International Journal of English and Literature

Full Length Research Paper

Needs analysis of the writing skills of HND Business Studies students at Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi Edo State

Balogun Femi Unueshotse

Department of Languages, School of General Studies, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Nigeria.

This study, using Business Studies Students in the Departments of Accounting, Business Administration, Management, Banking and Finance, Marketing at Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi in Edo State, as subjects was carried out to determine the writing skill needs of the Higher National Diploma (HND) students. The population of the study comprised 731 students. Using the University of Ibadan Modified Needs Analysis Questionnaire (UIMNAQ) – itself a modified University of Reading Need Analysis Questionnaire, as the major instrument, the respondents were required to respond to a set of questionnaire items which asked them to indicate the following: on a scale ranging from 'never' to 'more than 6 times', how often they have to carry out each of 12 given tasks in a semester; the extent to which they think they need each of the five basic writing skills in performing some writing tasks and nine given English Language competencies. The responses were analyzed; thereafter frequencies and percentages were used to answer the research question. It was found that the subjects, being post-experience learners who have spent one year out on Industrial Training (IT) need the following writing skills in order of importance: basic writing skills of describing, defining, listing, comparing and contrasting classifying ideas/problem. The significance of the research lies in the fact that it will serve as a guide in the production of a syllabus which will meet the needs of Higher National Diploma (HND) Business Studies Students in Nigeria and serve as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) document for Polytechnics.

Key words: Needs analysis, basic writing skills, ESP

INTRODUCTION

In Linguistics, the history of language teaching has largely been the history of successive redefinition of the nature of the task facing language learners, the condition, and the linguistic experience that linguists have to create to help the learners master the task. This is why, any discussion of language teaching has frequently taken the form of debates in which one theoretically-derived view confronts another and subsequently holds sway until it, in

turn, is overthrown.

Thus, there were the 19th century traditionalists, whose views on the nature of language, the description of language, language learning and teaching once held sway. Then came the "early modern" linguists represented by Henry Sweet (1845 to 1912), Otto Jesperson (1860 to 1945), and Harold Palmer (1877 to 1949), whose views, then appeared more modern than those of the traditionalists. The "formalists" – so called because they regarded language as a code or form – with their own radically different views on the same matters also came. Those were represented by Ferdinand de Saussure, (1857 to1913) and Leonanrd Bloomfield (1887 to 1949) they overthrew the early modern linguists and their views (formalism) came to hold sway. It should be recalled that applied linguists like C.C. Fries (1887 to 1967) and Robert Lado (1915 to 1995) were the ones who borrowed ideas from theoreticians of the formalist persuasion and formulated principles of teaching language as such.

"Functionalism" among whose representatives was M.A.K. Halliday (1925 to Date) was to overthrow formalism. It was actually a revolt against formalism because the functionalists see language as a social system for communicating meaning unlike the formalists who see language as a code and described it as such. According to Bell (1981), functionalism means:

A view of language as a dynamic, open system by means of which members of a community exchange information. This is in contrast with the static, closed system view of language (formalism) which has been until recently, the commonly accepted orientation since de Saussure (1915), seeing language as a code made up of elements and their relationship with each other.

The structuralist (behaviourism) and transformational (mentalism) approaches of the formalist, thus gave way to functionalism which still tends to hold sway today. The approach of functionalism has been communicative language teaching, whose import aims at helping the learner to turn his considerable dormant grammatical competence into a real practical mastery of the target language. Thus, the learner is taught to acquire competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner (Hymes, 1972).

Richards et al. (1985) reveal that the communicative approach has been developed by British applied linguists as a reaction away from grammar-based approaches such as aural-oral approach and further point out that teaching materials used with communicative approach often:

(1) Teach the language needed to express and understand different kinds of function such as requesting, describing, expressing, likes and dislikes, etc;
(2) Are based on NOTIONAL SYLLABUS or some other

communicatively organized syllabus;
(3) Emphasize the process of communication such as using language to perform appropriately in different types of situations, using language to perform different kinds of tasks, e.g. to solve puzzle, to get information, etc. using language for social interaction with other people.

Functional/notional syllabuses are used to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an outgrowth from the age-long English Language Teaching (ELT). By extension, they are used to teach language for specific purposes (LSP). This contrasts with a grammatical or structural syllabus which consists of a sequence of graded language items or a situational syllabus, which consists of situations and the relevant language items. It was Hutchinson and Waters (1987) that explain that ESP is "an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners" as well as "an approach to course design which starts with the question: "why do these learners need to learn English? They further reveal that although all courses are based on perceived needs of some sort, it is the awareness of a need rather than the nature of the need that seems to mark ESP out as different and distinct from any other course. In their words:

Thus, if we had to state in practical terms the irreducible minimum of an ESP to course design, it would be needs analysis, since it is the awareness of a target situation –a definable need to communicate in English – that distinguishes the ESP learner from the learner of general English.

This points to and underscores the importance of needs analysis in ESP, which, in fact, is the first stage in the design of a language training programme.

ESP, an outgrowth of the age-long ELT, is a crystallization of the communicative approach and communicative language teaching method. Although the study of language for specific purposes has had a long and interesting history going back, some would say, as far back as the Roman and Greek empires, since the 1960s, ESP has become a vital and innovative activity within the teaching of English as a foreign or second language movement (Howard, 1984). It is a movement, according to Johns and Price-Machado (2001:43), that is based on the "proposition that all language teaching should be tailored to the specific learning and language use needs of identified groups of students."

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Strevens (1988), Robinson (1991) and Umera-Okeke (2005) have all provided definitions of ESP since its evolution. While Hutchinson and Waters (1987) see ESP as "an approach rather than a product, which does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or method", Strevens (1988) definition, according to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), "makes a distinction between four absolute

characteristics and two variable characteristics." The absolute characteristics are that ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

(1) Designed to meet specific needs of learners
(2) Related in content (that is in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities.
(3) Centred on language appropriate to those activities in syntax lexis discourse, semantics and so on, and analyses of the discourse;
(4) In contrast with "General English."

The variable characteristics are that ESP:

(1) May be restricted as to the learning skills to be learned (for example, reading only).
(2) May not be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology (p.5)

Although there is no limit to the specific purposes to which English, or any other language for that matter, can be put, ESP is, however, categorized into three as follows:

(1) English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
(2) English for occupational or vocational purposes (EOP or EVP) and
(3) English for professional purposes (EPP).

Whatever the category, needs analysis is crucial and basic. It is, in fact, "the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a very focused course" according to Duddley-Evans and St John (2006).

Needs analysis (NA) which Hutchinson and Waters (1987) describe as "the irreducible minimum of an ESP to course design", is a complex process which is usually followed by syllabus design, materials selection, teaching/ learning a course, and evaluation (Kavaliauskiene and Uzpaliene, 2003).

Earlier, Gardner and Winslow (1983) had explained that the "purpose of needs analysis is to produce information which when acted upon makes courses better adapted to students' needs" and "part of the object of formal needs identification is to back up one's proposals with quantitative evidence of their importance." Fiorito (2005) indicates that in ESP, it is needs analysis (NA) that determines which language skills are most needed by the students and the syllabus is designed accordingly, in contrast to ESL where, as a general rule, all four language skills are stressed equally.

Until quite recently, as Bell (1981) observed, the majority of language courses have been created in the assumption that a learner needs the whole language for "general purposes", that is, "that the need was global and the course would suit learners of any type." This observation of Bell's seems to be true of English programmes in Nigerian Polytechnics. In these institutions of higher learning, although English is not studied as a discipline as no certificate or diploma is awarded in it, the

language is, nevertheless, the medium of instruction in all the disciplines. It is a service course in the Department of Languages, School of General Studies in Auchi Polytechnic. In view of this, the students' needs were thought to be "global". But because of the technical and technological bent of Polytechnics in Nigeria, the students quite appropriately qualify as ESP Learners whose needs cannot be "global", but must be specified from the outset (Balogun, 1997).

By the same token, Balogun (1997) has noted further, "English programmes in Nigerian Polytechnics should qualify as ESP courses where the syllabus and materials should be determined in all essentials by prior analysis of the communication needs of the learners, rather than by non-learner-centred criteria such as the teachers' or institutions' predetermined preference for General English or for teaching English as part of general education" (Munby, 1978). At this tertiary level, especially at the HND level, it is no longer proper, in keeping with the communicative spirit of the present times, to think of Polytechnic students as needing the whole language for "general purposes", having completed a course in general English in their various secondary schools.

Statement of the problem

The place of needs analysis in ESP cannot be over-emphasized. It is, in fact, to the functionalist what Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) are to the formalists. Bell (1981), Kennedy and Bolitho (1984), Hutchinson and Water (1987), Brindley (1989) and Long (2005) are a few authors and researchers who have emphasized the need for specifying the needs of learners before designing programmes for them. Bell (1981) in particular, went ahead to demonstrate how to go about specifying such needs.

In Nigeria, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the academic regulatory body for Polytechnics, has a common syllabus for English/Communication (a service course), contained in the General Studies Course Specification for National and Higher National Diploma Programme (1990, 1999, 2009). As specified in the syllabus, all National Diploma (ND) students are taught the same thing, irrespective of discipline. This is not a bad idea as it smacks of EAP which aims at developing and strengthening the students' study skills. At the HND level, the students are all still taught the same thing irrespective of discipline. In fact, the syllabus appears to have been designed without regard to the question: "Why do these learners need to learn English at this level?" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). There is, thus, almost no indication of the NA on which the syllabus is based. This has resulted in some practical problems which Owolabi (2012) explains as follows:

In many institutions in Nigeria, the English Language curriculum is still not significantly different from General

English. Learners are still taken through the vitals of learning the basic rudiments which some of them have mastered, although at times, poorly. The situation is more worrisome in specialized institutions such as universities of technology and polytechnics where English is not regarded as a core course, but which nonetheless is essential for success not only in their chosen career, but in the larger society.

As experience has shown, after their first year (NDI) in the Polytechnic, a majority of the students do not deem it necessary to attend any English/Communications classes again. This is because the students regard the lessons as a monotonous repetition of what has been learnt before. Besides, complaints are rife from employers that Poly-technic graduates especially Business Studies graduates cannot write reports, memos or produce readable minutes of meetings and other writing tasks.

From the foregoing explanation, the issue which then arises for this study is: "What can be done to sustain the interest of Auchi Polytechnic Business Studies Students in English/Communication courses at the HND Level and hence improve their ability in writing more proficiently in the target situation taking into consideration such a variable as grammatical competence.

Research question

To what extent do the learners at the HND level still need writing skills after what they had learnt at the ND level?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which Business Studies Students at Auchi Polytechnic still need writing tasks after what they have learnt at the ND level so that their interest in English/Communication courses can be sustained and thus be prepared to acquire more skills that will make them more proficient in the target situation.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it will contribute empirical data to the ESP context in the Polytechnic sector which "can be used as an input to feed the larger structure of the ESP context in language learning? (Alharby, 2005). It will also go a long way in helping to address the rife complaints by employers about Polytechnic graduates' inability to perform well in the target situation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of needs and models of needs analysis

The role of NA in any ESP course is indisputable. This is

why, for Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) NA is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevance for all subsequent course design activities. Brown (1995) defines the term 'needs analysis' (also called needs assessment) as the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum which meets the learning needs of a particular group of students such as Business Studies students in Nigerian Polytechnics. In his words:

Needs analysis is the systematic collection and analysis of all objective and subjective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institution that influence the teaching and learning situation (P.36).

The aforementioned definition draws a line between needs analysis and evaluation. Thus, while NA aims at determining the needs of a defined group of learners, an evaluation determines to what extent a programme meets these needs. This was re-echoed by Soriano (1995) who notes that NA collects and analyzes data to determine what learners "want" and "need" to learn while an evaluation measures the effectiveness of a programme to meet the needs of the learners.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) had earlier defined NA on the basis on "necessities" and "wants" in order to distinguish between what the learners have to know and what the learners feel they need to know. The focus here is on the 'lacks' that represent the gap between the required proficiency in the target situation and the existing proficiency of the learners. This definition views language needs as a process of negotiation between the learners and their society.

Watkin and Altschuld (1995) see NA as a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about programmes or organizational improvement and allocation of resources. NA, according to this definition, should fill the "gap" of needs between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs.

The definitions aforementioned base their concept of needs analyses around the terms "necessities", "lacks", "wants", and "gaps". However, all these terms have different interpretations from one individual to another. This is why linguists in the ESP field have not agreed exactly on the term "needs" itself. While West (1994) had commented on this issue by indicating that the term "needs:" lacks a unified definition and so remains ambiguous, Richards (2001) argues that the definition of "needs" depends on the perception of those making the judgment. Brown (1995) notes that although linguists disagree on the definitions, they all agree that there are external factors that influence the definitions. These factors which include staffing, time, cultural attitude, should be taken into consideration when conducting NA since NA is the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a very

focused course (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

On the purpose of NA, many authors including Edward (2000), Richards (2001), Umera-Okeke (2005) and Frendo (2007) have written to explain it. Richards (2001) in particular, itemizes some of the reasons why NA is conducted as follows:

(1) To find out what language skills a learner needs to perform well at the target situation.
(2) To help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs and potentials of students.
(3) To determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills.
(4) To identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is important.
(5) To identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do.
(6) To collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing.

The information gathered distinguishes ESP from General English instruction because it focuses on an awareness of a need – a flexible and responsive curriculum determined by ESP as an attractive learning alternative. The focus of this research is on the first reason aforementioned. It focuses on the writing skill needs of polytechnic Business Studies students at Auchi Polytechnic, who are post-experience learners (HND students).

Just as the definitions of needs and needs analysis have broadened with experience and research, so have different models under the ESP umbrella approached the field in different ways. These include a sociolinguistic model (Munby, 1978), a systematic approach (Richterich and Chancerel (1977), a learning-centred approach (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), Learner-centred approaches (Berwick, 1989), and a task-based approach (Long, 2005).

Jordan (1997) points out that two main and dominant approaches in NA are the Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and the Present Situation Analysis (PSA). Even through other approaches like Means Analysis, Strategy Analysis Approach, Discourse Analysis Approach, Register Analysis Approach, Deficiency Analysis Approach still exist, they are seen as permutations of TSA and PSA (Jordan, 1997; Songhori, 2008).

Alharby (2005) re-echoing Jordan (1997) indicates that the TSA and the PSA are the two landmarks in NA studies and that researchers continue to use either of these models as their theoretical base depending on the circumstances of the conducted research. This study adopted a similar theoretical base to the TSA approach since it is more appropriate for the objective of the study, the sample population and other considerations.

Empirical studies

The following overview provides a sampling of studies in

NA conducted in different parts of the world from the end of the last 20th century to the present decade of the 21st century. According to Adetuyibi and Osundahunsi (1984), reviewing the contents of English programme in Polytechnics lamented that:

What is being taught and learnt in Nigerian polytechnics is most likely to be short of ESP because most books usedare EGP books which can be used with secondary schoolsor university students.

This observation was made at a time when no uniform syllabus for Nigerian polytechnics and so the researchers went ahead to recommend that the English taught in polytechnics should be relevant to each student's field of specialization, as for instance, the students of accounting reading to acquire the language register of his field of specialization and the student of Engineering, that of engineering.

In 1990, six years after this observation, the first uniform syllabus for Nigerian polytechnics was produced by the NBTE. It was titled: General Studies Course Specifications for National and Higher National Diploma Programme. Its English contents are shown in Appendices1, 2 and 3. The contents were far from ESP as there was no clear indication of the NA on which the syllabus was based. Even the revised 2009 edition of the syllabus has not shown much difference.

Adedeji (1984) obviously aware of the importance of NA in ESP and also aware that it might not have been conducted with regard to Nigerian Polytechnics, argued that the technical student did not just need to be provided with "courses that give him advanced practice in comprehension, grammar and essay writing, but that he needs also, courses designed to show how sentences are used to perform different communication acts. Adedeji (1984) was obviously talking about communicative competence and the various strategies for achieving it as spelt out in Richards et al (1985).

His view, therefore, points to the direction to which this research is headed. The polytechnic Business Studies student certainly deserves much more than he is currently getting in English. His target needs need to be investigated and analyzed to know exactly what his requirement is. This is not a new thing; it has been done before.

Alexander (1988) reports an example of a needs analysis (NA) for pre-experience learners in which he examined the needs of students on a course in European Business Studies in Germany. Using the Munbyan CNP and eliciting responses to a questionnaire he designed, he identified two main purposes for which his subject required English: (a) for academic purposes to complete their course of study; (b) for occupational purposes as each student was to have a six-month placement in a work environment. The students, thus, needed the full gamut of skills to enable them to cope, but primarily needed oral and receptive skills of reading.

The report has some implications for the present study. First, the subjects for the present study, like those of Alexander's are equally Business Studies students. Second, the subjects of this study need a one-year placement in a work environment before returning for the HND programme. These subjects have already acquired that requirement. They are post-experience learners.

However, in terms of methodology, Alexander's instrument for eliciting responses – the Munbyan framework – does not seem to be appropriate for the present study. This is because of the present criticism against it (West, 1994). In terms of population, the subjects of the present are by far more than those of Alexander's. While Alexander (1988) used the Munbyan framework, this study uses the University of Ibadan Modified Needs Analysis Questionnaire (UIMNAQ).

Lombardo (1988) surveyed 200 students in the School of Economics, Italy, to investigate students' perceived needs and attitudes about learning English as a second language. The result showed that students were motivated to learn English to have a better chance to get a job. Technical terminology was the major problem in reading. Understanding oral reports and participating in meetings were the most needed activities to succeed in their field. In regard to the importance of the four skills, listening skills were ranked as the most important, followed by speaking, reading and writing. The present research has 731 students as subjects who are post-experience learners. Nevertheless, the insights provided by Lombardo (1988) are useful here.

Ubahakwe and Ntia (1990) is a compilation of empirical studies in NA. In clear unmistakable terms, the document is a university document prepared by university teachers about university students with no room whatsoever for polytechnic students. It is the first empirical study on NA in Nigeria. It contains:

(1) Needs analysis of speaking skills
(2) Needs analysis of reading skills
(3) Needs analysis of writing skills
(4) Needs analysis of listening and study skills.

The study covered the University of Ibadan and six others namely: Jos (Unijos), Port Harcourt (Uniport), Zaria (ABU), Kano (BUK), Calabar (Unical), and Nsukka (UNN). It is indeed a practical demonstration of how to conduct a need analysis; hence this study draws heavily from it in terms of instrument and methodology. Nevertheless, as the analyses were not restricted to fresh university students alone (except, of course, in the case of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka), it becomes difficult to see the gneralisability of the findings to the subjects of the present study who are Business Studies students in a Polytechnic. A particular striking point about the volume, however, is the statement by the authors that:

Needs analysis is so central to a programme that it defines the contents of the syllabus and the approach to be adopted in implementing the syllabus (P.vi).

It needs be pointed out that a textbook – English for Academic Purposes edited by Helen Chukwuma and Emeka Otagburuagu was later produced in 1997 based on the needs analysis of the university students. The textbook is now being used in the universities across the country.

Al-Bazzaz (1994) conducted a needs analysis on the students of the College of Business Studies at Kuwait University. He distributed questionnaires to students and teachers and also conducted interviews and observations. The research revealed that the English Language required to perform in the target situation – labour market – was attainable, but was not adequately covered in the English Language courses taught to the students of Business there. Al-Bazzaz's research has a lot of implication for the present study in terms of methodology and findings. Like Al-Bazzaz's research, questionnaires, interviews and observation are also used here. The findings are instructive.

Balogun (1997) using the survey method, conducted a needs analysis on Secretarial Studies students at Auchi Polytechnic. His subjects were pre-experience learners. His research revealed that the subjects needed the whole gamut of productive and receptive skills, but needed listening skills the most. Although the subjects of the present study are post-experience learners, the findings of Balogun (1997) still have implications for the present study, especially as the methodology is the same.

At the beginning of the present century, Almulhim (2001) investigated the English Language needs of Saudi employees in 101 companies representing business sectors in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The investigation measured the level of English proficiency required in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. A questionnaire was distributed to different companies and completed by 308 employees and managers. The results revealed that the English language knowledge is required for employment in most companies and that the level of proficiency varies among different companies. In regard to language skills, managers and employees rated listening as the most important skill followed by speaking, reading and writing respectively. The research concluded that though the English language is needed in the private sector, an intermediate level of proficiency is generally sufficient to conduct this job. The present study, being a survey, draws from the methodology of Almulhim (2001). This, however, differs from it in the sense that while his subjects were employees, the subjects of the present study are students.

Kavaliauskiene and Uspaliene (2003) is a research which aimed at presenting the on-going analysis of learners' needs, wants, and lacks at a tertiary level and prospective implications for successful language learning. Their research was conducted at the Law University of Lithuania, using a combination of questionnaire,

interviews and observation. It revealed that:

The thorough analysis of on-going learners' needs, wants and lacks allows teachers to adjust ESP course syllabus to students' changing demands by providing meaningful experience with language and placing emphasis on tasks and activities that will benefit learning (p.9).

The research charts a clear course for the present study even though the subjects are different. Their findings have implication for the present study. In 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, in association with the British Council commissioned a Baseline Study to:

Analyze the current situation of ESP teaching and assessment in Ukraine Higher Education, and define how it meets the requirements of National Education Reform, students needs and society as a whole; formulate a proposal for National ESP curriculum design based on the findings of the Baseline Study (ME and S.U. p. 8)

In the course of the study, a needs analysis was conducted, using the survey design methodology on 334 respondents from higher institutions across the country. The findings from the research reveal that NA is the basis of ESP curriculum design, and that TSA and study needs should determine the content of the ESP curriculum design. Furthermore, the TSA shows the need for introducing business correspondence and business communication as well as academic writing in the ESP curriculum.

The implications of these findings are obvious. The present study uses the survey design methodology and the respondents are also higher institution students. Also, the recommendations that business correspondence and business communication be introduced is instructive. This is because in Nigeria, Literature in English seems to enjoy equal status with the above-mentioned subjects (business correspondence and business communication) in the NBTE syllabus for Polytechnics.

Stapa and Jais (2005) using the framework of needs analysis, investigated the writing needs of and expectation of Hotel Management and Tourism students in three universities in Malaysia. Like the present research, the subjects of their research were post-experience learners. Their research questions were:

(1) What are the expectations and needs of the students with regard to their writing abilities to function efficiently in job markets in the future?
(2) Do current writing programme for Hotel Management and Tourism students in three higher learning institutions reflect the specific writing needs at the work place?

The findings of the research indicated the need to perform job-related tasks such as reports, memos, letters and several others which are among some of the common writing skills. The researchers recommended

that "many areas needed to be looked into to balance EOP and general English Language proficiency for students in order to ensure maximum effectiveness in the transition from learning to working." This is a very related research which the present study relies upon in terms of methodology and framework. The findings are particularly instructive. The research questions are similar to the one for the present research.

Huh (2006) conducted a needs analysis for an ESL Business English course aimed at improving learners' general Business English communication skills in Korea. Using the survey method – interviews and questionnaires – he elicited information from 75 Korean business professionals from 13 different companies. He identified 26 Business English tasks through the interviews and questionnaire survey. The findings of the study provided a sound basis and valuable implications for curriculum developers and teachers in developing Business English courses.

The relevance of the research to the present study lies in the fact that the findings of the present study could also be useful for curriculum developers and teachers in developing Business English course in Nigeria, especially in the Polytechnics. Although the subjects of both studies are different, the identified tasks are relevant to the present study as they are the tasks in the target situation. Chostelidou (2010) conducted a needs analysis on students of Accountancy with the aim of identifying their needs and introducing a needs-based course design. The findings of the study revealed the need for the development of a highly specific ESP language course with a clear focus on the target discipline – accountancy. There was, as a consequence, a call for the provision of ESP training which addresses the learners' immediate needs as students and their long-term needs as professionals in the Accountancy business. Although Chostelidou's (2010) research was conducted in a Greek tertiary institution, it is not without implication for the present study. Accountancy students, the subjects of this research, are part of the population of the present study. As a profession, whatever affects the curriculum in any part of the world is bound to have implications for the practitioner; hence the research findings are instructive.

Finally, ESP aims at helping learners to turn their dormant grammatical competence into a real practical mastery of the target language. It is rooted in the Sociolinguistic theory of communicative competence from which the communicative approach to language teaching/learning derives. Of the sampled empirical studies so far, none has focused on Polytechnic students that are post-experience learners especially in Nigeria. This is where this research comes in.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This work is a survey study; hence the survey research design is

Table1. Research question.

Research question	Sub-questions with questionnaire Items
At the HND level, to what extent do you think you still need writing skills after what you learnt at the ND level	How would you rate the relevance of English/Communication courses at the HND level in your discipline?
	Based on your IT experience, rate the following tasks in order of importance to your course/discipline
	In every semester, how often do you think you have to carry out the following writing tasks at the HND level?

Table 2. Rating of English/communication courses by Auchi polytechnic HND business studies students.

Sub-question: How would you rate English/Communication courses at HND level?	No	Percentage (%)
Very relevant	547	74.8
Somewhat relevant	177	24.2
A little relevant	5	0.7
Not at all	2	0.3

adopted. This is a more popular and convenient way of obtaining information about a given population by gathering data on the opinion of a selected sample and then generalizing the sample (Osuala, 2001).

Subjects

Seven hundred and thirty-one (731) HND 1 and 2 students of the 2012/2013 academic session in Auchi Polytechnic are the subjects of the study. These subjects are in the various departments of the School of Business Studies as follows: Accountancy 203; Banking & Finance 128; Management 139; Marketing 156; and Public Administration 105.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection is the questionnaire. It has three sections, A, B and C. Section A provides for the demographic data of the respondents, Section B has items on self-assessment, and Section D, items on writing skills. The instrument was taken to experts in Applied Linguistics, especially those conversant with ESP approaches and methodologies, language teachers and needs analysts of UI, UNN, OAU for validation. After careful validation, the instrument was pilot-tested on some HND I students before final administration. Out of the one thousand (1000) questionnaires administered, seven hundred and thirty-one (731) were returned to the researcher or his assistant who distributed them during the course of a two-hour lecture that was on-going.

Method of data analysis

As the study involves a research question, descriptive statistics was employed in the data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviation were used to analyze the data for the research question.

Research question

At the HND level, to what extent do you think you still need writing skills after what you learnt at the ND level?

The aforementioned research question was further broken down into sub-questions with questionnaire items as shown in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the rating of English/Communication courses by Auchi Polytechnic Business Studies students. While 547 (74.8%) respondents rate the courses as very relevant, 177(24.2%) respondents rate them as somewhat relevant, 5 (0.7%) respondents rate them as a little relevant, and 2(0.3%) respondents rate them as not at all.

Table 3 shows the rating of and ranking of writing tasks by the respondents. While 421(57.6%) rate "writing business letters" as very relevant/important and hence rank it as 1st, 20(2.7%) rate it as relevant/important, 283(38.7%) rate it as fairly relevant/important and 7(1.0%) rate it as not at all.

"Writing business reports" is equally ranked 1st by 343 (46.9%) respondents, who rate it as very relevant/ important; 366(50.1%) rate it as fairly relevant/important; and 2(0.3%) rate it as not at all. "Writing summaries" is ranked 2nd by 517 (70.7%) respondents who rate it as very important/relevant; 15(2.1%) rate it as relevant/ important; 178 (24.4%) rate if as fairly relevant/important; and 21(2.9%) respondents rate it as not at all. "Writing Memos" is ranked 3rd by 421 (57.6%) respondents who rate it as very important/ relevant; 112 (15.3%) respondents rate it as relevant/important; 192 (26.3%) rate it as

Table 3. Rating and ranking of writing tasks by respondents.

Tasks/options	Very relevant/ important		Relevant/ important		Fairly relevant/ important		Not at all		Ranking
	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	5	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	
Writing summaries	517	70.7	15	2.1	178	24.4	21	2.9	2
Writing business letters	421	57.6	20	2.7	283	38.7	7	1.0	1
Writing project reports	529	72.4	23	3.1	176	24.1	3	0.4	6
Writing instructions/directions	337	46.1	12	1.6	399	51.8	3	0.4	7
Writing business reports	343	46.9	20	2.7	366	50.1	2	0.3	1
Writing e-mails, faxes	320	43.8	96	13.1	313	42.8	2	0.3	5
Writing memos	421	57.6	112	15.3	192	26.3	6	0.8	3
Writing minutes of meetings	415	56.8	25	3.4	289	39.5	2	0.3	4
Writing plays/stories/poems/critical essays	337	46.1	0	0	394	53.9	0	0	8
Writing news reports	255	34.9	17	2.3	455	62.2	4	0.5	8

fairly relevant/important and 6 (0.8%) rate it as not at all. "Writing minutes of meetings" is ranked 4th in order of importance by 415 (56.8%) respondents who rate the task as very relevant/important and 25 (3.4%) respondents who rate it as relevant/important. 289 (39.5%) respondents rate it as fairly relevant/important and 2(0.3%) respondents rate it as not at all.

Ranked 5th is "writing e-mail, faxes" which is rated as very relevant/important by 320 (43.8%). 96 (13.1%) respondents rate it as relevant/important, 313 (42.8%) respondents rate it as fairly relevant/important and 2 (0.3%) respondents rate it as not at all. Ranked 6th is "writing project reports". While 529 (72.4%) respondents rate it as very relevant/important, 23 (3.1%) respondents rate it as relevant/important. Also, 176 (24.1%) respondents rate it as fairly relevant/important and 3 (0.4%) respondents rate it as not at all.

"Writing instruction/directions" is ranked 7th by 337 (46.1%) respondents who rate it as very relevant/ important, 12(1.6%) respondents who rate it as relevant/ important, 399 (51.8%) respondents who rate it as fairly relevant/important, and 3 (0.4%) who rate it as not at all. "Writing plays/stories/poem/critical essay" is ranked 8th by 337(46.1%) respondents who rate the task as very relevant/important and 394 (53.9%) respondents who rate it as fairly relevant/important. Equally ranked 8th is "writing news reports". This is rated very relevant/ important by 255 (34.9%) respondents, relevant/ important by 1(2.3%) respondents, fairly relevant/ important by 455 (62.2%) respondents and not at all by 4 (0.5%) respondents.

Table 4 shows the number of times that the respondents would like writing tasks performed in a semester. This is based on their experience in the industry (IT) where they had spent one year before returning for the HND, which qualifies them as post-experience learners. On a four-point scale of Never (1), 1 to 3 times (2), 4 to 6 times (3) and more than 6 times (4)

the respondents indicated as follows:

After ranking "writing business letters" as 1st, they would like the task performed 4-6times in a semester, 458(62.0%) respondents want it done 4-6 times/ semerster while 255(34.9%) respondents want it done more than 6times/semester. 18(2.5%) respondents want it done 1-3times/semester.

As the table further reveals, the following tasks: writing notes from text books (ranked 12th); writing instruction/ direction (ranked 10th) and reporting interviews and discussion (ranked 7th) are expected to be performed more than 6 times/semester (4). This perhaps could be as a result of the non-familianty of the topics to the respondents who might not have come across them during their industrial training (IT).

The following five writing tasks are expected to be performed 1 to 3 times/semester (2). Writing summaries (raked 6th), writing news reports, (raked 7th), writing critical essays (raked 8th), writing case notes (ranked 8th), and writing e-mails (raked 5th). This could be as a result of the over-familiarity of the tasks to the respondents and the presence of the topics in their syllabus at the National Diploma (ND) level (Appendix 1).

Seven writing tasks namely: taking lecture notes (ranked 13th); writing experiment reports (ranked 11th); writing business letters (ranked 1st). Writing project reports (ranked 4th); writing business reports (ranked 2nd); writing plays/stories/poems (ranked 9th); and writing memos (ranked 3rd) are all expected to be performed 4-6times/semesters (3). This could be due to the familiarity of the topics to the respondents (Appendix 3).

Three concepts: non-familiarity, familiarity and over-familiarity of tasks and topics to the respondents have played out in this research. Thus, when the tasks are unfamiliar to the respondents, they would like them to perform more than 6 times/semester, when familiar, they

Table 4. Number of times/semester Respondents would want writing tasks performed and ranking of tasks.

Tasks/Options	Never		1 to 3 times		4 to 6 times		More than 6 times		Ranking
	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	
Writing summaries	100	21.9	336	46.0	145	19.8	90	12.3	6
Taking lecture notes	0	0	163	22.3	313	42.8	255	34.9	13
Taking notes from textbooks	0	0	23	3.1	176	24.1	532	72.8	12
Writing experiment reports	0	0	12	1.0	464	63.5	255	34.9	11
Writing business letters	0	0	18	2.5	458	62.0	255	34.9	1
Writing project reports	2	0.3	93	12.7	381	52.1	255	34.9	4
Writing instructions/directives	5	0.7	110	15.0	245	33.5	371	50.8	10
Reporting interviews and discussions	0	0	24	3.3	347	47.5	360	49.2	7
Writing business reports	0	0	0	0	475	45.1	255	34.9	2
Writing plays/stories/poems	0	0	336	46.0	349	47.7	46	6.3	9
Writing news reports	76	10.4	370	50.6	229	31.3	56	7.7	7
Writing critical essays	79	10.8	512	70.0	72	9.8	68	9.3	8
Writing case notes	136	18.6	455	62.2	89	12.2	51	7.0	8
Writing e-mails	36	4.9	586	80.2	63	8.6	46	6.3	5
Writing memos	0	0	105	14.4	570	78.0	56	7.7	3

would like them to perform 4 to 6times/semester and when over-familiar, they would like them to perform 1 to 3times/semester.

The major finding of this study was that a majority of the respondents need writing skills very much at the HND level in spite of all that they had learnt at the ND level. The implication of this finding is that such writing tasks as writing business letters, writing business reports, writing memos, writing project reports should be given more attention than writing plays/stories/poems and critical essays at the HND level.

It was also found out that English/Communication courses are very relevant at the HND level. On a four-point scale of 1 to 4 (not at all, a bit relevant/important, relevant, and very relevant a majority of the respondents rated the courses as very relevant/important (Table 3).

On the number of times per semester that the respondents would want writing tasks carried out, a majority of them want them done in 4 to 6/semester (Table 4). This is as a result of the finding contained in Table 3.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Umera-Okeke (2005), the problem that exists in Nigeria is that there is not yet a realization, neither by intuitions nor by learners, of the importance of assessment of needs. This is evident in the fact that such assessments are rare, and if conducted, they are not taken seriously by both parties (that is, institution and learners. The result would be designing syllabuses and methodologies based on teachers' or employers'

intuitions that do not directly address the real needs of learners.

The study, using the Unversity of Ibadan modified Needs Analysis Questionnaire (UIMNAQ) as the major instrument has investigated the writing skill needs of HND Business Studies students in Auchi Polytechnic, Nigeria where complaints are rife from employers that polytechnic graduate, especially Business Studies graduates cannot write standard reports, memos or even produce intelligible minutes of meetings and other forms of writing tasks. The syllabus in use in Nigerian polytechnic was produced by the NBTE, the academic, regulatory body for polytechnics and it appears to have been designed without regard to the question. "Why do these learners need to learn English at the level?". Thus, there is no indication of the needs analysis on which the syllabus was based.

ESP teaching occurs whenever the content and aims of the teaching are determined by the requirements of the learner rather than by external factors (Johnson, 1993). This study has brought out what Business Studies students at Auchi Polytechnic feel should be emphasized for them in order for them to perform well in the target situation. As post-experience learners, these require-ments of theirs cannot simply be dismissed with a wave of the hand. That is why it is recommended that the identified "very relevant/important "writing skills and tasks in this study be included in the syllabus for Business Studies students in Nigerian Polytechnics, in the spirit of the communicative competence of the modern times.

Furthermore, writing tasks like "writing stories/poems/ essays," "writing case notes", etc. which are ranked low in order of relevance/importance should be accorded less attention in an emerging ESP syllabus unlike what

presently obtains wherein literature in English occupies so much pride of place in the syllabus in operation. Finally, the NBTE should consider convening of a conference on "English/Communication syllabus for Nigerian Polytechnics" where findings of research of this nature can be harnesses and utilized.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

Adedeji R (1984). The English Language Teacher and the Technical Student. In: Freeman R. and Jibril, M. (eds). English Language Studies in Nigerian Higher Education. London: The British Council.

Adetuyibi AO, Osundahunsi D (1984). Towards the Cooperate Marketing of English for Specific Purposes. In: Freeman R, Jibril M (eds). English Lauguage Studies in Nigerian Higher Education

Al-Bazzaz AA (1994). The Students' low achievement in Business English at the   College of Business Studies in Kuwait: An Analysis of the Students Educational and Occupational Requirements. England: The University of Sussex.

Alharby M (2005). ESP Target Situation Needs Analysis: The English Language Communication Needs as perceived by Health Professionals in Riyadh Area. Unpublished Ph.D, Dissertation. The University of George, USA.

Alexander R (1988). Examining the Spoken English of European Business students Problems and Prospect. Syst. 16(1):41-48.

Balogun FU (1997). Needs Analysis: the Case of Secretarial Students at Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Bell RT (1981). An Introduction to Applied Linguistics: Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. London: Bats ford.

Berwick R (1989). Needs Assessment in Language Programming: from Theory to Practice. In: Johnson, R.K. (ed). The Second Language Curriculum: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brindley G (1989). The role of Needs Analysis in Adult ESL Programme Design. In: Johnson, R.K. (ed). The Second Language Curriculum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown JD (1995). The Elements of Language Curriculum: a Systematic Approach to Programme Development. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, 20 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116.

Chostelidou D (2010). A needs analysis approach to ESP Syllabus design in Greek Tertiary education: a descriptive account of students' needs. Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci. 2(2):4507-4512.

Dudley-Evans T, St. John MJ (1998) Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://www.aelfe.org/documents/text2-Palmer.pdf

Fiorito H (2005). How is English for Specific Purposes different from English as a Second language also known as general English? Teaching English for Specific Purposes – Teacher Articles. File:///c:documents%20 and %20 settings/USER/My%20 Documents/... Retrieved July 15, 2011.

Frendo E (2007). How to teach business English. Essex: Pennson, Longman.

Gardner P, Winslow J (1983). Present and proposed methods of determining the Needs of students in public sector Higher Education. In Richterich, R. (ed). Case Studies in Identifying Language Needs. Oxford: Pergamon/Council of Europe.

Huh S (2006). A task-based needs analysis for a Business English course. Second Language Studies 24(2):1-64.

Hutchinson T, Waters A (1987). English for Specific Purposes: a Learning-Centred Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hymes DH (1972). On Communicative Competence. In: Pride, J.B. and Holmes, J. (eds) Socio-Linguistics.

Howard APR (1984). A History of English Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johns AM, Dudley-Evans T (1991). English for specific purposes: International in scope, specific in purpose. TESOL Quarterly 25(2):297-314.

Johnson-Laird PN (1993). Foreword. In Cacciari & Tabossi (Eds.), vii-x.

Jordan RR (1997). English for Academic Purposes. A guide and resource book for Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kavaliauskiene G, Uzpaliene D (2003). Ongoing Needs Analysis as a factor to Successful language learning. J. Language Learning. 1:1.

Lombardo L (1988). Language Learners' needs, interest and motivation. A survey of EFL students in an Italian Economics Faculty (No. ED304006).

Long MH (2005). Methodological issues in Learner needs analysis In: Long, M.H. (ed). Second Language needs analyses. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 19-76.

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2003). English for Specific purposes (ESP) In Ukraine. A Baseline study. Kyiv: British Council.

Munby J (1978). Communicative syllabus design. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

National Board for Technical Education (1999). General Studies Course Specification for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma Programmes. Kaduna: NBTE

Osuala EC (2001). Introduction to research methodology: Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers Ltd.

Owolabi DM (2012). Attaining Linguistic Proficiency in EFL/ESL Adult classroom Through English for Specific Purposes; The Nigerian example. TESOL J. 6:105-122. Available online at http://www.tesol-journal.com

Richards J (2001). Curriculum development in Language teaching. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

Richards JC, Platt J, Weber H (1985). Dictionary of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richterich R, Chancerel JL (1977). Identifying the needs of adults learning a Foreign language. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Songhori MH (2008). Introduction to Needs Analysis. English for Specific Purposes World. www.esp-world.info

Stapa SH, Jais IRM (2005). A survey of writing needs and expectations of Hotel Management and Tourism Students ESP World. 1(9):4.

Strevens P (1988). ESP after twenty years: a reappraisal. In: Tickens, M. (ed). ESP: State Of the art. SEEMED: Regional Language Centre.

Ubahakwe E, Ntia UN (eds) (1990). Needs Analysis of Communication Skills in Nigeria   Universities. Ibadan: Com Skip Publication Series.

Umera-Okeke NP (2005). An Introduction to English for Specific Purposes. (ESP) Awka: Nigeria Fab Educational Books.

Watkin BR, Altschuld JW (1995). Planning and Conducting needs assessment: A Practical Guide. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

West R (1994). Needs analysis in language teaching. Language Teachings 27(1):11-19.

Appendix 1. Contents of NBTE English syllabus 1990 Year 1 (ND I).

1st Semester	2nd Semester
Course title/Course code	**Course title/Course code**
Use of English/GNS 101	**Comm. in English/GNS 102**
Language development	Communication skills
Grammatical conventions	Oral composition
Summary writing/Note taking/making	Correspondence
Essays	Comprehension and interpretation
Literature in English	Report writing

Year 2 (ND 2)

1st Semester	2nd Semester
Course title/Course code	**Course Title/Course code**
Use of English 2/GNS 201	**Comm. in English/GNS 202**
Grammatical rules	Correspondence
Essays	Writing for publication
Denotations and connotations	Registers
Comprehension and summary	Reports

Year III (HND I)

1st Semester	2nd Semester
Course title/Course code	**Course title/Course code**
Use of English III/GNS 301	**Comm. in English III/GNS 302**
Sentences	Formal and Informal letters
Logic	Principles of logic
Types of essays	Continuous writing
Literature	Technical reports
Registers	Word usage

Year 4 (HND II)

1st Semester	2nd Semester
Course title/Course code	**Course title/Course code**
Comm. in English IV/GNS 401	**Literary appreciation oral composition/GNS 402**
Communication theory and process	Literary genres
Organizational communication	Literary development and writing
Principles and practice of communication	Oral presentation

Source: NBTE general studies course specifications (1990).

Appendix 2. Contents of NBTE English syllabus for 1999 Year 1 (ND 1)

1st semester Course title/Course code Use of English I/GNS 101	2nd semester Course title/Course code Comm. in English/GNS 102
Study skills	Communication
Language	Oral presentation
Grammatical conventions	Correspondence
Paragraphing	Comprehension and interpretation
Literature in English	-

Year 2 (ND 2)

1st semester Course title/Course code Use of English II/GNS 201	2nd semester Course title/Course code Comm. in English II/GNS 202
Grammatical rules	Registers
Essays	Correspondence
Denotations and connotations	Writing for publication
Comprehension and summary	Reports
Literature in English	-

Year 3 (HND 1)

Course title/Course code Use of English III/GNS 301	Course Title/Course Code COMM. IN English III/GNS 302
Sentences	Written communication
Logic	Comprehension
Essays	Project reports
Literature	

Year4 (HND 2)

Course title/Course code Comm. in English IV/GNS 401	Course title/Course code Literary appreciation and oral composition/GNS 202
Theory and practice of communication	Literary genres
Organizational communication	Literary essay
Oral presentations	-

Source: NBTE: General studies course specifications (1999).

Appendix 3. Contents of NBTE English syllabus for 2009.

Level	1st semester	2nd semester
GNS 101 Use of English1		**GNS 102** Communication in English 1
ND I	Study skills	Communication
	Language	Correspondence
	Grammatical	Comprehension and interpretation
	Paragraphing	Literature in English
GNS 201 Use of English II		**GNS 202** Communication in English II
ND II	Grammatical rules	Registers
	Essays	Correspondence
	Denotation and connotation	Writing for publication
	Summary	Reports
	Literature in English (Drama)	-
GNS 301 Use of English III		**GNS 302**
HND I	Sentences	Communication in English III
	Logic	Writing communication
	Essays	Comprehension
	Literature	Project reports
GNS 401 Communication in English IV		**GNS 402** Literary appreciation and oral composition
HND II	Theory and practice of communication	
	Organizational communication	Literary genres
	Meetings, debates, seminars conferences, interviews	Literary essays
	Leadership	Oral presentation