

# **A Comparative Needs Analysis of Business Students, Graduate Employees and Subject Instructors in Taiwan**

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## **Introduction**

Use of survey on students' English language needs has been widely conducted for ESP research in both ESL and EFL contexts. In either contexts, previous research aimed differently on academic requirements or target skills that students learn to perform in their future professions. Lepetit and Cichocki (2002) stated that "language needs analysis is an approach to curriculum development that bases the content of language courses on the communication needs, wants and interests of the learners." Studies which examined target-centered language skills yielded specific findings in branches of ESP, namely EBP or EMP and reflected on language training scenarios for settings in question. Learners' language needs survey in academic setting, on the other hand, examined the required competences for surviving academic tasks which is considerably discipline-dependent in nature.

Academically, Ferris' (1996a, 1996b) serial studies provided a comprehensive pictures on students and instructors' perceptions of aural/oral skills in tertiary education. The large scale data collected from instructors in four different institutions provided teachers' perspectives on various listening and speaking requirements across disciplines. Follow-up investigation in 1998 indicated the gap between students' responses and professors' perceptions. Moreover, dramatic variety on skills and needs rankings indicated the necessity for language teachers on preparing students for comprehension and participation in lectures.

Academic challenges were considered more significant for international students in the U.S academic education contexts, especially listening comprehension and oral speaking difficulties for Asian students. Kim (2006) provided graduate Asian students' responses to the requirements, their difficulties and suggestions for how EAP teachers might better offer assistance. In the same sense, Ferris and Tagg (1996b) noted ESL students' difficulties with listening/speaking tasks by investigating professors' viewpoints. Content-area instructors felt that ESL students have great difficulties with class participation, asking and responding to

questions and general listening comprehensions. Also, they suggested that authenticity was essential for ESL instructors to carry out EAP activities.

Along the same sense, Northcott (2001) found the similar challenges for international students in MBA program at the University of Edinburgh. Pervasive use of interactive lecture and group work with students from multinationals, non-native speaking students especially had difficulties in class participation. The findings suggested EAP professionals plan courses and materials that were tailored-made for helping students participate effectively in demanding subject lecture.

Studies mentioned above targeted on learners' perceived language needs and difficulties which provided implications for EAP curriculum development. However, concerns of language needs assessment addressed two fundamental questions in carried contexts: "target needs" versus "learning needs." The former, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987; cited in Taillefer, 2007):

"... include necessities (what the learner must know to function effectively), lacks (what is known compared to what must be known), wants (perception of what needs to be known), all of which may be viewed from both objective and subjective (learners') perspectives."

Opposed to examining the existing students, study is conducted on asking graduate's perceptions. In addition, due to the differences in how language training and curriculum design is related to domestic language use and educational setting, assessing learner needs in specified context might provide more insights. Aforementioned studies, though, noted the needs in ESL academic context for business programs, it is argued that ESL research findings should not directly transfer to EFL or other domestic learning situations (Kuo, p. 51).

Moreover, academic language needs may differ from future demands of their professions. Crosling and Ward (2002) surveyed graduate employees in Australia on oral communication skills used in workplace. The importance and frequency of skill use indicated that workplace communication is large proportionally informal and related to interpersonal interactions. Another study in Hong Kong, Chew (2005) investigated English language skills needed by young graduates employed in four Hong Kong banks. The data was intended to compare what

is taught at university to what is actually needed to fulfill work.

More recently, Taillefer (2007) compared professional language needs of economic graduates to other stakeholders (present students, economics teachers and language teachers) in French context. Four communication skills were seen to be necessary to high level of competence, and graduates expressed their difficulties in meeting their target needs especially in oral communication. The aim of the present study then is to compare present language teaching to the target needs for business graduate employee and to explore self-assessment competence and issues of language training in Taiwan.

English ability in Taiwanese workplace, though is used mainly for international communication, it is always required for assessment-based use (Sommers, 2008). Employees even if not use English in most of the works; firms use English as a measure of employee potential and certificates. Kuo (1987) investigated English needs of undergraduate, graduate and in-service technical professionals' in Taiwan. Graduate and working professionals had more similar specific academic or work-related objectives. On the other hand, undergraduates maintained more basic language skills training preferences. Three groups of participants, however, all considered reading the most important skills above other three. It is noted that EST learners in Taiwan, according to their educational levels, perceived different language needs and proficiency.

Along the same lines, Tsui (1991) investigated the English communication skills need of professionals in Taiwan's high-technology industries. It is suggested that basic English classes are needed to improve students' listening and speaking skills which surveyed to be insufficiently practiced. In addition, working professionals who learn foreign languages for their specific and individual requirement or objectives had shed lights on the task-oriented EPP courses.

However, few studies had targeted on business language needs in Taiwan. Sommers (2008) used qualitative interview data to provide in-depth comprehension of needs in target corporate companies. Demands of English competences in workplaces could be categorized into three types: intensive, elective and assessment-based use. Employees respectively mentioned their obstacles and difficulties in meeting those demands of their job. Speaking ability had been mentioned frequently, especially by higher position of operations, such as managers. Generally, e-mail writing task was suggested to be commonly required, followed

by translation of written and spoken language.

Language needs assessment (Lepetit & Cichocki, 2002, p 384) is an approach to curriculum development that bases the content of language courses on the communication needs, wants, and interests of the learners. Learner needs may be current versus future or real and hypothetical needs as well as student-expected, teacher-expected and in-service needs (Kuo, 1987; Mackay & Bosquet, 1981). These surveys contribute to the first step in organization of new curriculum and also of re-evaluations on existing courses.

The purpose of present study thus attempts to (a) examine the English target needs in Taiwan's workplaces for business learners by comparing student-expected, teacher-expected and in-service experiences, (b) identify the English communication skills most needed by business employees at work, and (c) discover most perceived necessary language training courses for business students. Survey questionnaires were completed by three groups of participants: undergraduate present students, business instructors and graduate employees.

## **Method**

**Participants.** One private institution in North of Taiwan was selected in inquiry. Target business-related majors were junior and senior students. Twenty-one (20 female, 1 male) present students completed paper-based questionnaires, and they were mainly from three departments: Accounting, Finance and Business Administration. Nearly all of them were female students (95%). Moreover, there were 8 content-area instructors (4 male, 4 female) at the same university participated in the study.

Twenty-five (11 male, 14 female) employees participants were mainly graduated from academic year 2004 to 2008 which mostly worked at assistant level. Table 1 shows more complete demographic information of the samples. Wide range of at least ten different industries of participants' current job was expected to shed lights on the real use of English in workplaces.

**Table 1**

Sex		Academic Year	
1. Male	11	1994	2
2. Female	14	2004 - 2005	3
		2006	8
		2007-2008	12
Major	1. Economics		5
	2. Business Administration		6
	3. Finance		9
	4. Accounting		1
	5. Shipping and Transportation Management		1
	6. International Trade		3
Position	1. Sales Assistant		7
	2. Accountant		2
	3. Marketing sales		1
	4. Research assistant		1
	5. Salesperson		2
	6. Administration Associate		2
	7. Math Teacher		1
	8. Customer Service Personnel		4
	9. Account Executive		1
	10. Other		4

**Instrument.** The survey questionnaire was developed to compare perception of expected English needs in workplace by students and instructors to in-service needs of graduate employees in the sample population. Fourteen closed-ended questions explored three representations of perceptions: (1) importance of four skills to business students;(2) the level of receptive and productive competence necessary for professional life according to modified six-point scale from Taillefer (2007), including self-assessment on the same scale; (3) suggestions for EBP course development. Only parallel versions for graduate employees included five more questions pertaining to the importance of languages in finding a first job and frequency of 14 English communication skills used with specific tasks (modified from Tsui, 1991).

Four to six more questions gathered participants' general demographic information in varied versions. Students were asked to complete questions with their perceptions on expected needs and language competence for their future roles. Subject instructors, on the other hand, provided their opinions on the role of English ability for business-related majors with regard to their expectations on students. Graduate employees, however, completed the questions on the basis of current experiences. Questions exploring importance and frequency of language skills were rated on 5-point Likert scale; 5 is the highest rating, labeled very important or often use and 1 is the lowest rating, labeled not at all important or never use.

## Results

### *Importance of language skills and perceived difficulties*

Three groups of participants generally rated English proficiency and four skills very important or important for future job application (see Table 2). Greater percentages of undergraduates and subject instructors expect the needs of English competence highly important for future professions than graduate responses. Writing ability, compared to other three skills, was rated less important. It was correlated to following results that participants considered writing more frequently used and thus less likely to be difficult.

Table 2. Percentage of Importance Ratings by Three Groups

	English ability			Reading			Listening			Writing			Speaking		
	Gr	Un	T	Gr	Un	T	Gr	Un	T	Gr	Un	T	Gr	Un	T
very important	52	95.2	100	52	95.2	100	56	85.7	100	36	71.4	75	52	90.4	100
important	36	4.7	0	44	4.7	0	36	14.2	0	28	23.8	25	36	9.56	0
moderately important	12	0	0	4	0	0	8	0	0	36	9.7	0	12	0	0
little important	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not at all important	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Gr=Graduate Employee, Un=Undergraduate Student, T= Subject Instructor

The importance ratings (see Table 3), then further specified by asking participants to rank four skills in terms of needs (1 is the most needed skill). Undergraduates and graduate employees in present study agreed that Speaking is the most needed skill, followed by listening, reading and writing. Among undergraduate subjects, eleven planned to apply for graduate programs (7 for domestic institutes, 2 for oversea study, three not sure). In Kuo's (1987) study, students of Science and Engineering viewed "reading" as the most important and needed skill. It suggested that business related tasks require more interactions since the field is people-oriented in nature. On the other hand, subject teachers ranked "listening" the most important skill, followed by speaking, reading and writing. The finding was consistent to the importance ratings that writing skill was regarded less urgent for business communications.

**Table 3. Importance Ranking of Four Skills by Three Groups of Samples**

Skills	Listening				Speaking				Reading				Writing				No. of sample
Rank	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Un	6	14	1	0	13	4	3	1	2	3	12	4	0	0	5	16	21
Gr	8	9	5	3	12	7	4	2	4	4	13	4	2	6	2	15	25
T	3	3	2	0	2	3	2	1	2	1	4	1	1	1	0	6	8

Participants' responses to the importance and needs of four skills also influenced their opinions on difficulties of English use. Both graduate employees and undergraduate students considered business students generally lack of sufficient speaking skills and listening comprehension. However, teachers indicated that most difficult task for business students was listening comprehension, followed by speaking skills. Moreover, "less amount of vocabulary" was ranked the third difficulty from student and graduate responses. Different opinions were gathered from teachers'; they thought business students had to improve their reading comprehension skills. The discrepancy occurred may due to limited observation of the instructors and subjective perception of the students. Materials and textbooks covered in university are mainly written in English, and teachers' evaluation from students' performances and their responses may direct teachers to notice how students process reading articles in class. Items such as vocabulary use or grammatical knowledge of business students were harder for teachers to judge.

### ***Required levels of competence, self-assessment***

Second section of survey questionnaire asked participants levels of competence they felt to be necessary for each skill. Different perspectives were assigned to three different sample groups; graduates reported by reflecting on what they've experienced after work, undergraduates responded with expectations of their future roles to play, and subject teachers provided their opinions on levels students need to acquire.

Graduate employees and undergraduate students then assessed their current levels of competence, while subject instructors commented on business-related majors' general levels of competences. By using the same modified six-point scale to fit this business-oriented context, Table 4 illustrates more specific responses of graduate employees.

**Table 4**

Graduates' representations (% of total) of levels of language competence necessary in the workplace and self-assessment by skill (n=25)

levels	Reading		Listening		Writing		Speaking	
	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)
A1	0	24	0	32	4	12	4	28
A2	12	16	8	8	4	44	8	32
B1	12	20	12	36	8	24	16	28
B2	<b>28</b>	32	<b>32</b>	24	<b>32</b>	16	<b>20</b>	12
C1	<b>28</b>	8	<b>28</b>	0	<b>28</b>	4	<b>32</b>	0
C2	20	0	20	0	24	0	<b>20</b>	0

<sup>a</sup> A1 Beginner (basic user), A2 Elementary (basic user), B1 Lower intermediate (independent user), B2 Upper intermediate (independent user), C1 Advanced (proficient user), C2 Mastery (proficient user).

Boldface figures highlight the perceived levels that employees needed to acquire from their current experiences. Business-related graduates felt that high levels of all four language competences are necessary, mostly B2-C1 (upper intermediate- advanced), with C2 (mastery) ranging between 20-24%. Total percentages of B2 to C2 accounted for at least 72% of the samples for each skill.

In assessing their own levels of competences with the same scale, the graduates felt that they were currently between levels of A1 (beginner)–B1 (lower intermediate). Especially Writing and Speaking skills, percentages of the three levels consisted of 80% of the samples, closely followed by listening with 76%. Compared to other skills, reading held a slightly distinctive position- over thirty percent (32%) of the samples considered themselves close to the perceived target levels.

Present students' responses to self-assessment in terms of levels of four language skills were similar to the graduates', with even higher percentage (at least 80 %) of the samples under B1 (shown in Table 5). Near half of the samples deemed their reading and listening competence at B1 level (47.6 & 42.8%, respectively), which was higher than writing and speaking perceived competence at A2 level (42.8% for both). However, results of teachers' judgments on present students' current competences indicated that students' writing and speaking competences were rated fairly low, between A1-A2 (beginner- elementary). The percentage of these two levels was accounted for at least 75%. Similar to student's self-assessment on reading and listening, subject teachers also considered students' having closer competence toward target levels. Since materials and course textbooks were large proportionally written in English, students may be more capable of reading longer articles or texts.



Table 5

Present student's representations (% of total) of levels of language competence necessary in the workplace and self-assessment by skill (n=21)

levels	Reading		Listening		Writing		Speaking	
	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)	Necessary (%)	Self-assessment (%)
A1	0	23.8	0	28.5	0	33.3	0	28.5
A2	0	9.5	0	23.8	0	42.8	0	42.8
B1	4.76	47.6	9.5	42.8	0	19	4.7	23.8
B2	19	19	<b>47.6</b>	4.7	<b>33.3</b>	4.7	<b>28.5</b>	4.7
C1	<b>33.3</b>	0	19	0	23.8	0	19	0
C2	<b>42.8</b>	0	<b>23.8</b>	0	<b>42.8</b>	0	<b>47.6</b>	0

<sup>a</sup> A1 Beginner (basic user), A2 Elementary (basic user), B1 Lower intermediate (independent user), B2 Upper intermediate (independent user), C1 Advanced (proficient user), C2 Mastery (proficient user).

If compared the graduate's perception to present student' and instructors' expectations, some differences were found between these stakeholders involved in EBP curricula and language policy (see Table 6). Present students tended to foresee target levels at C2 (mastery), while graduates generally aimed at B2-C1. Students overwhelmingly set sights at the highest

Table 6

Representations (% of total) of levels of language competence necessary in the workplace, for each skill by professional category

levels	Graduates (n = 25 ) (%)	Students (n = 21 ) (%)	Subject teachers (n = 8 ) (%)
<i>a. Reading</i>			
B1	12	4.76	0
B2	<b>28</b>	19	<b>37.5</b>
C1	<b>28</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>50</b>
C2	20	<b>42.8</b>	12.5
<i>b. Listening</i>			
B1	12	9.5	<b>37.5</b>
B2	<b>32</b>	<b>47.6</b>	25
C1	<b>28</b>	19	<b>37.5</b>
C2	20	<b>23.8</b>	0
<i>c. Writing</i>			
B1	8	0	<b>37.5</b>
B2	<b>32</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>50</b>
C1	<b>28</b>	23.8	0
C2	24	<b>42.8</b>	12.5
<i>d. Speaking</i>			
B1	16	4.7	<b>50</b>
B2	<b>20</b>	<b>28.5</b>	25
C1	<b>32</b>	19	<b>25</b>
C2	<b>20</b>	<b>47.6</b>	0

level to perform in future professions, while teachers generally aimed at lower level between B1-B2, except reading. Reading drew a more consistent comment from three different groups, with target level of B2-C1. However, half of the teacher samples believed B1 level of speaking competence was sufficient to cope with future demands. The gap between perceived target levels of three groups of participants was clearly shown in boldface figures.

To consider together, responses to current proficiency levels shared more similarities than discordance in three groups of participants. Present students and business teachers rated reading and listening competences (A2-B1) higher than writing and speaking (A1-A2). Graduate employees generally considered themselves currently at A1-B1 which was similar to present students. However, reading competence was outperformed other three at B2 level. It was noted that the levels felt to be necessary and those of current competences manifested a gap in between. The findings then served to explain following replies to suggestions for EBP course needs in universities.

### ***On-the-job context and English communication skills use***

The sample of graduate employees reported great level of language activity in informal context (daily and social contacts) than in formal one (meetings, presentations). Nearly equal opportunity to use English through direct (telephone) or virtual situations (e-mail) was performed. Frequency of English use in terms of four competences and fourteen communication skills with specific tasks was inquired in question 16 & 17.

Writing and reading skills were more frequently called upon than listening and speaking: respectively mean scores 2.92, 2.88, 2.84 and 2.72. General low mean scores indicated that samples in present study did not have many opportunities to use English according to their current occupational positions. Of particular interest, lesser used skill: speaking was perceived to be ranked more importantly needed and difficult (findings of question 6 & 7) than other three competences. Similarly, writing, the most often used skill was considered less important.

Same discrepancy between real use and ranked importance as well as difficulties was found in Taillerfer (2007). English oral skills- speaking and listening- though lesser used in workplace of French, participants tended to gave higher ranked difficulties and importance. Similarly, Taiwanese students and business employees seek to improve their conversation and telephoning skills (Tsui, 1992; Chia, et al. 1998, p.108), justifying previous finding that

“students leaving the public school system in Taiwan are poor in listening, speaking and writing in English”(Chia, et al., 1998; Derwing et al., 1978). This long-lasting attitude which was also found in this study implied students perceived weaker oral competence due to past English learning experiences. Extremely limited teaching focus on speaking and listening increased their sense of uncertainty to perform these skills in the future (Kuo, 1987).

Writing and listening have already been reported to be more frequently called on in workplaces. Participants then asked to rate frequency of performing fourteen communication skills with specific tasks for current job duties. Assigning 1-5 values to five levels of frequency (5= very often, 1= never), percentage and mean scores of each items are shown in Table 7. Tasks were presented in rank orders, from most frequently used to the least.

**Table 7 Frequency of English Communication Skills Used with Specific Tasks <sup>a</sup>**

Skill	Very often	Fairly often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Writing letters	20	12	16 (Mean Score= 2.88)	36	20
Writing memos	16	12	24 (Mean Score= 2.8)	32	16
Reading business reports	12	8	16 (Mean Score= 2.44)	40	24
Talking to clients	8	8	24 (Mean Score= 2.4)	36	24
Reading business journals	4	12	12 (Mean Score= 2.36)	60	12
Reading English Manuals	0	16	20 (Mean Score= 2.28)	40	24
Telephoning	4	8	16 (Mean Score= 2.24)	52	20
Reporting	4	16	16 (Mean Score= 2.24)	28	36
Writing reports	8	8	16 (Mean Score= 2.2)	32	36
Negotiating	0	12	12 (Mean Score= 2)	40	36
Writing proposals	8	12	8 (Mean Score= 2.16)	32	40
Public speech	4	12	4 (Mean Score= 1.92)	32	48
Exhibition	0	8	12 (Mean Score= 1.84)	36	44
Interviewing	0	8	8 (Mean Score= 1.84)	44	40

<sup>a</sup> Frequency figures are in percentages. Mean scores were calculated by assigning numerical vales 1-5 to frequency of use.

The findings were consistent with Sommers’ (2008); business letter writing was ranked the most frequently used workplace communication skills. It is suggested that the task was universally demanded in wide range of workplace types or occupational positions held by samples. Tasks such as “writing memos,” “reading business reports” and “talking to

customers” also ranked relatively high in frequency. Communications conducted in spoken forms, such as negotiating, public speech, interviewing, and exhibition English, were reported to be rare use. Data systematically indicated the limited opportunities for spoken tasks and thus were perceived difficult and important to learn.

Question 18 then tended to know whether their levels of language competence sufficiently prepared them to meet needs of the job market. Reading and writing competences were held to be just over half of the entire sample (56%, 56% respectively), feeling competent enough in these two skills. Prepared level of speaking and listening competence held an opposite position; less than half (44% and 48%, respectively) felt competent enough or sufficiently prepared to meet demands of workplaces.

Consider together the English competence and their first job, only minimal average of ranging from 16% (Listening) to 24% (writing) of the whole sample replied the levels of competence did help them land their first job. Results from samples of present study indicated that English ability, though didn’t play the dominant role during hiring process, the demands of job duties or future higher level positions may challenge current level of competences. In-depth qualitative interviews with managers and employees in Sommers’ (2008) study revealed that only senior managers repeatedly mention needed ability of speaking skill while e-mail writing competence was reported the most commonly demanded skill by employees.

### ***Suggestions for future EBP course design***

No matter the incongruency between used and expected skills needs, nearly all participants of three different groups (100% for students, 96% for graduate, 100% for teachers) agreed that business-related majors should compulsorily take extra Business English course. In Taiwan, universities have rights to design individual compulsory General English credits and curriculum through four-year education. Graduates and students’ responses indicated that, in order to have basic business communication skills to meet future demands, university should offer “Business Conversation,” “Business English-writing,” and “Business English” courses. Selections of subject teachers were the same, but “courses that facilitate general four skills competences” had the same frequency counts as other three specific courses. Responses from teachers indicated that they expected business majors to have basic language training in

terms of four skills while specific business courses were needed. However, students were expected to have more professional business English knowledge which enabled them to comprehend subject materials in English.

Above selections also reflected upon improvements needed for current EBP curriculum design at university education system. Samples of post-graduates were students from more than ten universities; yet they shared the similar opinions with undergraduate students from one institute. The results suggested the most common drawback of our tertiary English education would be “not sufficient English course periods and thus limited English training.” “EBP courses of my institute were not practical. Skills taught are not what students need” option was selected by both graduates and students which is EBP related. Moreover, students and subject teachers consider materials were not able to meet their needs for specific communication or professions.

Graduate employees, on the other hand, reflected back to their received training at school and reported “insufficient Business English curriculum offered.” Among these samples, one subject instructor wrote in open-ended option that “students didn’t take actions to participate.” The comment somehow manifested a condition that students’ needs were hardly satisfied which lead to less participation. Reversely, their performances with regard to handling subject matter materials or English communication skills were considered poor. Similar situation was indicated in Chia’s (1998) summary of previous research. “Although students realized the importance of English competence for success in their studies and future careers....., English education in colleges and universities failed to satisfy students’ expectations and to facilitate their language competence.”

## **General Discussion**

Present study focus on providing a comprehensive picture of the target needs from three stakeholders in business fields. By examining in-service business graduate employees in Taiwan, professional language needs in job market are expected to reflect on current EBP or English teaching in universities.

Consistent with previous studies (Kuo, 1987; Chia et al., 1998), English competence in terms of four skills were generally considered important in business field. Spoken skills-

speaking and listening though were less frequently used in workplaces, higher ranked needs was assigned. Lack of sufficient oral and aural training from traditional English teaching system in Taiwan, it was noted that students perceived more difficulties. The incongruity between skills felt most needed by present students and graduates and real communication tasks performed in services was consistent with findings of Taillefer (2007). Among fourteen communication tasks, writing and reading tasks were frequently used in either direct or virtual communication. Graduates generally considered their current reading than writing competences to be capable of coping with current jobs. It was suggested that even though a gap between self-assessment of current competences and necessary target levels remained, reading and writing were seen to cause fewer obstacles.

Responses from all three groups of participants implied ill preparation of current competences. Different views were discovered on the felt necessary target levels in terms of four skills. Generally, present-day business students overestimated necessary levels of competences compared with graduates' experiences on performing job duties. On the other hand, content-area instructors set levels of four skills lower than those of graduate employees' ratings.

Pedagogical recommendation, then proposed options for improvement on EBP course design specifically targeting on business students' needs. Asymmetries found in present study between three groups of participants indicated the insufficient language preparations for students by relating materials, communication tasks and skills to professional worlds. According to needs and perceived difficulties of students and graduates, speaking and listening courses were urgently needed. Business conversation, letter writing and business English courses were considered to prepare business students for future professions.

Moreover, in response to participants' general comments on current language curriculum design in universities, more course periods, time and practicality should be regarded as the priorities. In addition to compulsory language credits for every university student, business students may rely on more business-specific courses to attend to target needs. In response to suggestions of business teachers, basic language training on four skills may served as general language requirements. Students might need extra practical EBP training in their junior or seniors. Needs assessment results then shed more lights on setting appropriate institutional or departmental language policy.

## **Conclusion**

In answer to research focus of this study, comparative needs assessment data of three groups of participants shared partially identical perceptions, especially opinions for EBP curriculum design and general skills needs. Target language use in workplaces also reflected on current insufficient speaking and listening training. In addition, most frequently used communication tasks, such as letter or memo writing and reading reports, implied the necessary preparation of specific language training courses. Consistent with Tsui (1992), communication skills training courses should be offered in universities which are “...communicatively- based, learner-centered and task-oriented.”

Based on literature, it was suggested that different context may yield specific language competence levels, resulting in different needs and findings (Taillefer, 2007). Further studies may be needed for examining target needs in various domains. It should be noted that present students in this study were from same university; sample employees representatives were all at assistant level, mostly under five working years. Different views may be found if occupational positions were different (Sommers, 2008).

Finally, the perceived gap between necessary target levels and current competences implied that school English preparation had limited assistance on only reading and writing proficiency for new graduate employees. Speaking and listening comprehension were considered incapable for job duties. Even though English competences minimally help participants land their first job, general target expectations indicated the demands of broader company types and position levels.

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