



Identifying English Language Needs in Car Garages for ESP Syllabus Design

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Abstract

This study investigated the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) needs of employees and employers in forty (40) car garages across the Republic of Benin. The objective was to suggest an English syllabus based on the English language needs of the selected companies to meet the market needs of job seekers from a University college. Participant selection was based on convenience and accessibility with no gender restrictions. A total of sixty-two (62) individuals took part in the study, including fifty-four (54) employees and eight (08) employers, all holding various roles within their respective garages. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaires, structured interviews, workplace discourse analysis, and a review of existing English syllabi based on Westerfield (2009) adapted checklist. The findings indicated that while English is not used uniformly across all garages, it is essential for tasks such as understanding technical documentation, communicating with English-speaking clients or partners, and managing administrative procedures. These insights point to the need for a context-sensitive ESP syllabus that integrates real-world communicative tasks aligned with the language demands of car garage environments.

Keywords: car garages, mechanical engineering, ESP needs, workforce readiness, syllabus design.

Identification des besoins en anglais dans les garages automobiles pour la conception de programmes d'études en ESP

Résumé

Cette étude a examiné les besoins en anglais dans quarante (40) garages automobiles en République du Bénin. Le but est de proposer un programme d'anglais fondé sur les besoins linguistiques des garagistes afin de répondre aux exigences du marché pour les chercheurs d'emploi issus d'une unité de formation et de recherche. La sélection des participants s'est faite sur la base de l'accessibilité sans restriction de genre. Au total, soixante-deux (62) personnes ont participé à l'étude, dont cinquante-quatre (54) employés occupant divers postes au sein de leurs garages respectifs et huit (08) employeurs. En adoptant une approche méthodologique mixte, les données ont été recueillies à l'aide de questionnaires, d'entretiens structurés et d'une analyse du discours en milieu professionnel selon une grille adaptée de Westerfield (2009). Les résultats ont montré que, bien que l'anglais ne soit pas utilisé de manière uniforme dans tous les garages, il demeure essentiel pour certaines tâches telles que la compréhension de la documentation technique, la communication avec des clients ou partenaires anglophones et la gestion des procédures administratives. Ces résultats soulignent la nécessité d'un programme d'anglais de spécialité sensible au contexte, intégrant des tâches communicatives authentiques correspondant aux exigences linguistiques des environnements de garages automobiles.

Mots-clés : garages automobiles, génie mécanique, besoins en anglais de spécialité (ESP), conception de programme.



Introduction

The growing industrialisation of Benin, particularly in sectors such as automobile maintenance, construction, and renewable energy, demands that graduates in the fields acquire not only domain-specific skills but also communicative competence in the English language. In recent years, graduates of mechanical engineering have been increasingly employed in car garages across Benin, where they are expected to interact with foreign clients, use technical manuals in English, and understand safety regulations and technical specifications written in English. As a result, there is a pressing need to identify the specific English language skills required in these automotive settings to ensure that future graduates are adequately prepared for the realities of the workplace.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained prominence in vocational and technical training institutions to respond to the professional communication needs of learners. The Institut National Supérieur de Technologie Industrielle (INSTI) of Lokossa, formerly known as the Institut Universitaire de Technologie (IUT), plays an important role in training skilled technicians and engineers in various technical fields, including mechanical engineering. However, many ESP courses currently taught in this college are generic in nature and do not reflect the actual tasks that learners are expected to perform on the job. Several studies conducted in Benin (Lanmantchion, 2014; Fanou, 2016; Agbayahoun, 2019; Hindémè, 2022) have reported mismatches between the content of ESP

programmes and the communicative tasks performed in professional settings.

This research focuses on identifying the English language needs of workers and employers in car garages to inform the development of an ESP syllabus for mechanical engineering students. This research is relevant in that it encourages the interrelation between schools and businesses. In this regard, it draws attention to the need for workplace input into the design of school curricula. Thus, the study raises the question of the need for collaboration between school stakeholders and employers. It is anchored in the belief that language education should be functional, relevant, and aligned with the linguistic demands of the workplace. As Nunan (2005) points out, learners should not be forced to adapt to the curriculum; rather, the curriculum should be adapted to meet learners' real needs. Through a detailed needs analysis, this study seeks to provide curriculum developers and ESP practitioners with insights into the specific English competencies needed in automotive maintenance contexts, thereby improving both employability and job performance.

Review of the Scholarship

Brown (1995) prioritises needs analysis as the first logical step in the curriculum approach, in addition to goals and objectives, language testing, materials development, language teaching, and programme evaluation. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) agree, as they believe that the cornerstone of ESP that leads to a highly focused course is needs analysis. Some researchers share this view and point out that needs analysis makes the course more oriented to the real needs of learners (Gatehouse, 2001; Graves, 2000;



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Richards, 2001; and Westerfield, 2010). Furthermore, Iwai et al. (1999) overestimate the primary role of needs analysis by referring it to the activities of gathering information that will serve as the basis for designing a programme that will meet the needs of a particular group of students.

Hyland (2006) provides a comprehensive definition of needs analysis in course design, emphasizing that it involves more than identifying learners' deficiencies. It also considers their goals, backgrounds, and motivations for enrolling in a course. This holistic perspective ensures that course content and delivery methods are tailored to meet learners' diverse needs and expectations. Needs analysis, for Smoak (2003), must take into account observations of language use in context. According to her, an ESP professional must be prepared to determine how language is used in real-world situations and teach that language because she believes that "ESP is English language teaching based on the real and immediate needs of learners who must successfully perform real-life tasks. It is needs-based and task-oriented" (pp. 22-27). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have highlighted the need to distinguish between 'target needs' (what is required of the learner in the target situation) and 'learning needs' (the requirement at the time of learning) as the key to the needs analysis process. Their study highlights target needs as necessities, wants and desires. The researchers shed light on what necessities cover by stating that they are requirements of the target situation. In other words, they consider necessities as what the learner needs to know in order to meet the expectations of the target situation and the knowledge of linguistic features often used in the situations concerned (discourse, functional, structural and lexical).

Schutz and Derwnig (1981) consider needs analysis as a pragmatic activity that plays an important role in the process of designing or developing a curriculum. Johns (1991) mentions that needs analysis precedes other steps in curriculum development for any course and makes all course design activities effective. In the same vein, Brown (2009) argues that the prerequisites for the development of instructional materials, learning activities, tests, and programme evaluation strategies are obtained through needs analysis. For Richards and Platt (1992), needs analysis is a procedure by which the language needs of a learner or group of learners are identified and prioritised. Needs analysis is the basis of any ESP programme and therefore learners must be given confidence to assess their learning needs. Needs analysis refers to the students' requirements for study or work and what they want to achieve from the language course. It is an integral part of ESP. Any ESP programme must be preceded by an analysis of real needs. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), learners' needs are the criterion for the teaching/learning process. It is imperative to carry out a needs analysis to determine the specific reasons for learning the language (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) or to specify exactly what students are to achieve through English (Robinson, 1991). According to Nunan (1988a), a needs analysis refers to the techniques and procedures of gathering information to be used in designing the curriculum. The teacher must find out what knowledge and potential abilities learners possess at entry level and what they do not know and cannot do in English. Richards and Rodgers (1986) state that needs analysis aims to identify general and specific language needs that can be taken into account in developing the aims, objectives and content of a



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language programme. This implies that identifying general language needs is also essential in needs analysis. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), needs analysis is the process of establishing the what and how of a course. They further state that needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a much more focused course. If the course design does not consider the real needs of the learners and does not set realistic goals to target the needs, the ESP programme may fail to achieve the goals.

Research Objectives

The following objectives have been set to meet the purpose of the current study:

- Investigate the English language needs of the mechanical sector.
- Establish the relationship between the current English language programme and job markets.
- Suggest English syllabi, based on the English language needs of the selected companies, to meet the market needs of job seekers from the college under study.

Research Hypotheses

- Hypothesis one: The English language needs of workers in the mechanical sector differ from the content currently offered in the existing English language programme.
- Hypothesis two: There is a weak alignment between the current English language curriculum and the communicative demands of the mechanical job market.

- Hypothesis: An English syllabus designed to the identified workplace language needs of mechanical companies will better equip college graduates for job market integration than the existing syllabus.

1. Methodology

The Study involves fieldwork conducted across forty (40) car garages located in Benin, with the aim of evaluating the English language needs within the automotive maintenance sector. Participants in this study are experienced employees and employers from these garages, whose practical insights are instrumental in identifying the communicative challenges and language requirements encountered in their daily professional activities. The research is situated within the broader framework of technical and vocational education in Benin, particularly as it relates to mechanical engineering programmes offered by university technical institutes. This sectoral focus is informed by multiple factors, including the increasing number of young men and women enrolling in mechanical engineering programmes, the promising employment prospects for graduates, and the alignment of automotive training with the national development goals outlined in the Government's Action Plan (PAG, 2021–2026). Specifically, the government's emphasis on integrating employment market needs into vocational training and enhancing workforce readiness underscores the relevance of this study.

A total of forty (40) garages have been purposively selected, representing diverse work environments within the mechanical engineering field. The selection was guided by convenience and accessibility rather than rigid criteria, ensuring that a broad cross-section of garages (both large



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and small) was included. Gender was not a determining factor in participant selection, and both male and female respondents took part in the survey. The study encompasses sixty-two (62) participants, comprising fifty-four (54) employees and eight (08) employers. These participants occupy a variety of roles within the garages, allowing the research to capture a wide spectrum of perspectives on English as a Specific (ESP) needs in the workplace. This comprehensive data set is expected to inform the development of an ESP syllabus that is both context-sensitive and responsive to the actual communicative tasks required in Beninese car garages.

Data are collected through structured interviews, content analysis, discourse analysis, and questionnaires for the completion of this research. Structured interviews are conducted to collect data from respondents. In fact, unlike the other types of interviews, structured interviews are the most systematised type of interview in which the interviewer uses predetermined questions in a set order. This type of interview guides the researcher to collect straightforward data for tackling the research problem under study. In this context, Seliger and Shohamy (1989, p.168) argue that more structured interviews will elicit brief and concise data in the form of checks, marks, and short responses; while open interviews will elicit generally more elaborated data in the form of impressions, descriptions, and narratives obtained from interviews. In the present study, the interview format has been shared out between four main sections. Questionnaires were administered to collect data from many respondents and compare their outcomes with the ones from interviews, content analysis, and discourse

analysis. Westerfield's (2012) needs analysis questionnaire is slightly adapted and applied to this research.

A questionnaire made of twelve (12) questions is addressed to the employees and employers. The first question is about the identity of the employee, and question two asks for the position of the employees in the company. Question three deals with the work experience of the respondents, whereas the fourth question concerns their qualifications and skills. The fifth question enquires about the use of the English language during work in the companies, and question six aims to discover the level of English language proficiency of the employees. In question seven, employees are asked whether they were taught English language at the college and their opinions on the English language courses offered to them at the university are the focus of the eighth question. The English language skills and competences required of employees to function well in the relevant company and the challenges encountered by employees with low levels of English proficiency are dealt with in questions nine and ten, respectively. In question eleven, the hindrances to the English courses for the markets are displayed, and question twelve collects the opinion of the employees on a model English language program to meet the needs and expectations of the relevant company.

2. Results

The findings showed that employees usually face two English language needs: (a) interactions with visitors (e.g., clients and consultants) and seasonal workers, and (b) reading technical documents. It was found that nearly all respondents needed English at work and felt that, other than



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French, English was the most important language for them at work, which corresponds with English now being the global language of business (Graddol, 2006, 2010).

Further, 70% indicated that their need for English had increased since beginning work, while 83% expected that their need for English would grow in the future. When inquiring about the specific English skills in use at work, writing was selected as the most common English skill (90.3%), followed closely by reading (80.6%), which is in agreement with Male et al. (2009) and Evans (2010). These results could be anticipated as informants indicated that their corporate language was English meaning that, in addition to foreign customer communication, internal email is also in English. Accordingly, when asked about the frequency of the use of the four English skills, writing and reading were again rated most common with over 60% saying they used these skills several times daily. On the other hand, speaking and listening were rated as being needed on a weekly basis by over 50% of respondents. Teleconferencing and telephone communication were ranked second and third, respectively, with videoconferencing and face-to-face meetings the least commonly used means of communication with foreign customers.

The findings also revealed important constraints regarding the English language teaching at the college under investigation, including, for instance, the lack of materials related to technical English and an appropriate focus and attention to the English language at the college. The specific English language needs of job aspirants from the college under study, particularly in the companies' context, can be addressed through a tailored syllabus that aligns with the

communication demands they will encounter in the workplace. A comprehensive English language syllabus for these students should focus on several key areas to ensure they are well-equipped for professional environments.

One important aspect is **Technical English**. The syllabus should include technical vocabulary, industry-specific jargon, and language used in engineering contexts. This involves helping students read and interpret technical documents, manuals, reports, and specifications. Emphasis should also be placed on writing clear and precise technical reports, emails, and documentation, ensuring that students can engage with industry-specific texts in an effective manner.

Communication skills are another vital area. Job aspirants must develop proficiency in both written and oral communication for various workplace interactions. This includes writing emails, memos, and reports, as well as engaging in telephone calls, video conferencing, and meetings. The syllabus should create opportunities for students to practice formal and informal communication with clients, colleagues, and supervisors. Public speaking and presentation skills are also essential, and should be incorporated to help students convey their ideas professionally.

3. Discussion

The study collects data related to the English needs of the mechanical engineering companies. The findings show that the professionals need English during work in the companies. These studies confirm the studies of Lestari et al. (2017) and Izidi and Zitouni (2017), which indicate that automotive students need to comprehend the technical



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terms in English and add that their mastery influences the practice of industrial work by students in the workplace.

In the garages, there are tasks and situations for which knowledge of English is mandatory. Moreover, the findings indicated that the employees and the employers need to possess skills and competences in English in order to be up to these tasks and situations. These results are backed up by the studies carried out by Singh and Harun (2020), Adzmi et al. (2009), and Wijayanti and Nugroho (2021) in which they mentioned the tasks and situations that require English in automobile mechanics and the related-skills and competences. In their findings, they stated that speaking and reading are the first two language skills most frequently needed for students' academic and professional performances in addition to listening and writing in order of importance. Also, their studies depicted that applied terminologies and translations related to automotive vehicles are preferred to the grammatical rules of the language because many automotive technology references about vehicle inspection are written in English. Other findings from their studies indicates that reading of General Interest Materials and Sales-Related Materials; writing of General Interest Materials and Technical and oral communication; explaining information/ideas/opinions, and communicating with the public in groups, etc. are tasks and situations in the companies.

The results of the present study confirm that the English courses offered to the students cover some language aspects (the results from the content analysis). The findings show that the courses help the students develop their reading and listening comprehension skills, vocabulary background and

acquire knowledge for writing cover letter and curriculum vitae. Therefore, the employees and employers' needs and expectations in English are beyond what the programme teaches the students. These findings fall in line with Signh et al. (2011) who contend that language programmes offered have to be designed to include adequate practice in communication and the course should be related to authentic office situations in order to ensure that the students' professional communication skills are practiced according to the requirements of employers, and match the real workplace context.

The challenges encountered by many employees and employers in their jobs might be explained by the gap between the programme and the markets' needs. It is in this context that Latif (2020) and Lee and Schmidgall (2020) argued that universities should produce in their graduates the skills needed in the markets. Their studies support the studies about the respondents' suggestions of the content of an appropriate English syllabus.

4. Suggestions

The findings indicated the value of developing pedagogic tasks that are informed by the results of the needs assessment, particularly tasks underpinned by the principles of task-based language teaching. These tasks can be designed to reflect real-world situations that learners are likely to face in their future careers, thus fostering the development of practical language skills. By integrating task-based language teaching principles, curriculum designers can ensure that the tasks are not only relevant but also engaging and effective in helping students acquire the language skills necessary for their professional success.



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The study suggests that skill-based language teaching, when applied to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, offers a practical approach. It provides a structured method for incorporating authentic tasks into the curriculum, allowing students to engage with language in a way that mirrors their tomorrow work environments. This alignment between language teaching and professional tasks supports the development of functional language skills and prepares learners for the linguistic demands they will face in the workplace. Curriculum and program designers should consider incorporating skill-based assessments and pedagogic tasks as central components of ESP programs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in mechanical garages context. Syllabus designers should create tailored syllabi for the sectors of construction and public works, automobile and industrial equipment, computer engineering, and renewable energy. Each syllabus should include detailed course descriptions, aims, and objectives, establishing a clear and structured framework for language instruction. Designers should also identify the target beneficiaries and define the expected learning outcomes, ensuring that students acquire the language skills necessary to succeed in their careers.

The researcher has developed a syllabus tailored to the sector under investigation, the designed syllabus equip students and professionals with the language skills essential for effective workplace communication. These syllabi focus on key aspects such as technical vocabulary, industry-specific concepts, and communication strategies commonly used in meetings, and client interactions. By prioritising the skills needed for reading project documents, writing reports,

participating in meetings, and engaging in professional discussions, the syllabi aim to thoroughly prepare students for success in real-world professional environments.

The designed syllabus for Mechanical Engineering Sector: Skills and Subskills Required Based on the Study

Table: The Skills and Subskills Needed based on the study, Lanmantchion, 2024

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Skills and Subskills Required Based on the Study	Reading written instructions/ advice Reading manuals Reading project documents Reading office documents Reading professional texts	Writing emails Writing minutes of meetings Writing daily/weekly reports Writing completion reports Writing proposal for projects Writing business letters Writing	Giving oral presentations Attending meetings /seminars Speaking with customers on occasional visits Talking about everyday tasks and duties Teleconference communication	Receiving spoken instructions/ Advice Listening in international seminars / Conferences

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		memos Writing presentati on slides	Telephone communic ation Having informal and social conversati ons	
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Conclusion

This article investigated the English language needs in car garages to inform the design of an ESP syllabus for mechanical engineering students in Benin. It explores how English is used in real-world garage settings by both technicians and supervisors, focusing on the communicative tasks essential to daily operations. The study indicated the growing relevance of English in local car garages due to globalisation, imported vehicles, and foreign clientele. Through interviews, questionnaires, content analysis, and discourse analysis, the research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods for a comprehensive needs assessment. Findings revealed that although French dominates workplace communication, English is regularly required for technical documentation, troubleshooting manuals, email correspondence, and customer service. The most frequently used English skills in garages are reading and writing, especially for understanding manuals and writing job reports. Speaking and listening are also essential, particularly for interacting with English-speaking clients and

suppliers. However, these oral skills were reported as the most challenging due to limited practice and poor coverage in traditional curricula. Writing emerged as the most frequently used and better-mastered skill among workers. The study calls for ESP syllabi that reflect actual workplace demands, including vocabulary for auto parts, procedures, and customer interaction. It recommends integrating role plays, authentic materials, and hands-on practice into language instruction. The results urge educational institutions to collaborate with car garage professionals to design relevant training. Such partnerships would ensure that graduates are equipped for immediate integration into the labor market. Addressing these specific needs will not only enhance communication efficiency in garages but also increase employability and the mobility of young technicians.

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