ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES LEARNERS' NEEDS ANALYSIS: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to uncover the English language barriers that tertiary students faced while studying their academic courses in Ethiopia. The survey involved 421 participants (72 in the pilot research and 349 in the main research). To collect the relevant data, the researchers used a mixed-method technique. The study used probabilistic and purposive sampling techniques to choose samples from the target populations. The findings indicated that students had difficulties (e.g., in academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in studying their academic courses in English. The participants also indicated that current English language courses failed to encourage first-year students to improve their academic language competency to continue their studies. This happened due to a lack of thorough examination of learners' needs before creating any language curriculum. As a result, needs analysis should be viewed as the first phase to examine learners' academic language difficulties and design EAP syllabus that caters academic language requirements of the students both in the target and learning situations.

Keywords: *Academic Language Skills; Difficulties; EAP; Higher Education; Needs Analysis*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hambatan bahasa Inggris yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa saat belajar program akademik mereka di Ethiopia. Survei ini melibatkan 421 peserta (72 dalam penelitian percontohan dan 349 dalam penelitian utama). Untuk mengumpulkan data yang relevan, peneliti menggunakan teknik metode campuran. Penelitian ini menggunakan teknik probabilistik dan *purposive sampling* untuk memilih sampel dari populasi sasaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan (misalnya, dalam membaca akademik, menulis, mendengarkan, dan berbicara) dalam mempelajari kursus akademik mereka dalam bahasa Inggris. Para peserta juga menunjukkan bahwa kursus bahasa Inggris saat ini belum berhasil mendorong siswa tahun pertama untuk meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa akademik mereka untuk melanjutkan studi mereka. Hal ini terjadi karena kurangnya pemeriksaan menyeluruh terhadap kebutuhan peserta didik sebelum membuat kurikulum bahasa apa pun. Akibatnya, Analisis Kebutuhan harus dilihat sebagai fase pertama untuk memeriksa kesulitan bahasa akademik pelajar dan merancang silabus EAP yang memenuhi persyaratan bahasa akademik siswa baik dalam target dan situasi belajar.

Kata Kunci: *Analisis Kebutuhan; EAP; Keterampilan Bahasa Akademik; Kesulitan; Pendidikan Tinggi*

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INTRODUCTION

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is introduced because many EFL/ESL students in higher learning institutions need to develop their English academic proficiency. Without mastery of academic language skills, students face difficulties while studying their disciplinary fields (Kustati et al., 2020). Wubalem (2013), for example, argued that mastering academic language skills is one of the most reliable approaches to achieving academic success and job advancement in the globalized world. Therefore, the focus of the University English language is based on developing the academic proficiency of learners for the fulfilment of study objectives.

In addition, English prepares the students for scientific communication, international exchanges, education, and independent work with English-language resources (Wubalem, 2013). Therefore, English is seen as an asset both for the learners and the teachers that should be mastered for education purposes (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). This can be achieved by setting EAPs as a central element of the university English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum through learners' needs analysis. However, according to Masyhud (2018), there are various issues with teaching and studying ESP/EAP since most learners believe that learning English has little to do with their academic subject of study.

Needs analysis (NA) plays a significant part in language education planning before anything else (Benesch, 2001; Berman & Cheng, 2001). English for Academic Purposes, therefore, follow NA procedures to design and tailor appropriate materials and approaches for EAP learners (Zand-Moghadam et al., 2018). As a result, ESP/EAP professionals determine what their students are likely to demand to listen, speak, read, and write. Furthermore, several researchers and authors have stressed the vital role of NA in syllabus design, particularly in EAP (Albassri, 2016; Chatsungnoen, 2015; Ji, 2021; Kustati et al., 2020). Consequently, needs analysts should frequently use a "present-to-target-situation" needs analysis to develop a clear picture of a specific group of learners (Gholaminejad, 2020).

According to Gholaminejad (2020), needs analysts should include issues of potential academic language skills and sub-skills that learners require while conducting a survey of needs analysis. This means that needs analysis investigation includes determining "what learners already know"(Dudley-Evans & St John., 1998, p. 124), "what tasks and activities learners are or will be using English for" (Dudley-Evans & St John, p. 125), and "what the learner needs to know to function effectively in the target situation" (Dudley-Evans & St John, p. 126). NA is an essential component of ESP/EAP because it allows practitioners and curriculum designers to evaluate the needs of students in a specific academic setting.

English is the medium of teaching in Ethiopia, from high school to colleges and universities. As a result, mastering the English language in such a context is critical for learners studying their disciplinary subjects via English textbooks and lectures (Biniam et al., 2015; Hyland, 2006). Under the harmonized curriculum, Ethiopian universities currently teach Communicative English Skills I & II to all freshmen before they enrolled in disciplinary courses. The Communicative English skills (I & II) course books, as prescribed by the course designers (professionals from various universities), emphasize that students enrolled in the Freshmen English (Communicative skills I & II) program must listen to lectures, read books,

take notes, speak (communicate in various situations), and write exams, projects, or assignments in English.

Numerous authors, particularly in EAP, have emphasized the importance of NA because it is frequently dealing with unique needs that must be identified precisely (e.g., Freddi, 2015; Thompson & Diani, 2015). It considers the unique contexts and academic cultures of various subject areas. A Needs Analysis focuses on the language and skills that must be taught. Additionally, it attempts to capture the target needs of students, what they need to be able to perform as a result of the course, their challenges (Target Situation Analysis) and deficiencies, their existing proficiencies (Present Situation Analysis) and aspirations, and what learners wish to learn (cf. Flowerdew and Peacock 2001; Hyland 2006; Flowerdew 2013, Freddi, 2015).

A small number of research on the academic language needs of undergraduate students have been conducted in the local context (e. g., Aklilu, 2015; T. Biniam, 2013; T. G. Biniam et al., 2015; Jha, 2013; Medihanit, 2010; Yenus, 2017). However, studies on TSA and PSAhave not provided enough information about undergraduate students' needs, wants, lacks, and views about their language challenges and future academic language needs. In particular, in Ethiopian higher education, the difficulties that students have in learning English are frequently overlooked or inadequately investigated based on learners' needs analysis. The researchers could further claim that the English courses appear to be offered solely to fulfil course requirements rather than to assist students in improving their English skills while studying discipline-specific subjects and performing scientific research.

Therefore, the current study examines potential areas of academic language skills difficulties that students encounter over their academic careers. The study, in particular, intends to address the following research question: "What academic language difficulties do first-year Ethiopian university students face while learning their academic courses in English?"

The study aims to address academic language skills that undergraduate students need by identifying their potential difficulties. Even though it is recommended that involving learners in NA process plays a key role (Hyland, 2006; Long, 2005), it is not easy to get comprehensive NA study of Ethiopian university students, particularly regarding learners' language difficulties. Therefore, the current study attempts to inform the importance of students' voices while designing EAP materials through exploring learners' academic language difficulties. More importantly, the primary aim of this research is twofold: first, to identify the major academic language skills perceived as problematic; second, to examine the sub-skills or language aspects that obstruct students' academic success in the university.

EAP Needs Analysis and Academic Language Skills

Ji (2021) asserts that conducting a needs analysis is critical for developing foreign language education policies. Language curricula that are designed using a needs analysis approach can effectively meet students' needs and desires while also facilitating the teaching and learning process. Thus, this section discusses the EAP needs analysis regarding the academic language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) and components (vocabulary and structure).

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Academic Listening Skills

The importance of academic listening comprehension has been highlighted in second (L2) or foreign language (FL) acquisition literature (Supeno, 2018). Thus, the primary goal of academic listening instruction at the university is to help students develop skills such as note-taking, lecture comprehension, listening to informational instructions, listening to presentations, and participating in and succeeding in academic or academic-related discourse (Goh, 2013). So, EAP students are required to have excellent note-taking and listening comprehension skills to grasp lectures and communicate with others in the university (Ibid).

Needs analysis studies on academic listening have been conducted in a variety of contexts, including Iran (Rahimirad & Moini, 2015; Zohoorian, 2015), and the United States (Zohoorian, 2015; Quintus et al., 2012). For instance, Rahimirad and Moini (2015) examined difficulty of listening to lectures in an EAP class with a group of Iranian learners. They discovered that EAP students encountered significant challenges to grasp lectures delivered in English. The findings also suggested the necessity of language teachers to devote sufficient attention to the strategic use of listening tasks in EAP classrooms to enable their students to extract content information from input.

Quintus et al. (2012) examined the 'Effect of the Cornell Note-Taking Method on Students' Performance in North Dakota State University'. They found that taking notes during listening is a challenging task but an essential skill during lectures in the college. Additionally, they noted that by teaching students a structured technique for taking notes, the problems associated with note-taking during lecture can be solved.

According to Ali (2011), among the main problems were difficulties in understanding and identifying the meaning of words while taking notes and listening to lectures; he also suggested the need to improve the quality of lecturing to enhance students' listening proficiency. Yurekli (2012) also conducted a study on 'Analysis of Curriculum Renewal in EAP context' in Turkey. She found listening incompetence due to vocabulary and accents has become the most weaknesses in linguistics and academic skills. Consequently, she suggested that attention should be given to help learners improve the basic comprehension problems they encounter in their studies. Therefore, it is more helpful to design an EAP curriculum based on students' academic language needs to attain their perceived and desired comprehension skills for their academic success (Goh, 2013).

Academic Speaking Skills

Academic speaking skills allow students to practice speaking tasks and activities in different situations while studying at the university. This means students should be engaged in these tasks and activities on both cognitive and affective level. However, many English learners struggle to express themselves orally; they frequently encounter difficulties when attempting to use a foreign language (English). Gan (2012) noted that one of the problems is shortage of terminology, which in many cases is the most significant obstacle to oral skills. For instance, learners may pause speaking when they are unable to discover the appropriate words and expressions. Additionally, students frequently have

communication difficulties while doing internships, apprenticeships, or actual career after graduation.

Research findings into academic speaking show that both learners and teachers face difficulties while dealing with oral communications. This is because speaking in academic and professional settings occurs both in formal and informal situations. Regarding to this, learners are expected to be confident and have knowledge of pertinent vocabulary and language functions to communicate in various situations.

Academic Reading Skills

According to Grabe (2009) and Syafi (2021), reading is the most critical skill required in intercultural settings, in academic learning, and in self-study circumstances. Similarly, academic reading skill is regarded as an essential skill for university students to acquire knowledge about their field of study in higher education. Widowati and Kurniasih (2018) state that through critical reading, the students can gather much information and evidence or data related to the topic given by the instructor.

Despite the fact that reading is generally seen as the easiest of the four language skills, research indicates that reading difficulties are indeed addressed in EAP/EFL situations (Chatsungnoen, 2015). According to the author, engineering students in Thailand have expressed difficulty comprehending their field related publications, office paperwork, project or lab reports, and manuals pertaining to engineering. Brooks (2015) further notes that the absence of a systematic examination of the nature of academic reading practices research is extremely problematic in higher education because knowing the source of students' reading difficulties is necessary for developing an appropriate instructional response.

Academic Writing Skills

Learners require academic writing skills to pursue a successful study career (Kao & Reynolds, 2017). According to Yelay (2017), the ability to write academic papers is commonly recognized as a hallmark of graduates from higher education; university students must be able to write clearly on academic and research-related issues. Student academic writing, according to Coffin et al. (2005), is at the heart of learning and instruction in higher education. Learners are evaluated mostly on the basis of their written work and must master both general academic standards and disciplinary writing requirements to thrive in higher education. Additionally, studies reveal that in EAP, considerable percentages of participants reported having writing needs for notes, essays, memos, e-mails, formal letters, and reporting and interpreting tables (e.g., Coffin et al., 2005; Yelay, 2017).

Furthermore, the areas in which participants felt a need for improvement were developing arguments, joining sentences and paragraphs, writing well-developed paragraphs, writing introductory and body paragraphs, and arranging ideas (Yelay, 2017). However, Yelay (2017) also stated that students studying English as a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) sometimes struggle to create academic papers of sufficient quality to satisfy university requirements. Academic language issues are not the only difficulties; students also lack familiarity with the

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academic writing conventions in English (Ibid). Moreover, reports on students' academic writing point out that the writing performance of adolescents is of great concern (e.g., Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018) in higher education.

As a result, academic writing is perhaps the most problematic area in tertiary education. This is because writing activities range from writing short responses in examinations to producing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, and journal articles. Moreover, this area of EAP is especially significant for first-year students as they come from different backgrounds in many respects. As a result, academic writing is consistently regarded as the most challenging of the four academic language skills, as it requires complex mental processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. As a result, writing is frequently overlooked in favor of academic reading, speaking, and listening by both learners and EAP instructors, considering it as time-taking when writing and marking it (Kao & Reynolds, 2017).

Academic Vocabulary

Vocabulary is likely the most visible component of language item. In a variety of settings, shortage of word knowledge is considered as an impediment to student academic achievement (Nagy et al., 2012). For example, Alemu (1994) indicated that adequate vocabulary knowledge is indispensable to achieving communicative objectives in foreign language learning. Yopp et al. (2009) further confirmed that knowledge of vocabulary is a good indicator of academic achievement for several years. This may imply that vocabulary is a feature that demands further attention from course designers and curriculum architects, as it provides the foundation for all other skills. We consider both general academic terms (i.e., terminologies that are used across disciplines and that are more frequently used in academic language than in non-academic) and discipline-specific academic terms (e.g., terminologies that are typically unique to individual academic discipline).

However, academic vocabulary acquisition is frequently a considerable challenge for EFL learners in general, and university students in particular. Hyland (1997), Evans and Green (2007), and Ying Ho Ha and Hyland (2017) conducted extensive research and found that one of the most significant obstacles undergraduate learners in Hong Kong faced is the acquisition of professional vocabulary. Thus, academic vocabulary is crucial for EAP students since it enables them to develop subject competence. Nonetheless, EAP teachers typically face shortage of specialized knowledge essential to develop effective instructional materials for technical terminology and therefore feel uneasy in this area (Ying Ho Ha & Hyland, 2017)). On the other hand, comprehending technical vocabulary serves as a precursor to subject area of teaching and learning (Chung & Nation, 2004).

Academic Grammar

According to Chatsungnoen (2015) and Ouafa (2019), learners who do not learn grammar lessons appear to be incapable of expanding their language proficiency. Thus, grammatical knowledge is a fundamental aspect of English, particularly in universities where scientific communications prevail. Yurekli (2012) also underlined the inherent integration of Grammar and Academic Vocabulary into all skills. Notably, some grammar elements are commonly seen in scientific

discourses, and such rhetorical elements emerge on multiple levels in published papers (for example, in science or technology).

Haregewain (2008) examined the Impact of Communicative Grammar on Academic Writing Accuracy among Ethiopian students and found that students generated more efficient and correct writing when communicative grammar activities were used to improve writing skills. Similarly, Ouafa (2019) carried out a study on '*First Year Master Students of Computer Science Department in Algeria'*. He discovered that the in-house materials are likely to have a variety of structures with varying difficulty, as well as references to the past, present, or future tenses, and active and passive voices; he also concluded that to write effectively in academic settings, university students should be taught grammar structures such as present tense, past tense, and perfect tenses.

METHOD

The study employed a mixed-methods approach in order to elicit key insights and considerations on the difficulties learners encounter while studying at university or college. In addition, the researchers used a combination of quantitative and qualitative procedures. A mixed-method strategy is a design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to extract comprehensive evidence and a thorough understanding of the research topics (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018; Creswell, 2003).

Participants and Sample Size

The study was carried out at Wachemo University, located in Southern Nations, Ethiopia, about 230 kms from the capital Addis Ababa. A total of 421 participants were involved in the research (72 samples participated in pilot study and 349 samples participated in main study). The subjects were first-year students in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities who studied Communicative English skills course during the first and second semesters of the academic year. The instructors were full-time EA teachers and major subject areas teachers from the same college in the university under study.

The sample size is critical for any inquiry in which the objective is to deduce information about the population from a sample. The sample size determination procedure is a method for determining the number of observations to include in the sample. Thus, in the current study, 324 student participants were systematically sampled from among 1106 of the total population. When this study was undertaken, the sample comprised nearly 30% of the student population enrolled in the academic year of 2021 in the Social Sciences and Humanities College. On the other hand, the study recruited a sample of forty-one teachers from same College (CSSH) using a complete enumeration technique. That means the teachers were included by the census technique, which allowed for the inclusion of all sample participants due to their small number for the questionnaire data.

Data Collection Instruments

Considering the complexity of needs assessment, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest multidimensional techniques for Needs Analysis. Basturkmen (2010) and West (1994) also indicate that an essential step in NA is selecting an

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information-gathering instrument to determine the quality of the information to be gathered. Various investigators have also recommended some common techniques for Needs Analysis, although each technique has pros and cons. From the comparison of those techniques, it is indicated that questionnaires, interviews, and observations are the three most common ones. However, Astika (2015) emphasized the importance of questionnaires and interviews as two frequently used techniques for needs assessments. Therefore, structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from student and teacher samples.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are commonly used in needs analysis. Questionnaires can be used with large numbers of study participants to obtain information that is easy to organize and analyze (Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007). The questionnaires had the items on academic English language skills and sub-skills difficulties that students encounter in their course in the university. Two types of questionnaires (i.e., one for freshman students and one for EAP and core course instructors) were prepared and used as data gathering instruments. The questionnaire had a similar format and purpose. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect data on the learners' learning and target needs for EAP. The questionnaire were prepared based on previous empirical studies (Alfehaid, 2011; Alkutbi, 2018; Chatsungnoen, 2015; Jordan, 1998; Qotbah, 1990; Richards, 2001). The questionnaire had also been pilot-tested.

In this study, the questionnaire served as the primary data gathering technique for getting information. The information from the survey questionnaire would help the researchers determine students' language needs and the difficulties they face when learning academic English language skills, in particular, situation (e.g., learning situation). The questionnaire was divided into language skills and components to examine the students' academic language difficulties when studying their major courses.

Interview

Interview allows for optional follow-up questions that may vary from participant to participant. According to Grinnell and Unrau (2005), interview has the advantage of getting data in a natural setting to increase adaptability and enhance the ability to regulate the setting in which the interview takes place. When combined with the questionnaire, the interview provides a compelling argument for their utilization as contrasted to the survey questionnaire. Interview also increases potentials to explore and obtain additional information from the participants, which is beneficial.

Thus, in conjunction with the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were used in this research to elicit additional data to complement the questionnaire. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to better understand the problematic areas of academic English language skills in the EAP program. Therefore, semi-structured interview questions were developed and provided to both student and teacher participants during the research process. Finally, the data from the interviews were qualitatively analyzed based on Miles et al. (2014) by using the representative quotes in the results and discussion section. Due to the

multilingual background of the student participants, English was used during the interview process.

Reliability Test

According to Dörnyei (2007), data collection tools should score not less than 0.60 to be considered reliable. Table 1 shows the instruments for the reliability test.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Instrument	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items reliability
Students' questionnaire	0.87	92
Instructors' questionnaire	0.83	92

Source: Survey data (2021)

As indicated in Table 1, the analysis revealed that the two instruments were reliable or internally consistent to measure the underlying construct.

Data Collection Procedures

There were 20 sections consisting of between 54 and 58 students in each section. The number of samples systematically selected in each section was between 18 and 19 students. The surveys were then distributed to the student participants, who were responsible for filling in the information. As far as data collection procedures of teacher respondents are concerned, informal and formal discussions were made during February 2021 academic year with department heads and instructors at their respective offices. The researchers negotiated with the sample teachers to participate in the research. In general, the respondents expressed their interest to participate in the study. The questionnaires were then distributed to all teachers, as census sampling had been used in the process. However, only 41 of the respondents completed the surveys and returned them to the researchers, either in person or through their department heads (a response rate of 64 %). And, the remaining 23 respondents did not return the survey questionnaire, which yielded a non-response rate of 36%. In general, from 421 total samples, 72 (53 freshman students and 19 instructors) participated in pilot study, whereas 349 samples (i.e., 308 freshman students and 41 EAP and subject/course instructors) took part in the main study.

Regarding the interview data, the questions were designed in conjunction with the questionnaire data (L. Richards, 2009) to ensure reliability and validity. Accordingly, before the interview, the researchers made talks with the study participants. Consequently, the interviewees agreed on the consent about their voices to be captured using a phone recorder device. The interview protocols were extensively discussed with the participants. For example, Flexi-schedules were implemented to leave space for the interview participants to talk freely on the phone, as there was no eye contact or gestures to give indications. Finally, the communications were held smoothly and carefully with the individuals.

Data Analysis Techniques

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Because the initial data processing stage comprises converting subjective data to numerical values via 'coding techniques,' data from the questionnaire were coded into SPSS 20.0 (Dornyei, 2007). As a consequence, statistical techniques such as percentages, mean, standard deviation, and sample size (n) were used to quantify academic English challenges faced by the EFL learners.

Concerning the spacing between the five points of the Likert scale, Nyutu et al. (2021) reveal that the five positions may or may not have an equal interval. Thus, while the space between "not difficult at all/not problematic at all" and "slightly difficult/somewhat problematic" is equal, the interval between "difficult/problematic" and "neutral/no idea" is not equal (*see Table 2*)

Table 2. Qualitative Interpretation of 5-Point Likert Scale Measurements

Scale	Likert-Scale Description	Likert scale interval
1	Not difficult at all/not problematic	1.00-1.80
2	Slightly difficult /somewhat problematic	1.81-2.60
3	Difficult/problematic	2.61- 3.40
4	Very difficult/very problematic	3.41- 4.20
5	Extremely difficult/extremely problematic	4.21-5.00

Source: Nyutu et al. (2021)

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the aggregate data for the primary analysis (frequencies, percentage, means, and standard deviation). Therefore, the aggregate mean values were interpreted as follows: the mean values of 3.41 and above show as 'for' (i.e., agree with the items), and the mean values below 2.61, show 'against' (i.e., disagree with the items). Finally, 2.61- 3.40 shows no idea or is labelled as neutral.

The coded data were interpreted by employing descriptive statistics to verify and summarize the individual responses to each questionnaire item. However, only measures of central tendency were employed in the results and discussions section. According to Dornyei (2007), the most consistently reported basic statistics are the mean (M), the standard deviation (St. D), and the sample size (n). The mean values represent information about the participants' scores. The standard deviation (St. D.) is an index of the average disparity among the scores to indicate the average distance of the scores from the mean. Furthermore, the participants' numbers (n) represent the total sample of the respondents who participate in the study.

Next, qualitative analysis was used to examine the interview data. To do this, the interview data were analyzed in three stages: preparation, analysis, and summary (Alfehaid, 2011). Then, the audio-recorded interviews were verbatim transcribed and transformed into shapes for ease of navigation. Unfinished sentences, phrases, expressions, and pauses were transcribed during the transcribing process. Following that, the interview data were evaluated to examine students' EAP needs and difficulties they encountered to corroborate the questionnaire results. Finally, representative quotes for the findings and discussion sections were chosen.

FINDINGS

This subsection summarizes the findings and discussions that were conducted to address the research topic: "What academic language skills and sub-skills difficulties do university students face while learning their academic courses?" The following section indicates the students' academic English language difficulties as rated by the respondents. Thus, the respondents were asked to rate the items from the extremely problematic (4) to not problematic (1) areas on a five-point Likert scale, and it is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Academic language skills and components perceived as problematic areas

	Instructors			Students		
Items	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Academic Listening skills	3.32	1.31	41	2.84	1.39	308
Academic Speaking skills	3.68	1.33	41	3.07	1.33	308
Academic Reading skills	2.85	1.40	41	2.64	1.42	308
Academic Writing skills	3.29	1.49	41	2.70	1.38	308
Academic Grammar	3.61	1.41	41	3.08	1.27	308
Academic Vocabulary	3.51	1.21	41	3.08	1.23	308
Pronunciation	3.71	1.31	41	3.12	1.27	308
Overall mean	3.42	1.35	41	2.93	1.33	308

Source: Survey data (2021)

In this study, to obtain data on how difficult the major academic English skills were, the respondents were given lists of EAP components to rank order from 'extremely problematic' (5) to 'not problematic' (1). As can be noticed from Table 4.1, the instructor and student respondents rated all of the items (academic language skills) as 'problematic'. However, the degree of difficulty varies from skill to skill. For instance, the respondents rated pronunciation as the most problematic area, with an overall mean score of (n= 41, M= 3.71 and n= 308, M= 3.12).

On the other hand, the findings revealed that both groups of respondents perceived speaking skills (n= 41, M= 3.68 and n= 308, M= 3.07) as a problematic area. Additionally, students' lack of confidence to speak English, their limited English background, and insufficient time allocation to speaking skills in class were identified as problems in the open-ended questions; getting little or no opportunity to communicate in English in real-life contexts and the inappropriateness of textbooks (modules) to students' speaking needs are also the most common problems.

Grammar and vocabulary were rated the third most difficult language aspects next to pronunciation and speaking skills. Poor listening comprehension and poor writing skills were also considered as problematic areas for learners' academic studies. The open-ended questions result also showed that listening is problematic for the learners because of their inability to concentrate on the central idea of the lecture, their unfamiliarity with listening skills in lower grades, and lack of vocabulary and pronunciation problems. In addition, the unconducive environment for teaching listening skills was also indicated as problematic.

In general, instructors' opinions of learners' English learning difficulties surpassed students' perceptions with overall means score of (n= 41, M= 3.42, and n= 398, M= 2.93) respectively. The stronger the mean score for 'pronunciation' (M=3.42) rated by the teachers, the weaker the mean score for 'reading skill' (M= 2.64) ranked by the student respondents. In addition, respondents were required to

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indicate their perceptions about each language's sub-skill difficulty levels. As a result, descriptive statistics on participant responses from both groups (instructors and students) are provided in the tables below to illustrate the problematic areas of each sub-skill. The findings are presented as mean values to illustrate the students' academic English language proficiency. The difficulty levels were 'extremely difficult' (4.20-5.00),'very difficult' (3.41-4.20), 'difficult' (2.61-3.40),'slightly difficult' (1.81-2.60), and 'not difficult at all (1.00 -1.80).

Table 4. Perceptions about the difficulty level of academic listening and speaking sub-components

	Instructors			Students		
Items	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Listening to instructions	2.90	1.34	41	2.57	1.38	308
Listening to presentation during lectures	3.32	1.37	41	2.67	1.38	308
Listening to youtube and other English media	3.15	1.37	41	2.83	1.30	308
Overall average	**3.12**	**1.36**	**41**	**2.69**	**1.36**	**308**
Talking to audiences	3.37	1.45	41	2.88	1.23	308
Asking and answering questions during discussion	3.10	1.43	41	2.61	1.27	308
Introducing oneself and others in a variety of contexts	3.15	1.49	41	2.56	1.32	308
Giving presentations	3.49	1.43	41	2.73	1.31	308
Stating opinions or ideas during discussions	3.37	1.41	41	2.77	1.29	308
Speaking to foreigners	3.73	1.38	41	3.09	1.29	308
Pronunciation	3.71	1.52	41	2.88	1.32	308
Overall average	**3.42**	**1.44**	**41**	**2.79**	**1.29**	**308**

Source: Survey data (2021)

As revealed in Table 4, the participants expressed their perceptions of the sub-components difficulties students face when studying their courses. Even though the respondents have shown different estimates for the statements in each sub-skill/component, both respondents perceived that these sub-components are difficult areas for the student's learning. It means that student participants rated the sub-skills as 'difficult' with an overall mean score (M= 2.69 for listening sub-skills and M= 2.79 for speaking sub-skills), while the instructor respondents rated the sub-skills as 'difficult' (M= 3.12 for listening sub-skills and 'very difficult' (M= 3.42) for speaking sub-skills. The instructors' responses had a higher overall mean value than the students' responses to indicate the difficulty level of the sub-skills components. None of the respondents rated the sub-skills as 'not difficult at all,' except for a few respondents who rated the sub-skills as 'slightly difficult'.

According to the authors, the listening problem may refer to the difficulty of understanding the spoken language, and the language problems may imply difficulties of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc. Therefore, data obtained from both groups of respondents in the present research imply that the sub-skills/components are difficult for students' academic study and require further improvement.

In general, higher mean value (n= 41, M= 3.12 & n=308, M= 2.69 for academic listening and n=41, M= 3.42 & n=308, M= 2.79 for academic speaking sub-

skills/components) means the respondents reported that learners face challenges in learning their academic courses due to inadequate academic language capability. These academic language sub-skills/components (Table 4) were identified as problematic by both groups of participants.

Table 5. Perceptions about the difficulty level of academic reading and writing sub-skills/components

	Instructors			Students		
Items	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Reading laboratory reports	3.17	1.43	41	2.68	1.37	308
Reading exercise/test questions	2.63	1.36	41	2.50	1.47	308
Reading textbooks	2.49	1.36	41	2.36	1.52	308
Reading academic journal articles/papers	3.07	1.46	41	2.44	1.40	308
Reading manuals and instructions	2.76	1.22	41	2.41	1.38	308
Searching the Internet English resources	2.46	1.14	41	2.40	1.38	308
Reading handouts	2.51	1.17	41	2.33	1.36	308
Reading signs, rules, and notices in a laboratory	2.80	1.35	41	2.52	1.36	308
Overall mean average	**2.74**	**1.31**	**41**	**2.46**	**1.41**	**308**
Writing research papers or articles	3.15	1.37	41	2.69	1.32	308
Writing research papers or articles	3.17	1.32	41	2.81	1.35	308
Writing examination answers	3.07	1.39	41	2.53	1.41	308
Writing notes from spoken or reading sources	2.95	1.45	41	2.65	1.36	308
Describing diagrams, tables and graphs through writing	3.27	1.34	41	2.65	1.25	308
Writing summary	3.20	1.47	41	2.80	1.30	308
Overall mean average	**3.24**	**41**	**41**	**2.69**	**1.38**	**308**

Source: Survey data (2021)

In Table 5, the data are presented in relation to the perceptions of participants about a variety of academic reading and writing sub-skills. A scale ranging from 5 ('very difficult') to 1 ('not difficult at all') was used to assess the level of difficulty that the participants perceived with various portions of academic reading. Despite the fact that mean values are distributed across a very limited range, it is clear that respondents consider the information processing at the micro/sub level to be comparably challenging as the information processing at the macro/major skills level. As a result, the participants' responses to these skills/components are summarized in Table 5 in the form of mean values (in descending order difficulty level).

Consequently, according to the mean values as regards to instructor respondents, 'Reading laboratory reports' (M= 3.17), 'Reading academic journal articles/ papers' (M= 3.07), 'Reading signs, rules, and notices in a lab.' (M= 2.80), 'Reading manuals and instructions' (M= 2.76) and 'Reading exercise/test questions' (M= 2.63) were ranked as 'difficult' tasks. On the other hand, 'Reading textbooks (M= 2.49), 'Reading handouts' (M= 2.51) and 'Searching internet English resources' (M=

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2.46) were ranked 'slightly difficult' tasks. Hence, as demonstrated in the Table 4.2, the mean values showed the instructor respondents perceived that most (five out of eight) of the items were considered 'difficult' skills for students' academic study.

Regarding the student responses, the areas that the respondents perceived 'slightly difficult' were 'Reading signs, rules, and notices in a laboratory' (M= 2.52), 'Reading exam/test questions' (M= 2.50), 'Reading academic journal articles/papers' (M= 2.44), 'Reading manuals and instructions' (M= 2.41), 'Searching internet for English resources' (M= 2.40), 'Reading textbooks' (M= 2.36), and 'Reading handouts' (M= 2.33). The only item rated as 'difficult' was 'Reading laboratory reports,' which received (M= 2.68) mean score. It might be because the respondents thought that reading skills might be easy to acquire when compared with other academic language skills. There is also a consensus among the items that were indicated approximately still close to overall mean scores between (M= 2.74 and M= 2.6) for instructors and students, respectively.

The mean values presented in Table 5 showed participants' agreement on students' difficulties concerning the academic writing sub-skills. The overall mean scores for the academic writing components were M= 3.24 & M= 2.69 for instructors and student respondents, respectively. In connection with specific writing components, 'describing diagrams, tables and graphs through writing' had 3.27, 'writing summary had 3.20, writing research papers or articles' had 3.17, 'writing laboratory reports or assignments' had 3.15, 'writing exam answers' had 3.0 7, 'writing notes from spoken or reading sources' had 2.95 mean value as rated by the instructors while the mean values of, 'writing research papers or articles', 'writing summary', 'laboratory reports or assignments', 'writing notes from spoken or reading sources', 'describing diagrams, tables and graphs through writing', and 'writing exam answers', were rated 2.81, 2.80, 2.69, 2.65, 2.65, and 2.53 respectively by the student respondents.

If we understand a mean of 2.60 or greater denotes a certain level of difficulty, participants generally agreed that students face major difficulties in academic writing sub-skills—with the exception of a sub-skill- writing exam answers (i.e., 2.53 mean value), where the mean value is less than 2.60 (i.e., Slightly difficult).

In Table 6, the findings show that both groups of sample respondents indicated that the three vocabulary items as 'difficult,' with an overall mean score of (M= 3.26 for instructors & M= 2.93 for students). In particular, 'vocabulary meaning guessing or contextual clues' had (n= 41, M= 3.29), 'the ways of learning new vocabularies' had (n= 41, M= 3.22), and 'technical terms/ teaching disciplinary/specific vocabulary' had (n= 41, M= 3.29), exhibiting higher mean scores than student responses. The instructors perceived the items as 'difficult' for students' academic study; thus, these aspects of vocabulary may require due attention in needs analysis situations. However, the student respondents rated the items: 'the ways of learning new vocabularies' had a mean score of (n= 308, M= 2.95), 'vocabulary meaning guessing or contextual clues' had a mean score of (n= 308, M= 2.93), followed by 'technical terms/ teaching disciplinary/specific vocabulary' which had a mean score of (n= 308, M= 2.92).

Table 6. Perceptions about the difficulty level of academic vocabulary and Grammar aspects

	Instructors			Students		
Items	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Vocabulary meaning guessing or contextual clues	3.29	1.29	41	2.93	1.30	308
Ways of learning new vocabularies (e.g., collocations)	3.22	1.28	41	2.95	1.23	308
Technical terms or teaching disciplinary or specific vocabulary	3.29	1.37	41	2.92	1.25	308
Overall average	**3.26**	**1.31**	**41**	**2.93**	**1.26**	**308**
Using grammar in the context or situation	3.41	1.29	41	3.01	1.28	308
Grammatical structure for general communications e.g., tenses, aspects modality, etc.	3.29	1.29	41	2.92	1.34	308
Grammar structures common in scientific discourse include present participles, passives, and conditionals	3.32	1.39	41	3.08	1.37	308
Overall average	**3.34**	**1.32**	**41**	**3.00**	**1.29**	**308**

Source: Survey data (2021)

In the second section (Table 6), the selected grammar items were given to assess respondents' perceptions of these items. According to the table, both teacher and student respondents rated those grammar issues as 'difficult' for academic study, with mean scores of M= 3.34 and M= 3.00, respectively, indicating high mean scores. Moreover, 'Grammar structures frequently used in scientific discourse, such as present participles, actives, passives, and conditionals' (3.01), 'Grammar structures for communications, e.g., tenses, aspects modality' (3.29), and 'Grammar structures frequently used in scientific texts, e.g., present participles, actives, passives, and conditionals' (3.41), accounted for higher mean scores from the sample instructors.

On the other hand, the students rated the items as 'difficult' tasks, with smaller mean values than the sample instructors. For example, 'Grammar structures frequently used in scientific discourse, e.g., present participles, passives, conditionals' had a mean score of 3.08 and 'Using grammar in context' had a mean score of 3.01, followed by 'Grammar structures frequently used in scientific texts, e.g., present participles, passives, conditionals' had a mean score of 2.92. The difference between teachers' and students' views of the statements may occur due to their awareness of the difficulty levels of grammar teaching and learning. The teachers believe that the difficulties encountered due to grammar items negatively affect the learners' communication competence.

Student participants in this study also explained the difficulties they face in the university due to academic language skills. Participants stated that students encountered difficulties such as difficulty comprehending the lesson, an inability to communicate in English, and a restricted vocabulary. Additionally, participants agreed that a lack of proper practice impeded students' ability to improve their language skills. Difficulties related to motivation, lack of active participation, shortage of time to practice the language/skill, and the way exams are prepared among the challenges stated. Finally, the other participant also remarked

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on his inadequate grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation of academic language skills. He stated that

> *...there are many problems. When I joined university... from high school...I faced difficulty to explain things..., here in the university also I faced difficulties when I learned communicative English such as vocabulary, grammar...pronunciation. Most of the listening and reading topics are not interesting and challenging for students to understand; the method of explaining and clarifying the lessons is not...*

The participant said that he had difficulties in different academic language skills and components when studying his courses. Only three hours a week are allocated to the communicative classes regarding the class time. It leaves little time for students to practice; so, they cannot get enough English input.

The current study establishes a link between students reported academic English language challenges and their academic achievement. As a result, it would appear that their EAP instruction should put an emphasis on oral abilities such as asking and responding questions, participating in debates, and delivering presentations. Academic writing skills need to include essay tests, assignments, field or project reports, and other forms of formal academic writing, all of which are acknowledged to be difficult by many of them. Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are also critical components of academic studies at the university level.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers elaborated the results to answer the research question. The findings, therefore, answered the research questions of the study. It includes the findings of Table 3 through Table 6.

First and foremost, Table 3 shows both groups of respondents thought that academic writing is a difficult activity due to learners' lack of grammatical standards and adequate vocabulary for academic writing. This is consistent with Al-Ta'ani (2018), who discovered that writing is the most difficult skill for EFL learners to master due to considerable vocabulary limitations. Similarly, Lumbangaol and Mazali (2020) also stated that someone who is unable to communicate orally would have difficulty to express their thoughts to others. Furthermore, Fatimah (2019), who conducted a qualitative study on students' research writing challenges, revealed that ESL/EFL students obviously require assistance from their instructors in completing research writing assignments; they need clear and explicit instructions on tasks to complete; and that individual guidance is crucial in lecture communication across the learning process.

Moreover, the data obtained from both groups of respondents confirmed that academic reading is one of the problematic areas for students learning, although it contained moderate mean scores compared with the other academic skills. The mean score of this was nearly average mean (i.e., n= 41, M= 2.85 & n=308, M= 2.64). This could indicate that respondents were enthusiastic about academic reading since reading is frequently seen as the least difficult of all the language skills (Chatsungnoen, 2015). For example, from the local point of view, Paulos's (2015) study indicated that a fourth of students looked at reading skills as important to some extent, but they gave less attention to it as they did not use what they knew

already before and after reading in the English classroom. His study also confirmed that very few students face difficulties using the reading task to develop their reading skills easily. On the other hand, a large number of university teachers are concerned with the question of why students are unable to read English texts relevant to their field of study.

On the other hand, the results indicated in Table 4 showed that academic listening sub-skills are less concerned for the participants than academic speaking sub-skills. When comparing academic listening sub-skills to academic speaking sub-skills, participants reported a certain level of comfort with the academic listening sub-skills assessed. In line with the findings of Evans and Green (2007), who discovered that Hong Kong students perceived themselves as relatively proficient in their capacity to understand lectures presented in English rather than in their ability to communicate in English.

The findings also revealed that academic reading sub-skills are among the challenging tasks in learners' course of study. However, the student respondents rated as 'slightly difficult' sub-skills. This finding accords with Sharndama et al.'s (2014) opinion. They noted that listening skill difficulty in EAP is a combination of listening and language problems. In the contrary, since instructors think that academic reading abilities are the most significant in the EAP class, most of them ranked the academic reading sub-skills/components as challenging for students to learn, which is in harmony with Chatsungnoen (2015) and Solikhah (2015) findings. The findings also lend support to the findings reported by Eroğlu (2005). According to the findings, most students have difficulty reading English texts for academic purposes, and they want to improve their comprehension and writing skills through EAP classes.

Likewise, the findings of Table 5 describe the respondents' perceptions of or experiences with Academic Writing sub-skills. Thus, academic writing is the most likely crucial language skill at higher education since grades are mainly decided by students' performance on written works, tests, and examinations (Elsaid Mohammed & Nur, 2018). Furthermore, a recent study revealed writing is the primary cause of difficulties for Hong Kong undergraduates (Bhatia, 2002; Mohammed & Nur, 2018). Consequently, the current research emphasizes the importance of academic writing skills and the difficulties learners' face with it in the university.

According to Table 6, the findings of data obtained from both groups of participants implied that students had difficulties in vocabulary, especially in learning the meanings and collocations. The instructors also confirmed that these difficulties could affect students' performance, particularly in their specific disciplines. According to Evans and Green (2007), vocabulary is not the only language resource that perceive problematic; grammatical resources are also deemed insufficient to meet the demands imposed on students when completing academic assignments at the university.

Also as reported by respondents, EFL learners face difficulty with grammar, and these difficulties are also evident in many EAP classes. For instance, Chatsungnoen (2015) discovered that Thai university students struggled with grammar, specifically relative clauses. Evans and Green (2007) also explored the linguistic difficulties of Cantonese-speaking students at a university in Hong Kong,

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China, that is predominantly English-medium. The results indicated a sizable proportion of students struggled to study their courses in English; this was mostly due to insufficient receptive and productive abilities, as well as a lack of vocabulary knowledge (Ibid). Additionally, this study corroborates Atai and Shoja (2011) who discovered that both EAP teachers and Iranian undergraduate students indicated learners' difficulties with reading comprehension, general vocabulary, technical terms, and grammar. As the findings indicated, even though most Ethiopian students have been learning English for about 12 or so years, academic language skills remain big challenges for them to meet their academic requirements (Anh, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The data suggest that many students would benefit from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching following their admission to their studies program. Language difficulties can have particularly detrimental effect on learners' confidence, which in turn affects their attitudes and academic success. On the other hand, literature has also suggested that academic English proficiency requires learners to rely on different opportunities, understandings, and individual value judgments.

Thus, in the context of language learning, learners' needs can be studied from two distinct perspectives: target and learning needs. The learning needs is linked with learners' difficulties. For instance, one study asserts that present or learning needs are derived from affective and cognitive factors such as personal confidence and attitudes, expectations, and learning strategies. On the other hand, literature suggests that all accurate information about the learners, such as language difficulties, language proficiency, and use of language in real life situation, is used to collect data about target/objective needs. In contrast, all cognitive information about the learner, such as expectations, confidence, and attitude, are used to collect data on present/learning needs of the learners.

Accordingly, the findings suggest that the Social Sciences and Humanities students face much more academic language difficulties in their academic studies. As revealed in the discussion section, the participants generally perceived that it is difficult for students to communicate their ideas properly, precisely, and smoothly either through written or spoken language. In addition, data from the questionnaire survey and interview revealed academic grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are the main concern for students' academic study in university. The finding was in line with a previous research study which indicated that most ESL/EFL learners experienced significant difficulties in their university education due to academic language limitations.

The findings also indicate that students' problems with academic reading registered comparatively low mean. Furthermore, the participants' perceptions on vocabulary, grammar, and academic writing difficulties are consistent with the perceptions of tertiary students and teachers in previous studies.

Moreover, the current Communicative English course syllabus in Ethiopia partially achieves the goals and objectives set forth in the course description. Hence, a thorough needs analysis study should be carried out to improve EAP quality in ELT programs in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Finally, the way university

students try to overcome language difficulties is beyond the focus of this study but should be an area of further investigation.

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