

NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES IN UNIVERSITI SELANGOR – THE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract Needs analysis was conducted in order to identify 113 students’ perceptions toward the learning of language components (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) and language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) which are included in the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Universiti Selangor. The findings indicate that students acknowledge the importance of all the language components. However, most students think that vocabulary is difficult compared to grammar, whereas the least difficult component is pronunciation. More students are engaged in listening and reading activities compared to writing. Nevertheless, students responded that they have the least engagement in speaking activity. Similarly, students think that they are more developed in listening and reading skills but lack of development in writing and speaking skills. The findings of this study will assist the instructors and the institution to refine the syllabus and improve the approach in the teaching of EAP in Unisel.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes (EAP); Needs Analysis

1. Introduction

English for academic purposes (EAP) or also known as Academic English is one of the fields of language learning which is taught in most universities around the world including Malaysia. According to De Chazal (2014), the emergence of EAP is due to the effects of globalisation of education which have seen many tertiary institutions opening their places and offering their courses not only to local students, but also to international students.

The commercialisation of education is another factor that triggers the demand for education to play the roles in meeting the needs of the industry. In other words, the courses offered should be market driven. Therefore, most of the universities are currently tailoring their English language programs to cater to the needs of their clients i.e. the students, industry players and the society. This is to ensure that the students are well-equipped with the cutting edge knowledge of hard skills as well as soft skills which are in demand by prospective employers.

Besides that, the ‘internationalization’ of the universities in Malaysia with the target by the government to make Malaysia as the education hub that focuses on teaching, research and development have made the learning of EAP or Academic English as one of the most significant course in most universities. However, in reality, there are different views among scholars on the best approach in teaching EAP.

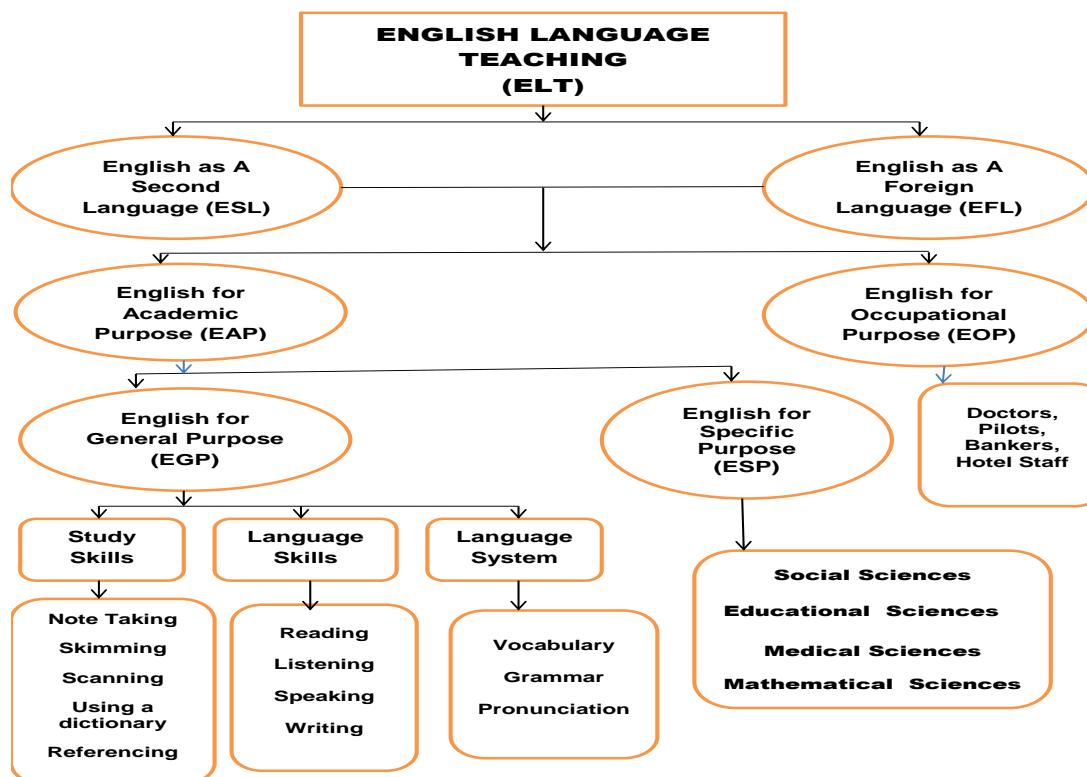
LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the dilemmas in the teaching of EAP is that there are differences in opinions between scholars on what should be the focus of the teaching of EAP and how does it empower students in the learning of their specific field of study.

According to De Chazal (ibid), one of the objectives of EAP is to enable students to perform well in their discipline of study such as business, law, health science, engineering and etc. Nevertheless, the focus of EAP is not to delve into the learning of the language for specific subject area of study. Instead, the teaching of EAP is mainly to prepare students with the academic literacy, language proficiency, learning skills and critical thinking skills which are required to fulfill the requirement of their study in the university. However, Hyland (2014) opines that EAP should be taught with the focus on the language for subject specific area or the students' discipline of study.

In explaining the position of EAP in the domain of English language teaching (ELT), Zohrabi (2010) illustrates it as the following:

Figure 1: ELT and Its Various Branches



(Source: Zohrabi, 2010)

Zohrabi (ibid), suggests that EAP could be approached with a broad focus as English for General Purpose (EGP) which include the teaching of study skills, language skills and the language system. From this approach, students' language proficiency will be polished in order to prepare them for the next stage i.e. learning English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

Despite of all the different scholastic views on EAP teaching approaches; it is crucial that the university and the instructors to be very clear with what should be the focus in the content of their EAP syllabus.

Therefore, needs analysis is important in understanding how much the students know about English language and how much the knowledge of English language is expected from them.

It is the responsibility of the institution, the faculty and the instructors to design their English language course with the concern towards the needs of the students who come from diverse backgrounds, attitudes, level of motivations and learning strategies.

One of the most important practices in designing the content or improving the teaching of any EAP course is to conduct needs analysis. Hyland (2014) defines needs analysis as “the techniques for collecting and assessing information relevant to course design: it is the means of establishing the *how* and *what* of a course” (p. 2).

Richards (1992) describes needs analysis as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities...[it] makes use of both subjective and objective information (as cited in Jordan, 2009, p. 20).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggested that the term ‘needs’ could be classified as i.e. necessities, lacks and wants. ‘Necessities’ is the knowledge that learners should possess to be able to respond effectively in a target situation. ‘Lacks’ is the gap between learner’s existing language proficiency and the required language proficiency which will eventually determine the syllabus design. Whereas the term ‘wants’ refers to learners’ personal desire such as which language skills that learners wish to master (as cited in West, 1994).

Moiinvaziri (2014) had conducted a needs analysis to identify the undergraduate students’ opinions on their learning needs, their preference on learning styles, their attitudes, motivation and interest in the learning of General English which is a compulsory course taught in Islamic Azad University.

Similar study was done by Eslami.Z (2010) who found that students really need to improvement in their English language general proficiency. The most significant problems faced by social science, engineering and medicine students are low level of language proficiency. Lack of vocabulary knowledge, slow reading speed, poor listening, speaking, writing and reading comprehension skills are among the problems perceived by the majority of the students.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

In Universiti Selangor (Unisel), EAP is taught to Diploma students in semester 1 and 2. The two levels of courses are Proficiency English 1 and Proficiency English 2. Whereas, at Bachelor degree level, students learn EAP only during their first semester which is taught only in Technical English 1 course.

In Technical English 1 course, the language component (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation), the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and some study skills are taught within limited time of 42 contact hours. This means that due to the limited time, lecturers mostly focus on teaching to prepare the students for examination.

Besides the limitation of time, lecturers also face difficulties to give attention to the students' learning development due to the big number of students in each classes. The average number of students is 40 in each classes. Every semester, the total number of students that each lecturers has to teach is approximately 250 students.

Students are multiracial with a small number of international students from the third world countries such as Bangladesh, Somalia and Afghanistan. They are majoring in various fields of study such as business, accounting, finance, health science, medical lab technology and etc. It is a common scenario to have classes with mixed ability students.

Generally, students' achievements in the previous semesters show that most students fared moderately in reading and listening but face uphill challenges in writing and speaking skills. Based on the researchers' experiences and observations; students face difficulties such as:-

- Lack of knowledge of vocabularies, grammar and pronunciation
- Lack of exposure to English language resources
- Lack of critical thinking skills
- Lack of motivation to learn English
- Lack of awareness of strategies in learning English

Realising this problems in the teaching of academic English in Unisel; therefore, it is important to identify the needs of the students' and their perceptions on their learning of EAP in Unisel. In other words, there are significant needs for a study to be conducted in order to know which area in the learning of EAP that the students perceive they are lacking.

In this study, the focus will be on the students' perceptions of their existing acquisition of language component (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and their perceptions on to what extent that they have developed in language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- i) To identify the students' perceptions on their learning of language component (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation)
- ii) To identify the relation between students' perceptions on their learning of language component and their language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) development

3. METHODOLOGY

The respondents consisted of 113 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Accounting and Faculty of Health Science. The respondents' demographic background is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondent Background

Demographic Factor		Frequency	Percent (%)
1	GENDER		
	- Male	43	38
	- Female	70	61.9
2	AGE		
	- 18 – 22 years	101	89.3
	- 23 – 27 years	12	10.6
	- 28 – 32 years	0	0.0
	- 33 – 39 years	0	0.0
3	HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
	- SPM	3	2.6
	- STPM	44	38.9
	- Foundation	14	12.3
	- Diploma	49	43.3
	- Bachelor's Degree	3	2.6
4	PROGRAM OF STUDY		
	Bachelor in Medical Laboratory Science	1	0.8
	Bachelor of Business Administration	12	10.6
	Bachelor of Business Management	14	12.3
	Bachelor of Finance	1	0.8
	Bachelor of Human Resource Management	82	72.5
	Bachelor of Occupational Safety & Health	3	2.6

The number of female respondents (70 students) is higher than the number of male respondents (43 students). The majority of the respondents have completed their study at Diploma level (49 students) and at STPM level (44 students). Only 14 respondents have undergone a study at the level of Foundation, followed by 3 students each who have completed their SPM and Bachelor degree respectively.

Data was collected by administering questionnaires which is replicated from (Sihong, 2007 as cited in Moiinvaziri (2014). The questions are divided into four parts. The first part (section A) is concerned with the demography (age, gender, race and etc.) of the respondents. The second part (section B) is to identify the learners' perceptions on what they need to learn. The third part (section C) investigates the learners' preferred learning strategies. The final part (section D) is known as an affective perspective that investigates the learners' motivation, attitude and interests towards the learning of English. However, in this paper, the focus will be on discussing the findings only for Section B i.e. to identify the learner's perceptions on what they need to learn.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Objective 1

- To identify the students' perceptions on the learning of language component (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation)

Data for the first objective were obtained from students' responses to the following questions:

- In your study of English, how important is grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to you?
- How difficult is grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation to you?
- How often do you do the following activities (reading, listening, speaking and writing)?
- Which is your most developed skill and which is the least developed skill?

4.1.1 Statistical Analysis

Below are the statistical analyses for each questions:

Question 1

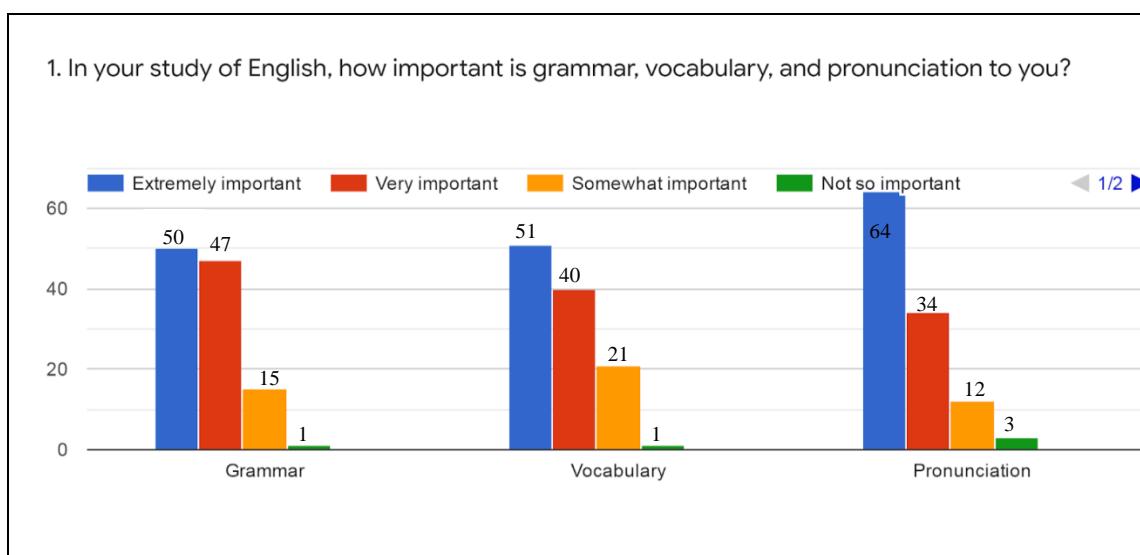


Figure 2

Comparison between the three language components in Figure 2 shows that 64 students responded that pronunciation is the extremely important language component. However, 51 students responded that vocabulary is the extremely important language component. Despite of that, 50 students responded that grammar is extremely important which has no significant difference compared to vocabulary. This shows that grammar and vocabulary are both almost equally extremely important language component to students.

On the other hand, the response whether pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are very important shows a significant gap of difference with the highest number of students (47) responded that grammar is very important while 40 students responded that vocabulary is very important and the lowest number of students (34) responded that pronunciation is very important.

Meanwhile, 21 students think that vocabulary is somewhat important and 15 students responded that grammar is somewhat important. This shows only a slight gap of opinions about the importance of grammar and vocabulary among students.

Only 5 students think that the language component is not so important with 1 student each for grammar and vocabulary and 3 students for pronunciation.

Thus, generally it can be said that the majority of the students responded that all the language components are important with pronunciation is the extremely important, followed by vocabulary and grammar.

Question 2

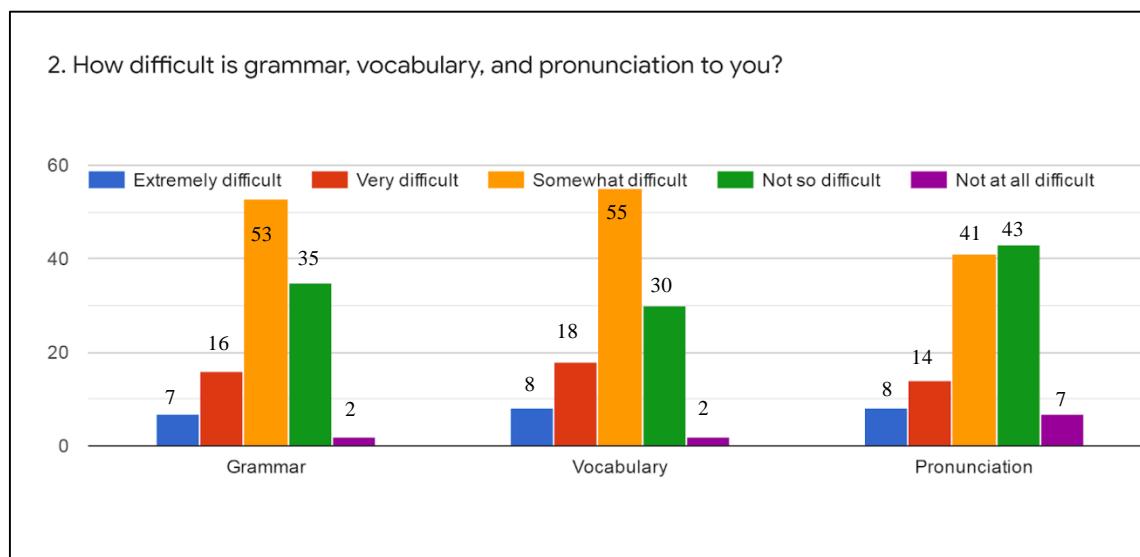


Figure 3

The graph in figure 3 shows that most students (55) responded that vocabulary is somewhat difficult. However, less number of students (18) responded that vocabulary is very difficult and only 8 students responded that vocabulary is extremely difficult. In contrast, 30 students responded that vocabulary is not so difficult and only 2 students responded that vocabulary is not at all difficult.

Another language component is grammar. It is viewed somewhat difficult by 53 students. On the other hand, less number of students (16) responded that grammar is very difficult, whereas 7 students responded that grammar is extremely difficult. On the other hand, 35 students responded that grammar is not so difficult. Only 2 students responded that grammar is not at all difficult.

In contrast to vocabulary and grammar, less number of students (41) responded that pronunciation is somewhat difficult. In fact, more students (43) said that pronunciation is not so difficult and 7 students said that pronunciation is not at all difficult.

Therefore, generally it can be concluded that most students responded that vocabulary and grammar are somewhat difficult. However, the comparison between grammar and vocabulary components shows that a slightly higher number of students responded that vocabulary is more difficult compared to grammar. On the other hand, students view pronunciation is not as difficult as grammar and vocabulary.

Question 3

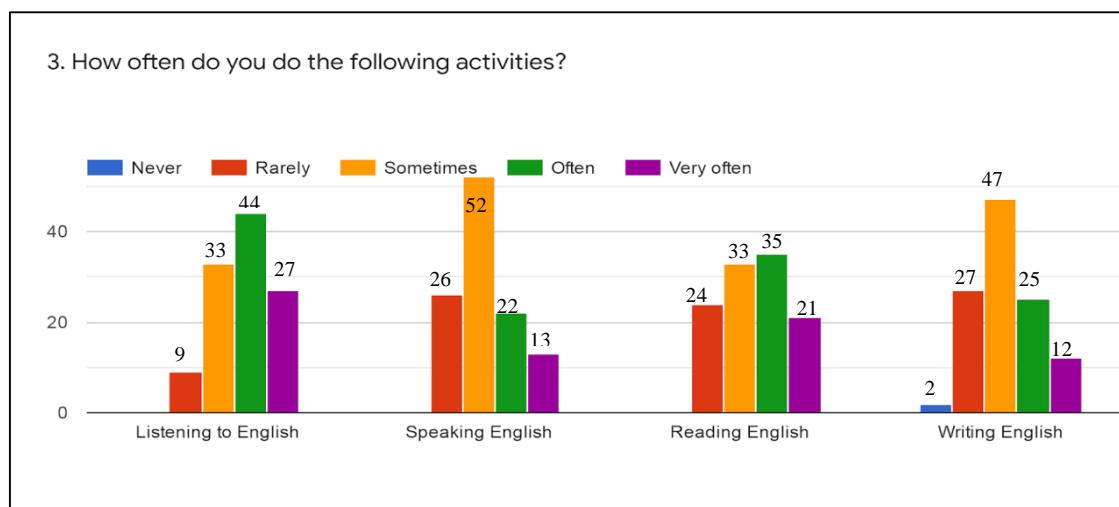


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows four language activities (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the frequency of students' involvement in these activities.

The highest engagement by students is in listening to English activity. The graph shows that 44 students responded that they often listen to English and 27 students responded that they very often listen to English which makes a total of 71 students who are frequently engaged in listening to English activity. On the other hand, even though listening recorded the highest engagement by students, yet, there is no significant difference in the number of students who listen less to English. This is because 33 students responded that they sometimes listen to English and 9 students responded that they rarely listen to English. Hence, this makes a total of 42 students who lack engagement in listening in English.

The second highest number of engagement in activity by students is in reading in English with the total number of 56 students who responded that they (21 students) read very often and 35 students responded that they often read. Despite of this, the number of students who do not frequently read is slightly lower than those who often read. As the graph shows, 33 students responded that they sometimes read and 24 students responded that they rarely

read. This makes a total of 57 students who do not frequently read which is almost as equal number as those who often read.

The third highest students' engagement is in writing in English activity with the total number of 37 students responded that they frequently write. They consist of 25 students who responded that they often write and 12 students responded that they very often write in English. On the other hand, 47 students responded that they sometimes write in English, 27 students responded that they rarely write in English and 2 students responded that they never write in English which makes a total of 76 students who lack practice in writing in English. This shows that there is a significant gap between the number of students who frequently write in English and those who write less and even there are students who have never engaged in writing in English activity at all.

The lowest students' engagement is in speaking activity with a total of 35 students who responded that they (22 students) often or very often (13 students) involve in speaking in English activity. In contrast, 52 students responded that they sometimes speak in English and 26 students responded that they rarely speak in English. This makes a total of 78 students who lack practice in speaking in English.

Therefore, generally, it can be concluded that students are engaged in listening and reading activities more than writing and speaking activities.

Question 4

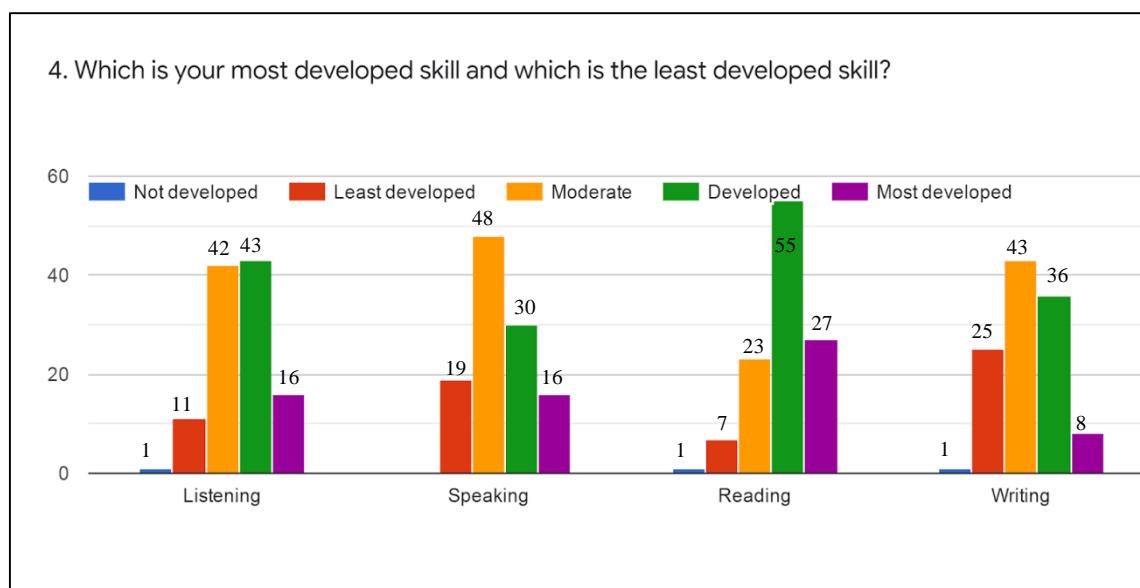


Figure 5

Figure 5 shows students' opinions on their most developed and least developed language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The comparison between all the skills show that a total of 82 students responded that their best developed skill is reading. The graph shows that 55 students responded that reading is their developed skill and 27 students responded that reading is their most developed skills. On the other hand, 23 students responded that they read moderately, 7 students and 1 student responded that their reading skill is least developed and not developed respectively.

Besides that, listening is the skills with the second highest number of respondents. The graph shows that a total of 59 students responded that listening is their best skill with 43 students responded that it is their developed skill while 16 students responded that it is their most developed skill. On the other hand, 42 students responded that their listening skill is moderate which is only a minor difference compared to the number of students who responded that they have developed their listening skill. Lastly, the least number of students responded that listening is their least developed skill and not developed with 11 students and 1 student respectively.

Lastly, speaking is the less developed skill as 46 students responded that their speaking skill is either developed or most developed. The graph shows that 30 students responded that they have developed their speaking skill and 16 students responded that speaking is their most developed skill. On the other hand, 48 students responded that their speaking skill is moderate and 19 students responded that their speaking skill is the least developed.

Next, the least developed skill is writing with a total of 44 students responded that their writing skill is either developed or most developed. Apparently, 36 students responded that writing is their developed skill, whereas only 8 students responded that writing is their most developed skill. However, 43 students responded that they have moderate writing skill, 25 students responded that writing is their least developed skill and only 1 student responded that his/her writing is not developed.

Generally, it can be concluded that students opined that reading and listening skills are their most developed skills compared to writing and speaking skills.

4.2 Research Objective 2

- To identify the extent of relation between students' perceptions on the learning of language component and their language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) development

Language Component	Language Skills (Reading, Writing, Listening & Speaking)	
Vocabulary, Grammar & Pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	0.525**
	Sig. (2-tailed) (p-value)	0.000
	N	113

Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that the language component is positively related to language skills ($r = .525$, $p < .000$).

In other words, there is a significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000$) positive correlation ($r = 0.525$) between language components and language skills.

Thus, students' positive perceptions toward the language components will lead to better performance in language skills.

5. Conclusion

The study has found that students perceive that learning all the language components is important. The highest number of students think that pronunciation is extremely important which is followed by vocabulary and grammar.

However, most students think that all the language components are somewhat difficult (moderately difficult) with the highest number of students have difficulties in vocabulary, followed by grammar and the lowest number of students face difficulty in pronunciation.

It is very interesting to note that listening is an activity which has the highest engagement by students. The second highest engagement is in reading activity, even though the number of students engaged in it is significantly low than listening activity. The third activity engaged by students is writing which is also significantly lower than reading activity. Finally, the least engagement by students is in speaking activity.

Besides that, the highest number of students perceived that they have developed in reading. The second highest developed skill is listening which is followed by writing. Whereas, the least number of students think that they have developed in speaking.

In conclusion, the finding from the needs analysis will enable us to discern the language component and the language skills that should be given the focus in the teaching of EAP or academic English to the students. In addition, we will be able to minimize the gap between what the students are lacking and subsequently tailor our syllabus in order to meet the students' needs.

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