RESEARCH ARTICLE

INVESTIGATING THE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SKILLS NEEDS IN ESP CONTEXT FROM SUBJECT TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the subject teachers' perspective on the students' needs regarding their present academic skills at Garden City College for Science & Technology (GCCST). More specifically, it attempted to address the students' actual mastery level in employing the academic skills to successfully pursue their academic studies at the college. These academic skills include note- taking , writing graduation projects and how to defend them , how to write exams and tests' answers , describing graphs and tables , and giving presentations in English Language. The sample of the present study is composed of 45 subject teachers whom were randomly selected to give their general views objectively on the students' academic skills in the subjects they are teaching. The findings of this study revealed that the subject teachers were not satisfied with the students' skills required for their academic progress.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in the volume of university education has shifted the attention from teaching English language as general subject to a remarkably discipline oriented subject. This newly emerging situation put further burden on the English language teachers. They have to deal with not only the English language they master, but also the students' subject knowledge.

In the early days of ESP, the term Needs Analysis mainly refered to the language of knowledge and the skills needed in the target situation. Later ,Hutchinson and Waters(1987) indicated that the term   Needs Analysis has become a much broader concept, referring to the concepts of demands , lacks , wants ,desires ,expectations , motivations , constraints and requirements (which could be linguistic ,affective , material and institutional).

In this context, Brown (1995) indicated that *Needs Analysis* refers to the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes and satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of a particular institution that influences the learning and teaching situation. According to the above definitions, the *Needs Analysis* process could be used as the basis for not only developing academic and training programs that are responsive to the needs; but also as a tool that could help forecasting future

decisions about a target group. Perhaps a more comprehensive definition is the one proposed by Brown in the year 2006, in which he explicated that:

> *"Needs analysis is the process of identifying the language forms that students ultimately will need to use in the target language .However, since the needs of the teaching administrators, employees, institutions .etc also has some bearing on the language learning situation ….Needs analysis, 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".*
> (Brown 2001:102)

However, Richterich (1983) noted that the difficulty of reaching an agreed definition for *Needs Analysis* is in that: "the very concept of 'language needs' has never been clearly defined and remains at best ambiguous ".In this respect, Berwick (1998:52) provided a simplified definition for the term *Needs Analysis* as follows: "The discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state". However, Brindley (1994) made a further distinction between needs which are *process-oriented* and those which are *product-oriented*, in which case the former are concerned with how the learning is carried out, while the latter are concerned with the final outcome of the

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English Language course. In addition to that, Ellis (2003: 345–6) illustrates a rather straightforward definition of needs analysis as "a procedure for establishing the specific needs of language learners". However, Robinson (1991:1) argued that "what is specific and appropriate in one part of the globe may not be so elsewhere", thus the difficulty of producing a universally acceptable definition of ESP is always present. In arguing against having a universal definition for the term ESP, Yassin (1999: 52) pointed out that "It would not be possible to give an accurate and precise definition of ESP as it is by its very nature an interdisciplinary area of enquiry".

Aim and scope of the study

This study aims to explore the perceptions of subject teachers regarding students' communicative competence (speaking and writing). The scope of this study focuses mainly on ESP courses at Garden City College for Science and Technology (GCCST) from English for Academic Purposes prospective (EAP)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Carter (1983) divided ESP into two types: English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. In the same context, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) classified ESP into three branches: a) English for Science and Technology (EST), b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and c) English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). To a more thorough examination, Hutchinson and Waters (1987:16) argue that there is no clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP:

"People can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job"

This probably justifies Carter's categorization of ESP into EAP and EOP. It seems that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are the same: employment. The third type of ESP fined by Carter is English with specific topics. In this type the content shifts from purpose to future topic.

From a different point of view, Carter (1993) stated that there are three features common to ESP courses:

1. authentic material from real life situations
2. purpose-related orientation which refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required of the target setting
3. Self-direction. In the sense that "ESP is concerned with turning learners into users" (Carter, 1983, p. 134).

English for academic purposes

EAP is usually defined as teaching English with the aim of assisting learners' study or research in that language (e.g. Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001: 8; Jordan, 1997: 1). In the same context, Dudley-Evans (2001: ix) notes, "EAP often tends to be a practical affair, and these areas are typically understood in terms of local contexts and the needs of particular students".

From a different point of view, Hyland (2006:8) described EAP as a broad term covering all areas of academic communicative practice such as:

- Pre-tertiary, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching (from the design of materials to lectures and classroom tasks).
- Classroom interactions (from teacher feedback to tutorials and seminar discussions).
- Research genres (from journal articles to conference papers and grant Proposals).
- Student writing (from essays to exam papers and graduate theses).
- Administrative practice (from course documents to doctoral oral defenses).
- EAP has thus come to highlight some of the key features of modern academic life . Among them are those:
- Students have to take on new roles and to engage with knowledge in new ways when they enter higher education.
- Communication practices are not uniform across academic disciplines but reflect different ways of constructing knowledge and engaging in teaching and learning.

Research Methodology and the sample of the study

The investigation of the subject teachers' views and attitudes regarding the academic skills of their students is considered to be as a core idea of carrying out the present study. The researcher has used the mixed method to tackle the factual and subjective data relevant to this study.

Therefore, the questionnaire and the personal interviews were made exclusively to subject teachers and department heads as the sample of the study at (GCCST); subject teachers' number is estimated by (45) from both sexes as well as interviewees' number is estimated by (8) from both sexes. The information obtained from the study respondents has been divided into two: objective and subjective (open ended).

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Table 1

Students do not take notes during their lectures.		
	Frequency	Percent
Very unsatisfactory	17	38%
Unsatisfactory	14	31%
Satisfactory	7	16%
Very satisfactory	7	16%
Total	45	100%

Table 1 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (69%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to take notes.
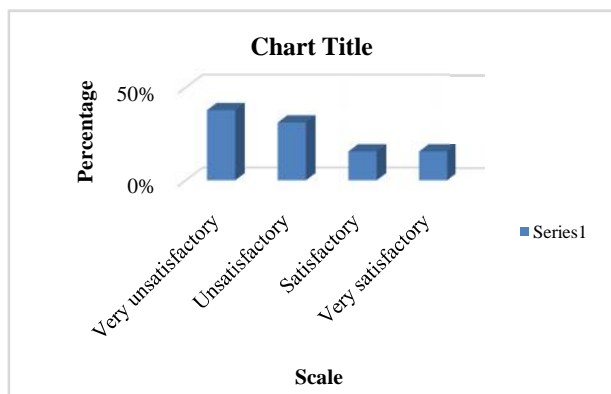
Chart Title
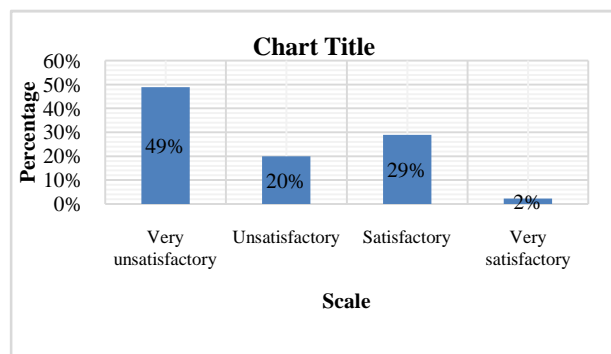

Table 3 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (60%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to write graduation projects in English Language.

Table 4

Students can not defend their graduation projects in English.

	Frequency	Percent
Very unsatisfactory	19	42%
Unsatisfactory	11	24%
Satisfactory	12	27%
Very satisfactory	3	7%
Total	45	100%

Table 2

Students do not give presentations in English.

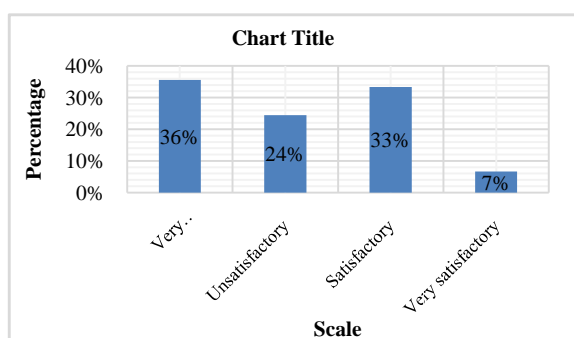|	Frequency	Percent
Very unsatisfactory	22	49%
Unsatisfactory	9	20%
Satisfactory	13	29%
Very satisfactory	1	2%
Total	45	100%

Chart Title

Figure 4

Table 4 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (66%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to defend their graduation projects in English language.

Table 5

Students cannot write well in exams and tests.

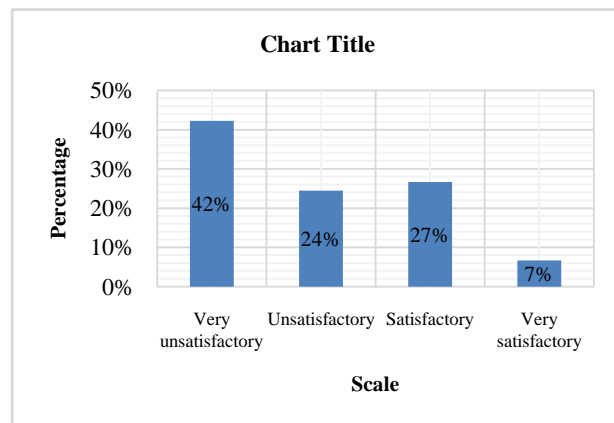|	Frequency	Percent
Very unsatisfactory	21	47%
Unsatisfactory	10	22%
Satisfactory	11	24%
Very satisfactory	3	7%
Total	45	100%

Figure 2

Table 2 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (69%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to give presentations in English.

Table 3

Students cannot write graduation projects.

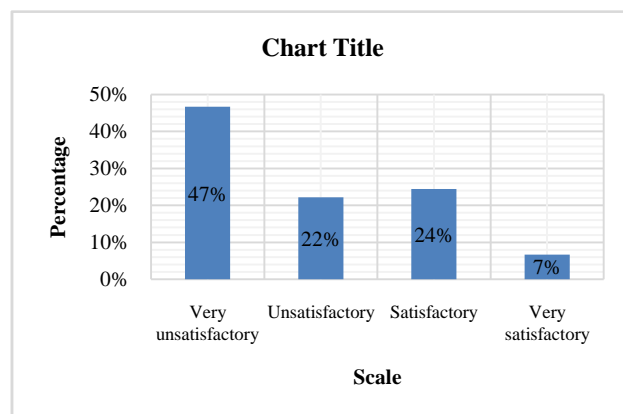|	Frequency	Percent
Very unsatisfactory	16	36%
Unsatisfactory	11	24%
Satisfactory	15	33%
Very satisfactory	3	7%
Total	45	100%

Chart Title

Chart Title

Figure 5

Table 5 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (69%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to write well in exams and tests.

Figure 3

Table 6

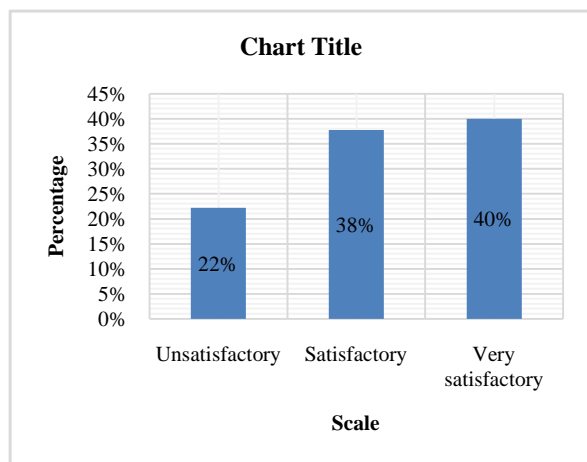| Students can not explain information in charts and graphs.		
	Frequency	**Percent**
Unsatisfactory	10	22%
Satisfactory	17	38%
Very satisfactory	18	40%
Total	45	100%

Chart Title

Figure 6

Table 6 shows that the highest percentage which is represented in the total calculation of Very unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory (60%). This justifies that students need to be trained on how to explain information in charts and graphs.

REPORT DISCUSSION

After analyzing and comparing the sub – hypotheses with the main hypothesis in terms of their percentages as to their total calculation (69% + 69% + 60% + 66% + 69% +60%) this equals average percentage (65.5%). This justifies that students need to be trained and developed in communicative competence in terms of their academic needs.

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