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FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEEDS ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY ON KAZAKHSTANI EXPERIENCES

Aissulu Kaldarova
Kazakh Ablai Khan
University of International Relations
and World Languages
Almaty, Kazakhstan
a.kaldarova@iitu.edu.kz

Marco Vasquez
Department of Languages
International Information Technology University
Almaty, Kazakhstan
m.vasquez@iitu.edu.kz

Abstract— Preparing students' needs while they spend their years at universities is critical. Some universities place a greater emphasis on the development of students' skills. Knowledge construction, real-world problem solving, skilled communication, collaboration, use of information and communication technology for learning, and self-regulation are examples of 21st century skills. These are vital as employers nowadays seek graduates who possess 21st century skills. This article provides a detailed analysis of the results of questionnaires completed by Kazakhstani university students. The primary research instrument in this study was a survey questionnaire with 12 items designed to identify the needs of first-year students studying English at International Information Technology University (IITU) in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The items were developed and designed by the authors of this article. The respondents were 449 first year students who were studying at IITU. Within four weeks, the data was collected, and an online questionnaire was sent to respondents' email addresses. The researchers gave the respondents 2-3 days to complete the questionnaire and return it to researchers for data analysis. The main aim is to gather information about what the learners' need in studying the type of course program they are interested in and to determine the need of English for specific purposes and when is the most appropriate time to study it. The summary of the results achieved concludes the article.

Keywords— *teaching; learning; languages; Information Technology*

I. INTRODUCTION

In this fast-changing world, universities are adapting various teaching strategies and techniques to ensure that students meet developmental milestones and are prepared to face the real world once they leave the four corners of the classrooms. In the context this paper, it is crucial to delve into the nuanced dynamics of language requirements within Kazakhstan's higher education milieu, especially among

students aged 17 to 21. This demographic, commonly termed young adults, demonstrates a notable inclination towards practical vocational aspirations, highlighting the essential role of linguistic competencies in both academic and professional spheres.

Previous research on foreign language needs analysis in Kazakhstan emphasizes the critical role of English across various sectors. According to Gerfanova [1], there is a significant gap between the required language proficiency and the actual skills of professionals. This discrepancy is largely driven by the demands of globalization and economic integration, which necessitate advanced communicative competence in English. Gerfanova's study highlights the importance of tailored language training programs to bridge this gap and enhance professional capabilities. The findings suggest that systematic reforms in language education are crucial to better align with the professional and academic requirements of the workforce. Addressing these needs through targeted interventions can significantly improve communicative competence, thereby opening greater opportunities for individuals and contributing to the overall development of the country [1].

An undergraduate education is regarded as a solid foundation in both content and academic skills, as well as non-cognitive skills, and is one strategy for assisting students in sticking with it. Students who can solve problems and analyzing content are considered to have higher levels of cognition than those who are not capable of doing so. These skills are referred to as academic skills, while time management, self-management, and study skills are considered non-cognitive. Regardless of any setbacks, students who possess these skills can still succeed in their academic studies [2].

Preparing students' needs while they spend their years at universities is critical. Some universities place a greater emphasis on the development of students' skills. Knowledge construction, real-world problem solving, skilled communication, collaboration, use of information and communication technology for learning, and self-regulation are examples of 21st century skills. These are vital as

employers nowadays seek graduates who possess 21st century skills.

Millennial students are also interested in participating in exchange or mobility programs for several months or a year to gain experience in an English-speaking environment, as they recognize its importance in their future careers. The process of internalizing the curriculum is referred to as internationalization. This procedure entails the creation of a specific framework and institution for the internationalization of higher education [3].

This paper provides a novelty due to its focused examination of the specific linguistic requirements within the unique socio-economic context of Kazakhstan. A comprehensive analysis of the professional and academic language needs of Kazakhstani individuals is uniquely integrated in this study, which highlights the critical gaps in current language education programs. Targeted recommendations for curriculum development and policy reforms are provided by the research to address the urgent need for enhanced language proficiency to meet global economic demands, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

Students' mobility programmes vary either shorter or longer depending on the factors that affect their study experiences. Because our research focuses on English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and its significance, as well as how young adults perceive its importance in their future careers, we will present our findings in the following section of our paper.

Theoretical Framework

Many studies in the Arab world [4]-[11] have focused on factors related to learning and development, such as learner ages, learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation. Adults who are not dependent on their parents or teachers can better understand learning behaviors. They will feel at ease in this setting. Many areas of interest in ELT (English Language Teaching) research have become focused on the differences in the teaching styles of different learners as a result of the significant changes in English language teaching over the last few decades. This is due to the fact that the concept of English language teaching as a learning process, or EPP, refers to the analysis and development of specific learners' needs.

The concept of EPP is intended to identify specific needs of specific learners. We would like to highlight some definitions presented for discussions. EPP is a term that refers to teaching and learning English for a specific career for example, law, medicine, information technology (IT), etc.

Designing a Syllabus for EPP

A syllabus is a conceptual framework that explains the content of a professional course or subject. It is defined as the sequence in which the content is taught. The process of organizing a teaching curriculum to meet the needs of

students is known as syllabus design. It entails determining the content to be taught as well as the appropriate number of learning units. The selection of a syllabus is the most important decision that a language teacher makes. It should be deliberated upon and thoroughly considered. This procedure begins with an examination of students' interests and needs, followed by the selection of appropriate syllabus content. It is the first step toward developing a comprehensive and effective teaching program.

Objectives of EPP

A goal is a description of the desired behavior that the student will exhibit. It should be remembered that EPP teaching is a benign and neutral operation aimed primarily at assisting non-native English speakers in improving their language skills. The goals of language education are divided into four categories. Proficiency objectives are concerned with the mastery of four macro skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Knowledge objectives are concerned with the acquisition of linguistic and cultural information, language analysis and awareness of the systematic aspects of language falls under the category of linguistic knowledge, and cultural knowledge objectives cover what is acceptable or not as a standard norm in society.

Instructional materials for teaching English for Professional Purposes

Materials are essential in any instructional program in order to achieve its goals, especially when teaching EPP courses. In order to achieve the desired target in the learning process, materials should be aligned and designed accordingly based on the needs of the learners. Instructional materials can be printed or non-printed, and they can include pens and paper, as well as technological and other educational materials.

II. METHOD

The main instrument in this study was a survey questionnaire with 12 items to identify the needs of first year students who were learning English language at International Information Technology University (IITU) in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The items were developed and designed by the researchers.

The respondents were 449 first year students who study at (IITU). The data were collected within 4 weeks and online questionnaires were sent to respondents' emails. The respondents were given 2-3 days to complete the questionnaire and send it back to the researchers for data analysis.

The main aim of this research is to get the information about learners' need in learning what type of course program they are interested in and if they need an English for professional purposes for their future, if yes when it will be most appropriate time to study it.

The questionnaire consists of questions about gender, level of English language, type of school where respondents had learned English language before enrolled in the university to get the profile information of the English language learners. We have listed the types of schools and types of learning styles to be selected by respondents to obtain information about their previous language education.

Question 4 tests what the need is, in respondent's opinion, for a university graduate to speak a foreign language (English) today. In addition, the respondents were asked to choose if knowledge/ignorance of a foreign language (English) affects their employment opportunities and career growth in the future. Question 6 is about the programs (English language courses) respondents were studying at the university at present time. The respondents were also asked to choose when it is most appropriate to start studying English courses for specific purposes (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th year of studying).

The final questions, 10 to 12, assess the need for EPP courses, and students write their own suggestions for improving the quality of the academic discipline "Foreign Language/English language".

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents are first year undergraduate students of IITU who have started learning English language from September, 2020.

The questionnaire gathered answers from a pool of 449 people, male respondents predominate (Table I).

TABEL I. BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS (QUESTION 1-3)

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	176	39.3%
Male	272	60.7%
English language level		
Beginner	2	0.4%
Elementary	73	16.3%
Pre-Intermediate	229	51.2%
Intermediate	103	23%
Upper-Intermediate	39	8.7%
Advanced	1	0.2%
Type of English classes (Where did you learn English language before applying to university?)		
At state school	313	70.2%
In language centers	234	52.5%
With English language tutor	74	16.6%
Participated in an International programmes	6	1.3%
Nowhere	4	0.9%
At college	3	0.7%
Self-Studying	19	4.2%

From the overall population (n=449) based on gender, there are 176 female respondents with a percentage of 39.3% as compared to 272 male respondents with 60.7%. Most of the respondents have Pre-Intermediate level with 229 (51.2%) followed by Intermediate level students with 103 (23%), then Elementary level with 73 (16.3%) and 39 respondents with Upper Intermediate level with 39 (8.7%). In addition, there are 2 respondents with Beginner level with 2 (0.4%) and 1 student with Advanced level of English with 1 (0.2%).

From the overall population based on the type of English classes they attended before applying to university, there are 313 respondents who studied at state schools and learned English language there with 313 (70,2%), and 234 respondents studied English in private language schools with 234 (52.5%), 74 (16,6%) respondents studied English language with tutors, 19 (4.2%) students learned English language by themselves through listening to music, watching videos, etc.

In the process of data analysis, we discovered that most respondents (68.2%) think that knowing English language and speaking English is very important for a university graduate. Only 0.7% of respondents showed that there is no need-to-know foreign language for a university graduate (Table II).

TABLE II. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Question 4	absolutely necessary	there is no need	recomm ended	do not know
	Frequency and Percentage (%)			
What is the need, in your opinion, for a university graduate to speak a foreign language (e.g., English) today?	304 (68.2%)	3 (0.7%)	133 (29.8%)	6 (1.3%)

Interesting findings of the survey were generated by Question 5 related to the knowledge/ignorance of a foreign language (English) which will affect respondent's employment opportunities and career growth in the future. 301 (67.9%) respondents believe that knowledge/ignorance of a foreign language (English) affect their employment opportunities and career growth in the future (Table III).

TABLE III STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Question 5	certainly	possible	unlikely	no	do not know
	Frequency and Percentage (%)				

In your opinion, can knowledge/ignorance of a foreign language (English) affect your employment opportunities and career growth in the future?	301 (67.9 %)	134 (30.2 %)	7 (1.6%)	0 (0 %)	0 (0%)
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Regarding the student's desire to learn foreign languages (English language), we aimed to find out what courses they were studying at present time. This percentage shows that most respondents (151-34.6%) were studying General English courses for pre-intermediate level learners. 150 respondents (34.3%) indicated that they were studying Academic English and IELTS preparation courses. There were 136 respondents (31.1%) who were studying a General English course for Elementary level students (Table IV).

TABLE IV ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES (QUESTION 6)

Question 6	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What programs (English language courses) are you studying at the university at the moment?		
General English Elementary/Low Pre-Intermediate course	136	31.1%
General English Pre-Intermediate course	151	34.6%
Academic English/ Introduction to IELTS course Intermediate&Upper-Intermediate levels	150	34.3%

An interesting result yielded was that students who were learning the following courses have indicated the effectiveness of them. Most respondents (280- 63.3%) showed that they have improved the level of their English language, as responses to Question 7 demonstrated. However, some of them (148-33.5%) indicated that they did not achieve significant results. In addition, 14-3.2% respondents highlighted that the course was ineffective (Table V).

TABLE V THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COURSE

Question 7	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How can you evaluate the effectiveness of the courses you have taken?		
My knowledge of the language has improved noticeably, with the help of the course I have achieved significant results.	280	63.3%
The classes were interesting, but my knowledge of the language remained at the same level, I did not achieve significant results.	148	33.5%
The course seemed ineffective to me, my knowledge of the language remained at the same level, I did not achieve any results.	14	3.2%

The next question (Question 8) aimed to identify what causes students difficulties in mastering English. Most

students underlined that speaking is the most difficult for the learner (Table VI).

TABLE VI. DIFFICULTIES IN MASTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Question 8	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What causes you difficulties in mastering English?		
Speaking	234	52.6%
Vocabulary	172	38.7%
Grammar	169	38%
Listening	165	37.1%
Writing	101	22.7%
Pronunciation	77	17.3%
Reading	66	14.8%
All skills mentioned above	33	7.4%

Question 9 concerns the respondent's opinion about the knowledge of which foreign language (English) may be most in demand for them in their future. Most respondents think that General English will be demanded in their future (Table VII).

TABLE VII. MOST DEMANDED ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE

Question 9	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Knowledge of which foreign language (English) may be most in demand for you in the future?		
General English	142	31.9%
English for Professional Purposes	112	25.2%
IELTS preparation courses	109	24.5%
Academic English	43	9.7%
I do not know	37	8.3%
None	2	0.4%

The survey was finalized with the questions on respondents' opinions when it is the most appropriate time to start studying a "profession-oriented foreign language (English)". Most students are motivated to start learning it from the first year of their study (Table VIII).

TABLE VIII. PROFESSION-ORIENTED FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Question 10	Frequency	Percentage (%)
When, in your opinion, is it most appropriate to start studying a "profession-oriented foreign language (English)"?		
from the 1st year	239	53.3%
from the 2nd year	132	29.5%
on the 3rd year	45	10%
I do not know	32	7.1%

In addition, 52.8% of respondents were interested in getting acquainted with professional topics in foreign

language classes, which they need for their future career (Table IX).

TABLE IX. PROFESSIONAL TOPICS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES LANGUAGE

Question 11	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What do you think about getting acquainted with professional topics in foreign language classes?		
it will be interesting	236	52.8%
it will be uninteresting	3	0.7%
it will be incomprehensible	42	9.4%
it will be unnecessarily difficult	26	5.8%
it will complement the knowledge of special disciplines	78	17.4%
I haven't thought about it	62	13.9%

In the final question 12, students write their own suggestions for improving the quality of the academic discipline "Foreign Language/English language" (Table X).

TABLE XII SUGGESTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Question 12
<p>Do you have any suggestions for improving the quality of the academic discipline "Foreign Language/English"?</p> <p>There are no offers. Everything is fine Do more speaking and listening activities such as podcasts, etc. Let students express their opinions without interrupting them, even if they make mistakes. After that, point out their mistakes. To make the lessons more interesting maybe Give students more opportunities No, I like everything I do not know It is possible to study General English in the first year of our study, and then divide students into groups for Professional English. For example, English for the IT sphere, for journalists, etc. That would be very helpful. Time management skills, explain student in simple language so that it is effective and interesting for mastering the full material. Everything is fine! Additional courses are needed To include in the program not only the study of grammar, as there are many and many tasks are given for it. That is, students simply complete or even write off tasks quickly before the deadline. Few people study for themselves. Perhaps it is necessary to include the study mor new words and practice to memorize these words. Also, useful topics: phrasal verbs, collocations, verbs with prepositions, prepositions. Pretty good It is necessary to increase the number of classes. Additional courses on subjects in English More spontaneous conversations. On various topics Groups with fewer students (at least less than 10, would be optimal). It would be better if we were preparing not only for IELTS but also for TOEFL and SAT in English lessons. I want to study Literature in English Write more essays</p>

Overall, the study offers insightful perspectives into the perceptions, experiences, and aspirations of first-year undergraduate students at the IITU concerning the

English language. A predominant male representation among respondents suggests a potential gender skew or differential enrollment patterns in the institution's programs. Notably, most students began their English language journey in state schools, highlighting the foundational role of public education in language acquisition.

The overwhelming consensus underscores the paramount importance students attribute to English proficiency, with a significant 68.2% asserting its criticality for university graduates. This sentiment aligns with global trends emphasizing English as a pivotal skill in today's interconnected world. Interestingly, a substantial portion (67.9%) recognizes the tangible impact of English proficiency on future career trajectories, signaling an acute awareness of its instrumental role in enhancing employability and career growth.

Course-specific insights reveal a preference for General English courses among pre-intermediate level learners, complemented by a notable uptake in Academic English and IELTS preparation. Despite the majority (63.3%) perceiving enhanced proficiency levels, a significant minority (33.5%) reported negligible progress, underscoring potential gaps in course effectiveness or pedagogical approaches. The identified challenges primarily revolve around speaking proficiency, suggesting a need for targeted interventions addressing conversational skills.

Furthermore, the emphasis on General English as a future professional requirement resonates with students' broader career aspirations. Encouragingly, a proactive inclination emerges, with a majority advocating for early integration of profession-oriented English courses from the onset of their academic journey. This proactive stance, coupled with an evident interest in professional thematic content, underscores the imperative for curriculum developers and educators to align pedagogical strategies with students' evolving needs and aspirations.

The findings illuminate a nuanced landscape of perceptions, challenges, and aspirations surrounding English language education among Kazakhstani undergraduate students, necessitating tailored interventions to optimize learning outcomes and enhance future employability.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted among first-year undergraduate students at the IITU provides invaluable insights into the significance, challenges, and aspirations related to English language proficiency within the Kazakhstani educational context. A predominant acknowledgment of English's pivotal role in academic success and future career prospects underscores its intrinsic value. Despite positive sentiments regarding course effectiveness, challenges, particularly in spoken proficiency, warrant attention. Furthermore, students' proactive stance towards integrating profession-

oriented English courses early in their academic journey highlights evolving pedagogical needs and aspirations.

The specific linguistic needs of Kazakhstan's workforce and student population are identified and addressed in this study. The necessity for tailored language training programs is underscored by the study, which highlights the gap between required and actual language proficiency. Educators and policymakers are informed by this research about the urgent need for curriculum reforms to enhance communicative competence, thereby improving professional and academic opportunities. Ultimately, the nation's socio-economic development is contributed to by aligning language education with global economic demands and local needs.

Moreover, the survey among 1st year IT students (which was conducted previously) showed that a significant number of students at the time of admission to a higher educational institution do not have a sufficient level of proficiency in the international standard of a foreign language. Insufficient level of foreign communication competence formation makes it impossible to introduce a course of professional-oriented foreign language in higher educational institutions on the first year of study. Therefore, the foreign language training of future IT specialists on the first years of study is held in accordance with the curriculum of the subject "Foreign Language", which is the general course of foreign language training. On the second year of studying the teaching of a foreign language is divided into two separate subjects: "English language for professional purposes" and "Business English." Therefore, to ensure the professional orientation of foreign language training of future IT specialists, it is necessary to supplement the course of study of a foreign language by effective online courses for their future career (for English Beginner/Elementary/Pre-Intermediate levels) and to organize a speaking club (in English) for the 1st year IT students.

This research proposes several recommendations. First is pedagogical enhancement. Institutions should prioritize curricular reforms by incorporating interactive, conversational components into English courses, fostering practical application and confidence in language skills. Second is diversified course offerings. To cater to varied linguistic needs and career aspirations, institutions must diversify their course offerings, ranging from General English to specialized modules [12]. Third is early integration of profession-oriented courses. Institutions should integrate profession-oriented English courses early in the curriculum, collaborating with industry experts to ensure relevance and applicability [13]. Fourth is pedagogical training. Continuous professional development for educators that emphasizes innovative methodologies and cultural nuances, is essential to address students' evolving needs [14]. Fifth is feedback mechanisms. Establishing regular

feedback mechanisms, including surveys and focus groups, can facilitate continuous improvement and student engagement [15]. Sixth is collaborative initiatives. Engaging with external stakeholders, such as employers and language professionals, through internships and industry-driven projects, can bridge academic learning with real-world application [16].

Addressing the identified challenges and aligning pedagogical strategies with students' aspirations can optimize English language learning outcomes, fostering holistic development, and enhancing future career prospects within the globalized landscape. Adopting a student-centric, collaborative, and innovative approach can navigate complexities, ensuring academic excellence, and fostering lifelong learning.

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