
In Search for Awareness of the Needs: A study of an ESP Intensive Program for Government Official

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at constructing the awareness-building process of Taiwanese government officials from historical and sociocultural perspectives. This paper analyzes the program designed by Asia University which offered a 12-week intensive English training course for 19 government officials in Nantou in 2013. The study used: 1) Needs Analysis questionnaires (pre- and post- survey), and 2) structural interviews to discuss the following questions: 1) To what extent do officials enrolling the program actually need English in their works? 2) How do they realize their needs? 3) Based on the Needs Analysis (NA), what elements should a successful government ESP program incorporate? The study found that although participants agreed on the benefits of joining the program, not many of them know their specific needs. They just want to improve their English generally. However, they gradually notify that their needs as the program brought then district idea of learning. Finally, their replies suggested that more ESP for government officials are needed.

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1. Introduction

Since 1950s', Taiwan government showed an inclination of using English as a second language in education as well as in international collaboration, which brought English into public education earlier than many other countries in Asia. However, this "early awareness" did not turn Taiwan to be an ESL country. After 60 years, considering the effects of globalization, the government putting even more emphasis on adapting English as a second language in governmental administration without a clear defining about when and to what extent the officials should use English. However, the need to improve officials' English abilities and proficiencies becomes a demand for those who wants to get higher promotion or be involved with international-orientated work. Thus, getting a recognizable English certificate is not only a sufficiency of one's own confidence but also a necessity of guarantee for a job stability and career development.

In regards to the pressure given to the officials to polish their English, more and more English courses offered officially every year like the target program in the present study. It is the time to understand the needs of government officials. A 12-week intensive English program is designed to provide for the officials to reach the goal of TOEIC 750 and was assigned to Asia University to be in charge with in 2013. Officials who joined this program were selective and to live in the dormitory was requested in order to have enough "exposure" in the English-only environment which was the learning strategy of "language immersion". During the courses, we found these officials are highly motivated and dedicated to achieving the learning goal. There is no doubt that the curriculum and lesson plans should be corresponded with their needs and expectations to ensure their concerns engaged. Therefore, the study aims at constructing the awareness-building process of Taiwanese government officials from historical and sociocultural perspectives. This paper would like to use: 1) Needs Analysis questionnaires, 2) the outcome of the post-survey, and 3) interviews to discuss the following questions: To what extent do officials enrolling the program actually need English in their works? How do they realize their needs? Based on the Needs Analysis (NA), what elements should a successful government ESP program incorporate? A Study of an ESP Intensive Program for Government Officials will surely provide overall answers to the above questions.

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Before assigning the proposal of this intensive program, an ESP course curriculum design is needed to be estimated by questionnaires. Before we started the ESP courses plan, a fully understanding of ESP methodology was required. And why ESP? “Comparing to general English courses which provide wider linguistics knowledge in broader linguistics domain (e.g., listening, speaking) at one time, ESP advocates suggest that ESP is an efficient approach in designing tailor-made curriculum for students with different sociocultural background because of its narrow goal(s) set by learners” (Jones & Dudley-Evan, 1991). Besides, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that ESP is a utilitarian approach aims at providing language knowledge which is able to be used in their future workplace or specific training (such as giving presenting). Long (2005) states that there is an urgent need for courses of all kinds to be relevant and to the needs of specific groups of learners and of society at large which indicates that needs analysis for such ESP is necessary and important crucially. By requesting the demands of ESP course design, the societal level of such issues will need to put into the consideration as well. Brecht and Rivers (2005) point out that at the societal level, the need for language is generally defined within very general social goals, such as ‘national security’, ‘social justice’, or the like. Therefore, the purpose of associating language with goals is to motivate policy and planning for language education at the national, state, or local level, let along the courses are designed for government officials.

With the support of ESP theories, designing tailor-made curriculum requires the needs analysis. Jones and Dudley-Evan (1991) state again, needs analysis and discourse analysis are indispensable processes before design ESP curriculum. Through these two processes, ESP scholars can incorporate authentic materials into materials design and thus bridge the gap between classroom use and real application. The reasons why we care about the awareness of needs is because though we can analyze the texts and gerunds learners may encounter, needs are also reported by learners. If learners are aware of the needs, 1) the curriculum designers can design more customized materials; and 2) learners are more motivated (Knight, 2010; Miyake & Tremarco, 2005). What’s more, needs assessment (NA) also plays an important role “as a valuable source of information from which relevant and informed curricular decisions can be made” when a part of program and curriculum development (Brown, 2009). So, questionnaires design and survey before and after the class instructions are part of the needs assessment and will help for the improvement of curriculum design and revision.

2. Methods

2.1 *Why do we care about awareness of needs?*

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2.2 Curriculum Design

Although it is highly suggested to offer a need analysis before designing the curriculum for the program. When there were no existing need analysis results as references, a curriculum plan still has to be designed.

Considering the intensive program was provided to government officials, Asia University has analyzed some ESP training course design core-features: 1) skill-sets based (Cox & King, 2006): course should provide clear skills sets training practicum; 2) communication-oriented: goals should be related to communication ability building (Lau & Wang); 3) cases should be included in giving trainees an expecting picture of their further uses of languages (Macpherson, T Berman, Joseph, 1996).

Based on these core-features, the curriculum design followed below principles: 1) clear sets of English communication skills; 2) practicum sessions for speaking and writing; 3) visiting relevant government offices; and finally, 4) a great deal amount of cultural experiencing courses, such as Taiwanese traditional opera introduction in English, to provide participating officials who are expecting to be a capable international communication representative in their own offices. Besides, following the spirit of ESP course design, students are no longer seen "as passive receptacles for the teacher's expertise but rather become agent" (Spencer & Bussi, 2020). So, to foster a "learner-centered perspective" is the concern when designing this ESP program. Schedule of the program is shown as below table 1.

Table 1 Intensive Training Course Schedule for Government Officials.

Time	Week	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.
8:10- 10:00 (2hrs)	Week 1	Opening Ceremony				
	Week 2		Listening and Speaking	Listening and Speaking	Listening and Speaking	International News Discussion (TED Talk speaking practice)
	Week 3		(cross cultural communication)	(cross cultural communication)	(cross cultural communication)	
	Week 4	Pronunciation				
	Week 5					
	Week 6					
10:10- 12:00 (2hrs)	Week 1	Opening Ceremony				
	Week 2					
	Week 3	Email Writing and Office Communication	English Presentation	English for Meeting	Skills for International Negotiation	International News Discussion (TED Talk speaking practice)
	Week 4					
	Week 5					
12:00~ 13:40	Week 6			Lunch		
13:40- 16:30 (3hrs)	Week 1	Speaking and writing pre-test			International Etiquette	International Etiquette
	Week 2				Report Writing	Report Writing
	Week 3				Midterm Forum	Speech for TOEIC (1.5hr)
	Week 4	TOEIC Reading	TOEIC Listening	Cross-Cultural Experiencing	English for Government Official Visit	Off-class visit
	Week 5					Communication with International Students(1.5hr) Conversation and Oral Interpretation Social Practice(1.5hr)

Time	Week	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.
	Week 6		TOEIC post-test		Policy Explanation and Promotion	Closing ceremony
16:40- 17:30				Free Time		
17:30-19:00				Dinner		
19:00- 21:00			Self-study and consulting			
21:00				Break		

3. Result and Discussion

To access student's awareness toward their needs during their cultivation of communication skills, questionnaires were designed to trace their learning and awareness growing process.

3.1 Questionnaire design

The Questionnaire contain parts below: 1) learner demographic info; 2) learners' English learning experience and preferences; 3) learners' uses of English in their offices; 4) their recognition of their needs in English training.

3.1.1 Questionnaire: before the program (Apr. 12th) and after the program (Jul. 2nd)

- Questionnaire design-the framework
- General information: Who is our learner?
- English self-learning: How does the learner learn?
- English use in workplace? Where/how does the learner use English?
- Needs Analysis: What kinds of needs do learner identify?
- Post evaluation: awareness reported by the learner

3.1.2 Examples of questionnaires

Same questions in both questionnaires (Apr. 12th and Jul. 2nd): students learning in different learning environments. These questions are intended to identify students' awareness in conscious level.

Sample question, part 1

Question 1 *Please assess your English proficiency by using the following scale?*

Question 2 *What techniques have you used for self-learning (You may have more than one answer)?*

Sample question, part 2

Question 1 *Have you ever found any difficulty when you communicate in English in your workplace? (Apr. 12th)*

Question 2 *Do you think you will still find difficulty when you communicate in English in your workplace? (Jul. 2nd)*

Opening question and evaluation: these questions are intended to identify awareness in self-reflection level

Sample question, part 3

Question 1 *Do you feel you become more confident in using English? (Jul. 2nd)*

Question 2 *Will you become more willing to dealing with works related to English? (Jul. 2nd)*

3.1.3 Background information survey

- Background information of the learners (based on the first analysis dated Apr. 12th) → gender/age
- Background information of their working environment (based on the first analysis dated Apr. 12th)
 - How long have you been in this position?
 - Based on your observation, please assess the English proficiency of your colleagues.
 - Following up, do you think your colleagues have sufficient ESP skills and knowledge?

- 4) Does your employer offer any ESP training course for you? If so, please indicate the course (such as business writing, etc.)
 - 5) Have you taken any ESP courses provided either by your employers or other institutions? If so, please indicate the institution's name.
 - 6) Following up, how long does it take for you to master these specialized or professional language?
 - 7) Do you think these specialized or professional English are crucial to you in your job? If not, why?
- c) Findings and comparisons (based on the analyses dated Apr. 12th and Jul. 2nd)
- 1) Please assess your English proficiency by using the following scale
 - 2) How many hours a week do you study English?
 - 3) What techniques have you used for self-learning? (You may have more than one answer)?
 - 4) How do you use English in your workplace? (You may have more than one answer)
 - 5) Following up, how often do you use English?
 - 6) Following up, which language skill do you most often use? (You may have more than one answer)
 - 7) Have you ever found any difficulty when you communicate in English in your workplace?
 - 8) If you tick yes, please specify the reasons.
 - 9) Do you have chance to use specialized or professional English at work?
 - 10) How do you acquire these specialized or professional English (You may have more than one answer)?
 - 11) Where do you think you are most likely to use the language you have acquired in the future?
 - 12) In which setting do you think you are most likely to use the language in the future? (You may have more than one answer)
 - 13) The reason why you are taking this course is because...?
 - 14) Following the above question, do you think it accomplishes the above expectation? (Only for Jul. 2nd)
 - 15) What do you expect from this program? (You may have more than one answer)
 - 16) Following up, do you feel the needs are fulfilled? Please tickle the needs you feel are met. (Only for Jul. 2nd)
 - 17) What specific English do you need now?
 - 18) Following up, do you feel you have acquired the specific English now? Please tickle the specific English you feel are covered in this program. (Only for Jul. 2nd)
 - 19) Following up, which skill do you like to improve?
 - 20) Following up, in which skill do you feel you have made progress? (Only for Jul. 2nd)
 - 21) Following up, which teaching method will benefit you most?

3.1.3.1 Post-program evaluation (based on the analysis date Jul. 2nd)

Question and options	Total	
a) <i>Do you think you will still find difficulty when you communicate in English in your workplace?</i>	Yes	16
	No	3

Below are the comments from the people who say Yes

- 1) I still have to study more professional terms and expressing ways about my jobs.
- 2) Keep on learning listening and speaking English.
- 3) Writing documents and letters.
- 4) Attend an English meeting.
- 5) I need to increase my English ability.
- 6) If I transfer to another section (e.g., international relationship bureau), I will need more practice and use the formal (foreign affairs like) way to host our guests.
- 7) I want to be able to react and interact with people in English efficiently.
- 8) Having limited knowledge of communication strategies.
- 9) Special terms still need self-learn.
- 10) I still have to enhance my listening skills and I think learning English is a life-long work. Without supports and environment, it's hard to keep learning.

- 11) Use English in a meeting.
- 12) Need to understand specific terms.
- 13) Three months is not long enough to make my English perfect.
- 14) For some professional jargons or terms, I need to keep learning

Question and options	Total
b) How will you acquire specialized or professional English in the future?	
<i>learning by doing</i>	15
<i>Asking peers or senior colleagues</i>	8
<i>Reading books or manuals</i>	16
<i>Taking ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses</i>	12
<i>Others (Please specify)</i>	0

Question and options	Total
c) Will you recommend your colleagues participate in the same program? Please specify the reason	
<i>Yes</i>	18
<i>No</i>	1

Below are the Comments from the people who say Yes

- 1) They can learn a lot.
- 2) Useful.
- 3) It's a good opportunity to practice English.
- 4) They can improve their English ability.
- 5) If they have enough English ability, I will recommend them.
- 6) Very useful.
- 7) In my opinion, they will learn a lot if they participate.
- 8) For officials who did not have chances to study abroad, the training is a great opportunity to learn English.
- 9) It's great as personal development.
- 10) Lifelong learning is crucial. I do benefit from the program.
- 11) For personal development.

Comments from the people who say NO from above question

Question and options	Total
<i>If the colleagues don't use English in workplaces, they will be lack of motivation to learning English</i>	
Do you feel you become more confident in using English?	
<i>Yes</i>	19
<i>No</i>	0

The Comments from the people who say Yes are follows

- 1) I still have a lot to learn, but at least I know now to commentate in English.
- 2) I already have the experience of talking to foreigners. It makes me become more confident.
- 3) Learn some skills about speaking.
- 4) The communication skill has been improved.
- 5) I have a lot of time to speak with other people in the sunny park.
- 6) I learn a lot, but, if we don't have the chances in my office, I will lose the ability again.
- 7) Yes, but still not enough.
- 8) I feel more confident, because I did practice in class.
- 9) The program provides a lot of chance to use English and I become more confident in using English.
- 10) English ability improved.
- 11) I speak more fluently than before.
- 12) I already get used to using English.
- 13) I had a lot of practices in communication. It helps a lot.

14) I speak English at here every day, and I think it is still doable in the future.

Question and options	Total	
<i>d) Will you become more willing to dealing with works related to English?</i>	Yes	15
	No	4

Below are the Comments from the people who say Yes

- 1) Initially, I have to use English in my job in the future, I will keep on using English.
- 2) I hope that I can learn some English form work.
- 3) Have some abolition to communicate.
- 4) It depends on what my chief wants me to do.
- 5) Even I don't want to deal with works related to English, our colleagues will ask me for help.
- 6) Increase the use of English
- 7) I will.
- 8) I am more confident in providing English services and my office will also render works related to English to officials who have been trained.
- 9) Learning by doing must be effective, efficient and practical.
- 10) I hope I have more chance to deal with works related to English.
- 11) I have to attend to English translation and interpretation, etc.
- 12) That's what I all good at, and I am the one can need it that.

Comments from the people who say NO are follows

- 1) I don't have the opportunity to deal with works related to English.
- 2) We do the job which be assigned.
- 3) Let professional person do that.

3.2 Feedback and Score result

They also reported some feedbacks which can have further implication in ESP program design. Positive feedbacks can be organized below.

3.2.1 General positive feedbacks

- a) Teaching English and teach self-learning: learners have developed more learning strategies
- b) Learners become more confident in using English

3.2.2 Finding related to ESP

- a) Teaching English and teach self-learning: learners have developed more learning strategies
- b) Learners become more confident in using English
- c) With the program, learners become more aware of what causes difficulties in their use of workplace English
- d) Rooms for improvement
- e) With the program, learners understand ESP course is more efficient to increase language proficiency than EGP course
- f) Expend learners 'understanding to ESP (for special terms to sociocultural aspects)
- g) Teach learners become more aware of their specific needs and analyze the specific use of language

The most significant result from the pre- and post-test questionnaires is that their time devoted to self-learning and their gaining confidence in learning English. Generally, Taiwanese learners are very humble in terms of their self-evaluation of their English ability. They still feel they have many room for improvement even though 3/4 of them passed 750 in TOEIC and can be recognized as CEFR B2 English users.

The major benefit for them was not just improving their English this time but to be able to know their needs of English in their workplace and focus on these needs when they completed the program. From their

responses, though they knew they were expected to be in charge of English works in the future, not so many works had to be completed in English in their current position. The program was mainly for preparation and not to solve on-hand English problems they found at their workplace currently. Whether they might have higher possibility in using English was not for sure. However, once the bilingual policy carries out nationwide, these officials who are master in English will be selected as learning models and have higher potentials to get promoted.

The major contribution of the result was to show that, though most of English learners in Taiwan have been learning English since high schools, they seldom noticed their needs and search for materials or programs that fit their needs. It may take time and specific curriculum design to raise their needs awareness, so that needs analysis can provide clear results.

4. Conclusion

As it has been stated, the need analysis is also considered as an important reference for future program curriculum designed. The present study discusses possible implication for designing ESP courses/program for government officials in future. And from the received questionnaires, participants reported some general positive feedbacks toward their learning and using of English. Same as most needs analysis findings that students' preferences of language sub-skills such as writing summaries for the writing skills or talking to colleagues/friends from different nations for the speaking skills can be added into as flexible courses in the program (Zohoorian, 2015).

Feedbacks related to future implication in ESP program design can be organized in several aspects: 1) they were more aware of English use in their work places; 2) they could analyze their learning difficulties; 3) Most of them felt they still have a lot of rooms for improvement; 4) they understood that ESP courses are more efficient in helping them improving their English; 5) they felt the program expanded their understanding of ESP; 6) they became aware of their individual specific needs in English learning.

Future implication of the results can be listed as follows: 1) using workplace English materials may not be enough as government officials have different uses in email writing, report writing and telephoning as compare to workers in companies; 2) learners may not be able to notice their needs in the beginning of the program or before the program starts, it may require subsequent tracing to understand their needs. 3) adjustments may be required in both materials and course objectives in the middle of the program after a needs analysis.

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