

Investigating Maritime students' academic and professional language skills: A needs analysis

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Abstract

This case study investigated the language skills that maritime students need in order to perform effectively in both, their academic and professional contexts, with the aim of designing an ESP course, tailored to the needs of this particular discipline. Data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews and a group discussion from maritime students, subject-specialists and human resource managers working in locally-based shipping companies. The findings are unequivocal signals for language educators to adapt new approaches to teaching ESP that are no longer solely directed towards the development of students' receptive skills and specialized vocabulary. ESP courses should become more interactive, fostering students' productive skills by exposing them to both authentic and simulated field-related tasks and making use of authentic materials relevant to the students' area of specialisation. Part of the ESP course should focus on raising students' intercultural business awareness, essential for their professional careers. Pedagogically, for ESP course designers and instructors, the current study proposes a framework to needs analysis, and offers insights into making the teaching/learning process beneficial for all stakeholders. It is the researcher's hope that the outcomes of this study can serve as a valuable reference when developing new ESP programs or revising existing ones.

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1. Introduction

The globalisation of trade and economy and the continuing increase of international communication in various fields have created the need for tertiary institutions and the stakeholders involved, to provide students at various disciplines with English language courses which cater not only for their academic but also for their occupational needs. This need has led to the growth of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), an approach which is now increasingly dominating the Western foreign language curricula, both at secondary and tertiary education (Huttner, Smit & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009, p. 99), as markets are on the lookout for employees with professional skills (Harding, 2007, p.7).

While in the field of ESP there has been a wealth of research carried out on various disciplines (Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999; Jackson, 2005; Kaur & Baksh, 2010; Pranckeviciute & Zajankauskaite, 2012; Jiajing, 2007; Papadima-Sofocleous & Hadjiconstantinou, 2013) and a myriad

of published materials commercially available on the market, this has not been the case for Maritime English (ME), a restricted subset of ESP. Renowned researchers such as Blakey (1987), Pritchard (2002, 2003) among others have shown extensive interest in improving the level of English within the Maritime industry; the necessity for the establishment of a databank of ME resources and materials has also been articulated at many conferences as well as in a number of EU projects on Maritime Education and Training (MarTEL, MarEng, IMO). However, the focus of these studies and projects lies on the development of vocational rather than academic language courses which aim at the acquisition of standard competence in the use of English onboard, so they mainly concern seafarers and are informed by the need for a common language, essential for avoiding accidents at sea. No research has been done on the language competence and skills that Maritime University students need to acquire in order to deal successfully with their academic studies as well as with the challenges of a potential shore side career path.

To address this gap, this study aims to identify the English language needs (language competence and language skills) that Maritime students studying at a private University in Cyprus, need in order to be able to perform effectively in both, their academic and professional contexts. Since learners' needs depend on various expectations, interpretations and individual value judgments (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989), it is important to ensure that the perspectives of all stakeholders involved are considered when conducting needs analysis. Multiple perspectives refer to institutions, the language teacher, the subject specialists, the students as well as professionals from the workplace. Therefore, stakeholders from both contexts (academic and professional) were involved in the process of needs analysis to fulfill the aims of this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. An overview of ESP movement

The concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has impacted English language learning across various disciplines bringing more and more scholars to value the practicability of English for bridging the gap between students' general English competence and their ability to apply what they learn in authentic discipline-specific contexts (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Soler, 2011; Laborda, 2011;

Cargill et al. 2012; Chiu and Liu 2013; Spence and Liu 2013). ESP is considered as the basis for broad divisions of various EAP (English for Academic Purposes), LSP (Language for Specific Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes "e.g. English for Business"), and EVP (English for Vocational Purposes) and numerous others with new ones being added yearly to the list (Brunton, 2009). Regardless of the various names given to these branches under the ESP umbrella, they all seem to be informed by a common philosophy and share the same core characteristics; an increasing focus on learners' immediate and future wants and needs, learner-centredness, authentic materials with a very purpose-related orientation and a move toward negotiated or process orientated syllabi with students' actively involved with their courses (Brunton, 2009).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make the criticism that the overwhelming weight of emphasis in ESP research and materials has been on language analysis and has often failed to consider learners as emotional beings. As they claim, curriculum developers are more concerned with identifying the target objectives (the knowledge and skills required by the learners of a specific discipline in order to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation) rather than with *how* these learners will go about achieving these objectives (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 60). As Stevick (1976) interestingly asserts, the learning of a language is an emotional experience and the feelings that the learning process evokes will have a crucial bearing on the success or failure of the learning. In other words, it will affect *what* learning, if any, will take place.

2.2. Needs analysis

The concept of learners' needs is one of the essential criteria which is adopted and validated in ESP. What remains to be clarified, however, is what the word 'need' actually entails. Throughout the literature, a number of scholars have given their own interpretations of learners' needs and have come up with frameworks delineating the types of needs that need to be investigated during the process of needs analysis. Instead of looking at each of these frameworks separately, it would be useful to examine what they have in common and how they can complement each other to form a more scientifically rigorous needs analysis. These are summarised on the table below and are

classified under three headings adopted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Robinson (1991), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Jordan (1997).

Table 1
Steps to needs analysis

<p>Present Situation Analysis (PSA)-(Robinson, 1991)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) • Objective needs (Brindley, 1989; Robinson, 1991) • Deficiency analysis (Jordan,1997) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Factual information about the learners, existing language proficiency, language use outside the classroom.
<p>Target Situation Analysis (TSA) - (Robinson, 1991)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication needs (Munby, 1978; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) • Necessities (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The language and skills the learners need to acquire in order to function effectively in the target situation.
<p>Learning Needs - (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) • Subjective needs (Robinson, 1991) • Perceived language needs (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) • Process-oriented needs (Berwick, 1989) • Strategy analysis (Jordan, 1997) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cognitive and affective needs, motivation, expectations, learners' preferred ways of learning, techniques, materials.

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Although students' motivation is a key factor in the design of an ESP programme, relying solely on their wants and expectations of the course would be shortsighted because of their limited knowledge and experiences. The framework adopted in this study seeks to identify students' language needs as well as the appropriate materials and tasks that should be used in the ESP classroom based on the perceptions of subject specialists and professionals from the workplace because of the latter's first-hand knowledge of what students need to learn and eventually perform (Tsou & Chen, 2014). An outline of the framework used in the study along with the data collection instruments and subjects involved is presented on Table 2.

Table 2
A framework to needs analysis

STEPS TO NEEDS ANALYSIS	ASSESSMENT ITEMS	PARTICIPANTS	INSTRUMENTS
PSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual information about learners • Language proficiency • Language use outside University. • Language difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learners ➤ Subject Specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Questionnaire/group discussion ➤ Questionnaire

TSA			
Academic Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language skills • Pedagogical techniques • Materials 	➤ Subject Specialists	➤ Questionnaire
Professional Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language skills • Employers' language standards for recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Subject specialist with relevant work experience ➤ Learners with relevant work experience ➤ HR managers in the maritime sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Questionnaire ➤ Questionnaire ➤ Interviews
LEARNING NEEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language skills • Pedagogical techniques • Materials 	➤ Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Questionnaire ➤ Group discussion

The proposed framework uses three broad categories describing the three stages of needs analysis adopted in this study and includes a comprehensive list of elements to consider in ESP course design.

3. Context and Rationale

Considering the most difficult economic period in decades, the constant and increasingly positive contribution of the Cypriot shipping industry to the country's economy, proves that, it is one of the most significant and enduring financial contributors. Significant recent developments in the business and energy sectors in Cyprus and in the Eastern Mediterranean area, make the programme of Maritime studies especially relevant and popular with students seeking employment in the local labour market. These developments, have led to an increasing number of enrolments in this programme, making it one of the most promising programmes of studies at Frederick University. Upon graduation from this programme, graduates are likely to pursue a career, in a variety of on board and shore-based managerial and administrative posts in the private and public sectors.

Courses, in this programme, are taught by faculty from different nationalities, most of which are both University lecturers and working professionals in a number of local shipping organisations. The medium of instruction in this programme of studies is English; however, there are no language requirements for enrolment in this programme. Upon admission to the programme, students, are expected to take two freshman English courses concurrently with the other subject-specific modules for two semesters in their first year. These lessons take place 4 hours a week and, focus on English for general purposes with particular emphasis on grammar. However, such courses, rarely appeal to the students who cannot find much relevance to the content of these courses and the other academic subjects which require a different kind of language proficiency and language skills. Apart from those

who are currently working in the Maritime sector, who may have the very basic field related language skills, the rest are expected to comprehend and use a language that is restricted to the academic needs of a particular discipline tied to the shipping industry, which they are completely unfamiliar with. This poses an even greater challenge and level of difficulty for weak students who do not even have the basic skills in General English.

Consequently these students need an extra effort to comprehend and perform well in the other modules. This extra effort is not a stand-alone subject, but, it is interrelated with so many aspects of the Maritime studies, often leading them to perform poorly or even fail some of their courses. On the other hand, students, who hold a recognised advanced level English language certificate, are exempted from these two courses.

To deal with this shortcoming, the department decided that additional credit-bearing English courses should be provided to all maritime students regardless of their language proficiency, which would be tailored to the specific needs of these particular students. These two courses were to be taken in conjunction with other mainstream Maritime courses in their first year and would aim at providing them with sufficient language and communicative skills to deal with their academic studies more effectively and succeed in their chosen field. This new policy was to be implemented the following academic year, that is, in four months. Due to time restrictions, the syllabus for this new course was initially decided by the Language Centre without examining what the real needs of these students actually were. Therefore, the language instructor had to use the new approach suggested by the Language Centre, which seemed to be at odds with some of the lecturers' expectations. An attempt was thus made to adapt the teaching materials used in this course on the basis of informal feedback from subject-specific lecturers and students. This led to an emphasis on content and terminology at the expense of oral communicative competence, the latter also being the result of the large student numbers enrolled in this programme. Concerns were expressed after the course had been implemented for a year, mainly by the students who seemed to have been struggling with difficult vocabulary and overemphasis on reading comprehension.

These concerns along with the philosophy which underpins the new course, are what inform the particular study, which aims at designing a course whose aims and objectives would be set based on

the needs, concerns and expectations of all stakeholders involved. In achieving this, feedback from the subject-area specialists, the students and other professionals from the workplace seems to be the primary issue to be considered.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The first cohort of the survey and group discussion sample consists of 34 first-year students (18 female and 16 male) enrolled in the programme of Maritime Studies. Twenty-eight of the students are Cypriots whereas a small percentage (17.6%) while originally from Russia, they live permanently in Cyprus. More than half (52.9%) of the students have passed an English proficiency exam and were therefore exempted from the two language improvement courses. All 34 students had already attended the two English specialist courses for two semesters before the data for this study were collected. Four of these students also have relevant work experience.

The second cohort of the survey sample consists of 10 subject specialists who lecture in this programme. Seven of these lecturers have also had extensive work experience (ranging from 7 to 45 years) in the Maritime sector. Lecturers were selected on the basis of the relevancy of the modules they teach. That is, those who teach more practical courses (Mathematics, statistics, and accounting) which do not require essentially advanced or specific language skills were excluded from the study.

The third cohort of the sample population consists of five Human resource managers who work in five major shipping companies based in Cyprus.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

The study uses questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a group discussion to collect data. Two questionnaires were developed based on the framework to needs analysis adopted in this study, reference to previous studies on needs analysis and informal feedback from subject specialists and students. The student questionnaire was translated into Greek and was reviewed by two independent translator-linguists to make sure that the translation was accurate. It consists of four sections, the first of which aimed at obtaining demographic information about the respondents, including their English language background and relevant work experience. Section 2 sought information as regards their use of English outside University and section 3 asked participants to indicate the type of tasks they have to

undertake as part of their job, so, it was only answered by those with relevant work experience. Section 4 examined students' learning needs, so the questions focused on their perceived academic language skills and the pedagogical approaches they considered most useful. The faculty questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section obtained information about the profile of the participants whereas the other two comprised questions associated with their perceptions of their students' abilities in English, the materials and pedagogical techniques students are exposed to throughout the course and the academic and professional language skills required by students enrolled in this programme. An open-ended question was included in both questionnaires which asked participants to add any comments or suggestions if they wished.

A group discussion, which lasted for about one and a half hour, was carried out with all first-year students (N: 34) and, aimed at explaining, and possibly adding to the quantitative findings (Cresswell, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five HR managers who work in five major shipping companies based in Limassol. These interviews were 50 minutes long on average and were held in the participants' offices. They aimed at gathering information about specific areas of concern informed by the relevant literature and the aims of the study and also encouraged discussion about other issues that the interviewees considered relevant. To facilitate this process, an interview guide was developed that identified the following areas for exploration:

1. Language standards set by employers for recruitment
2. Types of posts that applicants with no experience are likely to take in the company
3. Tasks undertaken by employees and language skills required for dealing with these tasks
4. Further suggestions

The quantitative data were computed analysed using an SPSS programme. Percentages were determined for section 1 in both questionnaires. Numerical data were analysed descriptively by calculating mean scores, standard deviation and percentages. T-tests were used to establish differences between proficient and non-proficient students. Statistical differences between the two samples were not examined due to the small size of sample 2 (subject specialists). Results were organised under the three major categories outlined on table 2 and were further subdivided in subordinate categories.

Data from the interviews and the group discussion were recorded, transcribed and translated into English for the needs of this article. These were then reviewed by independent translator-linguists to ensure their preciseness. The transcripts were reviewed in order to analyse the interviewees' responses to the research questions and identify other issues relevant to the aims of the study that emerged in the interviews and group discussion. Relevant data were then used to back up or add to the results obtained from the questionnaires.

5. Findings

The Findings of this study are reported and discussed in this section under the three major categories outlined on table 2, based on the different steps taken to needs analysis.

5.1 Present situation Analysis

The first step of needs analysis adopted in this study is PSA, the aim of which is to find out factual information about the learners, which relates mainly to their language proficiency (Robinson, 1991), the extent to which they use the target language in real life (Brindley, 1989) and the knowledge learners already have in relation to the target proficiency (Hutchinson & waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997).

5.1.1 Language proficiency & language use

Results show that a big percentage (67.6%) have a relative competence in English as eighteen out of the thirty-four students have passed an advanced English proficiency exam and five have graduated from English schools. Regardless of their language proficiency, fourteen students state that they use English at work on a daily basis, four of which have a maritime-related job. The great majority (67.6%) claim to use English when they look for information on the internet and for five students, English is the medium of communication with the people in the country where they live. Since only four students have a relevant job, it is assumed that the great majority (N: 30) are completely unfamiliar with the jargon used in the field and are unaware of the language demands needed to cope with daily tasks in multinational business.

5.1.2 Language difficulties as perceived by students

The students' comments obtained from the group discussion add more information on their language skills and the difficulties they perceive to have with using the target language to deal with their studies. There seems to be a consensus among the majority of the students (N: 27) that one of the

main difficulties they face is getting their message across orally using correct English. Some have attributed this difficulty to their previous language learning experiences which provided them with very few opportunities to engage in classroom communicative activities which is why they have always lacked the confidence in expressing themselves in spoken English. However, a small number of students (N:9) argued that their difficulty communicating in the target language, both in written and oral speech, relates to lack of grammar knowledge which prevents them from producing sentences which are grammatically and syntactically correct. Another difficulty reported by twenty-three students was, comprehending the lectures, this being the result of their poor listening skills and their unfamiliarity with subject-specific vocabulary used in lectures.

5.1.3 Students' language difficulties as perceived by subject specialists

In order to identify the language skills that Maritime students need in order to cope with their academic studies, subject specialists were primarily asked to evaluate on a five-point Likert scale (1=poor, 5=excellent), maritime students' English language abilities in a number of skills. The aim of this question was to identify their perceptions as regards the areas that students in this discipline seem to struggle with and make inferences as to what their lacks are.

Table 3

Subject specialists' evaluations of Maritime students' English language skills

Skill	M	SD	N
Reading & understanding material	2.6	1.07	10
Listening to lectures and taking notes	2.6	1.07	10
Expressing opinions in class discussions	2.1	.87	10
Expressing themselves accurately in writing	1.8	.78	10
Interacting with the lecturer for the purposes of the lesson	2.1	.87	10
Using subject-specific jargon	2.5	.84	10

Regarding subject specialists' evaluations of Maritime students' English language skills, the overall mean scores of their responses outlined on table 3, provide evidence for students' weak language skills as perceived by their lecturers. Writing and speaking skills were rated the lowest (1.8 and 2.1 respectively) and were deemed both essential and inadequate as also confirmed by participants' comments in the open-ended question. The majority of the lecturers expressed their concerns regarding students' difficulty in expressing themselves accurately in writing. As three of them asserted, students generally have no particular problem understanding technical lectures and

responding to exam questions. There was consensus however, among the majority of the lecturers (N:8) that what maritime students seem to be struggling with is essay type questions or questions which require relatively longer answers, requiring them to provide much more than factual information found in their books. Some of the reasons they gave relate to students' lack of knowledge of the linguistic aspects of the language (grammar, syntax) and limited vocabulary which prevent them from producing a coherent and accurate piece of writing. Another reason which was pointed out by four lecturers was students' poor analytical skills, their inability to achieve coherence between ideas and to provide a solid analysis of the topics they study when they are asked to elaborate on their answers. Students' poor communication skills was also emphasised by all lecturers. An observation made by five lecturers was that students are often reluctant to ask them questions during the lectures or to actively participate in classroom discussions, and generally lack the confidence to express themselves in a foreign language even when their overall language proficiency is considered sufficient for undergraduate studies.

Data discussed in this section (5.1) provide information about the students' current language proficiency and their difficulties with the language as seen from different angles and, it therefore pinpoints language skills that need to be further developed or improved in an ESP course designed for Maritime students in the context of Cyprus.

5.2 Target situation analysis

Findings related to Target Situation analysis centred around students' academic and professional needs as perceived by a number of stakeholders (see table 2) and are summarised and discussed under two sub-headings below.

5.2.1 Academic needs

In order to better understand the linguistic and conceptual challenges facing students, information was obtained from subject specialists about the kinds of instructional approaches and materials these students are exposed to. Data from the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire which asked participants to add any comments or suggestions if they wished were also used to provide further evidence for their answers.

Information regarding the instructional approaches and materials used by lecturers in their lessons (section 3 on subject specialists' questionnaire) showed that lecturing is the main instructional approach used as a means for providing content, in which case students are expected to have good listening and note-taking skills. The majority of the lecturers (N: 6) also stated that they often expose their students to case studies and to classroom discussions related to the topic under study. Their inadequate communication and weak language skills, as pointed out by five subject specialists often result in the use of L1 among students when they are asked to collaborate, as the great majority always comprises Cypriot students. Participation in classroom discussions is therefore limited to the few students who may feel more confident with their language skills due to their language educational background.

Maritime students are also expected to work independently on individual assignments and oral presentations which are usually used for assessment purposes. As two subject specialists asserted in their written comments, when students are asked to give an oral presentation to their peers, they are requested not to rely exclusively on the slides and written comments they had prepared in advance. However, the majority of students, who are generally not used to public speaking and to using English for communicative purposes, are likely to read the whole presentation or memorise the content for fear of making mistakes or receiving negative feedback from the teacher, as this is an assessed activity.

Apart from the instructional approaches used in the classroom, all lecturers pinpointed that students are expected to comprehend printed course materials (coursebook, teacher's notes) which form part of every lesson, emphasising the need to familiarise students with subject-specific jargon. Six lecturers asserted that they frequently use authentic study-related materials such as academic journals and online articles. However, the use of authentic materials presupposes a relatively advanced level of language proficiency as they are produced by professionals in the field and are not primarily created for educational purposes something which puts more pressure on the less proficient students.

In order to achieve more rigorous results subject specialists were also asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=very much) the extent to which they find the academic language skills outlined on table 4 below essential for Maritime students.

Table 4
Subject-specialists' perceptions of the Academic Language Skills needed by Maritime Students

Skill	M	SD	N	Rank
1. Understanding authentic study-related material	3.70	1.15	10	-
2. Understanding printed course materials (lecturers' notes, course books)	4.40	.69	10	1
3. Understanding lectures and taking notes	4.30	.67	10	2
4. Interacting with the lecturer for the purposes of the lesson	3.90	.73	10	4
5. Interacting with peers to complete a task	3.00	1.05	10	-
6. Extracting the main ideas from a passage / article	4.10	1.37	10	3
7. Participating in classroom discussions	3.90	1.10	10	4
8. Writing assignments/reports	3.90	1.19	10	4
9. Paraphrasing & Summarising	3.80	1.22	10	-
10. Interpreting data on tables & diagrams	3.50	1.17	10	-
11. Understanding subject-specific jargon	3.50	1.35	10	-
12. Preparing & delivering an oral presentation	3.20	1.22	10	-

Interestingly data related to the academic language skills of Maritime students as perceived by subject specialists did not coincide completely with their evaluations of students' difficulties and their expectations of these students' language skills that need to be developed or improved (see section 5.1.3). Although the writing and speaking skills are still perceived important as indicated by the mean scores above (3.90), subject specialists seem to place greater value on students' listening skills (4.30) essential for following up lectures and taking notes and reading comprehension skills (4.40 & 4.10) particularly useful for comprehending course-related materials and extracting the main ideas. The use of authentic materials is given a lower score, possibly because they are not used by all lecturers. Presentation skills are not perceived particularly important and interacting with peers was perceived to be the least important academic language skill receiving the lowest score (3.00). A possible reason for this is that the great majority of the students enrolled in this programme are Cypriots, it is therefore expected that even in case they are required to cooperate to do a task, they will undoubtedly use their L1, which is Greek, as the aim of the task would be content and not language-oriented.

5.2.2 Professional needs

This sub-section presents and discusses data regarding the English proficiency and professional English language skills required by employees in the maritime industry which were obtained from key parties in the professional context (see table 2).

The questionnaire results provided evidence of the necessity of English in dealing with everyday tasks in the workplace. Students and subject specialists' responses showed that writing and responding to both formal and informal emails, interacting with the clients and colleagues in everyday social and routine workplace situations and attending regular departmental meetings in English are all part of their daily routine. Five of the lecturers asserted that they are regularly asked to write reports while only four of them said that even though they have had to give presentations at certain points in their career, this is generally quite rare.

The five HR managers asserted that a relatively high level of English proficiency is a requirement, as English is the official language of the Maritime industry. New employees' language proficiency is assessed through an interview which is carried out in English. Despite the applicants' prior experience or qualifications, failure to express themselves accurately and clearly at the interview, is often a good reason for being rejected. Two HR managers also argued that for some jobs, (i.e. in the purchasing department), it is very common that candidates are given case studies which they have to discuss with the interviewers at the time of the interview. Besides knowledge of the job, this inevitably requires a high level of oral proficiency as well as analytical skills, essential for using the language spontaneously and elaborating on their answers confidently.

The responses of the HR managers as to whether new employees with no relevant experience in the Maritime sector, are expected to be familiar with specific jargon, were unanimous. They all said that such candidates are likely to be hired as crew operators, technical purchasing officers, accountants, or assistants in the operation department. For these posts, as they claimed, even though knowledge of specific jargon is not considered a requirement, it would be an asset, as it would enable them to integrate faster and easier into the work environment. They did pinpoint however, the importance of language proficiency in dealing with everyday tasks undertaken by employees in such posts, which were similar to the ones mentioned by the lecturers and students with relevant work

experience. Report writing was emphasised by three HR managers who claimed that it is very common for employees to be asked to provide formal reports and do presentations especially if they work in the purchasing or operating departments.

Besides language proficiency, intercultural awareness was stressed by three HR managers as an area that all employees regardless of experience or position in the company, need to receive training on. As they asserted, due to the prevalence of multinational staff employed in the Maritime sector, employees' weak English, unawareness of cultural differences and stereotyping often lead to miscommunication and consequently to a number of mistakes and wrong decisions which affect the well-being of the company.

5.3 Learning needs

Scholars in the field (see table 1) have stressed the importance of investigating learners' subjective needs and their wants and expectations in relation to the pedagogical instructional practices and materials that should be used in an ESP course as well as the language skills that should be developed or improved. Hutchinson and Waters, (1987), argue that while target needs are determined by the perceptions of other interested parties, namely, course designers, lecturers, and work professionals, these may conflict with learners' perceived needs, often leading the latter to lose motivation, in which case, little, to no learning, is likely to occur.

5.3.1 Academic language skills

In response to the required English skills perceived essential by maritime students, data outlined on table 5 below indicate that students share similar views with subject specialists as to which skills are deemed essential.

Table 5
Students' perceptions of the Academic Language Skills needed by Maritime Students

Skill	M	SD	N	Rank
1. Understanding authentic study-related material	3.79	.80	34	-
2. Understanding printed course materials (lecturers' notes, course books)	3.88	1.00	34	3
3. Understanding lectures and taking notes	4.14	.95	34	1
4. Interacting with the lecturer for the purposes of the lesson	3.64	1.09	34	-
5. Interacting with peers to complete a task	3.76	1.04	34	-
6. Extracting the main ideas form a passage / article	3.88	1.00	34	3
7. Participating in classroom discussions	3.85	1.04	34	4
8. Writing assignments/reports	3.70	1.03	34	-

9. Paraphrasing & Summarising	3.79	1.06	34	-
10. Interpreting data on tables & diagrams	2.70	1.31	34	-
11. Understanding subject-specific jargon	3.91	1.16	34	2
12. Preparing & delivering an oral presentation	3.26	1.33	34	-

Listening and reading skills and an understanding of subject specific jargon are rated the highest (see Rank column). Participating in classroom discussions is among the four skills that students feel they need to develop, which indicates a need for the improvement of their speaking skills. Students seem to place greater importance on interacting with peers (3.76) than on writing assignments and reports (3.70), a result which conflicts subject specialists' ratings of the same skills (3.00 and 3.90 respectively). Understanding subject specific jargon is seen as particularly useful by students. Unfamiliarity with subject specific jargon may present a major obstacle in their understanding of lectures and course materials, which is why it is highly valued by students. Similarly with subject specialists, students do not consider the skill of giving oral presentations as important, giving it a score of 3.26.

5.3.2 Students' perceptions on useful pedagogical instructional practices & materials

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The results presented on table 7 below illustrate students' preferences in relation to the pedagogical approaches that should be used in an ESP classroom.

Table 7
Students' perceptions on useful pedagogical instructional practices

	M	SD	N	Rank
Lectures	3.50	.89	34	5
Classroom discussions	3.61	.98	34	1
Situational role-plays (simulated interviews, meetings)	3.52	1.26	34	4
Individual tasks (i.e. assignments)	3.58	1.10	34	2
Group / pair work	3.55	1.18	34	3

Lectures seem to be the least preferred means of instruction (3.50) while classroom discussions is rated the highest (3.61), providing further evidence that students show preference to a more interactive pedagogical approach to language learning. Situational role plays received a lower mean score (3.52) possibly because such pedagogical activities are associated with their professional needs, which they are still unaware of.

In the group discussion, students expressed the need to practise their listening skills which they consider particularly important in helping them comprehend lectures and take notes, which as they argue, is the predominant approach used in all their core modules. Thirteen participants emphasised the usefulness of course-related videos in helping them improve their listening skills, familiarise them with different accents and increase their field-related vocabulary.

A need commonly reported by participants relates to the development and enhancement of their spoken language. Common among the majority of students (N: 27) was also the need for a more practical, interactive lesson which would provide them with ample opportunities to use the language in meaningful, work-oriented learning situations rather than passively learn about the language. Suggestions regarding such learning situations included field visits (to a port or a shipping company) where they would have the chance to interact with professionals from different fields in the Maritime industry as well as to become familiar with technical vocabulary they learn in theory in their core modules. Other ideas proposed by students included case studies scenarios (N: 4), interviewing techniques (N: 8) and exposure to course-related topics and authentic materials (N: 29) like documentaries, online news, and journal articles. Reading authentic articles and reports was perceived very important by most students who argued that the topics chosen should reflect the content of their core modules, which is why they should be decided with the subject specialists, a view which was also pinpointed in subject specialists' written comments.

Opinions regarding the importance of writing tasks were rather controversial as a number of students (N: 14) claimed that such tasks reflect more general English courses, while they felt that ESP courses should be more interactive and motivating. A smaller number of students (N: 6), however, expressed the need to be given opportunities to practice essay writing so that they can practise their use of grammar, which, as they claim, they consider particularly useful in the improvement of the spoken language.

Results from the t-test with language proficiency as the independent variable show that the responses between the two groups (proficient vs. non-proficient) were significantly different in relation to interacting with peers ($p < .030$) and understanding subject-specific jargon ($p < .008$).

Table 6
Proficient vs. non-proficient students' perceptions on Academic language skills (*t-test*)

Skill	Subjects						<i>p-value</i>
	Proficient			Non-proficient			
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
Interacting with peers to complete a task	3.94	.87	18	3.56	1.20	16	.030
Understanding subject-specific jargon	4.55	.61	18	3.18	1.22	16	.008

The mean scores outlined on table 6 above show that proficient students consider the development of these skills more important than their non-proficient counterparts. A possible reason for these results is that peer interactions, while useful, they require a certain level of language proficiency, in which case, non-proficient students may be threatened or intimidated by such classroom tasks. For non-proficient students, knowledge of subject specific jargon may be considered useful but not a priority, as they first need to acquire a certain level of language proficiency which will enable them to comprehend the context in which this subject-specific jargon is used.

6. Discussion

6.1 Academic language skills

Based on subject specialists' evaluations of students' language skills, poor writing, analytical and communication skills were the main difficulties encountered by students in this discipline. Lack of communicative competence, which seemed to present an obstacle in interacting with the lecturer and engaging in classroom discussions and case studies, was the main difficulty also reported by students in the group discussion. Having experienced an exam-oriented system, which, was very common in the Cyprus context until recently, means that their experiences with the language were limited to grammar-based exercises, reading comprehension passages which involved extracting meaning from the text and essay writing whose effectiveness was based on correct layout and correct grammar rather than on originality and elaboration of ideas. Such exposure to the target language may have led them to view writing as a passive mechanical activity which requires nothing more but the information needed to complete the task, which can be easily found in their coursebooks or the internet. Subject specialists argued that students should be helped to develop their writing and analytical skills as part of the ESP course through course-related tasks (reports, case studies, discipline-specific essays), a finding supported by Jackson's study (2005). A number of students, however, expressed the need for

more grammar practice in the course which would help them cope with the writing and speaking demands of the programme. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Pranckeviciute and Zajankauskaite (2012) which investigated doctoral and undergraduate students' perceptions of their needs in an ESP course. Findings showed that both cohorts of students considered communication skills as their main weakness while for doctoral students grammar was seen as a means to improve fluency.

What should be pointed out, however, is that while subject specialists pinpoint students' poor speaking and writing skills and the necessity to help students develop or improve these skills in order to deal with their academic studies successfully, they seem to rate listening and reading skills higher (see table 4). This presupposes a need for the development of students' receptive skills which require students to passively receive the information passed on to them through different sources (lectures, teacher's notes, coursebooks) at the expense of productive skills which rely on discussion and sharing among students. Interestingly, students' evaluations of their language difficulties were also slightly different from their perceptions of the skills which deemed essential in dealing with their academic studies. Data obtained from the relevant question (see table 5) indicate that the skills which were rated the highest are similar to the ones reported by the subject specialists. This finding might be an indication that students' needs do not always coincide with their wants. That is, while they show preference to a more interactive lesson, pointing to the use of authentic field-related materials and opportunities for experiential learning in real (field visits) and simulated (interviews, and workplace scenarios) learning situations which aim at the enhancement of their speaking skills, they seem to consider the development of their listening and reading skills a priority as these would enable them to better deal with their core modules. A possible reason for these differences in scores is the instructional approaches used by the lecturers, which are based on lecturing and reading of course-related materials. This finding is consistent with findings from other studies (Guo, 1987; Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999; Papadima-Sophocleous & Hadjiconstantinou, 2013) which found that while speaking and writing skills are important, reading and listening are the most important skills for students' academic studies as these are essential for comprehending lectures and understanding textbooks and journal articles.

6.2 Professional language needs

English is the official language of the Maritime industry which means that a high level of oral language proficiency is an important factor to be considered for recruitment as well as a requirement to deal with everyday tasks. The results of other employment surveys (Ungku Harum, 2004; Kassim & Ali, 2010) suggest that the development of speaking skills is crucial when working in multinational companies. The ability to write reports and emails accurately as well as to interact with colleagues and clients on a daily basis was emphasized by all stakeholders (students and subject specialists with work experience and HR managers). Knowledge of specialized jargon, while not a requirement, it is considered an asset for easier integration into the workplace. As three HR managers interestingly asserted, future employees need to have a clear understanding and an appreciation of the cultural differences among employees of diverse backgrounds and nationalities working together in order to develop and maintain effective business relationships. According to Virkkula-Raisanen (2010), global professionals require more than linguistic performance. She adds that in order to have successful business interactions in an international context, professionals also need to have intercultural business awareness and interpersonal skills among others.

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7. Conclusions

The results of this study underscore the value of collaboration between subject specialists, students and professionals from the workplace to better understand the language demands that are placed on students at various stages in their academic and professional life. The results depict that more emphasis should be put on developing students' communicative competence in English, which was perceived crucial by all stakeholders involved in this study confirming the findings of Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive (1999), Jackson (2005), Jiajing (2007), Kaur & Baksh (2010), Kassim & Ali (2010), and Trinder (2013). At the workplace oral communication skills were identified as valuable for obtaining employment, for successful job performance and for developing and maintaining business relationships. Well-developed writing skills were also perceived essential for students to achieve coherence, accuracy and elaboration of ideas when asked to write professional reports, formal emails and assignments or to answer exam questions. The delivery of content in all their core modules is done through lecturing and through readings of textbooks and of authentic course-related materials,

which presuppose a need for the development of good academic reading and listening skills as well as the enhancement of subject-specific vocabulary. Grammar was regarded as important by weaker students, as the means to enhance accuracy and fluency. Preparing students to be tolerant and open towards people of other cultures was also believed to be of utmost importance in an ESP course related to the business sector.

8. Implications

The findings are unequivocal signals for language educators to adapt new approaches to teaching ESP that are no longer solely directed towards the development of students' receptive skills and specialized vocabulary essential for passively dealing with their academic studies. ESP courses should become more interactive, exposing students to both authentic and simulated field-related tasks (interviews, reports, field visits, presentations, classroom discussions) and making use of authentic materials such as journals, online news, documentaries, videos relevant to the students' area of specialisation which foster students' productive skills and prepare them for the realities of their professional careers. In line with Kassim and Ali's study (2010), the pedagogical implications of the findings indicate that module design and development should take into consideration the incorporation of workplace scenarios as the basis of activities. According to feedback from the field, part of the ESP course should focus on raising students' intercultural business awareness, essential for successful business interactions in a multicultural context. This requires work and close cooperation between the shipping companies and the ESP practitioner. Employees should be asked about any problems and misunderstandings which may have occurred at the workplace because of their diverse cultural backgrounds and this feedback should be then used by the language teacher to make more informed decisions regarding the content and design of appropriate classroom tasks, aiming to raise students' intercultural awareness. Findings, while insightful, are by no means conclusive in relation to the specific language needed to deal with everyday tasks in the workplace. Samples of real reports, presentations, formal and informal emails should be examined by the ESP teacher so as to determine the terminology, vocabulary and language structures used in real situations. Feedback from people working in different departments in shipping companies would be particularly insightful since these

people, unlike the HR managers, have first-hand experience with the language used and difficulties they encounter with the language for dealing with daily tasks.

Unlike other pedagogical approaches, which may be less specific-needs-based and more theory-driven, ESP pedagogy places heavy demands on its practitioners to create or adapt materials to meet the specific needs identified and to cope with unfamiliar subject matter and specialized vocabulary. This puts extra pressure on the ESP teacher whose lack of subject matter knowledge may prevent him from elaborating on field-related topics and subsequently lead him to lose self-assurance, self-esteem and inevitably professional status. Crocker (1981) asserts that the ESP teacher should be seen as someone who facilitates learning and not as someone who provides content or information and this is something that should be made clear to students from the onset so that roles and expectations are clear. However, the facilitation of the learning process is still associated with the choice of materials which should be closely related to students' needs, they should be of appropriate level so that they provide a stimulus to learning and they should also lead to a range of classroom activities and tasks suitable for achieving specific language objectives set by the syllabus (Wallace, 1992). On the other hand as Pinner (2013) points out, authentic materials are not always seen as suitable for language acquisition due to linguistic complexities. This implies that the ESP teacher should be able to understand the material so that he can adapt them to suit his students' level without losing their authenticity. This requires the ESP teacher to have considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, who may know more about the content than he does, take interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in, read discipline-related articles, and attend conferences if necessary, in order to keep updated with current issues in the field. One of the aims of ESP courses is to facilitate comprehension of lectures delivered by subject specialists. Since these courses run in parallel with the other core modules, it would be useful if subject specialists suggested some general topics to be included in the ESP course which could be adapted or simplified by the language teacher if necessary. Realistically, students with very low language proficiency are unlikely to be able to cope with such materials and classroom tasks, regardless of how simplified they are; these students should be required to take extra general English courses for at least one semester before they are allowed to enroll in the programme.

Results suggest that in designing any course specifically aimed at students of a particular discipline, an identification of stakeholders' needs and goals is crucial in determining the tasks, pedagogical approach and materials that will be used in the course. A thorough multi-faceted needs analysis should therefore be an ongoing process in ESP course design and delivery to ensure that ESP practitioners and content specialists have the information necessary to develop courses that are attuned to their needs. As Kaewpet (2009) interestingly argues, the purpose of needs analysis is to identify learner needs, taking place at a relatively theoretical level outside classes, yielding recommendations on how a course should be designed (p. 215). While this is an important step to be taken in the process of curriculum development, it is not sufficient in generating a complete understanding of learner needs. Allwright (1988) states that what happens in the classroom still matters (p. 51). This has important implications for more classroom research, examining students' reactions to these tasks and materials in terms of difficulty, usefulness and relevance and evaluating their effectiveness as to whether they fulfill the learning objectives set by the syllabus.

Pedagogically, for ESP course designers and instructors, the current study proposes a framework to needs analysis, and offers insights into making the teaching/learning process beneficial for all stakeholders. It is the researcher's hope that the outcomes of this study can serve as a valuable reference when developing new ESP programs or revising existing ones.

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