

# **To what extent does the EFL programme respond to business students' needs and the Saudi business community language requirements?**

**Ahmed M. Alghamdi**

**Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK**

**ahmed.alghamdi@ncl.ac.uk**

## **Abstract**

*The aim of the study is twofold: first, to study the language skills and components of the EFL courses offered to students of business administration. Second, the study will investigate to what extent these courses have been successful in providing the necessary language skills for prospective business graduates. This study, therefore, attempts to investigate the aims and objectives of the EFL courses specific to business students, and then examine the target situation needs of a group of private sector organisations in order to determine whether the objectives of the EFL courses are in line with the language needs of the job market; if not, where do the discrepancies lie? Finally, the hope is to propose a coherent framework 'syllabus design' wherein academic and workplace language needs can be integrated to enhance students' immediate and future achievement.*

**Key Words:** Needs analysis, Stakeholders, Job market, Target situation needs, Present situation needs

## **1. Introduction**

Bridging the gap between what is taught in schools and universities and English language needs at the workplace will prepare students to meet the needs and expectations of the business world after their academic profession (Forey, 2004; Sidey, 1999; Warscheuer, 2001). Different students have different needs and the information gathered through needs analysis would help teachers to make choices as to what to teach (Graves, 1996; Richards, 2001). A number of researches have also indicated that teaching and learning of English in universities where English is a foreign language can noticeably help students to excel in their majors and professional contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Belcher, 2004; Seshadri & Theye, 2001). With the increased competition in the current global economical markets and the rapidly changing world, it is considerably important for the Saudi higher education institutions to continuously improve the quality of the teaching and learning processes. This research aims to investigate and evaluate the current English language courses in a Saudi university and their responsiveness to the students' immediate and future needs. The three stakeholders, the language and major subject lecturers, the students, and the private sectors have needs which will be examined in the context of the Saudi academic and business groups. The central aim of this study therefore is to propose a coherent framework in which academic and workplace language needs can be integrated to enhance students' immediate and future achievement (Stan, 1998).

## **2. Significance of the study**

The key aim of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of English as a foreign language (EFL) courses with respect to the needs and expectations of the three stakeholders involved in these courses: language teachers, business students; and a Saudi business community. The research attempts to examine the business students' immediate academic language needs and to investigate why many business graduates fail to meet the Saudi workplace language requirements. For validity and reliability of data collection processes, this research will take place in the context of the Saudi higher education institutions and business groups. The originality of the research project lies in the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no previous research that has investigated the potential effectiveness of the English language courses with respect to the language needs and expectations of the Saudi job market.

## **3. Statement of the problem**

Analyzing the students' immediate and future language needs has been discussed extensively in the literature (Nation, 1996; West, 1994). However, a review of the literature indicates that lack of deeply examining learners' language needs would create a gap between what is being taught in universities and the English language real use in the workplace. As a result, teachers in various disciplines usually complain that the EFL students were unable to cope with the language demands of the business major. Employers, also, maintained that university graduates lack the communicative skills which are needed in the workplace. This study will conduct a

language needs analysis. Its ultimate objective is to examine the EFL learners' language needs in business studies in order to provide data which might make the EFL courses more capable of equipping students with the necessary academic and professional language skills.

#### **4. Methodological Framework**

##### **4.1 The Research Questions**

The main objective of this research is based on the following central question:

*To what extent do the EFL courses respond to business students' needs and the Saudi business community language requirements?*

Research questions are designed in order to determine the adequacy of the EFL program outcomes to stakeholders involved. First, these questions examine the importance of English language for the three stakeholders. Second, whether they feel the EFL courses provide them with the necessary skills for the present academic and future professional needs. Finally, stakeholders will be asked to identify skills that should be included into these courses to accomplish their target language needs. In order to determine the appropriateness of these courses, the following sub questions will be researched.

1. Why is English language necessary in the Saudi higher education institutions?
2. What is the significance of English in the Saudi business community?
3. What are the English language skills that meet students' present and future language needs?
4. What are the requirements of the stakeholders regarding business English courses in the Saudi higher education institutions?
5. What are the requirements of the Saudi business community regarding business English courses?

##### **4.2 Research Population**

A questionnaire will be administered to 160 male and female students from the college of business administration who are enrolled as full time students at the university level. A questionnaire will also be given to 20 English language teachers and 20 business major lecturers and a third questionnaire will be administered to 10 Saudi private sector representatives. Interviews will also be conducted with 12 students, 6 teachers from each department, 6 private sector representatives and 6 graduates from the EFL program.

##### **4.3 Research Approach**

This study will use a mixed method approach for the data gathering process. Both types of data (Quantitative and Qualitative) can yield valuable information in any evaluation processes therefore ignoring either type of information would be pointless (Brown 1995: 57).

##### **4.4 Research design and Methods**

A number of data collection procedures and modes of analysis will be used with various stakeholders to answer the research questions. As can be seen from Table 4.5 (below) which provides an overview of the research questions and methods, the research involves both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. Survey questionnaires distributed among Saudi undergraduate business administration students, language and business lecturers, graduates employed in private sectors and private sector representatives will comprise the quantitative element of the methodology. Open ended and semi-structured interviews will form the basis of a complementary qualitative evaluation.

**Table: 1, Research Design and Methods**

Research Questions	Data Sources	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<p><b>Q1. Why is English necessary in the Saudi higher education institutions?</b></p> <p><b>Q2. What is the significance of English in the Saudi business community?</b></p> <p><b>Q3. What are the English language skills that meet students' present and future needs?</b></p>	<p><b>(a) Questionnaire:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students (N=160)</li> <li>• Language teachers (N=20)</li> <li>• Business lecturers (N=20)</li> <li>• Private sector representatives (N=10)</li> </ul> <p><b>(b) Interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students (N=12)</li> <li>• Language teachers (N=6)</li> <li>• Business lecturers (N=6)</li> </ul>	<p>Different question forms will be used throughout the questionnaires, including closed questions such as multiple choice, checklists, and Likert scales.</p> <p>A <b>semi-structured</b> interview will be used. The researcher will be taking notes, recording interviewees' opinions for data analysis and interpretation.</p>	<p>Statistical data will be analysed using SPSS The following measures will be used in the analysis:</p> <p>Frequencies, ANOVA, Chi-Square.</p>
<p><b>Q4. What are the requirements of the stakeholders regarding business English courses in the Saudi higher education institutions?</b></p> <p><b>Q5. What are the requirements of the Saudi business community regarding business English courses?</b></p>	<p><b>(c) Interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private sector representatives (N=5)</li> <li>• EFL program graduates (N=10)</li> </ul>	<p>All the interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Interviewees' responses will be analysed according to the main question areas and also to identify other language or program related issues that emerge</p>	

## 5. Conclusion

The current study is a contribution to the relentless efforts of the government to improve the outcomes of university education in general and particularly the English language programmes in order to meet the needs and expectations of the Saudi job market. The study also aims to explicate the nature and extent of the obvious discrepancy between the current practices in the EFL classroom and the actual learners' needs in business school: establishing the core language/learning skills for the academic and professional settings; and providing recommendations for improving the quality of the learning / teaching process of the EFL programme.

## 6. References

- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The Elements of Language Curriculum*: New York: Heinle & Heinle
- Belcher, D. (2004). Trends in teaching English for Specific Purposes. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (24), 165-169.
- Forey, G. (2004). 'Workplace texts: do they mean the same for teachers and business people?', *English for Specific Purposes*, (available on line-<http://www.sciencedirect.com>).
- Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as Course Developers*. In Graves, K. (eds) Cambridge:
- Richards, J. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* Cambridge: CUP
- Stan, K. (1998). Integrating Academic Standards and Workplace Skill Standards for a unified Education System. U.S. Department of Education. Available online at: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>. [Accessed the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, 16:10]
- Sidey, M. (1999). Writing in workplace and freshman writing classes: an imperative for relevancy. *ERIC Digest* No. 429315.
- Warscheuer, M. (2001). *Literacy and social process: a community in transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific purposes: A learning centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seshadri, S., & Theye, L. (2001). Professionals and professors: Substance or style? *Business Communication Quarterly*, 63 (3), 10-16.
- Nation, I. (1996). *Language Curriculum Design* Wellington: School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies Victorian University of Wellington
- West, R. (1994). Needs analysis in teaching: State of the art. *Language teaching/ learning* , 27, 1-10