

ESP Needs Analysis of Macroskills of Social Work Students

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study employed needs analysis then revealed the preferred learning aids and learning activities, and the level of proficiency in reading, listening, writing, and speaking of 50 social work students in a private academic institution. Findings revealed that students showed a strong enthusiasm for visual and audiovisual aids as learning tools and lectures and class discussions as learning activities. Moreover, among the four macro skills, the students excel in reading comprehension at C1 level but face challenges in the affective domain; writing skills at B1 level, with strengths in content but struggles in organization; listening proficiency at B2 level, highlighting difficulties with accents and vocabulary; and speaking skills range from A2 to B1 levels, with stronger interaction skills at B2 level, indicating a need for improvement in fluency and coherence. These insights suggest that the social work students are capable of simple communicative English and are more inclined toward traditionalist and conceptual learning. Furthermore, students need more application activities that showcase their listening and speaking skills, as well as more contextualized and immersive learning activities and aids that incorporate variation and encourage spontaneous production.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes; English language proficiency; macroskills; needs analysis; social work students; Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction is carried out to students with a particular level of English ability for the context in which the language will be used—a situation known as "target needs" (Agustina, 2014). Specifically, the instruction provided will help people become a better professional since it will help them use English more effectively in many areas of their career. Since it has been demonstrated that English language ability is essential for determining employment options and success in the workplace, Malokani et al. (2023) stressed that it is important to understand that language ability is just a single component of the complex problem that determines career success; other important components include skills, experience, and cultural competency. However, finding the best and most comprehensive array of ESP course materials to meet the needs of a variety of students in the workplace is frequently a challenging undertaking. This raises the issue of needs analysis in preparing learners for their future professional paths (Liton, 2015). For those in

professions like social work, learning English is crucial especially when considering one's macro skills of the language. Despite the difficulties faced by international students studying social work, especially those from non-English speaking nations, and the abundance of research emphasizing the value of social networks and other forms of support, these students presently get inadequate assistance (Song & Petracchi, 2015). Thus, tailoring ESP gives social work (SW) students the necessary language and cultural capabilities to advance their careers, communicate effectively, and provide better services in a globalized setting.

ESP plays a vital role in higher education, yet its absence in college curricula can have significant repercussions. Studies have shown that neglecting ESP courses hampers students' ability to communicate effectively in professional settings. Sultana and Rahman (2019) and Kuswando and Ulfa (2021) underscored the gap in ESP education within higher education institutions, emphasizing the need for tailored language instruction to meet students' professional needs. Similarly, Al-Buainain and Al-Mekhlafi (2017) explored the consequences of the absence of ESP in Saudi Arabian higher education, highlighting its detrimental impact on students' language proficiency and professional development. Moreover, Hutchinson and Waters (2017) highlighted the relevance of ESP in the digital age, emphasizing its role in preparing students for specific career paths. Notably, the lack of ESP in college curricula can be particularly challenging for students pursuing social work degrees, as evidenced by Chakraborty (2019), who identified significant English language proficiency gaps among SW students in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, Kumar and Singh (2017) reported similar findings in India, emphasizing the challenges faced by SW students in developing essential English language skills for their profession. Thus, addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring that social work students can effectively navigate multicultural and multilingual environments.

The Philippines faces difficulties in raising students' English proficiency. Cunha and Capellini (2016) reported that many SW students lack the basic skills needed for the program, with teachers expressing concern about students struggling to form simple English sentences, suggesting a lack of specialized English skills required for certain academic and professional domains. In addition, the Philippine Institute of Development Studies or PIDS (2021) explained that the very high degree of general English competence in the Philippines does not always convert to fluency in specific English abilities required for business and the workplace and recommended that a focus on the communicative approach and the development of reading, writing, and speaking skills be made to improve the quality of English instruction in schools. Consequently, Belcher (2018) expressed that ESP teachers lack the necessary training to instruct students in discipline-specific communication skills, which are vital for success in both academic and professional settings. These remarks cement the claim that one major obstacle to raising overall English proficiency among students and graduates in the Philippines is the lack of a strong emphasis on ESP in the educational system which significantly impacts people and organizations, communication, professional development, and global engagement.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the English language proficiency of the second-year social work students. Specifically, it aimed to unveil their current level in the four macro skills. By also examining the gaps, needs, and wants of the students, this scholarly work endeavored to create a specialized syllabus, course design, lesson plans, methods, and learning activities that address the observed gaps, needs, and wants in language ability. Ultimately, the goal was to provide students with the English that they need incorporated with communicative skills and methods required for professional development and educational success in the field of social work.

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 quantitative study employed a needs analysis approach to comprehensively investigate the English needs, lacks, and wants of 50 second-year social work students at a private non-sectarian academic institution. This approach provided researchers the opportunity to learn and understand the English language proficiency of the specified respondents and tailor a course designed to improve their four macro-skills.

Research Respondents

The respondents consisted of 50 second-year social work students in a private non-sectarian academic institution located in Davao City, Philippines. Convenience sampling was utilized for its practicality and effectiveness in gathering data from this specific group within the university community, allowing for easy access to participants (Vasantharaju & Harnarayana, 2016). A sample size of 50 was deemed sufficient for the study's objectives, considering practical constraints and research needs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection of both the sampling method and sample size was influenced by practical considerations, aiming to provide tangible findings and valuable insights into the research objectives.

Research Instruments

The instruments used consisted of two preliminary parts and four major parts. The first two sought to determine the 'wants' of the respondents on their preferred learning aids and learning activities. The four major parts were administered to determine their 'needs' in reading, writing, listening, and 'lacks' in speaking.

First, for reading, the adopted questionnaires from an author and online tests (Zhang, 2020; Reading Comprehension Practice Test, 2015; 10 Vocabulary Questions, 2009) aim to measure the lexical, applied, interpretive, affective, and literal reading comprehension levels with five multiple choice questions (MCQ) each. Next, for writing, the questionnaire downloaded from cakeresume.com has three subjective questions which required the respondents to answer in three to five sentences only. Then, for listening, the instrument adopted from Oxford Online English (2022) required the respondents to listen to an audioclip twice to answer a 15-item MCQ.

Lastly, for speaking, the instrument required the respondents to truthfully rate their speaking skills in terms of range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. Each indicator has six descriptive levels from where they base their self-ratings.

Data Analysis

To analyze and evaluate the data gathered in reading, writing, listening, and speaking tests, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Figure 1 was used to determine the social work students' level.

CEFR Level	Description	Percentage (%)
A1	Beginner	10-30
A2	Elementary	31-40
B1	Intermediate	41-50
B2	Upper Intermediate	51-60
C1	Advance	61-70
C2	Proficient	71-100

Figure 1. The Common European Framework of Reference Scale

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates the needs analysis results with emphasis on the social work students' wants, needs, and gaps.

Needs Analysis on Social Work Students' Wants

I. Learning Aids

Figure 2 shows that the most preferred learning aids by second year social work students are visual aids (88%), followed by audiovisual aids (70%), printed aids (64%), audio aids (60%), digital aids (36%), and narrative aids (32%). This implies that these students are dominantly visual learners or are more inclined to visual learning. Everything that is visually displayed has a significant impact on students as it provides them with various information. Philominraj et al. (2017) discussed that learners who use visual learning are exposed to media and the environment in their natural settings, which are crucial for stimulating their interest, holding their focus, and assisting them in understanding the language's fundamental principles. While Shabiralyani et al. (2015) emphasized that when visual aids are directly related to the course material, students find them to be relevant and helpful. Nonetheless, the perspectives on learning styles accentuate that educators should offer a variety of instructional strategies, including different resources and techniques, to accommodate each student's preferred learning style (Rinekso, 2021).

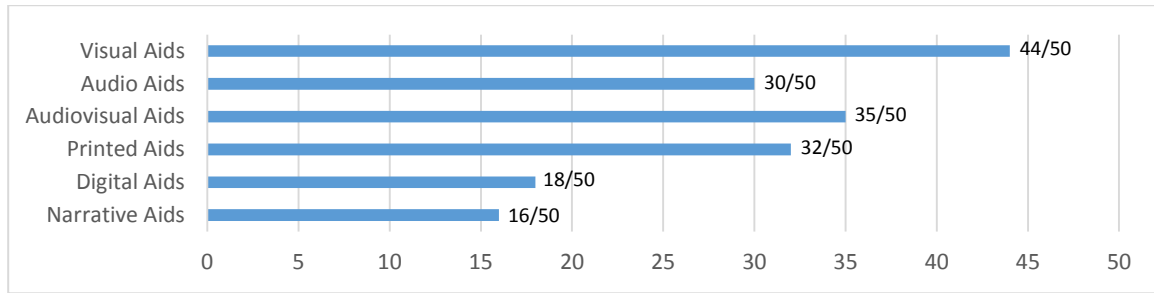


Figure 2. Students' Learning Aids Preferences

II. Learning Activity

Figure 3 shows that the most preferred learning activity by second-year social work students are class discussions (82%), followed by lectures (80%), writing assignments (60%), reading assignments (46%), group projects (40%), peer teaching (34%), problem solving exercises and role playing (30%), case studies (28%), debates (24%), and simulations (12%). This implies that these students prefer to learn from teacher's instruction and tasks. Echiverri et al. (2020) describes class discussion as an invisible interaction between students and teachers that aims to enhance skills and expertise whereas Dallimore et al. (2024) shared that several students prefer more self-involvement to improve their learning. Conclusively, class discussions can foster peer learning and the development of students' capacity to extend their comprehension by allowing them to express course material in their own terms.

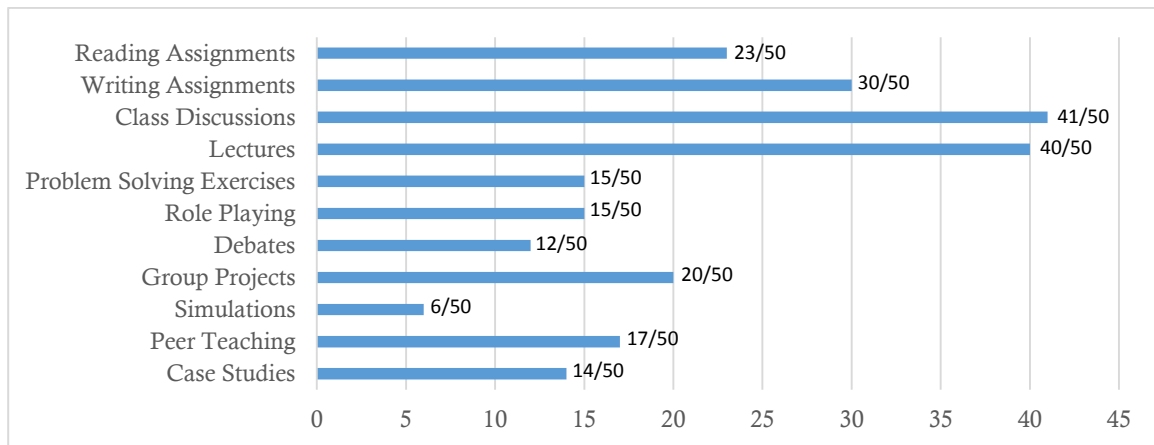


Figure 3. Students' Learning Activity Preferences

Needs Analysis on Social Work Students' Macro Skill Lacks and Gaps

I. Reading

The reading test measured lexical, applied, interpretive, affective, and literal reading comprehension levels. Results revealed that 94.2% of the students correctly answered the lexical level questions, 70% correctly answered the applied level questions, 66.4% correctly answered the interpretive level questions, 44% correctly answered the literal level questions, while 43.6% correctly answered the affective level questions. Apparently, their strength lies in lexical and applied reading skills which shows a good grasp of the English language and a satisfactory application of information. Nonetheless, a deficiency in affective reading skills points to possible difficulties in perceiving and communicating attitudes or feelings. Using the statistical

results of the reading comprehension test, Figure 4 shows that the SW students are generally in C1 level or advanced readers.

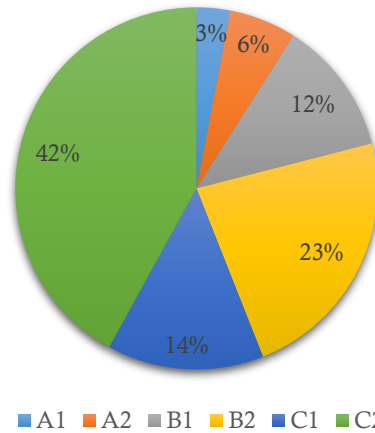


Figure 4. CEFR Level of the Social Work Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

II. Writing

The writing test was measured according to content, communicative achievement, organization, and language. Results revealed that content, communicative achievement, and language placed the students in B1 level with a \bar{X} of 3.34, 2.72, and 2.70 respectively, whereas organization placed the students in A2 level with a \bar{X} of 2.48. This implies that they knew what to write, how to articulate their ideas, and how to use the English language, yet they struggled with how to consolidate these together to construct coherent paragraphs. Using the \bar{X} scores of the writing test, Figure 5 shows the CEFR levels of the SW students. Notably, no student reached C1 and C2 levels.

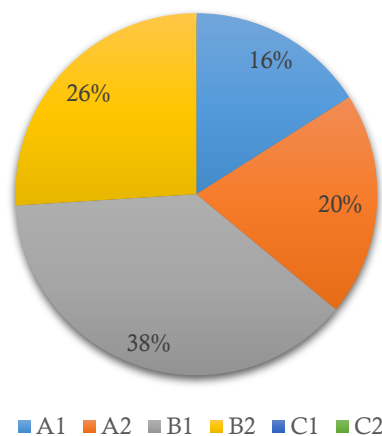


Figure 5. CEFR Level of the Social Work Students' Writing Proficiency Skills

III. Listening

The listening test measured their general listening comprehension skill. Figure 6 revealed that 56% of the students were upper-intermediate listeners (B2 level), 18% were intermediate listeners (B1 level), 12% were advanced listeners (C1 level) and elementary listeners (A2 level), 2% were proficient listeners (C2 level), whereas no

beginner listener (A1 level) was identified. This implies that majority of the SW students can understand standard language or familiar varieties, both live and broadcast, of both familiar and unfamiliar topics typically encountered in personal, social, academic, or vocational life.

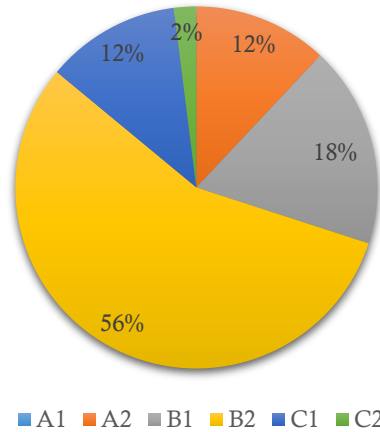


Figure 6. CEFR Level of the Social Work Students' Listening Proficiency Skills

D. Speaking

The speaking assessment was measured according to range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. Results revealed that the students are at best in a basic to independent level of competence in spoken English. This means that they either have adequate speaking competence to use simple and familiar everyday expressions or are capable to communicate with a degree of spontaneity that is enough to converse to native speakers without strain for either party. Shown in Figure 7 is the summary of the students' speaking skills.

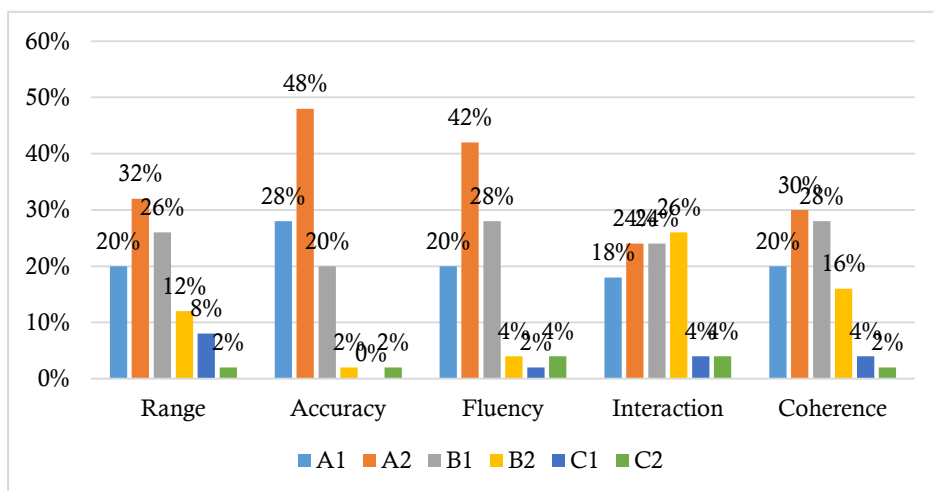


Figure 7. CEFR Level of the Social Work Students' Speaking Skills

CONCLUSION

Through needs analysis, the researchers determined the wants, lacks, and gaps of 50 social work students which are essential for their academic development and professional success. The students' learning aids preferences are more traditionalist and

simplistic which raises concern since social work students need more immersion in real-life applications. Additionally, their preferred learning activities suggests that instructor input is integral and output production through writing is most favored. Meanwhile, the students' proficiency in macro skills are generally average or more than average. The findings suggest that application, evaluation, and production should be focused more along with more contextualized and immersive learning activities and learning aids that incorporate variation and encourage spontaneous production.

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