

Needs Analysis: Undergraduates' Evaluation of a University-wide English Language Course

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Needs analysis in language teaching aims not only to identify the needs and wants of language users, but it also aims to assess the outcome of courses. This article reports on a study which used needs analysis to investigate undergraduates' perceptions of their language needs and their progress on a university-wide Use of English course. The study reported in this article surveyed two hundred and four (204) first-year undergraduates to find out how they rated the importance of different language skills across six faculties and how they rated the effect of the course on the development of their academic language skills. Results from this study revealed a mismatch between undergraduates' perception of their development in the language course and their actual development. This study suggests that needs analysis is a useful tool for gaining insights into issues related to academic language development.

Key words: Needs analysis; language skills; evaluation; undergraduates

Introduction

Undergraduates in many Caribbean universities are required to take Use of English or English for Academic Purpose (EAP) courses in their first year of study. This requirement exists although undergraduates would have been exposed to English Language as a subject in secondary schools, and they would have had to obtain passing grades (1 – 3) in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) English Language (English 'A') examination to qualify for entry into the university. Many of these EAP courses emerged out of the need to develop language skills which were believed to be essential for university students (Winford, 1973), and the need to address inadequate development in written language proficiency (Dyche, 1996; McLaren & Webber, 2009; Ramsay, 2011) in light of persistent complaints from faculty about undergraduates' poor academic language skills (McLaren & Webber, 2009). However, while faculties have complained consistently about undergraduates' poor academic language skills, not many studies in this context have sought to evaluate the outcome of language courses which are used in many instances (Simmons-Mc Donald, 2004).

One study, Dyche (1996), sought to evaluate whether students' level of written English was related to their academic success. She investigated the relationship between first-year undergraduates' level of writing proficiency in English and their academic success (end of first-year results in all subjects and in individual subject areas) across two years (1988 and 1999). Dyche (1996) drew undergraduates from two faculties (Natural Sciences and Arts and General Studies) and compared the academic performance of three groups. One group had passed a proficiency essay and grammar test and was exempted from a year-long Fundamentals of English course. The second group had failed the proficiency test and was required to complete the

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Fundamentals of English course. The third group had failed both the proficiency test and the Fundamentals of English course. Dyche (1996) found that undergraduates who had failed both the proficiency test and the Fundamentals of English course had the lowest percentage of passes across the faculties.

Dyche's (1996) study highlighted important issues in developing written English proficiency in a Caribbean setting. These issues include the relationship between the discipline-specific role given to writing and the nature of first-year undergraduates' evaluations. For example, she found that while some faculties expressed concern about undergraduates' low level of written English proficiency, even in cases where undergraduates' were required to write essays in evaluations, content and analytical ability determined failure. Undergraduates were not penalised for poor English grammar and weak expressions. Notwithstanding these issues, Dyche's (1996) study aimed to determine whether undergraduates' academic performance in content courses yielded useful information about the impact of their written English proficiency. What English language skills undergraduates perceive that they need to be successful in their academic studies appears not to have been addressed in the research literature.

Significance of the study

Given the importance of developing academic language skills in this context, there is need for more empirical studies to shed light on the usefulness of English courses which are designed to develop general academic language skills. If course instructors are to provide adequate support for developing academic language skills, then they need data which can help them to understand the issues related to undergraduates' academic language development. This present study attempts to provide this kind of information. This type of study has the potential to fill a gap in Caribbean research and also provide information that is critical to course instructors.

This study's focus on the outcome of a *Use of English* course suggested that needs analysis was the most appropriate way for course instructors to gain insights into undergraduates' perceptions of the effects of the course on the development of their academic language skills. This study analysed undergraduates' self reports to find out what language skills undergraduates considered to be important for success in their faculties and how they perceived the *Use of English* course to contribute to the development of academic language skills. Knowledge of learner's language needs and the relationship between language courses and other academic courses can be potentially useful to course instructors who seek to design effective EAP courses (Hyland, 2006; Hinkel, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Needs analysis in language teaching

Needs analysis has long been considered an important feature of language teaching and learning because it plays a critical role in course design and evaluation (Belcher, 2006; Munby, 1978). While needs analysis draws on an eclectic range of theories, including genre and critical theories (Hyland, 2008) to develop and assess the outcomes of courses (Basturkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), needs analysis should not be regarded as a short-term activity. According to Hyland (2006, p. 74), it is not a "done once then forgotten activity"; it is a dynamic reactive process of questioning and revising that is "behind every successful EAP course".

Though conducting needs analysis might be considered time consuming, its focus on situated teaching and learning contexts through systematic data collection and analysis (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2006) could provide insights into learners' struggle to develop

academic language skills in teaching and learning contexts. For example, needs analysis can provide better understanding of potential mismatches between language courses and learners' needs and also between language courses and other content courses (Bovill et al., 2011; Gimenez, 2008). In terms of course development, findings from needs analysis are likely to provide opportunities for instructors to access knowledge about the relative importance of different features of language courses (Basturkmen, 1998; Belcher, 2006).

Needs analysis in university settings

In university settings, the goals for aligning needs analysis research with language teaching do not only include building empirically validated data into course programs (Oanh, 2007); very importantly, they also include balancing top-down approaches with bottom-up approaches to curriculum decisions (Basturkmen, 1998; Leki & Carson, 1994). For example, Basturkmen (1998) conducted a needs analysis project with engineering undergraduates at a University in Kuwait to provide information concerning the use of English by students. From qualitative and quantitative methodology and data from both faculty and undergraduates, Basturkmen (1998) found similarities and differences in a number of areas. Both faculty and undergraduates gave the following order of priority for language tasks: reading textbooks, writing up lab reports/lab assignments and following lectures. However, faculty perceived both reading and listening to be almost equally important while undergraduates considered listening to be far more important than reading. In addition, faculty perceived undergraduates to have inadequate language skills while only few students perceived their language skills to be inadequate in any other area except speaking (Basturkmen, 1998). Information collected from the users in Basturkmen's (1998) study was useful to determine curriculum reorientation and redefine the roles for the English Language Unit at the top level.

Combining such bottom-up approaches with top-down approaches in curriculum decisions is important because undergraduates' perceptions of language needs can influence how receptive they are to learning (Horwitz, 1987; Leki & Carson, 1994). Dyche (1996) suggested that if students perceive that there is a lack of focus on weak expressions, then they might not be motivated to improve their writing skills. In addition, analysis of undergraduates' perceptions of language needs can also expose gaps between students and instructors' understanding of what needs to be learnt. These gaps are likely to be potential sites for language learning difficulties (Lea & Street, 1998).

Research on undergraduates' perceptions of language courses

To determine how well courses prepare undergraduates to develop academic language proficiency, research studies have focused on gathering data from undergraduates who are engaged in language courses in different language learning settings and across different disciplines (Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Basturkmen, 1998; Chan, 2001; Chostelidou, 2010; Elsami, 2010). In seminal studies, Christison and Krahnke (1986) used structured interviews to gather data from 80 second language (L2) undergraduates. These undergraduates who had completed language intensive courses across five universities reported that listening and reading were the most important skills in their academic studies. Undergraduates considered writing in academic tasks to be a less important skill.

In another study, Leki and Carson (1994) surveyed ESL undergraduates enrolled in university-level content courses at a university in the United States. They investigated seventy-seven (77) undergraduates' perceptions of the relationship between instructions they received in

their ESL writing classes and actual writing tasks that they were required to perform in courses across their disciplines. Leki and Carson's study (1994) indicated that undergraduates credited areas such as planning, outlining and drafting and those related to reading, for example, knowing the material, selecting, summarizing and synthesizing relevant and important details, and managing sources for success in developing writing proficiency. The most frequently expressed specific needs from the ESL writing course were vocabulary and grammar, but similar to Dyche's (1996) study, these specific areas of need appeared not to have adversely affected undergraduates' grades (Leki & Carson, 1994).

Later needs analysis studies such as Chan (2001) used a questionnaire survey to investigate, among others, undergraduates' perception of language needs in all the departments at a university in Hong Kong. Undergraduates identified reading and speaking at seminars and meetings to be very important for academic study. Taken together, these studies which have examined undergraduates' perception of their needs through their evaluation of courses have provided relevant information for course instructors. However, these kinds of studies which indicated areas of needs for general language skills and provided information for improving courses appear to be non-existent in Caribbean universities where undergraduates are exposed to EAP courses in their first year. This study adds another context to the existing literature.

The study

The purpose of this study was to investigate undergraduates' perceptions of English language needs across faculties at a university in Guyana. Language needs in this study referred to language skills which undergraduates consider to be necessary for their success in academic study. The study also investigated undergraduates' perceptions of the usefulness of the *Use of English* course in developing their academic language skills. Many faculties have complained that their students' English language skills are weak, and the *Use of English* courses appear not to be helping students to develop their academic English language skills. Therefore, this study sought to access information which can prove useful to the *Use of English* course instructors. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1 What are undergraduates' perceptions of their language needs in their faculties?
- 2 How do the undergraduates rate the usefulness of the course in developing academic language skills?

The Language course

Structure

The *Use of English* course (ENG 115) is one of two English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses offered formally through the Department of Language and Cultural Studies. It is conducted in Semester 1, and it is a compulsory course for mainly first-year undergraduates across faculties in the university. This fifteen-week course comprises four (4) credit hours, divided into two (2) hours of lectures and two (2) hours of tutorials per week. Lectures are delivered by a main lecturer to very large groups of undergraduates, over two hundred (200), in one two-hour session. Tutorials are done by individual lecturers with smaller groups, approximately forty undergraduates. In this course, 50% of the total marks are awarded for course work assessments and 50% for final examinations. Coursework assessments consist of in-class tests. These tests include reading comprehension and essay writing. For the academic year 2012 – 2013, the average course grade in the writing section of the exam was D. The average

course grade in the comprehension section was also D, one grade away from the failing grade F on a grading scheme as follows: A:75 – 100; B:65 – 74; C:55 – 64; D:45 – 54; F:0 – 44.

Methodology

Design

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), descriptive research can produce statistical information about aspects of education that are of interest to policy makers and educators. Our focus on providing course instructors with insights into language development issues suggested that a cross-sectional survey design would be an appropriate way to investigate language needs.

Instrument

Questionnaires were administered to mainly first-year undergraduates at the university. The questionnaires are divided into two sections. Section 1 consisted of two (2) questions which were designed to elicit background information about the undergraduates in two key areas: (1) faculty in which they were registered and (2) their English language experience prior to attending university. In a case where undergraduates were not given a diagnostic assessment upon entry, combining dimensions of prior language experience and faculty seemed important to cater for a group that was not homogenous in all respects. Section 2 consisted of five (5) questions, which sought to provide answers for research questions 1 & 2, undergraduates' perceptions of language needs across faculties and the effects of the *Use of English* course on their English language skills. We believed that framing undergraduates' language needs and the effects of the course on their English language skills in the context of content courses in their faculties could provide data which is important for differentiating needs.

Sample and Population

Participants in this study were a purposive sample of two hundred and four (204) undergraduates drawn from two different campuses (Turkeyen and Berbice) and across six (6) faculties: Social Sciences (SS) (34), Natural Sciences (NS) (34), School of Education and Humanities (SEH) (34), Technology (TEC) (34), Health Sciences (HS) (34) and Agriculture and Forestry (AGF) (34). The highest number of questionnaires which was fully completed by one faculty was thirty four (34). This number determined how many samples were selected from each faculty. Purposive sampling was used to allow comparisons to be made across faculties. Apart from faculty differences in undergraduate groups, other differences existed. One hundred and eighty (180) undergraduates were in transition from secondary schools, with passing Grades (1 – 3) in Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) English 'A' exam. Twelve (12) had Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) certificates, and eight (8) were undergraduates who did not pass CSEC English 'A' but had passed the university's English Qualifying Exam (EQE). Four (4) were undergraduates who had majored in English Language at the Teacher's Training College.

Ethical considerations

Undergraduates were informed of the nature of the research and how the information collected in the study would be used. They were assured that questionnaire responses would be anonymous and participation or non-participation would not affect their course grades.

Procedure

The questionnaires used in this study to gather undergraduates' perceptions of their English language needs were adapted from Basturkmen (1998) and Bacha and Bahous (2008). It was believed that questionnaire items similar to those used in these contexts could provide information useful to investigating undergraduates learning English for academic studies in this particular context. Questionnaire items also drew on the content of the course outline to provide answers for research question 2, the usefulness of the course.

Pilot study

Questionnaires were first piloted on a group of twenty undergraduates who had completed the same language course across different faculties during the previous academic year. Following this pilot study, the language in some areas of the questionnaires were revised, and questionnaires were directly administered to undergraduates (2012 – 2013). Questionnaires were administered to undergraduates who had attended the course, made more than 75% attendance and were eligible to write the final examinations. Because we wanted a high response rate, questionnaires were administered after undergraduates had completed the *Use of English* course, and before they had written the final examinations. One faculty (Health Sciences) could not be accessed before final examinations, so undergraduates in this faculty who had written the final exams were provided with questionnaires just after the final examinations. Because we wanted a high response rate, questionnaires were administered and collected by lecturers in the Department of Language and Cultural Studies. Participants were required to complete the questionnaires using the traditional paper and pencil.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analysed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS statistical package Version 19.

Results

The results are presented according to research questions.

Research Question 1: What are undergraduates' perceptions of their language needs in their faculties?

To answer this research question, undergraduates were required to indicate which of the four English language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) they found to be most important for their success in other courses in their faculties. They were also required to indicate which items under each skill were most important for their other courses. The results for this question are displayed in Tables 1 – 5.

Table 1

Skills most important for undergraduates' success in other courses

Skills	Faculties					
	AGF n=34	SEH n=34	HS n=34	NS n=34	SS n=34	TEC n=34
Reading	47%	53%	74%	35%	94%	59%
Listening	44%	38%	35%	38%	73%	47%
Speaking	35%	26%	24%	12%	56%	29%
Writing	21%	57%	38%	41%	76%	41%

Overall, as is evident in Table 1, most of the faculties rated reading as the skill most important to their success in other courses. More than half of the undergraduates in Health Sciences (HS) (74%), Social Sciences (SS) (94%) and Technology (TEC) (59%) gave the highest rating to reading. Just under half of the students in Agriculture and Forestry (AGF) (47%) gave the highest rating to reading. In contrast, writing was rated as the most important by two faculties: School of Education and Humanities (SEH) (57%) and Natural Sciences (NS) (41%).

Table 2

Items (under reading skill) most important for undergraduates other courses

Reading	Faculties					
	AGF n=34	SEH n=34	HS n=34	NS n=34	SS n=34	TEC n=34
Textbooks	73%	79%	76%	74%	100%	71%
Articles in journals	26%	50%	35%	18%	41%	21%
Manuals	29%	38%	35%	15%	38%	32%
Course handout	67%	47%	47%	74%	100%	79%
Instructions for assignments or projects	94%	68%	59%	56%	97%	68%
Instructions for labs	76.4%	38%	71%	59%	76%	41%
Study notes	50%	45%	57%	62%	48%	62.5%

As Table 2 indicates, most of the faculties rated reading textbooks as most important for their other courses. Approximately three quarters of the undergraduates in School of Education and Humanities (79%), Health Sciences (76%) and Natural Sciences (74%) identified reading textbooks as the most important while the entire sample (100%) from Social Science rated reading textbooks as the most important component under the Reading Skills. Course handouts were rated equally as important as textbooks by Natural Sciences (74%) and Social Sciences (100%). Instructions for assignments or projects were identified as most important by most of the undergraduates in the faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (94%).

Table 3

Items (under writing skill) most important for undergraduates other courses

Writing	Faculties					
	AGF	SEH	HS	NS	SS	TEC
	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34
Lab reports	53%	44%	62%	62%	50%	62%
Assignment	62%	41%	30%	47%	100%	44%
Field trip reports	53%	47%	35%	50%	44%	35%
Essays	50%	79%	65%	59%	100%	56%
Critical reviews	26%	56%	59%	53%	71%	44%
Project reports	59%	67%	32%	56%	79%	65%
Notes in lecture	74%	70%	50%	56%	100%	58%

Table 3 shows that there were diverse writing needs in the different faculties. More than half of the undergraduates in School of Education and Humanities (79%), Health Sciences (65%) and all of the undergraduates in Social Sciences (100%) identified writing essays as most important for other courses. All of the undergraduates in Social Sciences (100%) also identified assignment and notes in lecture as equally important as essays. Close to three quarters of the undergraduates in Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (74%) rated notes in lecture as most important while over half of the undergraduates in Technology (65%) rated project reports and Natural Sciences (62%) rated lab reports as most important.

Table 4

Items (under speaking skill) most important for undergraduates other courses

Speaking	Faculties					
	AGF	SEH	HS	NS	SS	TEC
	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34	n=34
Discussion	67%	59%	47%	47%	94%	71%
Ask questions	56%	56%	47%	44%	76%	50%
Oral presentation	59%	71%	85%	50%	76%	50%
Answer questions	47%	50%	55%	44%	76%	47%

Table 4 indicates that faculties were divided in their rating of items (under speaking skill) as most important for courses. Agriculture and Forestry (67%), Social Sciences (94%) and Technology (71%) identified discussion as most important for other courses. School of Education and Humanities (56%), Health Sciences (85%) and Natural Sciences (50%) rated oral presentation as most important.

Table 5

Items (under listening skill) most important for other courses

Listening	Faculties					
	AGF n=34	SEH n=34	HS n=34	NS n=34	SS n=34	TEC n=34
Lectures	74%	76%	82%	88%	100%	74%
Presentation	53%	71%	65%	68%	88%	56%
General instructions	56%	62%	68%	26%	100%	62%
Instruction for assignments	65%	59%	56%	68%	100%	53%
Participate in discussion	59%	62%%	50%	44%	82%%	56%
Ask questions in class	59%	50%	53%	47%	67%	47%

Table 5 shows that faculties were homogenous in their rating of items (under listening skill) most important for courses. Most of the undergraduates in all the faculties rated listening to lectures as most important for courses. Also, Social Sciences (100%) rated listening to general instructions and instructions for assignment as equally important as listening to lectures.

Research Question 2: How do undergraduates rate the usefulness of the course in developing language skills?

To answer this research question, undergraduates were required to (1) rate the usefulness of the course in developing specific language skills, (2) state their agreement with statements on the overall effects of the course on their English language skills and (3) determine areas of the course which developed these skills.

Table 6

Usefulness of the course in developing specific language skills

Language Skills	Ratings			
	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Reading	70%	37%	3%	0%
Writing	44%	46%	9%	3%
Speaking	36%	62%	6%	5%
Listening	54%	42%	4%	3%
English Grammar	42%	55%	6%	7%
Vocabulary	38%	59%	7%	6%

Table 6 indicates the results of undergraduates' rating of the usefulness of the course in developing specific language skills. Undergraduates' perception of this effect of the course was more positive for reading than it was for any other language skill. More than half of the undergraduates (70%) reported very good effects of the course on reading abilities. This area was closely followed by listening (54%). For good effects, Speaking (62%), Vocabulary (59%) and English Grammar (55%) were rated higher than writing (46%).

To easily identify areas for consideration in course development, in Tables 7 and 8, directional responses on either sides of the mid-points of the scales in the questionnaires are combined into single categories, agree and disagree, and very important and not very important respectively.

Table 7

Overall effect of the course

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Effective writer	80%	8%	12%
Effective reader	45%	3%	52%
Effective listener	42%	1%	57%
Effective speaker	42%	2%	56%
Confused	31%	30%	39 %

Table 7 reveals undergraduates' agreement or disagreement with statements on the overall effects of the course on their English language skills. Most undergraduates (80 %) agreed that the course had made them effective writers. This rating was followed by effective reader (45%), and effective listeners and speakers (42%) respectively. Further, 39% of the undergraduates disclosed that the course did not confuse them.

Table 8

Areas of the course most useful to developing their English language skills

Areas of Course	Most Important	Important	Not very important
Guyanese linguistic context	51%	11%	38%
Reading comprehension	62%	22%	16%
Organising essays	77%	10%	13%
Using primary and secondary sources	66%	8%	26%
Grammar	75%	9%	16%
Editing, proofreading and redrafting	63%	10%	27%

Table 8 indicates areas of the course which undergraduates perceived to develop their English language skills. Most undergraduates (77%) rated organizing essays as most important. This rating was closely followed by Grammar (75%). Undergraduates responded similarly to Reading Comprehension (62%) and Editing, proofreading and redrafting (63%) as the most important areas of the course that were useful to developing their language skills. While two thirds of the undergraduates (66%) indicated that using primary and secondary sources was most important for them to develop their language skills, just about half of them (51%) rated Guyanese linguistic context to be most important.

Discussion

This study investigated undergraduates' perceptions of their academic English language needs. It also determined their perceptions of the effects of the course in developing specific and general language skills. Generally, the study indicated that undergraduates' language needs vary

according to faculties, and while the present focus of the *Use of English* course accommodates to some of the perceived needs, there are some gaps in the course.

Consistent with the findings reported in studies conducted by Leki and Carson (1994) and in part Christison and Krahne (1986), undergraduates in this study identified reading and writing as the skills most important to their success in their content courses. However, faculties were divided on the relative importance of these two skills for success in content courses. Four faculties gave higher ratings to reading. Similar to Basturkmen (1998) reading textbooks was considered most important by most faculties. Two faculties gave higher ratings to writing essays and lab reports. One possible explanation for this difference in the importance of skills could be the types of evaluations which the faculties use. Possibly, most faculties use evaluations which require extensive reading to provide short answers and responses to multiple choice items while the other faculties use evaluations which require much more writing such as producing extended essays and reports. This finding is important, as Dyche (1996) pointed out that if faculties use evaluations which place little emphasis on writing, then undergraduates might not be motivated to improve their writing proficiency.

In addition, this study indicates a positive finding for organizing essays and grammar in the *Use of English Course*. Most undergraduates indicated that organizing essays and grammar was most useful to developing their language skills. Again, this finding supports in part those of Leki and Carson's (1994) study in which L2 undergraduates across universities credited organizing essays as extremely useful to developing their writing proficiency. However, in the first semester of undergraduates' studies, there is a range of writing tasks, including field trips, lab and project reports, and content assignments. The exclusive focus of the course on one writing task, the essay, which is perceived to be important in the Humanities and Health Sciences, appears not to be aligned with the writing needs of undergraduates in the other faculties who identified lab reports, project reports and content assignments as the most important tasks in their faculties. This is a possible reason for over half of the undergraduates rating the specific development of writing skills lower than other skills such as reading and listening. Thus, there appears to be a gap between some of the first-year undergraduates' writing requirement and the content of the *Use of English* course. Bridging this gap is important; as Dyche (1996) indicated, gaps between the discipline-specific roles given to writing and what undergraduates are formally taught in language courses could also be possible factors that demotivate students to improve their writing proficiency. Information about the communication demands of different faculties which is accessed from the faculties could provide further support for this claim.

In addition, this study found that under the skill of speaking, undergraduates in most of the faculties rated oral presentation and discussion as most important to their other courses. These results are consistent with those found by Chan (2001) for undergraduates in an EFL context. Undergraduates identified speaking at seminars and meetings to be very important for academic study. Thus, this study indicates a gap between the course content and the language needs of the faculties in this area. While undergraduates frequently engage in discussions and oral presentations in their content courses, oral language skills are not formally targeted in the *Use of English* course. In view of undergraduates' perception of the importance of oral presentations and discussions, teacher-fronted lecturing mode of course delivery may need to be reduced to provide undergraduates with more opportunities to make oral presentations and participate in more interactive sessions. Also, oral presentations may need to be explicitly taught to make the course more relevant to undergraduates' needs.

This study also found that there is a correspondence between undergraduates' self-assessment of the specific language skill most developed by the course and the skill considered most important for their success in their faculties. Most of the undergraduates indicated that the specific language ability most developed by the course was reading, which was also considered most important for their success in other courses by four faculties. This response is not surprising given that a major section of the course focuses on reading comprehension. For the course to develop other language skills such as writing, much more attention needs to be focused on the course content – possibly including other writing tasks besides essays.

Similar to Basturkmen's study (1998), this study also found that there appears to be a mismatch between undergraduates' self-assessment of the general language skill developed by the course and anecdotes from their lecturers as well as their course grades for the writing section. The undergraduates perceived that, overall, the course made them more effective writers than readers, speakers or listeners. However, anecdotal evidence from lecturers across faculties indicates that the level of undergraduates' writing proficiency is inadequate. Also, the average course grade for the writing section of the paper was D (45 – 54), one grade away from a fail grade (F). Thus, this study indicates a gap between undergraduates and instructors' understanding of what is good writing. As Lea and Street (1998) have indicated, these gaps are likely to be potential sites for language learning difficulties.

Reasons for undergraduates' positive perception of the overall impact of the course on their writing skills could be due in part to special emphasis given to this ability in tests in the course, and that often many undergraduates who would have failed the writing section are able to pass the course overall when their comprehension scores and writing scores are combined. Another possible reason for undergraduates having difficulties with objectively assessing their own writing could be their inability to distinguish poor writing from effective writing because of unfamiliarity with both non-standard and standard forms of English in both written and spoken modes (Ramsay, 2011). This study thus suggests that opportunities should be provided in the course for undergraduates to be explicitly made aware of difference between effective writing and poor writing in academic contexts.

Implications

The findings of this study could have implications for course instructors. First, course instructors should be aware that different faculties may require different types of language support. Thus, they should identify from the various faculties which language skills are relevant to them in the first year of undergraduate study. This kind of inquiry would allow courses to be made more relevant to undergraduates' needs (Long, 2005).

Second, it is important for the Language Department to recognize that the traditional language support provided in English for General Academic Purpose courses might not be relevant to the language tasks which are in use in some faculties. Thus, they need to work collaboratively with other faculties to identify how best undergraduates can be initiated into the academic community and meet the language demands of academic study in their respective faculties (Bacha & Bahous, 2008; McLaren & Webber, 2009).

Conclusion

In university settings, researchers have recognized the importance of needs analysis to continually refine courses and make them relevant to the language needs of undergraduate populations and disciplinary fields (Belcher, 2006; Gimenez, 2008). This study focused very

generally on language skills and text types, and the quantitative findings alone do not provide conclusive evidence to suggest what specifically should be changed in the language course, but they indicate how course instructors can use needs analysis to assess the outcomes of their courses (Basturkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) and identify various forms of academic language support that undergraduates might require.

Future studies that seek to use current needs analysis in this context should combine both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive picture of undergraduates' language needs. Also, because needs is complex and multifaceted (Elsami, 2010), and undergraduates' perception of what they need might not necessarily be what their instructors or their faculties require, it is important for future studies to include faculty perceptions of undergraduates' language needs. Comparisons of language needs identified by faculty with those identified by undergraduates might lead to a more comprehensive understanding of needs.

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