

# PHÂN TÍCH NHU CẦU CỦA KHÓA HỌC GIAO TIẾP NÓI TIẾNG ANH DỰA TRÊN NĂNG LỰC CHO SINH VIÊN QUẢN TRỊ KINH DOANH Ở VIỆT NAM

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*Sự chênh lệch giữa năng lực giao tiếp nói tiếng Anh (GTNTA) của sinh viên Quản trị Kinh doanh (QTKD) ở Việt Nam và yêu cầu nơi làm việc ngày càng lớn. Do đó, nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích tiến hành phân tích nhu cầu (PTNC) của một khóa học GTNTA dựa trên năng lực cho sinh viên QTKD. Trong bài nghiên cứu này, cả dữ liệu định tính và định lượng được thu thập trong một nghiên cứu hỗn hợp, gồm có phỏng vấn và bảng câu hỏi khảo sát. Nghiên cứu này có thể giúp làm phong phú thêm lý thuyết của PCNC khi không chỉ dựa trên quan điểm học thuật (giáo viên, sinh viên) mà còn các bên liên quan (nhà sử dụng lao động và sinh viên tốt nghiệp), và góp phần vào việc áp dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp trong NCNC để bổ sung sự thiếu hụt của các nghiên cứu liên quan đến khóa học GTNTA cho sinh viên QTKD.*

**Từ khóa:** giao tiếp nói trong tiếng Anh, năng lực, Quản trị Kinh doanh.

*The discrepancies between Vietnamese Business Administration (BA) majors' English oral communication (EOC) competencies and workplace requirements have been increasingly urgent. Thus, the study aims at conducting a needs analysis (NA) of a competency-based EOC course for BA undergraduates. The research employed a mixed method study to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from interviews and a questionnaire. The study can help enrich the theory of NA which is not only based on academic perspectives (i.e., teachers, undergraduates) but also all the stakeholders' (i.e., employers and graduates) and contribute to the application of mixed methods in NA in an attempt to fill the gap of studies on EOC course for BA majors.*

**Keywords:** English oral communication, competency, Business Administration.

## A NEEDS ANALYSIS OF A COMPETENCY-BASED ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSE FOR VIETNAMESE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION UNDERGRADUATES

### 1. Introduction

In the field of English language teaching, English for business purposes is the fastest growing area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Belcher, 2009). As a result, the courses are taught at the university level for preparing students

before entering the business world. In Vietnam, the participation in the World Trade Organization since 2006, Trans-Pacific Partnership and ASEAN Economic Community since 2015 assisting the country in integrating further into the global trading system has brought up more potential international business deals than ever before. These opportunities have strengthened the

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motivation and also set out the urgent requirements for Vietnamese labor force in general and business administration (BA) graduates in particular to acquire a good command of English to interact in real-life workplace.

Nevertheless, the issue of discrepancies between university English language curriculum and English language requirements in the workplace have been mentioned in many studies (Kieu, 2010, Do, 2012). Although adequate English competencies have been usually among the first requirements for job applicants in business, Do (2012) found that 90% of Vietnamese third year non- English major students (N=9900) fell well below employers' requirements related to the Test of English for International Communication. The shortage of supportive environment for learning English communication is considered a drawback in Vietnamese universities (Hoang, 2008). It therefore may be argued that the learners' passiveness is shaped by insufficient interaction in learning English and course requirements in Vietnam (Tran, 2013).

On the other hand, according to Huhta, Vogt, Johnson and Tulkki (2013), "ESP should be redirected away from foreign language education and towards training in communication for professional purposes... The content of ESP course should be based on evidence, not teacher intuition" (p.51). Hence, the rationale for choosing to investigate this issue lies in the importance of exploring workplace requirements from perspectives of BA graduates and their employers. However, up to the date of the research, none of

universities in Vietnam that train BA undergraduates have provided an EOC course officially designed for BA major according to the researcher's personal communication through phone call and email with those universities. This serious shortage of an EOC course designed for BA undergraduates could possibly cause the discrepancies between the academic preparation of the universities and the workplace requirements regarding EOC. It is hoped that this study will be able to fill a few gaps and lead to further research in the area. The research questions that the present study seeks to answer are: *What are the expected learning outcomes of a competency-based EOC course designed to prepare BA undergraduates for the workplace? What are the features of assessment, teaching and learning plan of the competency-based EOC course for BA undergraduates?*

To answer these research questions, an NA was conducted in two steps namely semi-structured interviews with employers, BA graduates and teachers from four universities (A, B, C and D) and then a survey questionnaire with BA undergraduates from university A. The next parts of the article will discuss the concept of NA, competency, EOC in business, and the research methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion of the study.

## 2. Needs analysis

NA serves as a preliminary foundation for an ESP course and a tool for course designer in an attempt to locate the objectives of the course and to prepare the appropriate teaching activities and materials (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987;



Berwick, 1989). Therefore, it would lack realistic foundation when an ESP course designer just select a textbook published overseas without conducting an NA. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide detailed classification that learning needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in order to learn) was at the centre of the course design process besides target needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation). They (1987) state that it would be “naive” if the course designers simply base on “the target objectives” by considering only the starting point (lacks), destination (necessities), and dispute to what that the destination should be (wants). In the present study, both workplace representatives (employers, BA graduates) and academic institution (teachers, BA undergraduates) are involved in the NA of the present study to explore the information about both the learning needs and target needs.

### 3. Competency

Richard and Rodgers (2001) asserts that competencies as “a description of the essential skills, knowledge and attitude required for effective performance of particular tasks and activities” (p.159). The application of competency-based education principles to language teaching is called *competency-based language teaching* – an approach that has been widely used as the basis for the design of work-related and survival-oriented language teaching programs for adults (Richards, 2006). It seeks to teach students the basic skills they need in order to prepare them for situations they commonly encounter in everyday life.

What characterizes a competency-based approach is the focus on the outcomes of learning as the driving force of teaching and the curriculum.

### 4. English oral communication in business

Dudley-Evans and John (1996, p.26) provide a more comprehensive summary of BEOC with core performance areas in published materials, which can be a base for developing relevant EOC competencies for BA undergraduates in the present study. They (1996) have noted that the BEOC is defined primarily in relation to five core performance areas namely taking part in meetings, giving presentations, telephoning, socializing and negotiating. Specific competencies related to each mentioned area are adapted mainly from updated publication- Harvard university competency dictionary and other sources. They were used as a suggested list for all the stakeholders in NA.

### 5. Research methodology

The chosen mixed methods design was an exploratory design in which qualitative research employed to develop questionnaire in an NA so that better wording or more comprehensive closed answers can be generated (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 62). Importantly, the researcher needs to develop and test an instrument for key EOC competencies for BA undergraduates because one is not available in literature (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 86). In this part, participants and sampling, data collection instruments, data collection and analysis procedure will be discussed in detail.

### ***5.1. Participants and sampling***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the first step of NA in which the participants were selected based on purposive sampling and they were required to satisfy a number of criteria. Specifically, 35 selected participants consisted of 12 teachers (both full-time BA subject teachers (content teachers) and ESP teachers with at least three year experience teaching BA major); eight BA graduates (minimum of one year working in business sectors and speak English on regular basis in their workplace) from four universities (at least two cohorts of BA graduates); and 15 employers (at executive and managerial level with over 10 years of working experience with some experience in recruiting and employing BA graduates). For the survey questionnaire in the second step of NA, all the population of 227 BA undergraduates from the first to third year at university A was surveyed.

### ***5.2. Data collection instruments***

Prior to the administration of the interviews, the questions were consulted by two experts in course design and piloted on two practitioner instructors so as to see whether the interview questions were understandable, clear and easy to answer. The semi-structured interview forms including a set of open-ended questions were designed in Vietnamese for teachers, graduates and employers. The common question contents were mainly about key EOC competencies for BA undergraduates to develop the expected learning outcomes of the course, and suggestions for the design of proposed

course to build the route of learning to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

The survey questionnaire was designed based on the findings of the interviews with the item generation from the key EOC competencies, common difficulties and suggestions for the course components resulted from the in-depth interviews. Next, it was piloted with a group of 30 BA undergraduates from university A to see whether the questions were understandable and clear. The questionnaire consisted of four main parts including background information, key EOC competencies, difficulties in EOC and expectations for an EOC course.

### ***5.3. Data collection procedure***

A needs analysis was conducted in two steps. The interviews were either face-to-face or through telephone calls from October 2014 to December 2014. The interview recordings were transcribed. The second step in NA was a survey questionnaire with BA undergraduates from university A. After being piloted, questionnaires were administered by the researcher herself to 227 BA undergraduates from the university in the middle of March 2015. 206 questionnaires were collected with a return rate of 90.75%.

### ***5.4. Data analysis procedure***

The NA involved both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data collected from interviews and questionnaires respectively. First, the qualitative data analysis approach termed “interactive synthesis” (Huberman & Miles, 1994) which combined both case-oriented and



variable oriented strategies was used in the study. Starting with a variable-oriented strategy of “finding themes that cut across cases” (Huberman & Miles, 1994), the study then returned to individual cases for configuration within each case, and performed comparative analysis to arrive at findings for the interview themes. The quantitative data from questionnaire, on the other hand, was analyzed using frequency for descriptive analysis.

The quantitative and qualitative data from NA was integrated during data collection. According to Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 67), in an exploratory design, mixing data during data collection occurs when the quantitative and qualitative strands are mixed during the stage of the research process when the researcher collects a second set of data. The researcher mixes by using a strategy of connecting where the results of one

strand build to the design and collection of the other type of data. Hence, in this exploratory design, the key EOC competencies for new BA graduates, suggestions for EOC course components and difficulties in EOC resulted from the semi-structured interviews of the first step in NA were used to build the items in the survey questionnaire of the second step in NA.

## 6. Findings

Data of NA comprises of results from interview and questionnaire data to design the components of the proposed EOC course namely expected learning outcomes, assessment, teaching and learning plan for BA undergraduates.

*Research question 1:* What are the expected learning outcomes of a competency-based EOC course for BA undergraduates?

| EOC performance areas and competencies   | Unnecessary | Unsure | Necessary |
|--|-------------|--------|-----------|
| <b>1. Socializing</b>  | 2.7         | 7.6    | 89.7      |
| 1.1. Build relationship with business partners by greeting them appropriately when they pay visit to one's countries | 3.8         | 4.9    | 91.3      |
| 1.2. Build relationship with business partners by greeting them appropriately when they pay visit to one's office    | 2.7         | 5.9    | 91.4      |
| 1.3. Develop a conversation appropriately about one's experiences in past or present life                            | 3.5         | 16.9   | 79.2      |
| 1.4. Develop a conversation appropriately about one's career with cross-cultural understanding                       | 5.5         | 15.8   | 78.7      |
| 1.5. Exchange information about the distinctive features of company products and services                            | 2.2         | 6.6    | 91.2      |
| <b>2. Telephoning</b>  | 4.3         | 4.9    | 90.8      |
| 2.1. Handle business phone conversations properly from starting to ending a telephone call                           | 3.8         | 7.1    | 89.1      |
| 2.2. Arrange a business appointment appropriately based on a schedule  | 7.1         | 9.8    | 83        |

Table 1. Importance of EOC performance areas and competencies

The results from the questionnaire in NA regarding EOC performance areas and competencies were summarized in percentage according to five Likert scales. However, for the convenience of report, the questionnaire is rescaled: 1 and 2 were rescaled as 1 which means “unnecessary”; 3 was rescaled as 2 which means “unsure”; 4 and 5 were rescaled as 3 which means “necessary” as in Table 1. It can be seen from Table 1 that both socializing and telephoning performance areas were rated as necessary by most of the participants (89.7% and 90.8% respectively). The relevant competencies were rated in the same categories with considerably high percentage ranging from 79.2% to 91.3% in socializing; and from 83% to 89.1% in telephoning. Therefore, all of these competencies were included in the proposed course for BA undergraduates. Other competencies were also suggested by the participants such as “make a professional presentation”, “negotiate contracts effectively”, and “make an invitation to eat out”. However, all these competencies were suggested with low percentage (<50%) so they were not necessarily included in the designed course in the present study. In short, the socializing and telephoning competencies necessary for BA undergraduates were included as learning outcomes to design the proposed EOC course for BA undergraduates in the present study.

*Research question 2:* What are the features of assessment, teaching and learning plan of a competency-based EOC course for BA undergraduates?

| Assessment                                    | %     |
|---|-------|
| Performance assessed in real world situations | 67.0  |
| Mutiple methods of assessment                 | 65.4  |
| Focus on continuous assessment                | 60.9  |
| Peer evaluation                               | 55.08 |
| Detailed feedback from teacher                | 16.20 |
| Feedback about verbal and non-verbal language | 11.73 |

Table 2. *Suggestions for assessment*

Regarding assessment, table 2 presents the percentage of the participants in selecting the suggestions for this course component. It can be seen clearly from the table that all the items listed in the survey questionnaire namely “performance assessed in real worl situations”, “mutiple methods of assessment”, “focus on continuous assessment”, and “peer evaluation” were all selected with significantly high percentage of participants, ranging from 55.08% to 67%. Notably, all the criteria of performance-based assessment were agreed by more than 60% of the participants. From 11.73% to 16.20% of participants also gave their further recommendation for the designed course assessment such as “feedback about verbal and non-verbal language”, and “detailed feedback from teacher” after speaking.

Regarding teaching and learning plan, BA undergraduates’ difficulties in EOC were also examined in the survey questionnaire so that appropriate teaching and learning activities and materials could be designed based on their current level to help them improve their EOC.



| Difficulties                                    | %    |
|---|------|
| I have low confidence in speaking English.      | 92.6 |
| I speak with poor English pronunciation.        | 89.2 |
| I have low fluency in spoken English.           | 88.1 |
| I have weak English listening skills.           | 87.5 |
| I have poor and insufficient vocabulary.        | 74.4 |
| I produce grammatical errors when speaking.     | 69.3 |
| I have trouble understanding different accents. | 56.8 |
| I lack cultural understanding.                  | 46.6 |

Table 3. *BA undergraduates' EOC difficulties*

Table 3 reveals that a majority of the participants dealt with the listed difficulties, especially 92.6% of them experienced “low confidence in speaking English”. It can also be seen from Table 3.6 that the undergraduates have difficulties in pronunciation, fluency, listening skills, vocabulary, and grammar since more than half of them chose these. Lack of knowledge in different cultures was also an issue faced by 46.6% participants.

Table 4 summarizes the percentage of the participants in selecting the suggestions for the learning plan of the proposed course to address the undergraduates' difficulties.

| Suggestion                | %    |
|---------------------------|------|
| Emphasis on pronunciation | 86.0 |
| Communication games       | 82.1 |

|                            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Topics related to business | 79.3  |
| Role play                  | 78.8  |
| BEOC videos                | 72.1  |
| Various online sources     | 62.0  |
| More group work activities | 17.88 |
| More speaking practice     | 17.32 |
| Movie-watching             | 4.47  |
| Authentic materials        | 1.68  |

Table 4. *Suggestions for learning plan*

These suggestions are related to course contents, classroom activities and materials. As seen from the Table 4, the items regarding course contents from “various online sources” to “emphasis on pronunciation” were chosen with enormously high percentage of participants, ranging from 62% to 86%. For classroom activities, communication games and role play were favored by a majority of participants (82.1% and 78.8% respectively). From 1.68% to 17.88% of participants also gave their further recommendation for the designed course such as “more group work activities, more speaking practice, movie-watching and authentic materials”. All of these suggestions were helpful to help a course meet learners' needs so the researcher took all of them into consideration when designing the components of the course.

## 7. Discussion

Based on the findings of NA in the present study, the needs of an EOC course for BA undergraduates resulted from triangulated data of different perspectives to provide a broad picture for a model EOC course to meet the stakeholders'

needs. However, it is common practice that ESP teachers in Vietnam are likely to be the only ones to be in charge of designing and implementing ESP courses which matched with the report by Huhta et al. (2013). They stated that much of the development of LSP and study skills courses had been largely based on the teachers' intuition, rather than any rigorous investigation of what actually happened. The findings of the NA supported this notion when they showed that current ESP courses were designed without any participation of the stakeholders such as employers and BA undergraduates. Meanwhile, according to Berwick (1989), learners' English needs depend on various expectations, interpretations and individual value judgments. Therefore, it is important to ensure that interpretations consider the perspectives of all those involved, and stakeholders from both academic and business locations including employers, graduates and teachers, undergraduates should be invited to participate in needs analysis research.

Another issue to discuss is that the results of NA emphasizes the importance of a competency-based course in preparing BA undergraduates for the workplace since a variety of activities in this kind of course can help the undergraduates practice their EOC competencies. Different classroom activities such as pronunciation practice, games, role-plays were suggested from NA could attract their interest. Heavy emphasis on practicing each competency

given in every unit in which class activities as well as homework assignments were also recommended to enable the learners to achieve each competency. Moreover, based on all the suggested assessment and learning activities as well as learners' difficulties in EOC, learners expected to learn in interaction with peers in pair or group, receive both teacher's and peers' feedback, become more confident in EOC, and have more practice during the course. Hence, the application of socio-cultural theory (SCT) that could provide the learners with chances of learning in interacting with the teacher and peers to co-construct the knowledge was appropriate to design the learning plan of the proposed course and create supportive learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Also, Sysoyev (2001, as cited in Basturkmen, 2010) suggest links between NA in ESP and notion of the Zone of Proximal Development in SCT (ZPD) by Vygotsky (1978) which emphasizes the collaboration between the teacher and the learner in the co-construction of knowledge and skill. This theory enriches and helps NA in ESP become on-going with more understanding of the learners' understanding during the course, not just a one shot before the course.

## 8. Conclusion

This article has provided information on the needs analysis of a competency-based EOC course for BA undergraduates. The findings reveal the features of the course to prepare BA undergraduates to work effectively in real workplace. The



major recommendations emerging from the investigation are that it is essential to build a bridge between the academic world and the business world, and apply the features of competency-based approach in course design to prepare BA undergraduates effectively for the workplace. Importantly, the application of SCT is necessary in designing the teaching and learning plan and also the implementation of the course.

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## A SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION UNDERGRADUATES

Date: ...../...../.....

*With the aim of developing an appropriate English oral communication (EOC) course to prepare Business Administration (BA) students well for the workplace, this questionnaire is conducted to examine BA students' needs. We value your honest and detailed responses. Your responses are completely anonymous.*

### A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Please tick (✓) beside your answer

- Your level of English oral communication  
 ≤ Excellent ☐ Average/ fairly good  
 ≤ Very good ☐ Not good  
 ≤ Good ☐ Other idea (please specify)....
- Have you had any plans for the future job? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet  
 If yes: + Which field do you plan to work for?  
 ≤ Manufacturing ☐ Travel ☐ Commerce ☐ Other (please specify) .....  
 + Which position do you plan to apply for?  
 ≤ Sales personnel ☐ Sales administrator ☐ Manager assistant  
 ≤ Other (please specify) .....
- How important do you think EOC competencies are for you to work effectively after graduation?  
 ≤ Not at all important ☐ Not important ☐ Somewhat important  
 ≤ Important ☐ Very important

### B. KEY ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES FOR BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION UNDERGRADUATES

|   |          |          |          |          |          |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <p><i>Please circle the importance of below EOC performance areas and competencies for you after graduation.</i></p> <p>1= Unnecessary<br/>         2= Slightly unnecessary<br/>         3= Unsure<br/>         4= Slightly Necessary<br/>         5= Necessary</p> |          |          |          |          |          |
| <b>EOC competencies that BA undergraduates need to undertake these below performance areas</b>  |          |          |          |          |          |
| <b>Socializing in English</b>   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 1.1. Build relationship with business partners by greeting them appropriately when they pay visit to one's countries  | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 1.2. Build relationship with business partners by greeting them appropriately when they pay visit to one's office   | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 1.3. Develop a conversation appropriately about one's experiences in past or present life   | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 1.4. Develop a conversation appropriately about one's career with cross-cultural understanding  | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 1.5. Exchange information about the distinctive features of company products and services   | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |



|  |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1.6. Other competencies (Pls specify)  | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| <b>2. Telephoning in English</b>   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 2.1. Handle business phone conversations properly from starting to ending a call | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 2.2. Arrange a business appointment appropriately based on a schedule            | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |
| 2.3. Other competencies (Pls specify)  | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        |

**3. Other recommended competencies that you find necessary to prepare for your future work (please specify)**

.....

.....

.....

**4. What are your difficulties in English oral communication?**

Please tick as many as appropriate

≤ I speak with poor English pronunciation

≤ I have poor and insufficient vocabulary

≤ I produce grammatical errors when speaking

≤ I have weak English listening skills

≤ I have low confidence in speaking English

≤ I have low fluency in spoken English.

≤ I have trouble understanding different accents

≤ I lack cultural background

**Other difficulties in English oral communication (Please specify):**

.....

.....

**C. EXPECTATIONS FOR AN ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSE:**

**5. Please tick the boxes that reflects your suggestions and expectations for EOC course components**

**a. Assessment**

≤ Multiple methods of assessment

≤ Focus on continuous assessment

≤ Performance assessed in real world situations

≤ Peer evaluation

**b. Course contents:**

≤ Topics related to business

≤ Emphasis on pronunciation

**c. Classroom activities:**

≤ Role play

≤ Communication games

**d. Materials**

≤ Videos of business English oral communication

≤ Various online sources suggested for self-study

**6. Other suggestions for the EOC course components (Please specify):**

.....

.....

.....

**Thank you so much for your cooperation!**