

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This special project seeks to determine the English language needs of first-year MBA students at Payap University. It is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the rationale, objectives, significance and scope of the study as well as defines terms used in the study. Chapter 2 covers a literature review on the theoretical issues in needs analysis, needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an overview of needs analysis, and related research on needs analysis. The methodology of this study is described in Chapter 3: the subjects of study, the instrument employed, the procedures, and the analysis of data. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 summarises the results of the study, discusses implications, and proposes recommendations for further research.

1.1 Rationale and significance of the study

Needs analysis is a prerequisite in the planning of language courses. According to Yalden (1983), needs analysis is sometimes referred to as needs assessment. Richards (1984) and Jordan (1997) point out that needs analysis is the logical starting point for developing curriculum and syllabus. Richard further states that needs analysis "... provides a way of obtaining wider input into the content, the design and the implementation of a language programme." Needs analysis is a tool which is widely used both in developing new courses and in re-evaluating existing course content, teaching methods and materials.

In the field of ESP, needs analysis focuses on the learner. Strevens (1980) points out that ESP "... is based on a close analysis of the learner's communicative needs for a specific occupation or activity, as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity." According to Robinson (1980), "An ESP course is

purposeful and aimed at the successful performance of occupational or educational roles. It is based on a rigorous analysis of learner needs”

Fundamental to an ESP approach of needs analysis is understanding the learner’s purpose for learning English (Hutchinson and Waters 1993). The emphasis of needs analysis is on the collection of data in terms of both the learner’s ‘target’ needs (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and ‘learning’ needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn). The data is analysed and used to make decisions on appropriate language content and methodology to meet the learner’s specific area of need or interest. The rationale is that when the programme or course is relevant to learner needs and personal goals, motivation will be enhanced and learning will thus be facilitated (Brindley 1989). It is this rationale that prompts the study to determine the English language needs of first-year students in the MBA Department at Payap University.

At Payap University, first-year MBA students are required to take Course BA502: “English for Graduate Studies” either in the first or second semester of the academic year. The course aims to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Since its introduction in 1992, no formal study or survey of the English language needs of students taking this course has been undertaken. As such, a needs analysis that documents information on the students and their needs and difficulties in learning and using English would be useful. The data collected will provide feedback to the instructors and the MBA Department. Based on the feedback, informed choices and decisions could be made to adapt or revise course content and methodology to meet the particular needs of the students in the class. ✓

In addition, the findings of this study can serve as input to the MBA Department for the development of future business English courses for students at Payap University. The results will provide guidelines for the design of these courses to better meet the needs of students.

To summarise, this study has implications for the MBA Department at Payap University as well as the instructors in terms of curriculum development, syllabus design, methodology and materials selection in relation to Course BA502. Lastly, the recommendations of this study can be used as a springboard for further research in other aspects of needs analysis related to business English language learning.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the project are:

1. to determine the needs of the first-year students in the MBA Department at Payap University in learning English language skills.
2. to identify the degree of difficulty the first-year MBA students have in using English language skills in relation to their field of work or intended field of work.

1.3 Scope and limitations of the study

1. This study focuses only on first-year MBA students at Payap University who are taking Course BA502 in the second semester of the academic year 1998/1999.
2. It is limited to documenting and drawing a profile of the first-year MBA students in terms of their English language needs and the degree of difficulty they have in using English language skills in relation to their field of work or intended field of work.
3. Data is collected from the first-year MBA students, through the use of questionnaire only.
4. There are many types of needs analysis under an ESP approach of needs analysis. The two types used in this study are Target-situation analysis and Present-situation analysis.
5. Although needs analysis is usually done as a means of syllabus specification and curriculum development (Munby 1978, Yalden 1983, Brindley 1989, Jordan 1997), there is only an attempt made to improve the syllabus of Course BA502 for this semester based on the results of the study.

1.4 Definition of terms

Needs:

The needs to be determined in this study refer to the 'target' needs and 'learning' needs of first-year MBA students in relation to Course BA502.

Target needs:

The English language needs of the first-year MBA students in relation to their field of work or intended field of work.

An analysis of the target needs of students is known as Target-situation analysis.

Learning needs:

The preferred learning modes of the first-year MBA students - the types of classroom activities, styles of learning, and the correction and evaluation preferred by the students.

Difficulty:

The students' perception of their present ability in using English language skills in relation to their work or intended field of work.

An analysis of the difficulty or present ability of students is known as Present-situation analysis.

English language skills:

The four main English skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing.

ESP approach to needs analysis:

An approach to needs analysis which "aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English." (Robinson 1991: 3)

There are many types of needs analysis under an ESP approach of needs analysis. The types of needs analysis used in this study are Target-situation analysis and Present-situation analysis.

1.5 Abbreviations

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

MBA: Master of Business Administration

M: Mean

N: Number of subjects / respondents

SD: Standard Deviation

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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