

Assessing the ESP Needs of Saudi Engineering Undergraduates: A Diagnostic View

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Abstract

The recent development in the field of science, technology and commerce has revived the significance of English language teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi educational policies are envisioned to configure the students' communicative competence in English to the demands of the specific professional disciplines as well as the global market. Engineering undergraduates studying at Saudi public universities rely on the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) to meet their English language needs. However, it seems that no empirical study to date has been conducted to analyse the English language needs of the engineering undergraduates. This study aims at analysing the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) needs of engineering undergraduates studying at a Saudi university. It intends to identify what academic tasks they often carry out in English. The researcher adopted a mixed-methods approach by employing a questionnaire and interviews to collect data from 257 engineering undergraduates and 32 content-subject teachers. Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed through NVivo software. The participants' perceptions of target tasks were compared and examined to see if there are significant differences between the groups based on the specialty of department or year of study. Overall, 27 tasks were identified as most frequently performed by undergraduates across all engineering departments at the university. The findings also revealed significant differences in the undergraduates' responses across all four levels of study. The findings suggest incorporating those tasks into the current ESP syllabus which are aligned to the immediate needs of undergraduates of engineering departments.

Keywords: academic tasks, engineering undergraduates, English for Specific Purposes, needs analysis, Preparatory Year Programme

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