

## Assessing the Gaps in Macro Skills: A Needs Analysis among Third-Year Psychology Students

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### Received:

July 25, 2024

### Revised:

September 3,  
2024

### Accepted:

September 4,  
2024

### Published:

November 1,  
2024

### ABSTRACT

This quantitative study employed a needs analysis approach which aimed to identify, aid, and present the problem with the proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of third-year Psychology students. 50 respondents from the psychology department in a private non-sectarian academic institution were randomly surveyed to gather the requisite data. Results showed that the respondents need guidance across various language competencies. Their reading skills are at the frustration level, listening skills are at the proficient level, and writing and speaking skills are at the moderate level. This study suggests customized instructional approaches which can significantly improve the receptive and productive English language skills of third-year psychology students, thereby empowering them to achieve greater academic and professional success. These findings underscore the effectiveness of ESP programs in enhancing the language skills required for psychology students and of similar academic contexts.

**Keywords:** *English for Specific Purposes; needs analysis; macro skills; psychology; reading; speaking; writing; listening*

## INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language learning that focuses on students' specific needs within certain academic or professional contexts. Paltridge and Starfield (2014) stated that unlike general English language courses, ESP tailors its curriculum to the unique requirements of learners, incorporating vocabulary, contexts, and skills pertinent to specific disciplines or occupations. ESP's primary goal is to give students the language skills they need to successfully communicate and carry out activities in their respective fields. Furthermore, the lack of ESP training could severely impede professional development and career advancement, as professionals with specialized language skills may need to work on interacting with industry-specific documentation, communicate with peers efficiently, or participate in meaningful activities and projects. For instance, Anthony (2018) stated that engineers without ESP training may find it challenging to follow technical instructions or work with others on global projects, resulting in poor work performance and few career options.

Flowerdew (2013) emphasized that psychology students may need help with their English. Since studying psychology involves understanding intricate theories, conducting research, and analyzing academic journals, students with insufficient

English proficiency may find it challenging to understand fundamental ideas and procedures. This shortcoming may cause them to need more clarification on critical psychological concepts, hindering their academic achievement and capacity to participate in academic discussions. Moreover, Hyland (2016) highlighted that a lack of English proficiency might prevent students from accessing a wide range of foreign publications and research, which limits their exposure to other perspectives and advancements in the subject. As a result, psychology students may find themselves academically and professionally disadvantaged, unable to fully engage with the global psychology community or pursue further education and career development opportunities.

In addition, Huhta et al. (2013) pressed ESP integration into higher education to provide students with the specialized language skills required in their respective fields. With ESP, students may have the professional vocabulary and communicative competence needed in professional settings, which could improve their ability to perform at work and advance their careers. Gatehouse (2016) further established ESP's crucial role in technical and vocational education, pointing out that the lack of it might hinder students' engagement with industry-specific procedures and records. Subsequently, in the Philippines, Tiongson et al. (2019) found that ESP teachers need help teaching specialized writing courses due to a lack of training in technical content and the need for collaboration with a specialist. Moreover, Jie and Cross (2014) stipulated that the absence of ESP in college curricula has garnered attention due to its potential impact on students' ability to succeed in their chosen professions. Similarly, Arboleda (2022) stressed the relevance and benefits of ESP in one's profession or career. By focusing on the specific language demands and communication activities of a particular field or occupation, ESP enables individuals to develop proficiency in the specialized vocabulary, grammar, and discourse practices relevant to their profession. Furthermore, Avila et al. (2021) stated that psychology students' English proficiency has been the focus of several national journals (see Martinez et al., 2019) in the Philippines.

In psychology, the importance of ESP is evident. As psychologists often conduct research, publish findings, and communicate with colleagues and patients, proficiency in English is crucial for success in the field. It equips learners with the necessary linguistic and communicative skills to effectively navigate the demands of psychological research and communication in the global academic community. Additionally, Orville (2024) asserted that integrating ESP into the curriculum aligns with best practices in higher education, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the demands of their future professions. Thus, ESP is crucial for psychology students as it equips them with the necessary language skills tailored to their academic and professional needs.

To properly tailor the curricula for English specific purposes, needs analysis (NA) must be conducted first. NA in ESP learning has been the subject of numerous studies carried out in several fields in the past few years, such as Todea and Demarcsek (2017) in engineering, Faidah (2022) in nursing, Miqawati et al. (2023) in office

administration, Miqawati and Sa'diyah (2023) in agriculture, and Kusuma et al. (2023) in the hospitality industry. However, we had not come across a needs analysis that explores psychology students' reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills in most colleges and universities in the Philippines. Due to the inadequacy of the needs analysis in the current situation, it is in this context that leads us to investigate third-year psychology students' reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. As a result, this analysis must be completed to add meaningful literature to the growing amount of information already in existence.

In this premise, the primary aim of this needs analysis was to determine the following: level of reading comprehension of the third-year psychology students in terms of vocabulary, main ideas/themes, and topic sentences; level of listening skills in terms of comprehension, retention, active listening in counseling, processing verbal and non-verbal cues, empathetic listening, and analytical listening; level of writing skills in terms of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and rhetorical problems; and level of speaking skills in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation.

## **METHOD**

In this section, the researchers delineate the parts of the method which cover research design, research respondents, research instruments and materials, and data analysis.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing a needs analysis approach to identify the language requirements, strengths, and limitations of the respondents. This approach enabled the researchers to gain insights into the English language proficiency of the selected cohort and inform strategies for improving their language skills.

### **Research Respondents**

The respondents were 50 third-year psychology students enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> semester of AY: 2022-2023 in a private non-sectarian academic institution located in Davao City, Philippines. The respondents were identified using convenience sampling because of time constraints faced by respondents and researchers. Turner (2020) explained that convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily available and accessible to the researcher and often employed when time or resources are limited, allowing for quicker and more efficient data collection.

### **Research Instruments and Materials**

The instruments utilized consisted of four major parts: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Reading and listening instruments employed proficiency tests through multiple choice questions (MCQ) whereas writing and speaking instruments employed survey questionnaires.

First, the adopted reading proficiency test by Kusumastiti (2021) comprised 10 MCQ which covered areas namely vocabulary (four items), main ideas/themes (three items), and topic sentence (three items). Second, the adopted listening proficiency test by Kumar (2017) comprised 10 MCQ which covered areas namely comprehension (two items), retention (two items), active listening in counseling (two items), processing verbal and non-verbal cues (one item), emphatic listening (two items), and analytical listening (one item). Third, the survey questionnaire for writing was adopted from Ghulamuddin et al. (2021) which consisted of five key indicators namely vocabulary (two items), spelling (two items), grammar (two items), punctuation (two items), and rhetorical problems (two items) to be answered using a five-point Likert scale. Finally, the survey questionnaire for speaking was adopted from Wulandari et al. (2022) which consisted of indicators vocabulary (three items), grammar (three items), and pronunciation (four items) to be answered using a five-point Likert scale as well.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze and evaluate the data gathered, the following tools were used to determine the students' needs and lacks:

*Reading.* The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) is an assessment scale for reading proficiency level from the Bureau of Learning, composed of graded passages designed to determine every student's performance in silent reading, oral reading, and listening comprehension. Phil-IRI has three categories namely independent, moderate, and frustration levels. When students score between 90-100%, they are placed at the independent level which indicates that they have high comprehension mastery and can easily explore English literature independently without assistance. Next, students who score between 75-89% fall into the instructional level which indicates a moderate comprehension skill where they understand the concepts at hand sufficiently, but could use some focused training to advance. Lastly, a score of <74% places students at the frustration level which indicates a poor degree of comprehension mastery and a considerable need for ongoing assistance and support to understand texts efficiently.

*Listening.* The International English Language Testing System or IELTS (2022) was used to assess and determine psychology students' listening proficiency. It has five scales and levels: students who score between 1-2 fall under Beginning Proficient; 3-4 are Developing Proficient; 5-6 are Approaching Proficient; 7-8 are Proficient; and 9- 10 are Advanced Proficient.

*Writing.* Mahmot's (2013) criteria were used to analyze and interpret the self-assessment data of the writing scale of the psychology students' writing proficiency. This scale is a standardized system for interpreting and categorizing mean scores, offering a structured approach to interpreting the range of scores obtained from self-assessments. It classifies these scores into high, medium, and low levels. A mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) score falling within the range of 3.5 to 5.0 corresponds to high level which signifies difficulty in expressing ideas or descriptions clearly and many grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors.  $\bar{X}$  between 2.5 and 3.4 are classified as medium level where the

writing style conveys meaning adequately but has some grammar, syntax, and spelling errors.  $\bar{X}$  between 1.0 and 2.4 are categorized as low level which shows a strong writing style with an apparent ability to express thoughts and points of view, and excellent grammar, syntax, spelling, and the like.

*Speaking.* Mahmot's (2013) criteria were used to analyze and interpret psychology students' speaking proficiency self-assessment data.  $\bar{X}$  between 3.5 and 5.0 represent a high level indicating that several grammatical, syntactic, and spelling errors, and mispronunciation make it difficult for students to express themselves correctly.  $\bar{X}$  between 2.5 and 3.4 represents a medium level indicating that ideas are adequately expressed despite some obvious grammatical faults and mispronunciation.  $\bar{X}$  between 1.0 and 2.4 represents a low level indicating outstanding competency in grammar, syntax, spelling, and effective communication.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates the needs analysis results of psychology students per macro skill and their respective key indicators.

### Level of Reading Proficiency of the third-year Psychology Students

Table 1 presents the reading proficiency level of the third-year psychology students in terms of vocabulary, main ideas/themes, and topic sentence.

The overall mean score accumulated is 67.95 indicating that the level of reading proficiency of the third-year psychology students is at frustration level which means that the students need more mastery and constant guidance to comprehend the text. This is consistent with the results of Bernardo et al. (2021) who identified that only 19% of Filipino pupils met the minimum proficiency standards in the PISA 2018 assessment, indicating low reading proficiency levels. They stressed the significance of socio-ecological factors such as school experiences, socioeconomic position, and family resources in impacting reading proficiency. Similarly, Liu et al. (2022) stated that individual elements such as curiosity and reading metacognition significantly impact students' reading literacy, underscoring the need for customized instructional techniques.

**Table 1. Level of Reading Proficiency of the Third-Year Psychology Students**

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Vocabulary	81.50	21.59	Instructional
Main Ideas/Themes	78.67	24.49	Instructional
Topic Sentence	43.67	33.70	Frustration
<b>Overall</b>	<b>67.95</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>Frustration</b>

Therefore, third-year psychology students need help to improve vocabulary and to spot main ideas/themes and topic sentences. This implies that their reading proficiency may be hindered by their inability to understand terms used to construct sentences and effectively identify and understand a paragraph's focus or point of view. Also, their inability to find main ideas or themes in a written passages could impact their ability to comprehend and analyze complex psychological concepts in academic

texts. It may also affect their ability to write clear and concise essays or reports that effectively convey their understanding of the topic.

### **Level of Listening Proficiency of the Third-Year Psychology Students**

Table 2 presents the level of listening proficiency of the third-year psychology students in terms of comprehension, retention, active listening in counseling, processing verbal and non-verbal cues, emphatic listening, and analytical listening.

**Table 2. Level of Listening Proficiency of the third-year Psychology Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Descriptive Level</b>
Comprehension	7.2	3.06	Proficient
Retention	8.7	2.60	Proficient
Active Listening in Counseling	7.2	3.49	Proficient
Processing Verbal and Non-verbal Cues	8.0	4.0	Proficient
Emphatic Listening	7.9	2.84	Proficient
Analytical Listening	8.2	3.84	Proficient
<b>Overall</b>	<b>7.87</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

The overall mean score accumulated is 7.87 indicating that the third-year psychology students' listening proficiency is at the proficiency level which means that the third-year psychology students have excellent reception of the English language. Further, the results solidify the notion that future psychologists need to be skilled or proficient listeners because listening is integral to their future work in understanding and diagnosing their clients, establishing rapport and empathy, spotting patterns in the clients' or patients' well-being, and improving communication skills. Tanewong (2018) stressed that less proficient students can transform into proficient ones in listening through practical, planned, or organized instruction. Similarly, Milliner and Dimoski (2021) proved that strategic instruction is effective in developing learners' listening proficiency.

### **Level of Writing Proficiency of the third-year Psychology Students**

Table 3 presents the writing proficiency level of third-year psychology students in terms of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and rhetorical problems.

**Table 3. Level of Writing Proficiency of third-year Psychology Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Descriptive Level</b>
Vocabulary	2.98	0.53	Medium
Spelling	2.80	0.20	Medium
Grammar	2.80	0.42	Medium
Punctuation	2.49	0.24	Low
Rhetorical Problems	2.52	0.06	Medium
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.71</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>Medium</b>

The overall mean score accumulated is 2.71 indicating that the level of writing proficiency of the third-year psychology students is moderate which means that their writing style conveys meaning adequately with some grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling errors. Also, they need a little help describing past events in writing and need clarification when referencing previously mentioned elements. Pichette et al.

(2019) suggest that writing a text may lead to significantly higher recall than reading if enough time is allocated for each task. Therefore, language teachers may require writing tasks with ample time limit for students to enhance retention, vocabulary, and writing mechanics. As students progress, they face more complex demands to broaden their writing proficiency to communicate their ideas effectively. Thus, the findings imply a need for tailored approaches to teaching and supporting students with differing levels of writing proficiency in psychology.

### **Level of Speaking Proficiency of the third-year Psychology Students**

Table 4 presents the speaking proficiency level of third-year psychology students in terms vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

**Table 4. Level of Speaking Proficiency of Third-Year Psychology Students**

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Vocabulary	3.0	0.10	Medium
Grammar	3.0	0.20	Medium
Pronunciation	3.0	0.30	Medium
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>Medium</b>

The overall mean score accumulated is 3.0 indicating that the level of speaking proficiency of the third-year psychology students is moderate which means that the respondents express ideas adequately with few grammar, syntax, and spelling errors, and several mispronunciation. Sari (2018) found that self-efficacy and speaking skills are highly correlated. In a similar vein, Sangaji (2019) concluded that grammar issues caused by hesitancy, nervousness, low self-esteem, and lack of vocabulary affect university students' speaking proficiency. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to incorporate creativity and technology when teaching English to enhance students' self-efficacy. Through this, students will feel energized, more confident about themselves, and motivated to resolve difficult situations. Additionally, extracurricular activities such as public speaking, speech delivery, news casting, storytelling, and debate, to name a few (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018) may improve the students English speaking skills and confidence.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through needs analysis, the researchers identified specific gaps and strengths in each area, which are crucial for their academic and professional success. The findings revealed that the student's current reading proficiency level could affect their ability to understand and analyze complex psychological concepts and hinder their capability to write clear and concise academic texts. Meanwhile, the students are generally proficient in listening. They demonstrate strong abilities in retaining and recalling key information, analysing and evaluating content, and showing empathy and understanding. Moreover, they are adept at recognising and interpreting both verbal and non-verbal cues. However, there is room for improvement in their skills related to active engagement during therapy or counselling sessions and comprehension of

spoken content's main ideas and details. Enhancing these skills is crucial, as they are fundamental for effective communication and application of psychological concepts in professional settings.

Furthermore, considering the current writing level of the psychology students, it is suggested that there is a need to broaden vocabulary, to spell correctly, to master the structure of grammar, and to respond to rhetorical problems. Hence, it is emphasized that these difficulties are to redirect or recalibrate the psychological methodologies that the field needs for future purposes. Lastly, their current speaking ability level reports committed errors such as mispronunciation, ungrammaticality, syntax errors, and misspelling. Apparently, there is still a need to exemplify the necessary skills to elevate psychological facts to clients and patients. Effective communication and the accurate transmission of complex psychological ideas will be more valuable if precise vocabulary, grammar, and spelling are incorporated and will avoid misinterpretations and misdiagnoses. All things considered, effective communication in the psychology area is facilitated by a solid grasp of language, grammar, and spelling.

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