An Exploratory Analysis of Non-starter Undergraduates' Learning Needs for a Scaffolding ESP Curriculum

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

An orthodox curriculum for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is determined upon a comprehensive needs analysis thus optimally accommodating the demands of all the stakeholders including the learners. Though explicitly accommodated in the curriculum in its delivery, individual differences contrive some learners to achieve greater aptitude while others are forced to remain non-starters. This needs analysis is a response to admit the demands of a such sample of non-starter learners. The exploration seeks baselines to materialize a scaffolding English for specific purpose curriculum solution. Eighteen non-starter engineering apprentices of a Sri Lankan university were subjected to the needs analysis via the tools of; a preliminary dialogue; a diagnostic test of linguistic demands; and a questionnaire survey. The data collected underwent a qualitative thematic nature analysis catering to the exploratory purpose of learner needs. Learners' limited exposure to vocabulary and genres were the challenges behind the non-starter status extended by a grammar knowledge gap and the deficit of aptitude in strategies to master the four skills of language. The diagnostic test of linguistic demands manifested a profile of the linguistic demands included in the prospective curriculum shedding clear light on the required portions of each component of linguistic content. The force of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic aspects held by the learners confirmed that the learners' less effective motivation corresponds with less drive for language learning. These findings inform the need to locate the objectives of the curriculum and determine the content, themes, tasks, and assessment of learners' interests. The study implies that a needs analysis of the beneficiary learners with precise data collection tools attuned to the scaffolding scopes suffices to serve as the baseline for the development of a language skills curriculum.

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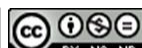
INTRODUCTION

Addressing the diversity of the individual differences of learners remains a critical challenge in pedagogy since such differences in irrepressible nature contrive some learners to achieve sound aptitude while others are forced to remain the non-starters of the mission of learning. A domain where this scenario remains evident is teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) context in Sri Lanka. Having completed their 13 years of school education in vernaculars (Sinhala or Tamil) most Sri Lankan students embark on their tertiary education offered in English medium instruction (EMI). The Department of Languages of the University of Moratuwa is the sole language skills development solution provider of the university which functions with a vision to accommodate a humanized teaching-learning environment for our learners. The ESL curriculum offered to the Engineering undergraduates of the University of Moratuwa is of English for Specific Academic Purpose (ESAP) nature which was implemented after a seminal analysis of the needs of the stakeholders of the curriculum (Ratwatte, 2013). This ESAP curriculum is offered in three proficiency level tiers wherein the learners are assigned to function in a relatively homogeneous aptitude group with an input decided to see the average aptitude held by the learners. Learners who work under any tier of the aptitude work through an appropriate ESAP input during their first semester and are advanced to an immediate next proficiency level input during semester two. Irrespective of the different ESAP inputs they are treated during the semester studies all are assessed formatively on the status of achieving learning outcomes of the course.

It is a universal fact for any curriculum to have a minute proportion of the learner community who fail to achieve learning outcomes. Yet, our attention is critically pleaded by a sample of non-starters who deserve extra scaffolding opportunities to ameliorate their second language (L2) needs. This exploratory study is set in such a critical pedagogical context of a group of learners who were non-starters of the ESAP programme. They demanded a brand new and augmented scaffolding module to achieve the requisite competencies of the English language to complete the ESAP module's outcomes of learning. In view of serving this mandate, the department intervenes to offer tailor-made learning opportunities to scaffold learners towards achieving expected learning outcomes. The prospective scaffolding module is decided to be within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) purview, for which the keystone is a needs analysis to carry out a focused course (Rahman, 2015). Scenarios like the purpose of this needs analysis include the studies of Hoekje (2007) in which the needs for acculturation of international medical graduates serve in the United States of America were explored, and the study by Liu et al., (Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun, 2011). These studies make efforts to rationalize the specific demands of language encountered by learners in ESL contexts. With such guiding lights of NA research, this exploratory study exerts our capacity to reach the actual augmenting demands of the non-starter learners who follow the existing ESAP module. Laying the baseline for an augmented ESP module, this study is planned as a micro-scale needs analysis aimed to optimally confluence the specific demands of the explicit learners with the expected learning outcomes negotiated in a converging learning milieu of a more humanized nature. Seeking the potency of the needs analysis approach to determine curriculum components, especially at the classroom level of language teaching pedagogical praxis, this study proposes a viable and attuned

approach of minuscule needs-analysis executed along a dialogue, diagnosis, and discovery (DDD) trajectory.

Having recognized that there exist certain gaps in linguistic knowledge, deficits of continuing motivation and difficulties to adapt to the EMI among the non-starter ESAP module followers, the study questions the following.

What caused the non-starters to find the ESAP module challenging?
What deficits in the target language's linguistic knowledge caused their non-starter status?
What particular features of the language classroom do the non-starter learners prefer?

Seeking answers to these questions, the study aims to discern the specific learner-sensitive augmenting demands of the scaffolding curriculum that can cater to the subjected non-starter learners. Deficits of learners' linguistic knowledge and learning trajectories that caused them to find the ESAP programme challenging and the learner demands in terms of classroom preferences were probed in this inquiry.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In ESP literature, a Needs Analysis (NA) is the diagnosis instrument of the goals and content of a course. By examining the present and the anticipated knowledge of learners, a NA can ensure the espousing of relevant and useful content to a course (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Simplifying the original definition offered in 1995, Brown (2009) redefines needs analysis as "the systematic collection and analysis of all information necessary for defining a defensible curriculum" (p. 268). As Brown's (2009) proposition admits, a defensible curriculum is the output of NA that can satisfy the language learning and teaching requirements of both students and teachers valid within the institutional context.

Developed over four decades, three dominant perspectives on needs analysis (NA) are available in ESP literature. The sociolinguistic model by Munby (1978) seeks the identification of the learners' needs by placing the learner's target linguistic requirements at the heart of the ESP course thus considering target needs as the basis for the course content and materials selection. Deficiency analysis by West (1994) transcends NA focus taking account of learners' present needs/wants together with the requirements of the target situation assessed with both an inventory of potential target needs to be articulated in terms of activities, and a scale used to determine the priority for each activity. Learning-centred approach by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) is a model that analyzes students' needs from the onset up to the target situation with the learning process as a focus of the analysis than the knowledge expected at the end of the classes. In this approach, target needs fall into three categories: the necessities or outcomes expected, lacks or the gap between outcomes and present skills and wants which mean the learner's perception of what they need. The attempt of this NA delimits its model with the learning-centred approach of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) with which many possibilities of the subjected context be located.

Dynamics of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis literature has focused majorly on the ESP context (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002; Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. , 1987) while EAP curriculums in the ESL context have also been an area under investigation. Needs analysis and their explorations are specific to the very context it is executed. The pedagogical context in which language learning occurs is a site that evolves expeditiously and hence in response to the changing context, it is evident that needs analysis should also be cyclically repeated. In an exercise like this where the ESP curriculum is augmented to suit the learner preferences and needs, the potency of a NA in correctly determining the demands is critical. This attempt of NA being a narrowed exploration of the subjected learners' learning demands to scaffold the ongoing ESAP curriculum in effect, recognizes students alone as stakeholders while attempting deeply to uncover their exact expectations and deficits. Long (2005) and Watanabe (2006) admit that students are major stakeholders of the curriculums and hence their specific needs of the curriculum cannot be overlooked. Hwang & Kim's (2019) findings also assure that it is of the key importance of considering students' perception and evaluation of the curriculum. They suggest that the curriculum needs to be modified and implemented in a way that motivates students to participate in classroom activities more actively.

Needs Analysis (NA) for Augmenting Learning

In creating a module of scaffolding potency within which the ongoing learning can be augmented, we must ascertain the precise language skills required of the subject learners. To develop optimal classroom instructions that are sensitive to learners' goals, Liu et al. (2011) warn the educator to be comprehensively aware of and replicate on diverse language needs of learners. Widodo (2016) adds to the same proposition stating that the educator should take learners' expectations and goals into account to offer the learners motivating and engaging materials and tasks in pedagogies.

A key assumption in this study is that while learners in the same batch of a university remain homogeneous to a certain extent in terms of their fields of study concerned, the learning needs of different students may vary due to the differences in their learning trajectories. Alhassan's study (2021) resonates mostly with the scope of this study. Alhassan (2021)in the exploration of business students' learning needs and skills in an English-medium programme in Sudan counting qualitatively on students' and subject content teachers' perspectives, found the need for curriculum provisions to be sufficiently comprehensive to cater for the various literacy needs of students. A very recent study by Karnine et al., (2022) investigate appropriate categories of skills in English language learning required for degree-level students in engineering and found the skills in need and order together with critical challenges and difficulties encountered by learners thus gaining insights to augment learning for them.

In terms of the NA's scope, this study adheres to three philosophies elaborated in Stufflebeam et al. (1985). The discrepancy philosophy considers needs as any differences between future desired student language performances and what they can currently perform, whereas the democratic philosophy recognizes needs as learning goals preferred by a majority of the stakeholders involved, while the analytic philosophy

values needs as skills the students would naturally learn next based on the diagnosis of them and the learning processes and the diagnostic philosophy commends needs as any language elements or skills that would be harmful if missing. This NA is based mostly on the discrepancy philosophy supplemented by diagnostic and analytic philosophies. As recognized by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) the necessities are ascertained together with the learners' differences between target L2 proficiency and the present. This study captures necessities by utilizing the data of diagnostic test of linguistic needs, while the subjective needs (wants) including what and how the learners would like to learn are absorbed through the questionnaire.

Needs Analysis in Sri Lankan ESL Setting

Kothalawala et al. (2015) review the literature on NAs in ESP seeking the evolution of: the term 'needs' together with models and approaches in needs analysis, selecting the most widely used eight models in curriculum development throughout ESP practice. Their study reveals the use of 'needs' as a term distinguished for establishing learning and target needs, lacks, wants, gaps, deficiencies and rights, associated with limitations of the definition of 'needs'. They further evaluated the bounds of data collecting tools thereby identifying each of the popular eight models to be having criticisms. They locate 'needs' as a non-single entity and the approaches of needs analysis as scenarios evolve towards complexity.

Basnayake (2020) undertakes a NA seeking solutions and amendments concerning the content and presenting materials of the existing textbooks being practised in Sabaragamuwa University using a questionnaire survey on a random sample of students following the ESL course (Core English Language - CEL). She investigates the negative views held by learners on explicit grammar teaching and their favour for speaking and listening activities related to real-life situations and determines the inductive teaching approach to be the best way to cater to the needs of ESL learners raising the need for authentic materials in the content of textbooks to attract and motivate students.

Ranasuriya and Herat (2020) undertake their NA focusing on the perceptions of industry personnel expected from vocational graduates as needs to function in the workplace, using focus group discussions of 15 industry industrial occupants. The vitality of English for effective performance in the industry is censored as an outcome with weightings demanded by them on knowledge of ESP with a foundation in EGP thus prescribing the curriculum to espouse Technical English used in specific situations as prescriptive curriculum inputs.

Highly theoretical, the study (2015) sheds light on delineating the taxonomy of needs analysis while the latter two studies published quite recently convince us of the potential of NA in deciding curriculum for ESP context. Viewing to add to the existing limited literature on NA in the ESP context of Sri Lanka, this study marks its uniqueness as an intense and explicit exploration of the learner aspects. This study locates its mandate in a specific territory, with the fact that NA is employable even within the classroom boundaries to gather data on augmenting demands and the learner trajectories that assist informed decision-making in designing scaffolding curriculums for non-starters.

RESEARCH METHODS

Endeavouring to formulate a curriculum for the non-starter learners, in this NA, the educator focuses primely on the learning needs of students. The motivation for this intense but explicit exploration of the learner's needs is corresponding to the very nature of the ESP solution it intends to materialize upon this exploration. The ESP solution manifested upon this exploration is a scaffolding to help advance the non-starter learners to progress with an ongoing ESAP programme. Such identification of needs is in view to be translated into learning objectives thereby determining the teaching materials, learning activities, tests, program evaluation strategies, etc.

The population subjected in the present NA is delimited in terms of both the scale of the project and the scope of the NA. As Purpura et al. (2003) noted NAs are all specific to the situation and hence the scale of present NA falls within classroom and program level due to its tailormade nature. Considering these limited purposes of the intended course, its programme level scale, time and resource constraints, this study chooses a set of carefully decided three distinct data collection tools. Though limited in purpose, the depth of the learner demands and learning trajectories are explicitly ascertained using these tools. These tools include a preliminary dialogue with the learners established via the zoom online platform enabling the learners to voice their language demands articulated in their vernaculars (wherein the investigator captured their perceived difficulties of working in the English language), a diagnostic test of linguistic demands conducted using the Oxford Practice Grammar–intermediate diagnostic test (by a way of an adapted online quiz consists of 100 test items of multiple choice question nature), and a questionnaire survey to explore the perceived needs of the learners (executed via an online google form).

Viewing to diagnose the actual deficits of linguistic knowledge of the intended learners, a sample of 18 students who were unsuccessful aka non-starters at the mid-semester assessment was subjected to the NA. The sample was selected by inviting the purposively filtered non-starters (41) identified from the mid-semester assessment. The non-starters were invited openly to register for a scaffolding module for which 26 students responded. On the time scheduled for the diagnostic test after the negotiation among the registered students, only 18 students attempted the quiz. All the students who completed their diagnostic test responded to the questionnaire at a later stage.   Out of the 18 diagnostic test takers, 11 of them volunteered to attend the preliminary dialogue. The data of qualitative nature ascertained via the three tools was then subjected to a qualitative analysis of thematic nature thereby delineating the spectrum of goals of a prospective course of tailormade nature. Analysis of data is dominantly thematic and mostly interpretative.

Having assumed the fact that the tools employed in this study were novel and exclusive to the context it employed, a rigorous alignment of triangulation has been adhered. As Long (2005) admits "comparing different sets and sources of data with one another" (p. 28) is a technique employable in triangulation. Adhering to this proposition, this study employs a comparison of all data ascertained across the three investigation tools. The key findings of the preliminary dialogue were testified with the detailed results of the diagnostic test of linguistics demands. This study further employs a purposeful effort

inclusive of three types of triangulation strategies: 'data triangulation' which is performed using multiple types of procedures (Dialogue transcripts, Test scores & Questionnaire survey data) in analyzing data, and 'methodological triangulation' achieved by using multiple data gathering procedures such as Dialogues, Tests and Questionnaires, and 'time triangulation' performed using multiple data gathering occasions (Preliminary dialogue, Pre-test of diagnostic nature and finally a survey of the questionnaire at three stages of diagnosis). The triangulation procedure of this study covers three types of triangulations out of the seven types prescribed by Brown (2001, p. 229).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Starting from the general profile of the learners who generated data, this section presents the data and findings harvested from the preliminary dialogue, diagnostic test and questionnaire survey in the order of research questions that framed the study. The learners who generated data from this study represent diverse backgrounds with which they bring diversity to the classroom. Aimed to compiling a general picture of the learner community, some queries were set in the google form questionnaire. The learner community profile compiled upon such queries is given in figure 01 below as a graphical summary of multiple items.
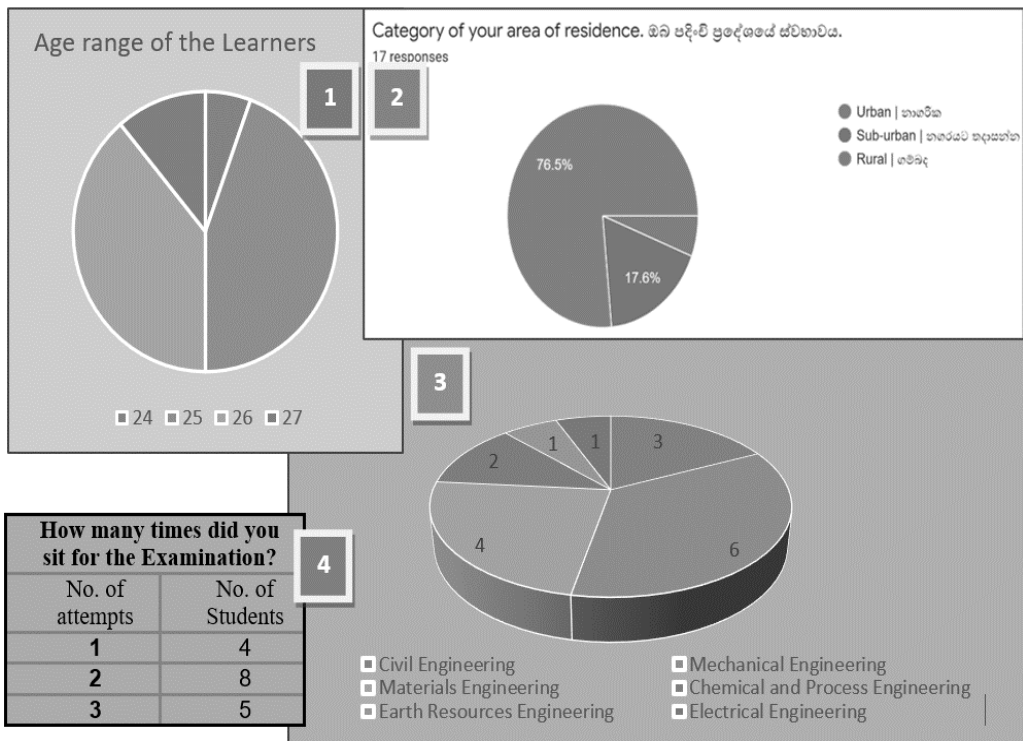
Source: (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

Figure 1: Learner Profile Summary

The age composition of the sample is visible in the profile summary item number 1 appears in the top left corner of the figure. The learners' age ranged from 24 to 27 years. The area of residence of the sample learners is given in the profile summary item number 2 appears in the top right corner of the figure. The sample consists of only one number of urban residents whereas 76.5% of the vast majority are rural descendants. The suburban representation of the sample is 17.6%. The statistics convince us that the sample happened to obtain a failed mark at a few subsequent attempts of examination (see profile item 4, table of statistics on the number of examination attempts) is a majority that descends from rural and non-urban localities. As profile item 3 (pie-chart) appeared on the bottom right corner indicates, the learner's background in a major field of study is also diverse though they all represent engineering disciplines. These diversities of disciplines and some of the homogeneities such as non-urban descent and age group remain significant inducers of the prospective ESL programme to be tailor-made for the learners. Evident from these statistics is that the vast majority of non-starters of the ESAP programme descend from deprived localities. Their locality of descent is deprived in terms of opportunities and facilities available for them to learn English. This resonates with the claim that the fluency and priority of English language use and opportunities for learning English in Sri Lanka remain a geopolitically determined phenomenon (Seefa, 2017).

Reasons behind the learners' non-starter status

The answer to the question—of what caused the non-starters to find the ESAP module challenging, was ascertainable via both the revelations of the preliminary dialogue, and the responses to the queries in the questionnaire survey.

The preliminary dialogue was more informal thereby allowing learners to develop a rapport with the investigator. For this purpose, learners were permitted to use their mother tongue to articulate their demands. Their revelations are transcribed (see annexure 1) into English and summarized.   Learner revelations are solemn data of qualitative nature and their tabulation into thematic areas eased our interpretation. A summary of the key aspects detected from the dialogue is presented in frequency table 01 below.

Category	Central Issues detected	Frequency	
		Occurrence	%
Lexical	Limited vocabulary	9	82
	Lack of understanding of cohesive devices of the passages	1	9
Syntactic	Incomplete understanding of the grammar (structures)	7	64
	Disconnection between the phrases of a sentence	2	18

	Difficulty with word order, L1 & L2 structure differences	1	9
Semantic	Inability to decide Sentence patterns with their meaning	1	9
Strategy	Absence of Comprehension strategy in reading	2	18
Genre	Limited awareness of academic genres	9	82
Source: (Study Data) Preliminary Dialogue, 2021			

Table 1 : Summary of the Central Issues detected

Learners' limited awareness on different genres of writing and limited vocabulary remain the greatest challenges of all which is the case for 82% of the informants. Grammar remains the second most opted area of difficulty with 64% of relevance. The informant sample indicates a great deal of incompetency in strategies for different skills of language from which reading is of much relevance. Phrases and their interconnection, word order and L1 & L2 differences, sentence patterns, and cohesive devices are all significant aspects of grammar and also remain skill deficits of the learners. Although such findings provide an account of learner demands, the acquisition of a substantial profile of learner demands cannot be expected solely from the preliminary dialogue.

Learner perceptions on the areas of difficulty in language skills and such reasons perceived by them as relevant for the difficulty are queried in the questionnaire. Though grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary are not principally regarded as central skills of language, such options were offered together with the central skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening for the learners to elect to seek a more utilitarian absorption of the difficulties. Figure 02 below summarizes how the learners perceived these areas of language as difficult for them to cope with.
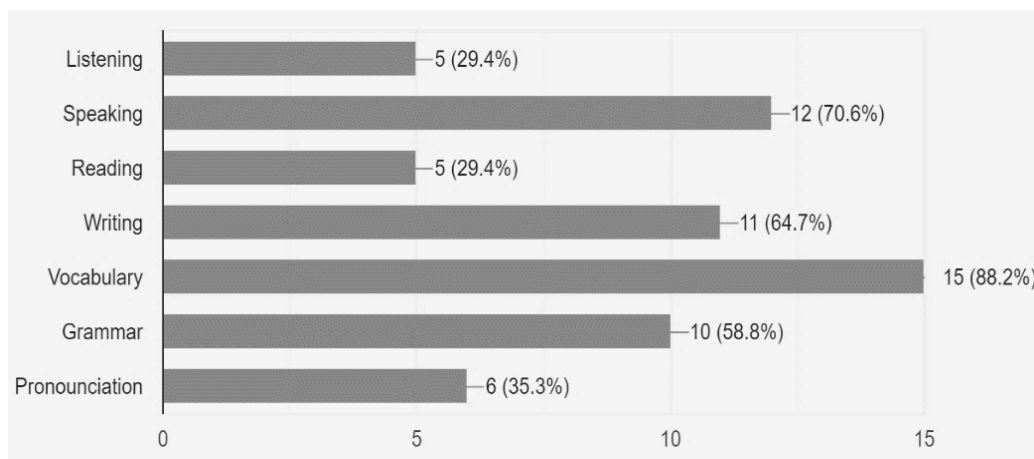

Figure 2 The Most Difficult Area of Language   Source: (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

The most difficult area of the English language for the learners was vocabulary which was the case for 15 students while speaking, writing and grammar are regarded as such difficult areas encountered by 12, 11 and 10 students respectively. Pronunciation was a

difficulty for 6 students while listening and reading skills were found to be difficult for 5 students each. The revelations of these learners during their preliminary dialogue (see Table 01) seemed to be confirmed by the questionnaire query responses. Lexical issues which they revealed to be one of the most challenging are confirmed herein as it remains the perception of most of the learners.

Diagnosing the reasons which force them to consider the difficulty of each of the skills of language was considered significant as such can inform us of the learners' perceptions on the areas specifically challenging for them. Though enquired under each skill with comprehensive phrases, the options provided for the learners to opt for were given in options that categorically fall under five themes: vocabulary, grammar, cohesive devices, genre or text structure and others. The theme, other included skills-specific areas such as interest in the topic, accent, speech anxiety, pronunciation, the pace of the speech etc. The percentage of responses is summarized in figure 03: Summary of Learners' Perceptions on Causes of Difficulty.
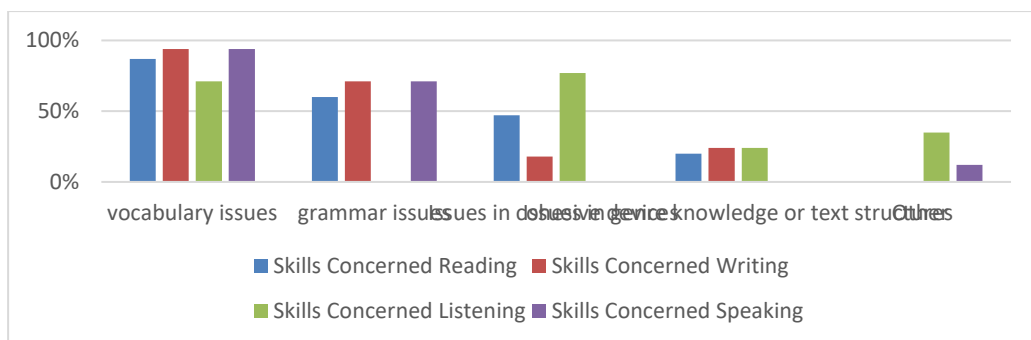

Figure 3 Summary of Learners' Perceptions of Causes of Difficulty Source: (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

According to the clustered column chart above that summarizes the learner perceptions on possible causes for the difficulties in each of the four skills, vocabulary issues are dominant. The vocabulary alone caused difficulty in each of the four skills for more than 70% of learners while grammar issues caused difficulties in reading, writing and speaking skills ranging between 60% -70%. As perceived by the learners quite confidently, among linguistic demands lexical issues remain dominant. Lack of understanding of Cohesive devices and issues in genre knowledge or text structures have been the cause of difficulties in three skills namely: reading, writing and listening. Other factors such as interest in the topic, accent, speech anxiety, pronunciation, and pace of the speech were causes for the difficulty encountered by the learners in listening and speaking skills.

Deficits of the L2 Linguistic Knowledge

The central question that probes the deficits of the linguistic competence held by learners was—what deficits of the target language's linguistic knowledge caused their non-starter status? This was responded to by the non-starters by facing the diagnostic test of

linguistic demands. The test was a 100 items quiz. Each query tested a particular aspect of linguistic knowledge held by the learners. Test items were shuffled and randomly produced for the test takers thereby allowing no connection between the queries. Using a couple of queries to test the same phenomenon, the test examined the aptitude held by learners in sixteen areas of linguistic knowledge. The areas under probe in alphabetical order were: adjectives & adverbs, conditional & wish, determiners, infinitive & present participle, linking words, modal verbs, nouns and articles, passive, phrasal verbs, prepositions, pronouns, questions & negatives, relative clauses, reported speech, verbs, and words & sentences. Twenty-three students attempted the test wherein five

Descending Order Listing of Linguistic Needs of Learners
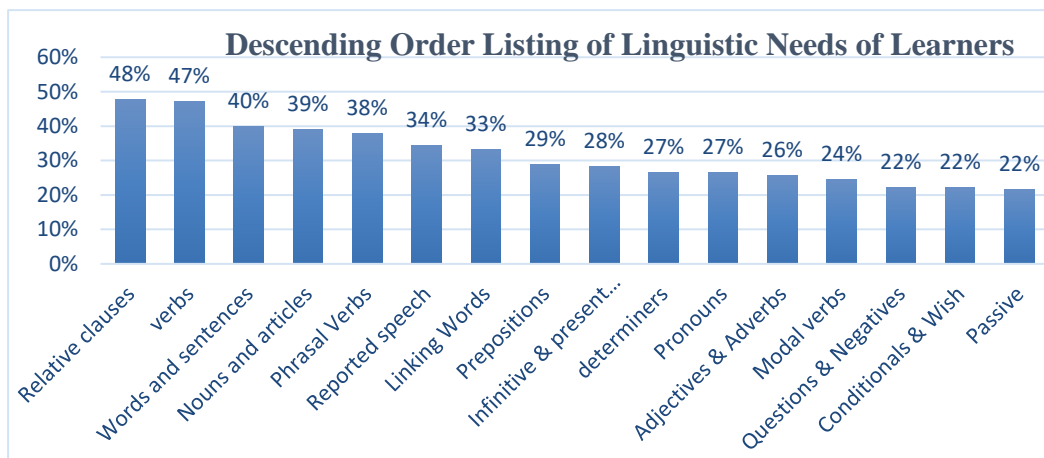
candidates could not complete it, and hence the five incomplete records were eliminated in the analysis. The 18 complete attempts were considered the sample (n=18) of the subject.

Figure 4 Descending Order Listing of Linguistic Needs of Learners   *Source: (Study Data)*
Diagnostic test of the linguistic demands, 2021

Diagnostic test of linguistic demands provided a clear and precise profile of the linguistic knowledge demands held by the subjected learners. The seminal finding is that all the test categories received responses with substantial sums of incorrect thereby convincing the need for all the categories of grammar aspects to be espoused in a prospective scaffolding ESL curriculum. Even the three least incorrect percentage reported categories (Questions & Negatives, Passive, Conditionals & Wish) indicated 22% of the sum of incorrect answers revealing that there is one learner among each five of them who demands explicit teaching of these grammar topics. Relative clauses, Verbs, Words and sentences categories of grammar remain the three most demanded areas with 48%, 47% and 40 % incorrect sum instances thus these aspects were the demand of nearly one learner of each pair. Such aspects of grammar, therefore, demand frequent and explicit integration in the prospective scaffolding curriculum. One learner from each three-student group demands knowledge of the areas of: Nouns and articles, Phrasal Verbs, reported speech, Linking Words, and Prepositions. One learner from each four-student group needed assistance with: Infinitive & present participle form, Determiners,

Pronouns, Adjectives & Adverbs and Modal verbs. Showing deficits in all the sixteen categories of linguistic knowledge tested in the diagnostic test, learners demanded the inclusion of all the grammar aspects tested in the diagnostic test in the ESL curriculum in varying doses and emphasis.

In addition to the linguistic knowledge categories concerned in the test, some insights on the deficits of linguistic, metalinguistic and genre knowledge were ascertainable via the preliminary dialogue (see table 01) and the questionnaire (see figure 02) queries also. Such issues include the deficits in genre knowledge and the aptitude and knowledge deficit of strategies.

Classroom Preferences of the non-starters

A greater spectrum of non-linguistic demands and wants held by the learners are attempted to investigate by the questionnaire (google form) survey to which 18 learners responded. The analysis of responses discussed below answers the question — what particular features of the language classroom do the non-starter learners prefer?

Discovered from the google form responses are presented under two themes: aspects of motivation and classroom preferences thereby surfacing the learners' collective choice to be accommodated in prospective course preparation.
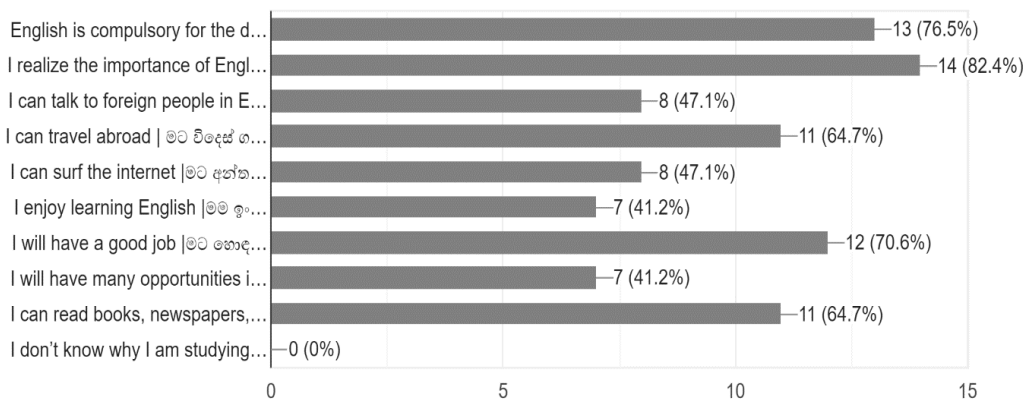

Figure 5 General Motivation: What are your reasons for learning English? (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

As graphically shown in figure 04, the entire sample admitted that the non-motivational indicator: I don't know why I am studying English has no significance for them. The extrinsic motivational aspects have received a greater significance from the learners while intrinsic motivators have relatively low significance. Investigating further into the field-oriented motivational aspects, the questionnaire problematized the learners' objectives for English learning. Learners' responses ease us to delineate the projected

needs of the course they demanded. The cumulative scores of the sample for each query are calculated and presented in the clustered bar chart below.
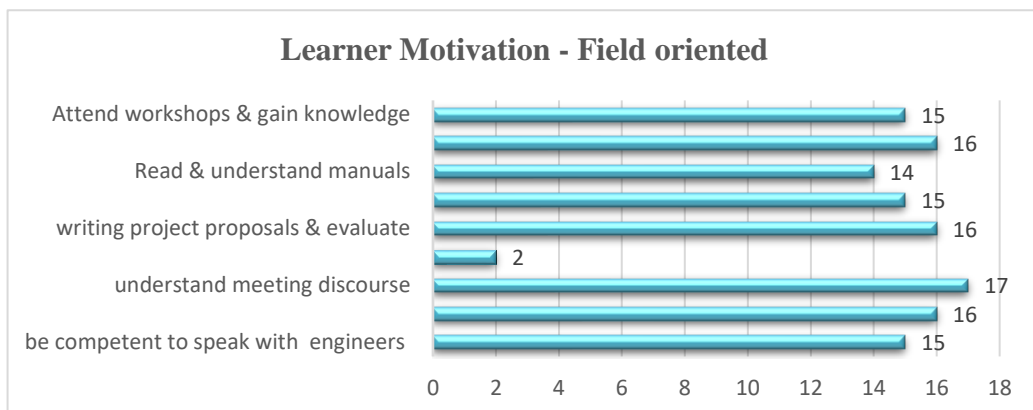
Learner Motivation - Field oriented

Category	Value
Attend workshops & gain knowledge	15, 16
Read & understand manuals	14, 15
writing project proposals & evaluate	16, 2
understand meeting discourse	17, 16
be competent to speak with engineers	15

Figure 6 Extrinsic Motivation: Field-related reasons for learning English? (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

The field-specific demands of English articulate a clear message on their objectives for learning English. Other than passing the module they seem to have wished to consider English as their medium of the workplace. Except for the need to instruct junior staff in English, they all opted for the need for English to understand the meeting discourses which they have currently perceived as the top priority. The rest of the demands are also considered very needy by the sample as a very clear majority of learners opted for the rest of the field-specific needs as vital. The literature suggests intrinsic motivation is a more powerful driving force than extrinsic motivation (Brown & Lee, 2015) and hence these statistics confirm the subjected learners' less effective motivational drive which has an impact on their less drive for learning L2.
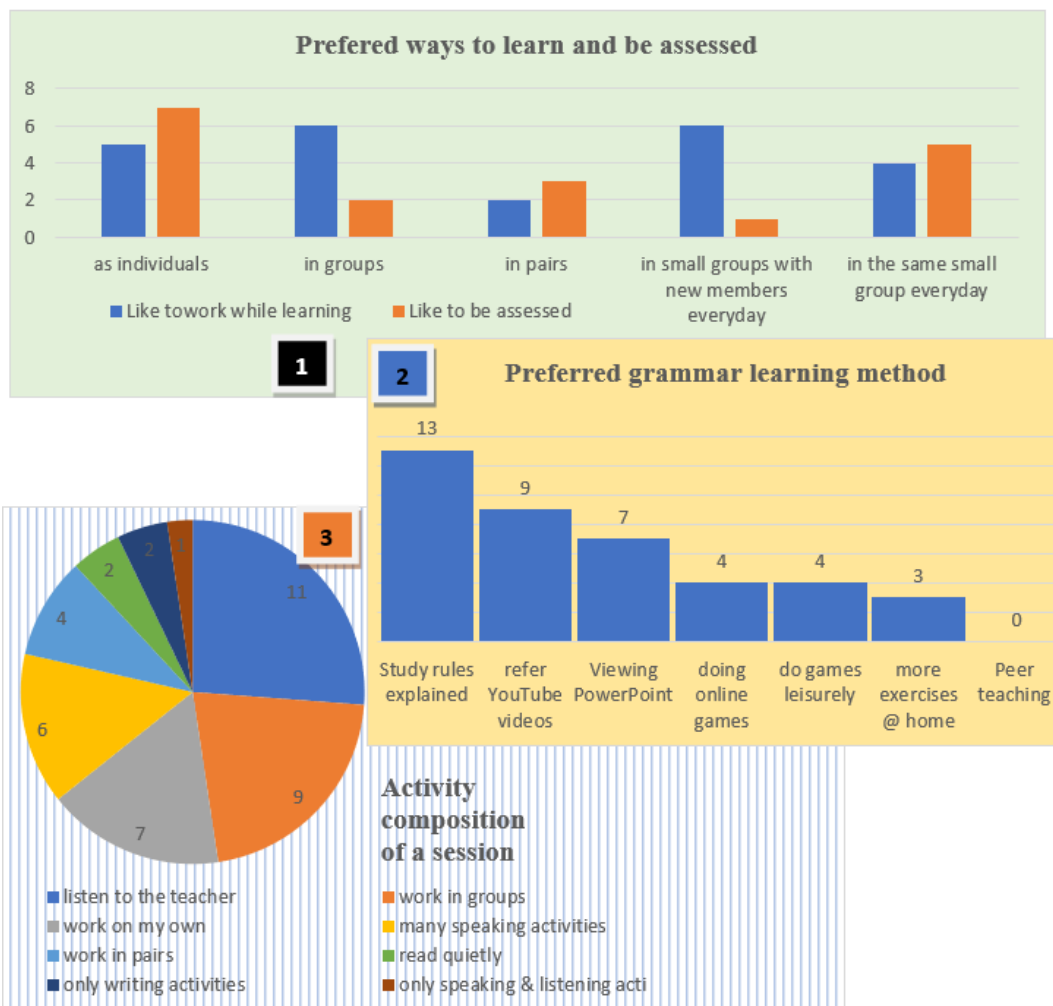
Source: (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

Figure 7 Summary of Classroom Preferences

Accommodating learners in the desired learning milieu is also an objective of this NA and learners were questioned on preferred methods of learning and assessment and choices for classroom amenities and lesson contents. Summary of the findings relevant to classroom preferences given in figure 06, item 1 includes how learners prefer their sessions to be conducted and the ways of assessment. The highlighting aspect is that the learners prefer to work in groups while opting to be assessed individually.

The preferred grammar learning method given in item 2 of the figure convinces us that the learners still opt conventional teacher-centred approach over the methods that stimulate autonomous learning and self-discovery. Item 3 of the figure wherein the learners' preference over session activity confirms further the greater reliance of learners on the teacher.

These findings inform us of the stereotype of learners' epistemological beliefs on grammar learning. A challenge is there for the teacher to introduce, establish and inculcate the new methods to the learners and convince them of the effectiveness of such methods in learning. Further to these, learners' expectations concerning the facilities and learning aids inform the level of opportunities they are aware of affordances and modalities espoused with modern technology.
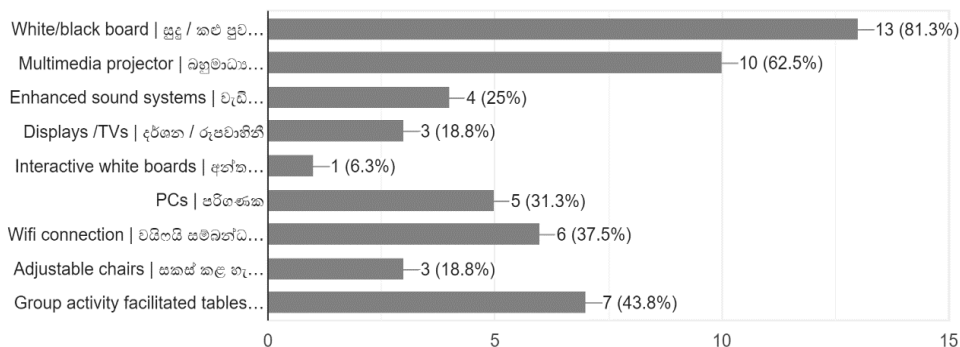

Figure 8 Facilities expected in a classroom Source: (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

As observed in many instances, the learners subjected herein are seemingly fond of a conventional classroom and it is evident as they opt for blackboard/whiteboard to be an essential classroom facility. Yet, their second preference for multimedia projectors, third on group activity facilitated tables followed by Wi-Fi connectivity and the demand for PCs in the classroom are potentials with which the teacher can sustain motivation for learning. Learning aid preferences illustrated in figure 07 below also compromise learners' readiness for multimodality afforded dynamic activities in small groups. Their preference for videos, followed by group activities, and drama/performance over posters and flip boards witness these potentials of the learner community anticipated in the prospective language programme.
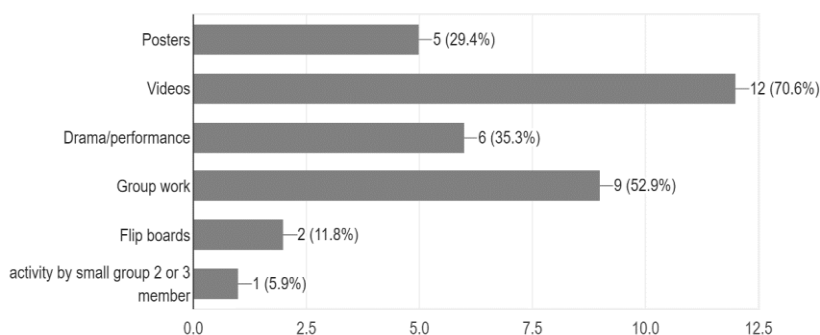

Figure 9 Learning Aids and activity preferences (Study Data) Needs Analysis Questionnaire, 2021

Discussion

Critical findings of this exploratory study manifest new insights of both pedagogical and academic significance. Our findings and approaches to this inquiry resonate with other contemporary ESP pedagogy scholarly work. Discussed herein are such implications for further exploration.

The long-term residence or the geopolitical descent of the subjected non-starters found through the learner profile is a ubiquitous observation peculiar to Sri Lankan ESL pedagogy. Their locating in deprived areas is a negative contributor to their L2 learner trajectory. Seefa (2017) in her exploration of learners' perspective of the challenges faced in learning ESL found that learning English in Sri Lanka remains a geopolitically determined phenomenon. Though not explicitly probed, our findings also resonate with her assertion.

As our exploration confirms learners' limited awareness of the genres of writing and limited vocabulary remains the greatest faced by the learners. This echoes substantially with Alhassan's (2021) review of the Sudanese ESP learners. It is of pedagogical significance that the genre approaches ESP are of greater potential to overcome these deficits.

The deficit of knowledge and aptitude of the ESP learners on strategies deployable for enhancing different skills of language is also a significant finding. Though language learning strategies (LLS) have been forcefully prescribed, these students' reach of them was reportedly null. This problematizes the decade-long English education they underwent in schools as ESL students.

In terms of the methods used in this study, it was an observation that the casual dialogues, especially in free expression permitted translanguaging instances, and learners' articulation of their issues is exceptional. As Early (1981) suggests "interactive" dialogues as a method wherein the teacher and learners on an individual or small group basis can communicate openly on topics of interest (p. 48). As speculated by Early in applying such dialogue, the teacher can reduce his reserve thereby stimulating the "emergence of significant content in communication" (1981, p. 48) and hence such can be a very powerful data collection tool for NA.

The finding relevant to the motivation of learners confirms that the extrinsic motivational aspects are of greater attachment to learners while intrinsic motivators receive relatively low significance. Inherent to non-starters, this condition of motivational drive can be a significant index of detecting such learners as a clue for diagnosis. Resonated with the definition of needs by Brindley (1989) this finding guides us on the way forward for sustaining motivation of the ESL learners.

CONCLUSION

Determining the optimal components that suffice the overarching objectives of the curriculum remains the critical duty vested in the educator who initiates the project of curriculum designing. In this critical endeavour, using a methodically rich analysis of

the needs of the learners can substantiate a great deal of knowledge required for the educator to elucidate the right decision-making on curriculum.

As evinced in this exploration, a critically significant gap encountered by the learners in their lexical proficiency essentially widened by the insufficient grammatical and strategic knowledge resulting in the learners encountering difficulties in L1-L2 transfer thereby forcing them to remain non-starter competitors of the mission to achieve proficiency standards in English.

The potential of diagnostic tests to accurately benchmark the actual lexical, grammatical and meta-linguistic competence of the subjected learners of a curriculum was adequately convinced by this NA. The baseline for the curriculum content could only be accurately laid if the educator is comprehensively aware of the present state of the knowledge held by the learners. Such analytical tools of diagnostic nature, therefore, are of greater impact and assistance in any NA mission.

Asking learners about what they wish to be espoused in their language programme is essentially a democratic view and such a component of a NA can thus ensure the learner-centeredness of the curriculum. Learner-centred curriculum endeavours to nurture the learner experience of learning in a more homely milieu thereby sustaining their motivation.

The study consequently guided with evidence the need for the following featured implications. A critical examination of the histories of the language learning experience has a seminal potential to diagnose the bases of learner statuses, especially in diagnosing the non-starters. As evidenced, the histories held by learners that are deprived of: sufficient exposure and sustenance of motivation to learn English resulted in a distant gap in lexical proficiency depriving them acquire language skills. The nature of the dysfunctional grammar knowledge explored via the test of linguistic demands revealed that less sense in cohesive devices widened the deficit of language skills and the nix of genre knowledge or text structures as the bases of the deficit. The more explicit exploration of learner demands convinced the confidence held by learners in a dynamic group milieu guiding us on their faith in social constructivist bases of language learning while evidencing their choice for utilizing affordances and modalities of modern technology in a more humanized ESL input.

I recommend giving frequent chances for learners to disclose their expectations while advising the educator to decide the scope and level of the NA based solely on the requirement. Such findings confirm the role of the teacher as an evolving one towards humanizing ELT pedagogy. NAs can be viewed as a baseline communication to assure learners' confidence in methodology built via getting them involved in the NA thereby precisely espousing affordances and modalities of modern technology with the learner preferences. A clear understanding of assessment methods offered to learners especially to the non-starters via NA has the potential to make a comfortable learning milieu with alternative ways of assessments.

Urging to reconsider the orthodox supposition of NAs as a precursor of a longitudinal process of curriculum development, this study proved the ability, precision and viability of NAs to employ in a classroom praxis of language teaching.

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