English for Academic Writing Purposes

An Empirical Analysis of Needs and Wants

That Face Libyan EFL Learners atTertiary Levels

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Abstract

Academic writing remains an essential skill for English learners in Libya in EFL context. English courses offered in Libya at tertiary levels mostly focus on teaching for general purposes, few concerns writing for academic purposes, even for English majors. Therefore, This paper examines the needs and lack of EFL Libyan learners who study English for academic writing purpose . Analysis of the questionnaire and learners' texts that have been used to collect data were presented. Results indicate that most of the participants have never taken an academic English course before and that learners found a huge difficulty in academic writing skills. Therefore, an EAWP (English for Academic Writing purpose) course is needed for learners who study at tertiary levels in Libya in order to write academic papers appropriately.

Introduction:

In recent years, academic writing has become an important tool for people in today's international community. Therefore, it is used in reporting analyses of current events for newspaper, composing academic essays, letters and e-mail messages. The ability to write effectively allows individuals from different cultures and backgrounds to communicate. In addition, it is widely recognized that writing plays a vital role not only in conveying information, but also in transforming knowledge to create new knowledge. Many believe that teaching academic writing for specific purposes will benefit learners more than teaching it for general purposes, because that enhance students' needs and necessities. In this context, program can be designed by analysing learners' needs and identifying some certain points which learners struggle with when they write academically. Needs analysis can be defined as "lacks rather than needs that come to determine curriculum since what we are really interested in is the gap between the target proficiency and the present proficiency of the learners" (Basturkmen 1998 p.1). This research paper will focus on analysing the needs and wants of group of learners who study English for academic writing purpose. This will be discussed by presenting the description of the teaching context, discussion of needs analysis tools and information about learners' present difficulties whichwere collected through questionnaire and writing texts' analysis. Following that, findings of learners' needs and implications of this project will be presented.

Teaching context:

These are EFL Libyan learners who were involved in an intensive teaching program for English Academic Writing Purpose (EAWP) which will be taken for fifteen weeks and three

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days per week and two hours per day.The aim of this program is to assist learners who have been asked to write an academic essay in order to complete their tertiary studies in overseas countries. These learners study at a private institution in Libya and they are a mixed group (males &females) who are aged between 18-21 years. Their first language is Arabic and they have Arabic cultural backgrounds as well as they have already learnt English language in both high school and university for three years through using the grammar translation method. This method basically depends on translating the language from English language to Arabic language and teaching how to write some simple and compound sentences with certain grammatical features. Therefore, the learners have not benefited from such method, because they have not developed their academic writing abilities.

Moreover, these learners have various levels of English proficiency, but the focus in this context will be on an intermediate level. This is because of the fact that, although they have good levels of general English writing proficiency, they still in need to improve their academic writing abilities,since they have not been introduced to how use variety types of sentences structures. Also, they in need to use technical and formal vocabulary in their writing. This program will assist these learners by identifying the wants, necessities and the gap between their present learning situations and their target situations. Therefore, the aim of this research paper is to help learners with their academic essays, so they could write in more a proficient manner and complete their tertiary studies in overseas countries.

Discussion of previous studies and needs analysis :

As it has been stated in the previous studies, it is noted that needs analysis can be divided into three categories that necessities, lacks and wants (Hutchinson and Waters cited in Benesch, 2001). Another study includes that needs analysis "emphasize the important of investigating the competencies, strengths and weaknesses that students have prior to the beginning of a course of study, and provide arrange of devices that could be used for this purpose" (Richterich and Chancerel cited in Tajino, James & Kijima 2004 p. 2). Also, it is confirmed that giving students examples of strategies for improving, planning, organizing, drafting and editing would develop the necessities of student's academic witting. Furthermore, teachers should evaluate student' writing to know their common grammatical structure and syntactic errors (Giridharan 2012).

Moreover, a study by Sanders (2006) includes that a questionnaire was developed in EAP course to identify certain elements which are important for students' learning needs such as paraphrasing and paragraph structures. Also, a study by Vardi (2002) demonstrates that learners' needs appear when those learners are required to write long complex texts objectively and explicitly which they may not have experienced before. Also, a study by Barkaoui (2007) confirms that raising learners' awareness about successful writing processes is important by providing them with models and clear specific learning goal. For example, it is concluded that vocabulary is more important to maintain a consistent academic pattern (Swales &Feak 2004). These studies seems to suggest that needs analysis means to identify learners' problems which they may have at the beginning of the course and focus on these problems with the aim that provides a good support to assist students' learning. Thus, this context has focused on identifying

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the problems which learners have and providing them with good writing strategies to overcome their problems.

Furthermore, information about need analysis can be gathered by different ways such as questionnaire and analysis of authentic written texts (Evans & St John 1998). In this context, there are two methods which were used to gather information about the learners' needs; primarily a questionnaire was given to 15 learners to gather information about their needs or necessities. According toBoshr and Smalkoski (2002), a questionnaire has been used to collect information about learners' needs regarding course design for EAP. Secondly, analysis of learner's writing texts were used to identify the microstructure level of the texts and identify the gap between the current levels of learners and their target situations. For example, Lewin and Fine &Young (2001)include that analysis of genre texts can identify a gap between the current level of learners and the target situation. Based on the above studies, it can be confirmed that the methods of texts' analysisand the questionnaire which have been used in this program would be very useful ways to identify the academic writing' gap between what do learners currently can do and what do learners can do after completing their academic stages.

- Research Data:

1. Analysis of the questionnaire:

A questionnaire was one of the methods which were used to gather information about the learners' needs and necessities in this context. Learners were asked to answer four questions that were written by English language regarding the difficulties that face learners while they are writing an academic essay. The questionnaire was distributed equally to all 15 learners who study at an English collage to ensure fairness and valid data for better learning program.

First Question:[see Appendix]

Decide which of these sentences are the topic sentence and decide the order of the supporting sentences and number them .

Percentage%		Incorrect answer	Correct answer	Total
Incorrect	correct			
80	20	12	3	15

This table shows that learners have faced a lot of problems with writing and organizing the correct form of the paragraph. That is attributed to the students' disability to distinguish between the topic , supporting and concluding sentences. For the first question, the majority of the learners' responses about 80% are incorrect . On the other hand, about 20% of the learners' responses are correct. As a result, It is noted that learners in this context encountered difficulties with organizing the different parts of the paragraph.

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Second Question: [see Appendix]

Choose the transition signal that best shows the relationship between the following sentences.

Percentage%		Incorrect answers	Correct answers	Total
incorrect	correct	10	5	15
66.6	33.3			

From this table, it is resulted that about 66.6% of the learners faced difficulties in determining the best transition signals but about 33.3% of them have not faced these problems. The reason for these errors is that most learners did not know how to link between different parts of the paragraph by using the suitable transition signals.

Third question:[see Appendix]

Do you have difficultiesin constructing compound and complex sentences when you write an academic paragraph ?

Yes	80%
No	20%

Based on the table above, it shows that most of the learners about 80% have confirmed that they faced problems in constructing compound and complex sentences while they are writing their paragraphs whereas about 30% of the learners found it easy to use these types of the sentences in their writing. learners need to know how to use complex sentences in their writing rather only using simple or compound sentences, so later on they can perform well in the complex context of academic writing in their tertiary studies.

Forth Question: [see Appendix]

Do you think, you can produce new and technical words quickly when writing an academic essay ?

Yes	80%
No	20%

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In the final question, a wide range of academic vocabulary is another problem that has faced the learners. Difficulty in choosing the correct vocabulary even with theuse of a dictionary was another aspect that faced the learners in this context. About 80% of the learners faced difficulties in producing new words while they are writing an academic paragraph whereas about 20% of the learners have not faced those problems.

2. Analysis of written texts:

Secondly, analysis of learners' writing was used to gather information about the microstructure level of the learners' texts and identify the problems that the learners have with organizing and writing each part of their essays' paragraphs. For instance, a study by Burstein and Marcu (2003) states that essay topics have been evaluated to collect data about learners' weaknesses in order to seek students' needs. Therefore, in this context, learners' essays have been evaluated to identify their weaknesses and the gap between their current levels and their target situations. The learners attempt to write essays about (*Rich countries should give aid to poor countries*). The analysis of the learners' essays resulted in to the following:

Firstly, the learners have difficulties in using technical and academic vocabulary and this can be seen through skimming learners' essays. As a result, it is suggested that English learners need to be taught how to gain academic vocabulary pattern, so that they will be able to practice writing which is one of the language skills. Therefore, this means that learners in this program should gain rich and technical vocabulary. Therefore, they can use more than one way to express their ideas in academic writing skill.

Second difficulty which learners need to improve in order to write a good academic essay is paragraph structures ((Lewin , Fine &Young 2001). In this context, most of the learners have a huge difficulty in constructing the topic sentences which is the important part of the paragraph. Also, learners have not stated the main idea, concluding sentences and recommendation of the essay very clearly. For example,in the first paragraph of one of thelearner's texts (*aid helps developing countries to improve medi*cal *treatment)*. It is noticed that, there is a lack in this sentence to convey meaning to the reader and this writer should include more details in the sentence, so the main idea of the paragraph can be understood.

Thirdly, most learners' texts in this study have grammaticalerrors especially, in using of variety of sentences structures. For example, in the first paragraph regard one of the learner's text, it is stated that (*As result, life expectancy was increased*). Thus, it is noticed that this learner uses simple sentences in writing an essay instead of complex sentences. Based on the above results which have been taken from the analysis of the learners' texts, it can be seen that there are some certain grammatical features which learners had not paid attention to learn in the past. As result, there is a gap which can be defined as certain hidden skills which learnerscan not master in the current situation, so if these skills are identified, the learners will improve their academic writing abilities.

In addition, regarding the learners' texts, there is not linkage between different parts in each paragraph which make the paragraphs incoherent. learners have not used transition signals

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to link sentences within the paragraphs. For example, a study by Swales &Feak (2012) includes that to write academically, you should make many considerations which are audience, purpose, organization and flow of the writing. Thus, it can be inferred that, there is not linkage in the learners'texts and the learners should organise their writing with many considerations in order to write an academic essay.Consequently, learners' needs and wants should be taken into account for designing an effective EAWP program.

Finding:

In sum, discussion of needs analysis tools (questionnaire & learners' writing texts analysis) and relevant literature have revealed that EFL Libyan students who were involved in the EAWP course, had the most difficulties in the following:

- Using a wide range of vocabulary that assists learners to express their ideas in more than one way.
- Being able to write a good academic structured paragraph with well organised ideas using topic, supporting and concluding sentences.
- Being able to use and identify grammatical features as well as using varieties of sentences in writing such as compound and complex sentences.
- Being able to write academically and coherently with and between paragraphs by usingtransition signals to link different parts .

Implication:

Analysis of learners' needs should be starting point for designing a better program that satisfies learners' needs and necessities. According to Hamp-lyons (cited in Tajino, James & Kijima 2004), an EAWP program is starting point because it begins with a learner and a situation. This study confirms thatan EAWP course starts with analysing learners' needs that are regarding learning situation. Therefore, in this context, the EAWP course should start with learners' needs as a first step that makes this program more effective. For example, a study by West (cited in Bosher&Smallkoski 2004) indicates that learners' needs analysis must be translated into appropriate course objectives. This study seems to suggest that the EAWP course must focus on the needs and necessities which learners have difficulties with by translating these needs and necessities as objectives of this course. Thus, according to the above needs analysis and finding of this project, it can be suggested that needs analysis is considered as an essential step in the EAWP course design.

Moreover, materials, books and methods of teaching in this program should be chosen regarding learners' needs (objectives of the course). For example, Bosherand Smallkoski (2004) include that materials and methods of teaching when designing an EAP course must be selected according to the results of the finding. This study demonstrates that when designing a course, teachers should select the relevant materials and approaches which will focus and assist learners' needs to improve their language learning. Consequently, in this context, teachers should take the above point into account, so learners will reach the aimed outcome and teachers would have a successful teaching program.

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Next, teachers should provide consultation time for learners, so each learner obtains an opportunity to mention their needs and necessities. For example, conferences which can be defined as an appointment which can be organized between a teacher and a learner to discuss a particular piece of work or the process of learning or both of them (Brown & Hudson 1998).

This study defines the conferences as a plan for meeting that can be organized between a teacher and a student to discuss the issues regarding learning process. This approach will be very helpful for learners in this context, because by such way those learners will have the opportunities to meet the teacher face to face and discuss the certain points which they struggle with when constructing an academic essay writing. Therefore, such a useful strategy should be included in EAWP course.

In addition, there are a number of contextual factors that should be taken into account when designing the EWAP course. Firstly, learners in this context come from an Arabic language environment and this should be considered, because learners will be using English only at the institution while using the Arabic language in their daily life. Therefore, in such that case, teachers might suggest English writing program outside the classrooms, so learners can use more English every day out and inside the classrooms. Secondly, class size also should be considered when designing the EWAP course, since it is sometimes impossible to teach writing skills to a class of 30 learners. Also, this may have a great impact on the conferences strategy which has been mentioned above. This is because of that, if the class have 30 learners, a teacher can not provide enough time for each student. Thus, enough time should be considered for each lesson, so learners can ask some questions about their difficulties regarding certain points and teachers can give them the feedbacks, because it is critical for developing better content structure and overall language proficiency (Giridharan 2012) .

Finally, learners' motivation should be considered too. For example, it is claimed that students' motivation should be considered when designing an EAP course because this helps teachers to work out what is needed to enable learners to reach the target aim (Evans & St John 1998). This study means that learners' motivation decide whether learners' needs become explicit or implicit which helps teacher to identify the learners' needs and assist them. Thus, teachers should motivate students to elicit their difficulties, so teachers help them to overcome their problems. Based on the above studies, all stakeholders should consider the above factors when designing an English writingcourse, so they can reach their aims and design a successful teaching program.

Conclusion:

To sum up, it has been indicated that descriptions of target context, discussion of needs analysis tools, analysis of the questionnaire and learners' texts that have been used to collect data which was presented. Then, finding of Libyan learners' needs and some suggestion for the EAWP course have been presented. Results of this study have focused on needs and necessities which learners who study in the EAWP course find difficulties with. learners in this context

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should be though academic writing skill with considerations of teaching specific aspects that are main structures of the paragraph, technical and new vocabulary, using transition signals and using different types of the sentences. Also, It can be recommended that teachers and learners should participate in designing an effective academic course by both ways, firstly, student should ask explicit questions about their weaknesses to be understood. Secondly, teachers should provide a good explicit answers or feedbacks for students. Thus, it can be ensured that learners' necessities have been identified and resulted into an effective teaching and learning program.

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Appendix

The following questionnaire was distributed equally to all 15 Libyan learners who study at an English collage:

1- **Decide which of the following sentences is the topic sentences of the paragraph and decide the order of the supporting sentences and number them[ss1,ss2,ss3 and so on….]**

a- It enables customers to do several blanking transactions twenty-hours a day…..
b- In addition, a customer can transfer funds between accounts or get a cash advance on a credit card…….
c- An automated teller machine [ATM] is a convenient miniature bank……..
d- For example, a customer can use an ATM to deposit money and with draw a limited of cash…….

2- **Choose the transition signal that best shows the relationship between these sentences in each group from the choices given in the parentheses, and add punctuation and change capital to small letters if necessary.**

1- The same article said that the causes of inflation……..the cure for inflation was not so easy to prescribe. [however, for example, therefore]
2- Era also suggested that rising wages were one of the primary causes of inflation………the government should take action to control wages. [however, for example].
3- In physics, the weighs of an object is the gravitational force with which the earth attracts it ………if a man weighs 150 pounds, this means that the earth pulls him down with a force of 150 pounds.

3- **Do you have difficulties in constructing compound and complex sentences when you write an academic paragraph ?**
-Yes

-No

4- **Do you think, you can produce new and technical words quickly when writing an academic essay ?**
-Yes

-No