# A Needs Analysis of English Language of Thai Pre-service Teachers

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## Abstracts

This research had the objective to investigate the needs related to English language skills among Thai undergraduate pre-service teachers at a university. It also seeks to determine which skills are lacking among these students and the skills they wish to improve in 4 skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing). The participants were selected via convenience sampling methods and included 220 senior non-English majors from universities in northeastern Thailand. Participants were aged from 21 to 23 years old. The five-point Likert scale questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data, which was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the SPSS program. The results indicate a high demand for English language skills among Thai pre-service teachers. Specifically, the Thai university participants reported that listening was the most required skill, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, they said that the skill they lacked the most was writing, followed by speaking, listening, and reading. A lack of writing skills is one of the most common problems among English learners of various levels, who experience difficulties with academic writing skills and vocabulary. Finally, the participants reported that listening was the most desired skill among Thai pre-service teachers for their future careers, followed by speaking and writing skills. The current results also offer important insights for course designers, curriculum planners and university administrators. Other valuable recommendations for future studies and the limitations of this study are also discussed.

**Keywords:** ESP; Needs Analysis; Necessity; Lack; Want; Pre-Service Teachers; English Language

## Introduction

English for specific purposes (ESP) is designed to meet the learners' English language needs and focuses on acquiring the language skills relevant to academic and occupational contexts (Basturkmen, 2010 : 65 ; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998 : 70 ; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 : 49). ESP can also be described as a continuum of English language learning courses where the learners' needs for a specific purpose change during the learning process (Basturkmen, 2010 : 65 ; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998 : 70 ; Huhta, Vogt, Johnson, & Tulkki, 2013 : 87).

The primary aim of ESP courses is to prepare learners to use English within academic or professional settings and, therefore, ESP course designers must be aware of the specific needs of particular groups of learners (Basturkmen, 2003 : 48-63, 2010 : 65 ; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998 : 70 ; Flowerdew, 2013 : 325-345 ; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 : 67). Basturkmen (2010 : 65) provided guidelines based on a needs analysis to help curriculum

developers design hands-on ESP courses or programs. A needs analysis is necessary for achieving learning outcomes, particularly in ESP courses (Basturkmen, 2003 : 48-63). Indeed, ESP courses not based on a needs analysis frequently contain too much, or too little, teaching to meet the learners' requirements. Therefore, a needs analysis is vital to collect information to identify the learners' learning targets or problems and develop ESP courses to achieve specific English skills.

Students' needs are always considered in ESP language teaching and learning, and course content is developed to meet learners' expectations. Needs analysis is regarded as a fundamental part and core process of course and curriculum development in teaching ESP. argued that needs analysis is essential to develop courses that benefit all involved, including students, teachers, and institutions. Needs analysis also helps course designers to identify the learning goals, language use in real situations, and learning environments (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998:70; Gözüyeşil, 2014 : 66). However, despite efforts to explore learners' needs of adult learners before the language course design and development, little is known about language learners' English language needs, especially among engineering students at Thai vocational universities. This is particularly important as the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Thailand has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) international standards to enhance students' English language abilities. Specifically, all university graduates must pass the English language test at level B1.

Previous research on language learning needs has shown that oral communication skills are crucial. For example, Kaur and Khan (2010 : 1-16) conducted a needs analysis of English for art and design students in Malaysia. Their findings showed that 47 students and ten staff members regarded English speaking skills as the most helpful element of their art and design courses and careers, followed by English listening, reading, and writing skills. Moreover, Tseng (2014 : 25-36.) found that learning was essential in Asia. It was also found that non-native English speakers from China, South Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand learn reading and speaking before writing, and in Saudi Arabia learning focuses first on reading and speaking, then on writing and listening instruction (Pawanchik, Kamil, Hilmi, & Baten 2011 : 505-510).

In the Thai context, a large body of research showed ESP courses operated by colleges or universities offer English courses or training courses for workplaces contexts such as nursing, business, and engineering. These training courses are short and usually meet the needs of learners in different disciplines. For example, Anuyato (2012 : 76) surveyed the perceptions of diploma students in one vocational college in Bangkok. Most students' perceptions suggested that ESP benefits future careers after graduation and improves their ability to use English and creativity in using language. However, these short-term courses may be less effective and or unsuitable for specific fields and student needs.

At present, little effort has been made to analyze English expectations and needs in university students, especially in Thai EFL contexts. Therefore, the current study will explore the language needs of undergraduate students and identify the gap between the students' existing proficiency and target proficiency. The current study may shed light on teacher training and development preparedness to meet the students' demands.

## Research Objective

The present study investigated the needs related to English language skills among Thai undergraduate pre-service teachers at a university. It also seeks to determine which skills are lacking among these students and the skills they wish to improve. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the needs for specific Thai pre-service teachers' English skills while studying at a university?

2. What are the perceived lacks of English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?

3. What are the wanted English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?

## Research Methodology

### 1. Participants and setting

The participants in this study included 220 senior non-English Thai pre-service teachers at the Faculty of Education, who are preparing for internship teaching. All participants were aged between 21-23 years old at the time of data collection. Participants had studied English for more than ten years and received theoretical teaching coursework consisting of English language and literacy for Young Children, English Language for Early Childhood Teachers, Practicum 1, and Practicum 2. These courses focus on teaching concepts, theories, knowledge, and development of English language skills to enhance professional development with an emphasis on listening and speaking communication. Thai pre-service teachers must also take a licensing exam by passing an English language proficiency test at the Common European Framework Reference on Language (CEFR) level B1.

The convenience sampling method (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008 : 78 ; Pickard, 2007 : 66 - 67) was used to select participants who were taught theoretical coursework of teaching and learning and had learned English for more than ten years of education. It is the most commonly used in the study not to list all of the population of interest.

### 2. Research instruments

#### 2.1 Questionnaire

This study used questionnaires to collect data related to Thai pre-service teachers' English language requirements. The questionnaire was developed using Hutchinson and Waters' (1987 : 67) needs analysis model, focusing on the needs, lacks, and wants to explore the participants' needs and perceived English proficiency in the target situations and their requirements for future occupations.

The questionnaire was first written in English and then translated into Thai. It comprised four sections, with 20 items in sections 2-4. The first section collected the participants' personal information, such as age, gender, years of English study, years of study at the university, level of English proficiency for each English skill, and ranking of English skills in order of importance. The second section assessed the students' English language needs while studying at a university. The third section addressed the English skills that students perceived themselves to be lacking is the perceived lack of Thai pre-service teachers in target situations. The fourth section identified the "wants" of Thai pre-service teachers for their future careers. Each item in these sections was presented on a five-point Likert scale, and participants were asked to rate their needs, lacks, and wants related to speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills. The five-point Likert scale is illustrated as follows:

A final section of the questionnaire focused on the participants' general comments or suggestions on English courses designed for Thai university students. It was presented as an open-ended question.

### 3. Data collection procedure

Ethical approval was obtained before the study from the Ethics Committee of Mahasarakham University. Permission from the Faculty of Education was also obtained. Informed consent was sought from all participants to ensure participation was voluntary.

### 4. Data analysis

The current study used quantitative data collection approaches, and data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 23 software. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was also performed to calculate the reliability of the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and percentages, were used to present the study findings. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the responses on the

| Scale | Meaning | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | necessary | lack | wants |
| 5 | very necessary | Excellent | Extremely needed |
| 4 | necessary | Very good | mostly needed |
| 3 | neutral | Good | moderately needed |
| 2 | unnecessary | Fair | Slightly needed |
| 1 | very unnecessary | Poor | Least needed |

five-point Likert (1932 : 88) scales.

## Research Conceptual Framework
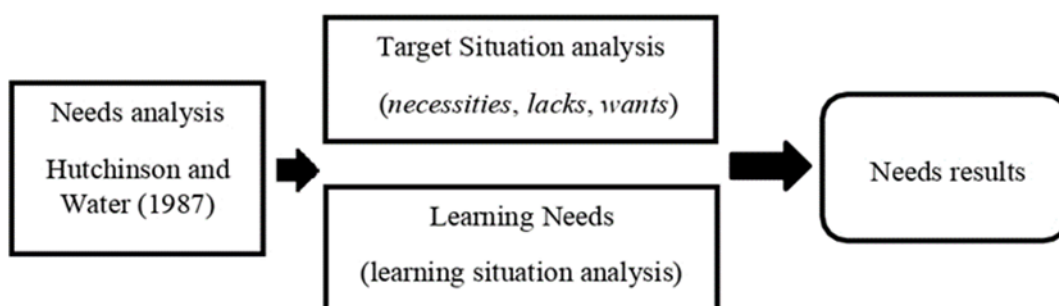


This research focuses on target needs, including *necessities*, *lack*, and *wants* is based on the framework of Hutchinson and Water (1987 : 54). This framework provides essential information, including the target situations, *lacks*, and *necessities*. Overall, the framework includes target needs (i.e., what the learners need to do in the target context) and learning needs (i.e., what the learner needs to do to learn) (Hutchinson & Water, 1987 : 54).

## Results

| Scale | Meaning | | |
|-------|---------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | **necessary** | **lack** | **wants** |
| 5 | very necessary | Excellent | Extremely needed |
| 4 | necessary | Very good | mostly needed |
| 3 | neutral | Good | moderately needed |
| 2 | unnecessary | Fair | Slightly needed |
| 1 | very unnecessary | Poor | Least needed |

*1. What are the needs for specific Thai pre-service teachers' English skills while studying at a university?*

Five-point Likert scale questions were used to collect participants' perceptions of their English language skill needs. The results are shown in Table 1. The findings revealed that Thai university participants reported that *listening* (78.22%) was the most necessary skill, followed by *speaking* (77.91%), *reading* (75.96%) and, finally, *writing* 74.35%. Additionally, the findings showed that Thai pre-service non-English teachers considered all English skills to be important for their academic study at a tertiary level of education.

Table 1 Students' performance scores on reading comprehension test

| Skills | Mean | S.D. | % | Rank |
|--------|------|------|-----|------|
| Listening | 3.91 | 0.73 | 78.22 | 1 |
| Speaking | 3.90 | 0.73 | 77.91 | 2 |
| Reading | 3.80 | 0.70 | 75.96 | 3 |
| Writing | 3.72 | 0.89 | 74.35 | 4 |
| **Total** | **3.83** | **0.69** | **76.61** | |

*2. What are the perceived lacks of English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?*

The results related to the participants' perceived lack of English language skills in the target situations are shown in Table 2. It was found that Thai pre-service teachers believed they lacked all four English skills. Specifically, university participants reported that they were most lacking in *writing skills* (36.67%), followed by *speaking* (35.40%), *listening* (34.44%) and *reading* (33.22%) skills.

Table 2 Thai university students' perceived lack of English skills

| Skills | Mean | S.D. | % | Rank |
|--------|------|------|-----|------|
| Writing | 1.83 | 1.01 | 36.67 | 1 |
| Speaking | 1.77 | 0.94 | 35.40 | 2 |
| listening | 1.72 | 0.91 | 34.44 | 3 |
| reading | 1.66 | 0.88 | 33.22 | 4 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **1.75** | **0.86** | **34.93** |

*3. What are the wanted English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?* As shown in Table 3, the results revealed that the participants' "wants" for their English language skills were high (83.41%). Specifically, *listening* was rated as the most desired skill (85.02%), followed by *reading* (83.62%), *speaking* (82.93%) and, finally, w*riting* (82.07%) skills.

Table 3 Thai pre-service non-English teachers' wants for their English skills

| **Skills** | **Mean** | **S.D.** | **%** | **Rank** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listening | 4.25 | 0.67 | 85.02 | 1 |
| Reading | 4.18 | 0.66 | 83.62 | 2 |
| Speaking | 4.15 | 0.74 | 82.93 | 3 |
| Writing | 4.10 | 0.78 | 82.07 | 4 |
| **Total** | **4.17** | **0.65** | **83.41** | |

## Discussion
### 1. What are the needs for specific Thai pre-service teachers' English skills while studying at a university?

The present study investigated the English language skills needed among Thai pre-service non-English major students and the students perceived 'lacks' and 'wants' in relation to their English skills. Overall, the quantitative analysis first revealed that English skills were highly necessary for academic study at a tertiary level. Specifically, participants reported listening as the most important skill, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking skills were reported as the top two necessary skills because these skills are fundamental for daily communication. For example, listening skills are required to understand academic lectures, whereas speaking allows participants to express their needs and explanations if the subject content is unclear. Indeed, listening and speaking skills are inextricably linked and are necessary for Thai university participants (Celik & Yavuz, 2015 : *2137-2140* ; Kaewkunha, 2021 : 7 ; Polsombat, 2015 : 62 ; Surapan, 2014 : 54).

Listening may be considered the most important skill because the subject content is primarily delivered through class lectures and oral explanations of exercises or assignments. Students also need to listen to academic conversations and exchange ideas with their teachers and classmates with different accents. In addition, they must use their speaking skills to communicate and exchange ideas with teachers and classmates, such as answering questions, presenting information reports, explaining, and providing advice on assignments to their classmates. The current findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of speaking and listening skills (Gass, 2012 : 1-21; Kaewkunha, 2021 : 7 ; Tseng, 2014 : 25-36.). The results also support previous findings that learners consider writing to be less important than reading (Kaewkunha, 2021 : 7 ; Polsombat, 2015 : 62 ; Surapan, 2014 : 54). This may be explained by the specific learning conditions of an EFL context. That is, students in EFL classes are rarely required to write reports or assignments in English.

In conclusion, the current study revealed the necessity of English skills among Thai pre-service teachers. Specifically, Thai pre-service teachers reported that listening was the most important of the four English skills, closely followed by speaking. Reading and writing skills were considered 'less important' for pre-service teachers in their classrooms.

**2. What are the perceived lacks of English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?**
The current results indicated that the participants believed they lacked all four English skills. Writing was reported as the weakest skill, followed by speaking, listening, and reading skills. The participants may consider their writing skills lacking due to insufficient opportunities to practice their writing in the EFL classroom. This finding is consistent with previous reports that EFL learners believe they are lacking in writing skills (Gass, 2012 : 1-21; Kaewkunha, 2021 : 6 ; Polsombat, 2015 : 62 ; Surapan, 2014 : 54 ; Tseng, 2014 : 25-36.). The participants reported that a common problem is the inability to clearly distinguish the key points observed from writing without paragraph breaks, indicating that most Thai students are unfamiliar with, and do not understand, many writing methods. They also reported problems in the use of vocabulary in academic writing. A lack of academic terminology among pre-service participants may render them unable to differentiate between informal writing and formal language. In addition, grammatical correctness is also considered a significant problem, as these errors make it difficult for the reader to understand the text.

Speaking was identified as the second most lacking skill among the study participants. The participants believed they could not give oral speeches and presentations, perhaps because Thai pre-service teachers have few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Moreover, classroom activities do not allow students to interact with other classmates socially. The participants also have little exposure to English use in target situations, such as teaching demonstrations, academic presentations, or classroom discussions. Another problem that leads to speaking anxiety is the lack of vocabulary, which was identified as one of the barriers to English communication among pre-service teachers in the present study. These findings support previous studies showing that tertiary English learners lack English speaking skills (Al-Mukdad, 2019: 300-306; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017: 111-121; Khatoony & Rahmani, 2020: 59-69; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017: 111-115; Toba, Noor, & Sanu, 2019: 57-73; Wanchid, 2020: 201-208).

The current results indicated that reading skills were perceived to be the least lacking skill, and this may be because reading can be completed at any time and the participant's own pace. The quantitative findings revealed that participants mostly read to complete university assignments and acquire the main ideas and general comprehension of a text. Previous studies have also reported that university students use their reading skills more than their speaking, listening, and writing skills (Al-Mukdad, 2019: 300-306; Khatoony & Rahmani, 2020: 59-69; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017: 111-115; Toba, Noor, & Sanu, 2019: 57-73; Wanchid, 2020: 201-208).

In conclusion, the current study showed that Thai pre-service non-English majors believed that they lacked English skills in several domains. Writing was reported to be their most lacking skill, followed by speaking, listening, and reading.

### 3. What are the wanted English skills among Thai pre-service teachers?

It was found that listening and reading skills were the most desired skills among Thai pre-service non-English teachers for their future careers, followed by speaking and writing skills. In the globalized environment of the 21st century, multilingual communication has become increasingly important in daily life (Chalkiadaki, 2018: 1-16; Renukadevi, 2014: 59-63; Yurko & Styfanyshyn, 2020:98), and listening is at the heart of all effective communication. Indeed, listening skills are required for emotional processing, perception, understanding, interpretation of content and behaviour, and responding to others both verbally and non-verbally (Tang, 2020: 22-27.). Reading was identified as the second most desirable skill for pre-service teachers. The more learners read about a particular topic, the more they understand it. Indeed, reading is vital for academic studies as well as for communication. It is also required for interpreting and translating letters, words, and sentences into meanings (Beers & Probst, 2012:76; Beltramo & Stillman, 2015:9; Serravallo, 2015:10).

## Conclusion

Overall, the current study indicated a high demand for English language skills among Thai pre-service teachers. The Thai university participants reported that listening was the most required skill, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, the participants perceived they lacked English language skills in the target situations. Specifically, they reported that the skill they most lacked was writing, followed by speaking, listening, and reading. A lack of writing skills is one of the most common problems among English learners of various levels who experience academic writing and vocabulary difficulties. Finally, the participants reported that listening was the most desired skill among Thai pre-service teachers for their future careers, followed by reading, speaking, and writing skills.

Table 4 The finding

| Skills | Rank | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Needs | Lacks | Wants |
| listening | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Speaking | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| reading | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Writing | 4 | 1 | 4 |

## Limitations

The current study investigated the English language needs, lacks, and wants of Thai pre-service teachers. The data in this study were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the epidemic prevention policy prevented face-to-face contact and imposed restrictions on distributing questionnaires to target audiences. As a result, the number of participants in this study was lower than expected.

## Implications

The current study offers valuable guidelines for curriculum planners, teachers, and researchers regarding learners' English skills requirements. The current findings will be a primary source of information that helps course designers and instructors create practical English lessons and learning activities to achieve learners' language goals. In addition, the study will raise awareness among curriculum planners and university administrators that well-planned courses equip university graduates with the English abilities required in their future employment. The current results indicate that the course design must address all English skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Learning activities or tasks designed for language classrooms must serve the learning goals.

## Recommendations

Future studies may wish to increase the number of participants and include other locations within Thailand (e.g., North, East, South). More specific information regarding the participants' needs within the four skills (e.g., vocabulary versus grammar) should also be explored. Future studies should also include interviews with the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their language needs, wants and lacks. Investigations with specific cohorts of learners may also be useful. Finally, qualitative data is necessary to better define and understand learners' needs and, hence, to design effective courses.

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