skills. They proposed adding a "public speaking" course to the English syllabus or offering it as an individual course to address the lack of attention given to these skills. The teachers also suggested that the examination assess speaking and listening skills and called for a syllabus that would include effective content focused on all four English skills and aligned with specific course objectives.

Findings from Students' FGD.

During the FGD session with the students, it was found that they were dissatisfied with the current English syllabus. Students believed the syllabus was inappropriate and did not effectively help them overcome problems with speaking, listening, and reading difficulties. Therefore, they demanded that the syllabus be revised to provide appropriate reading material to help them develop their English language skills.

Furthermore, the students emphasized the importance of developing presentation skills and demanded that the syllabus include teaching these skills. They also stressed the need to incorporate speaking and listening skills in the syllabus and demanded that speaking and listening practice be conducted in the classroom. Finally, the students expressed concern about teachers not following up on feedback and requested that teachers be motivated to provide effective feedback.

The students requested more English classes in different semesters or years to help them improve their English language skills. In addition, they emphasized the importance of evaluating speaking and listening skills and demanded that the examination include assessing these skills. They also requested that teachers deliver lectures in English to provide a better learning experience.

Finally, the students suggested incorporating appropriate speaking and listening activities into the syllabus to help them improve their English language skills. The students believed that these activities would provide them with practical language use experience and enable them to communicate better.

According to the findings from student feedback, there was dissatisfaction with the English syllabus as it did not prioritize the development of all four language skills. Most students only experienced improvements in their writing skills, while speaking, listening, and reading skills were overlooked. The students suggested revising the syllabus and offering more courses on English language skills in different semesters throughout the year. The students also emphasized the need for appropriate reading materials, classroom practice, and more teacher motivation to develop their speaking and listening skills. They suggested that teachers deliver lectures in English to improve listening skills and that the examination should equally test all language skills. The students believed that if their demands were met, they would have a better chance of developing communicative competence in English, boosting their confidence in facing global competition and improving their job prospects.

After examining the syllabus, the main emphasis is developing the students' grammatical knowledge. The syllabus covers various grammar topics, including tenses, parts of speech, infinitives, and participles. The writing section covers multiple types of writing, such as correction, sentence completion, combining sentences, notions, functions, attitudes, paragraphs, essays, amplification, reports, and formal and informal letters, among others. In addition, there is a reading comprehension component. The English (Compulsory) syllabus for Economics includes materials that focus on building vocabulary and developing speaking skills, such as using dictionaries, learning suffixes and prefixes, and practicing dialogues.

Closing Reflection

Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that the English syllabus in higher education needs to be revised to address the needs of students and prioritize the development of all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The study found that students expressed dissatisfaction with the syllabus, particularly in speaking and listening, and felt that separate classes should be devoted to developing these skills. The study also found that students believed practicing in the classroom with teacher feedback was essential to their progress and that more follow-up and motivation from teachers were needed.

The study also found that the syllabus focuses on developing students' grammatical foundation, with writing exercises covering various topics. However, students also expressed a need for appropriate reading materials to aid in developing their reading skills. Additionally, the study identified that some English syllabuses in specific fields, such as economics, include content on vocabulary and speaking skills development, involving dictionaries, suffixes, prefixes, and practicing dialogues.

Overall, the study contributes to the understanding that a practical English syllabus should prioritize the development of all four language skills and provide opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback on their speaking and listening skills. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of revising the syllabus to meet the needs of students and improve their chances of developing communicative competence in English, which can boost their confidence in facing global competition and improve their job prospects.

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Appendix A

Syllabus of B.B.A., C.S.E., E.C.E., and Economics:

The name of the English course for B.B.A. is English (Code:1105), for C.S.E. it is GED (Code:116), for E.C.E. English (Code:101) and for Economics English (Course: 9999)

The syllabuses of B.B.A., C.S.E., and E.C.E. are same:

Course content:

1. Reading and comprehension:

Thematic structures, vocabulary, cohesive and rhetorical devices, grammatical items, intention/ attitude of the writer, precise i. comprehension; ii. Paragraph; iii. Précis; iv. Essay; v. amplification; vi. dialogue-writing

2. Structures:

The sentence:

i. Normal group-a. Determiners, b. Adverb, c. adjective, d. Noun-adjective, e. Headword, f. Prepositional phrase g. the infinitive phrase, h. participle phrase, i. appositive

ii. Verbal group: a. the tenses, b. the modal auxiliaries, c. the phrasal verbs

iii. Verb Modifiers: a. adverbials of time, b. adverbials of place, c. adverbials of manner, d. adverbials of duration, Completing sentence correction of sentences, the transformation of sentences combination of sentences, framing of wh questions

3. Notion and Functions:

i. Emotional attitude, e.g. liking ii. Moral attitudes, regret, etc

ii. Sufasion (utterance designed to influence the behavior of others)

iii. intellectual attitudes, e.g., agreement, disagreement, permission, obligation, etc.

iv. Socialization, e.g., greeting, farewell, etc.

4. Letters:

Application---Request---Enquires---Quotations---Complaints---Tender to newspaper,

Formal and informal, Advertisements, etc.

5. Translation:

English to Bengali and Bengali to English

6. Technical Writing: Projects, reports, and thesis

The content of the syllabus of Economics is a bit different from those of BBA, CSE, and ECE. In the syllabus of Economics, along with all the contents of the syllabuses of BBA, CSE, and ECE, there is some content concentrating on the development of speaking skills and vocabulary development. The additional part of the syllabus of Economics is as follows:

Developing vocabulary: Using the dictionary, suffixes, prefixes, synonyms, antonyms, changing word forms (from the verb to noun, etc.) and using them in sentences.

Speaking skills: Speaking skills should be integrated with writing and reading in classroom activities.

The English sound system; pronunciation skills; the IPA system; problem sounds, vowels, consonants, and diphthongs; lexical and syntactic stress.

(Students can develop their speaking skills by writing dialogue and practicing it orally.)

Marks Distribution:

Reading Comprehension: 20

Writing and Grammar: 60

(National University Syllabus of English non-credit course)

Name:	Level of education:
Address:	
Phone number:	email.
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the English language ne of the students of the National University.	
Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without penalty.	
Consent: I have all my questions answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I agree to take part in this study.	
Participant's signature:	Date:
Questionnaire for the students: (Put a tick mark indicating your answer)	
1. Does your English Course facilitate your further study? a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes	
2. What English skills got focus in your classroom learning? a. Reading and Writing b. Speaking and Listening c. A mixture of the different skills	
3. What English skills were focused on in the testing/examination? a. Reading and Writing, b. Speaking and Listening c. A mixture of the different skills	
4. Do you think the four English language skills should get the focus in the syllabus and examination? a. Yes b. No	

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