



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### A STUDY INVESTIGATING THE MISMATCH BETWEEN “*CUTTING EDGE*” COURSE BOOK AND THE NEEDS OF PRINCE SULTAN AIR BASE STUDENTS

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#### ABSTRACT

Needs analysis is generally believed to be important in ESP context because it enables practitioners and materials writers to find out about their real learners' needs. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the mismatch between the *Cutting Edge* course book and the needs of Prince Sultan Air Base students. A total of 70 students from different technical sections at Prince Sultan Air Base participated in the study. Two types of data collection methods were used in this study: quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview). The results obtained revealed that the current course book being used at PSAB does not meet their needs because the activities provided are not relevant to the specific needs of their field which is basically military and aviation. Finding and adapting a textbook that is clearly linked to their students needs and to the course objectives was suggested as one possible solution. In the context of PSAB, data from the interview and survey showed the need to assess the contents of the course book in relation to the needs of the learners. It also indicated the strong demand of the students for supplementary materials that allow linguistic input to match their needs. Finally, offering supplementary materials and content-based instructions for those students bridges the gap between the language training and practical performance needs in real situations.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The statement of the problem

The textbooks used in teaching English to cadets attending the Prince Sultan Air Base English Language School (ELS) developed at the Technical Studies Institute (TSI), Dhahran city, Saudi Arabia, by the department for curriculum development. It is argued that this book is not appropriate to meet the needs of those students. As an officer and from my experience working as a teacher I have noticed that the current course book has this particular problem although it has many advantages. I have also found that the English language of the students is weak and needs would be better served by replacing the textbook currently in use with the world renowned Cutting Edge textbooks developed by Pearson Education. By using the new course book, the level of students has been improving and students are now able to use the language in an adequate way. However, the course book which students are currently using is a general English course book and the learners have very specific needs. Each individual gained a degree at the Technical Studies Institute, in various specialisms, and was

employed according to the personnel requirements of the RSAF. They were appointed to work in different sections in PSAB such as: maintenance of both AWACS planes and C130 planes, supply section, air traffic control, airplane crew, weapons and ammunitions, intelligence as well as training wing. So, this study will examine the mismatches between the course book and the needs of learners. Munby (1978) states that the students' learning needs should be the basis of syllabus design. Attention to the importance of analyzing learners' needs is mirrored in many studies carried out to investigate learners' language needs in a whole range of fields and majors. The only fields for which no investigation of this type could be found are the military ones.

### Significance of the study

The Royal Saudi Air Forces have undertaken language training for their personnel in order to prepare them to perform their job tasks competently and skilfully in a second language. English language is a very important course since technicians working in different sections need English in many ways such as: reading manuals, communicating with other works who are mostly not Saudis, and developing their knowledge. As a matter of fact, the students and teachers find it difficult to deal with these courses because they are in contrast with the

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students' needs and their levels. While the significance of relating the teaching to the particular needs of students has been identified throughout the history of formal language learning, which recently led to a growing interest in a distinct branch of language teaching, referred to as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the royal Saudi air forces are no exception. This kind of language teaching is intended to provide learners with the competence to accomplish a particular set of tasks in order to achieve occupational targets.

### Research questions

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceived English language needs of the learners in Prince Sultan Air Base PSAB?
- What are the language skills needed most for different departments in PSAB?
- What are some of the difficulties the students meet when using the English language?
- To what extent is the present course book appropriate for the current learners? And where limitations are found, what solutions are available?

### Literature Review

The part played by English for occupational purposes (EOP), while significant, was a lesser one (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998:2). A huge rise in the amount of business conducted internationally has prompted a corresponding increase in the significance of English for business purposes, which currently accounts for the greatest proportion of publications in the ESP category, and is attracting increasing attention from educators, organisations and publishing houses. ESP activity used to be closely associated with projects led, and usually staffed, by expatriate British, North American or Australasian teachers, often in large numbers. Projects in the Middle East, in Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are good examples. Local teachers seemed to play relatively small roles in such projects, and it was even occasionally argued by non-native speakers that ESP work was too difficult for them. We have always believed that local teachers knowledge of their situations as well as their familiarity with their students' motivation and learning styles give them a potential advantage over native speaker expatriate teachers.

### ESP: History and development

There are various trends that led to the wide expansion of a new realm in the teaching of English as a foreign or a second language known as ESP. These trends resulted from various fields as politics, science and commerce. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ESP came out as a result of three reasons: (a) the demands of the new world, (b) the revolution in linguistics and (c) the focus on the learner.

### Differences between ESP and EGP

There are various differences ESP and EGP that can be found in the ESP literature. This section will shed light on these differences. Walther (1987) summarizes the difference between ESP and EGP. She says that the goal of many EGP programs is to improve the linguistic and communicative ability of the learner to enable him use the second language. There are two main reasons for such intent. First, students in

EGP programs often learn the language as part of their education or out of interest so that it is usually unknown how the language will eventually be used. A second reason why EGP courses develop the capacity to handle a large amount of situations is that these courses are rarely homogeneous, particularly where there are large classes (as in entire school system), so that the needs of students to perform specific tasks at specific times rarely coincide. On the other hand, like EGP, the goal of ESP is to develop the linguistic and communicative capacity of the learner to deal with different sorts of situations in the second language. ESP programs, Walther adds, attempt to develop as quickly as possible, different degrees of capacity to meet the different immediate needs of the learners.

There are two principal reasons why the aims of an ESP course are different from those of EGP courses. First, where language courses are for experienced employees, language training often costs the employer time (in the case of in-house courses) and money, so that employers would like the training to produce effective results as quickly as possible. Even in situations where learners are taking language training on their own, these learners would like to be able begin using the language right away- and not some time in the future – to perform specific tasks. Second, since learners require the language for different purposes, which have different linguistic demands, not all learners need to be able to analyze great parts of the language system. Indeed, since many of the situations in which ESP require the second language can be clearly pinpointed, only the linguistic and communicative capacity required to tackle these situations need to be provided.

### Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is seen as a fundamental element in ESP. Richards (2001, p. 32) suggests that the reason and context of the English requirement of the learners should drive planning and content, as opposed to basing this on design of general English courses. As particular learners have specific need for language, it is necessary to limit content to reflect only learner requirements. Need analysis will be a guide for the learners to adapt the new learning program when their teachers identify their needs of the learning process. One essential advantage from needs analysis is that by identifying the case of learners, needs analysis will identify the weakness and strengths of the skills that the students use in their jobs. Dudley-Evans and John (1998) identify needs analysis as the first stage in course design, and state that this should be conducted prior to the start of the course in order to allow for a basic course structure as well as gathering of resources. Needs analysis and courses should be developed around human and material resources. Needs analysis can be seen as an objective endeavour to assist teachers of ESP find out the best methods of teaching that are relevant to their learners.

### Studies related to needs Analysis

Much research has been conducted in this field which seeks to determine students' learning needs in order to design appropriate English language or academic courses. Such research has focused on a variety of specialist areas, including scientific fields and the medical profession as well as in business. Alfehaid (2011) conducted a study to evaluate the ESP course to investigate the needs of two groups of ESP students and health professionals at Health Sciences College in Saudi Arabia. The main goal of this study was to create a proposal for the development of the present English for

Specific Purposes course. A mixed method was adopted in obtaining the data. Findings of the language needs revealed that all four of the language skills were important for both students and for their target careers. Also, the evaluation results showed that while the ESP course was effective to some extent, it had some limitations including its curriculum organization and syllabus specifications, the teaching-learning materials used and the assessment procedures adopted. Accordingly this study proposes a new ESP curriculum based on the students' needs. A study by Nakaprasit (2010) of learning requirements of adult students of ESL learners who wished to enter higher education was conducted based upon an intensive course in English language in Ontario University, Canada. The research aimed to facilitate administrators and teaching professionals in designing effective ESL courses to address learners' language needs for both academic and social aspects of university life. A mixed-methods approach was used in this study, with a qualitative focus and narrative findings. This holistic study gathered data on the perspectives of both learners and administrators. The study reveals that the learners' academic requirements were not sufficiently addressed by the course, and that speaking and listening skills were not given adequate focus in the course.

In addition, it was identified that the most effective way to tackle these problems was not to alter classroom practice but to provide a different structure to the course which would allow more flexible learning tailored to individual requirements. Al-huqbani (2008) conducted a study to investigate and assess the English language needs of police officers in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was administered and distributed to 103 officers on their job at (King Fahad Security College, The Higher Institute of Security Sciences and the Individual Security Sectors). The results of the study showed English language plays an important role in police work. Also, these results revealed that although police officers and their sectors understand the importance of English to police work many officers stated that they have not been trained on how to use English for police purposes. Al-huqbani suggested some general guidelines for the improvement of the English program at security sectors. He found out that it is important to take into consideration the proficiency level of the target learners before the commencement of the ESP program. Al-huqbani concluded that the selection of materials should be related to police work. Moreover, the language materials that the cadets are exposed to should include the communicative knowledge that cadets and officers need in order to achieve their duties.

Finally, Al-huqbani concluded that there should be more emphasis on the teaching of listening and speaking since there is a need for improving the officers' English proficiency. Cowling (2007) carried out a needs analysis survey in a major Japanese firm for the purpose of designing an intensive course of study in English. This multiple-method research showed the essential role of needs analysis in uncovering the requirements of this group of learners. Algorashi (1989) conducted a study to investigate the English communicative needs of Saudi military cadets at King Abdul Aziz Military Academy (KAMA). Algorashi distributed a questionnaire to 212 Saudi army and air defence officers: eighty-nine captains, fifty-six first lieutenants and sixty-seven second lieutenants. They all represented various army branches. The questionnaire consisted of 58 items and was divided into three parts: one about biographical data, the second gives questions about the language background of the subjects and a third including

questions about the activities in which English may be used by the subjects. The findings of the study showed that English is of great importance in situations related to the cadets' future jobs and training courses. The study also revealed that the English course at KAMA is not enough in terms of instructional information given to the cadets and the content of the textbook is not relevant to their needs. For the development of teaching English at KAMA, Algorashi suggested many recommendations. He suggested that the teaching of English should be defined in terms of the final practical use of English in the workplace, and not in terms of general capacity of English. There should be more focus on the teaching of the reading and listening skills. The textbook should enhance the communicative knowledge needed for achieving military activities that are related to the cadets' specialty.

Finally, a study by Mosallem (1984) investigated the communicative needs in terms of English within the Egyptian police force, across ten separate departments. These included special security, passports, airport security, traffic, tourist police, criminal investigations, Interpol, police station forces and national security. The research instrument used was questionnaire. Within each department, individuals were selected on the basis of several variables, including rank and age group. Within the survey questionnaire there were sections which gathered data on the degree to which English was needed in the officers' professional role, what skills were required for completion of their usual tasks, how well officers considered that they were able to use English, which aspects caused difficulty with using in English, and perceptions of the importance of English skills in succeeding in work and in promotion opportunities. Mosallem found that English language requirements within the police force were set out by the individual departments. However, a recommendation of the study arising from a needs assessment was that a basic English course could be created for use by officers of all departments in order to prepare them to use English within their working tasks.

### **Research design**

There are different ways of investigating and gathering data. In terms of methodology, this research has utilized mixed research method. Dörnyei (2007) describes such research as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods within a single research project. Also, Dörnyei (2007) makes a distinction between these two methods:

Quantitative research includes procedures of data collection that result in numerical data which are then analysed by statistical methods. On the other hand, qualitative research involves data collection procedures that result in open-ended, non-numerical data which are analysed by non-statistical methods. Holliday (2010) states that the basic goal of qualitative research is to get to the bottom of what is going in all aspects of social behaviour. The main advantage of mixed methods research is that by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches the researchers can utilise the best of both paradigms, thereby integrating quantitative and qualitative research strengths (Dörnyei, 2007). Also, Dörnyei adds, mixed methods research has the special potential to provide evidence for the validity of the research. Indeed, improving the research validity is related to the idea of triangulation. The data collection will follow different stages. In the first phase the researcher will use a textbook evaluation

questionnaire to collect students' perception about the English textbook for the Saudi cadets. The second stage will employ an interview to obtain in-depth information from the participants. As will be seen in chapter four, our research issues are divided into four areas as follows:

- Learners' Perception of the Present Course Book
- Perceived English language needs of PSAB learners
- The Language skills needed most for learners in different departments
- Difficulties met by the learners in using the English language
- **Setting and Participants:** Since the goal of this study is to investigate the mismatch between the course book and the needs of Saudi cadets working at Prince Sultan Air Base, the sample population focused on Saudi Air Force Technicians. 70 cadets of different ranks participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 22 to 30 years. Those cadets are studying an RSAF Elementary English Course at the school of English language/Base Training Wing/ Prince Sultan Air Base. All of them graduated from the Technical Studies Institute (TSI) with different specialties and appointed to fulfil the RSAF needs. They were appointed to work in different sections in PSAB such as: maintenance of both (AWACS) planes and C130 planes, supply section, air traffic control, weapons and ammunitions, intelligence as well as the training wing. Training strategy in RSAF permit the instructor-learner ratio 1:12 as a maximum limit in each classroom, unless there is a waiver by the Training Wing Commander to exceed the limit when there is a shortage in teaching staff of school facilities.
- **Instrumentation:** This study will use two types of collecting data. Questionnaire and interview will be used in collecting quantitative and qualitative data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Learners' Perception of the Present Course Book:

Apparently, most of the participants in this study perceived that the content of the course book is appropriate for their needs as shown by their response to statement 1 (S1). A combined total of 78.6 per cent indicated agreement to the statement that the content of the course book is appropriate for learners' needs. This observation could have been due to the participants' perception—indicated in the response to the question what they like most about the course book-- that the exercises and examples provided in the course book are simple. The data obtained from the survey and the interview further reveals why most of the participants indicated that the course book is appropriate to their needs. First, the new words and situations presented in the course book hook the interest of the learners. A typical response in this case was from Student A who mentioned during the interview that

, "The new words in the new course book excited me because it assisted me with new words ,meanings and topics that are likely related to everyday situation."

Thus, a total of 60 per cent agreed to statement 2 (S2) that the topics and lessons in the course book promote students'

engagement and interest. Another reason that could have made the participants claim that the content of the course book is appropriate to their needs is that they found that the instructions and examples are adequately explained and illustrated for the students. In fact, a total of 54.3 per cent indicated agreement to statement 3 (S3). Also, the participants believed that the accompanying materials of the course book are useful and informative as can be seen in their response to statement 4 (S4) where 17.1 per cent chose strongly agree while 47.1 per cent chose agree. Moreover, the participants indicated that somehow, their exposure to instructions in the course book helped them read the instructions in manuals written in English as 5.7 per cent of them showed strong agreement and 54.3 per cent showed agreement to statement 5 (S5). In addition, it appears that the course book improved the participants' general vocabulary as indicated by their response to statement 7 (S7) in which 58.6 per cent expressed agreement to the statement that the course book helped them improve their general vocabulary. Similarly, 57.1 per cent of the participants reported that the course book helped them with everyday listening while 62.9 per cent claimed that the course book helped them with everyday speaking. All of these perceived benefits may have stemmed from the students' exposure to new general vocabulary and interesting situations that reflect casual everyday conversations that happen at home, in the shopping centres, or in restaurants. As student C noted:

*I learned new words I can apply to everyday situation when I see friends in shops or when I meet office workers during tea breaks. The new words also help in making listening to casual conversations.*

However, despite the aforementioned benefits that the participants obtained from the course book, the course book seemed to have fallen below the expectations of the participants. To illustrate, less than half of the participants agreed that the course book helped develop their writing. In fact, 22.9 per cent chose neutral, 28.6 per cent disagreed, and 2 per cent strongly disagreed to statement 6 (S6). Data from the interview suggested that the participants generally did not consider the course book helpful in developing their writing skill because the writing exercises presented in the course book were not relevant to the writing skill needed in the actual jobs of the participants. According to Student F:

*The writing situations in the course book are so very different to writing situations in the actual work. Writing in the course book did not show actually how to write things related to our field.*

Further, the participants reported that the course book did not really help much in terms of providing them with expressions and technical words relevant to their job. Thus, only 45.7 per cent indicated agreement to statement 10 (S10) while 30 per cent chose disagree and 12.9 percent expressed strong disagreement. This finding was supported by interview data that revealed that while the course book abounds with situations reflecting real-life scenarios, it does not provide situations pertaining to the scenarios in PSAB. A typical response from the interviews was from Student E who reported:

*Really we appreciate the realistic situations in the course book but there is different reality in PSAB. Everyday life in PSAB is not all about eating, drinking, and going out. It is*

*more maintenance of planes, of working in supply section. PSAB means weapons, ammunitions, and intelligence and you know, training and more. There is no mention of that in the course book. It should be part of it.*

Similarly, in response to statement 11 (S11) which tells whether the course book provided the learners with adequate knowledge of English to be used in their field of specialization and work, only 11.4 per cent of the participants strongly agreed and 28.6 per cent agreed while 30 per cent were uncertain, 11.4 per cent disagreed and 18.6 per cent strongly disagreed. These results indicate that there is a need for the teachers to provide the learners with adequate knowledge of English that the learners could use in their field of specialization and work. Another reason why the participants perceive that the current course book is insufficient for their needs is that the course book being used in PSAB did not help much in improving their skills in conducting conversations with their supervisors and colleagues who need assistance in the work place. This is revealed by the participants' response to statement 12 (S12) in which only 8.6 strongly agreed and 40 per cent agreed compared to 18.6 per cent disagreed, and 2.9 per cent who strongly agreed. Student B provided a typical explanation for this observation:

*You see, the dialogues in the course book that we use are not technical only ordinary conversations. That is good for general English learning, but in case of our actual work which is we have to give advices to people or offer solutions to supervisors, the course book dialogues are not at all of help.*

Correspondingly, less than half of the participants reported that the course book helped them to understand the English spoken by foreign workers working in PSAB. Only 5.7 per cent strongly agreed and 40 per cent agreed to statement 13 (S13) while 37.1 per cent chose neutral, 11.4 per cent chose disagree and 5.7 percent chose strongly disagree. Apparently, the exercises in the course book did not help the participants listen to and comprehend spoken texts. Also, in response to statement 14 (S14) from the questionnaire about whether the course book helped them write reports and business letters, only 11.4 per cent of the participants indicated strong agreement. On the contrary, a considerable 41.4 per cent were uncertain (neutral) while 12.9 per cent disagreed strongly. Responses to the interview revealed that while the course book provided writing exercises, the situations given were more on descriptive writing and personal essays as Student D surmised:

*Yeah...we write a lot...but not reports or business writings or memorandums...but...a lot of describing...like describing myself, my family, and personal stuffs like that. I do not remember making us to write letters to commanders and other sections or reports about that...like when we have problems in the work...or we solved something.*

Another criticism that the participants attributed to the current course book is that it is not helpful in making them pass the English language examinations given at PSAB. In fact, the combined percentages of those who agreed and strongly agreed to statement 15 (S15) is only 42.9 per cent while the combined percentages of those who were uncertain and those who disagreed and disagreed strongly is 57.1 per cent. This observation could be due to the fact that the participants thought that technical information was not given sufficient

attention in the course book. As reflected on the response of Student H during the interview:

*The course book does not really help in terms of preparing for the exams. The exercises are good in the course book. But the problem is that when they test us, instructors give us exams full of exercise that have close link to technical words and sentences (like fuselage- cockpit- radar-engine).*

Subsequently, only 5.7 per cent of the participants strongly agreed and only 34.3 percent agreed to statement 16 (S16) which deals with whether the activities in the course book enabled them to apply the English knowledge they learned to real situations. It appears that while the participants' general English knowledge improved, the English knowledge that is relevant to their work at PSAB did not improve. The following common responses to the question "Write down three things that you dislike about the course book" provide insight as to why the participants thought that the activities in the course book did not enable them to apply the English knowledge they learned to real situations:

- *There was not enough explanation of grammar.*
- *There were no words and idioms that relate to our job or specialty.*
- *Some topics' vocabulary is very different from the words they use in their work.*

The aforementioned inference is further supported by the explanation of Student D who stated:

*Sometimes, I feel I do well really in English class. But I get really confused when I notice that the vocabulary and idioms and words I learn in the course book are not used in actual job. The people in my work, I mean, the foreigners and the superiors, they use other words not at all use in course book. It confused me. It makes me frustrated sometimes really. I hope too that grammar is explained enough. I think grammar is important especially grammar related to my work.*

To recapitulate, it could be inferred from the survey and interview data previously presented there is a mismatch between the learners' work-related needs and the skills promoted or developed by the current course book. Hence, it would be better if modification on the current course book could be done. In addition, the use of supplementary materials that could help the course book meet the needs of the PSAB learners to a greater extent should be considered. Thus, based on the previously mentioned data, it could be inferred that there is a mismatch between the learners' needs and the skills promoted or developed by the current course book. Hence, it would be better if modification on the current course book could be done. Further, the use of supplementary materials that could help the current course book meet the needs of the PSAB learners to a greater extent could be considered. The data pertaining to the learners' satisfaction provided more enlightenment with regard to the mismatch between the course book and the work-related needs of the participants. To start with, a small 25.7 per cent agreed to statement 1 (S1) of the third section of the questionnaire which states "Generally, I am satisfied with the course book". On the contrary, 55.7 per cent of the participants indicated uncertainty (not sure) while 18.6 per cent of the participants signified disagreement. This

finding can be explained by the common response to the question "Do you think the present course book meets your needs as a learner?" articulated by Student G:

*The course book is good to learn English but in fact it is a general English course book and to some extent I think it should be improved to meet our needs as technicians since we are studying specific English.*

The way the course book is taught also seemed to magnify the mismatch perceived by the participants as indicated by their response to statement 2 (S2) in which only 28.6 per cent reported that they are generally satisfied with the way the course book is being taught compared to a considerable 40 per cent who reported that they were not sure and the remaining 31.4 per cent who showed outright disagreement. The same thing is true with the participants' perception of whether the course book has contributed to the improvement of the level of their English. Only 38.6 per cent reported agreement while 37.1 per cent reported uncertainty and the remaining 24.3 per cent showed disagreement. According to Student H, the students at PSAB generally did not feel that the level of their English actually improved because

*'even after studying English, the difficulty experienced in the work place is almost the same.'*

Another source of learner dissatisfaction is the number of hours allotted for studying the course book in the classroom. On one hand, a minute 8 per cent indicated agreement to statement 4 (S4) while 37.1 per cent expressed uncertainty. On the other hand, a massive 51.4 per cent of the participant reported that they are not generally satisfied with the number of study hours provided for the course book in the classroom. Student I shed light on this concern as he commented:

*There should be more hours to spend in discussing the content of the course book. You see, it is not good that students are assigned home reading most of the pages. Teacher explanation is important especially in grammar and vocabulary. Maybe, if there is more time for the course book, teacher can give more use of the English knowledge that we can use in the work place.*

Finally, in response to statement 5 (S5), only 25.7 per cent agreed that the skills taught in the course book were appropriate to their needs while a considerable 38.6 per cent signified uncertainty and 35.7 per cent indicated disagreement. This observation implies that overall, the participants were not satisfied with how the course book addressed their actual needs. As Student K emphatically revealed:

*Actually, the course book does not have topics related to our needs just English language which I think it is necessary to build up our general English but also we need to have topics related to our specialty and our job.*

In short, the learners are not satisfied with the current course book because while it presents novel experiences for them, its contents are not sufficient to meet their needs as they carry out their work at the Prince Sultan Air Base. Hence, it would be better if the teachers handling the English language classes could adapt the contents of the course book and the way the structured learning experiences are provided to the learners to ensure that they match the needs of the learners.

### Perceived English language needs of PSAB learners:

To study the needs perceived by the learners at Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB), a semi-structured interview was conducted. The responses of the learners were coded and categorized. Table 1 summarizes the perceived English language needs of the respondents.

**Table 1. English Language Needs Perceived by PSAB Learners**

Learn to read instructions found in manuals written in English
Develop skills for writing reports, memos, and business letters
Learn general vocabulary
Use technical words
Communicate with superiors and fellow workers
Understand English words spoken by foreigners

As can be seen in Table 1, the learners of the English language at PSAB consider learning the four macro skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as necessary skills in the conduct of their respective jobs. A typical response to the question "What do you need to learn in your English language class?" is that of Student A who also stated:

*I want to learn everything English...You see, my work so demanding. I read manuals in English sometimes difficult words I can't understand really. My superior asked me to write letters and all that. Then there are foreigners in my work. They talk really it is difficult. Sometimes their English is hard. The words I can hear, but ...I don't know exactly what it means.*

Further, Student B succinctly explained how the four macro skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are related to their jobs in the air base:

*I think the four skills are of great importance to us. Since we are technicians and work in technical sections in the air base especially in the maintenance of planes, we need to know how to read, write, speak and listen. Knowing how to read this will help technicians how to read manuals in English and also knowing how to write will help me to write reports to supervisors and will help me order parts for the planes. Also, the listening and speaking skills are also important to understand and communicate with the pilots and with our supervisors whose their language is English like Americans, Philippine and people from United Kingdom.*

The aforementioned data from the qualitative data interview and survey imply that the learners acknowledge the fact that they need to be able to learn how to read, write, speak, and listen to English texts and be able to apply those skills in the context of their work. Since the course book plays a major role in the PSAB learners' learning process, then it could be inferred that they expect that their English course book should be able to address such needs.

### The Language skills needed most for learners in different departments

With regard to the language skills needed most for the different departments, data from the interview revealed that aside from the aforementioned need to learn how to read, understand, and

follow the instructions found in operation manuals written in English; write reports, memoranda, and business letters; communicate with English-speaking superiors and fellow workers; and comprehend spoken texts; the respondents perceive the need to pass the language tests in the air base as well as the need to be able to apply their language skills in real situations outside the classroom as needs that should really be satisfied by the language class. Such statement could mean that the learners expect that their course book could provide them with sufficient structured learning exercises that will not only ensure that they pass the language test given in the base but also help them transfer the English language skills as they communicate with other English-speaking interlocutors outside the confines of their work. Hence, there is a strong need to ensure that the course book being used matches the needs of the learners at PSAB.

### Difficulties met by the learners in using the English language

Among the difficulties experienced by the learners in using the English language are understanding the spoken texts, sustaining conversations in English, writing formal texts, understanding technical terms and other English vocabulary words, and expressing themselves clearly in English. For example, when asked about the difficulties he experienced in using the English language, Student D replied:

*It is hard for me to understand foreigners like Filipinos speaking in English to me. Some words I don't know. Some I heard already before but the meaning I don't know." Student D claimed, "The most hard part is when I start talking in English with a foreigner but I feel really mad because after the start, I cannot continue the talk anymore." In addition, Student E narrated, "Many, many difficulties. Last week, the boss said write memo for him then he sign. I confuse. I not moved first. How about that?"*

The foregoing responses of the participants indicate that the language needs they perceive as well as the skills they think they need the most reflect the difficulties that they experience in using the English language. Hence, teachers and administrators concerned with the language learning in PSAB are compelled to ensure that the course book which is the primary instructional material used in the English classrooms provide activities that address the perceived needs and the English-language learning difficulties that the learners at PSAB actually experience.

### Conclusion

This study has generated data that point to the fact that the learners of English for Specific Purposes at Prince Sultan Air Base believe that they have to learn not only general English language skills but more importantly, English language skills that are very much related to the field of military and aviation. Among the English language skills that they consider of utmost importance to them are reading skills, technical writing skill, communication skills, listening skills, and speaking skills. Unfortunately, while the participants in this study acknowledged the benefits given by the current course book in terms of developing general English skills, they realized that the current course book does not really help them acquire the language skills specific to their field of specialization.

Consequently, the data from this study imply that there is a mismatch between the activities offered by the current course book and the needs of the learners at PSAB. Thus, it would be better to provide supplementary materials that will address the discipline-specific needs of the learners. Similarly, there is a need to modify the current teaching strategies utilized by the English teacher. While the textbook is not yet replaced, there is a need to integrate writing, speaking, listening, and reading activities that are more relevant and workplace-based.

### Implications for ESP

The results of this study highlight the importance of considering the absolute characteristics and variable characteristics of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in developing instructional materials like course books and creating appropriate language learning environment for adult or professional learners enrolled in English courses in specific disciplines (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The recurring responses of the participants to the questions in the survey and interview conducted is that the current course book being used at PSAB does not meet their needs because the activities provided are not relevant to the specific needs of their field which is basically military and aviation. This is precisely what absolute characteristics of ESP refer to the capacity of ESP to provide the learners with the skills they specifically need in their field of expertise through structured learning experiences that mirror the realities in the area of specialization that the learners will eventually practice.

An implication of this for teachers is a need to find and adapt a textbook that is clearly linked to their students needs and to the course objectives. If the textbook focuses on the linguistic skills technicians need in the workplace, it will be useful. Also, teachers should make use of authentic materials by taking and if necessary adapting parts of relevant work-place manuals. Brown (1995, p. 5) states that it is important for teachers to facilitate activities in which learners can "express their intentions." Communication opportunities also allow learners to practice what they have gained in terms of language competences, discourse competence, pragmatic and strategic competence. Likewise, the responses of the participants echoed the need to provide learners with instructional strategies that are different from those used in teaching general English. This is precisely what variable characteristics of ESP mean. In addition, the results of this study also lend support to the argument of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) that learner-centred approach is crucial to the effective teaching of English for Specific Purposes.

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