

LANGUAGE NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR WORKING ABROAD: A CASE-STUDY FROM THUA THIEN HUE PROVINCE

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Abstract

Needs analysis is the first essential step of designing a language curriculum [26]. Needs analysis provides a mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input in the contents, design, and implementation of a language program. The process identifies general or specific language needs so that they can be addressed while developing goals, objectives, and content for a language program. In this study, we aimed to explore the language needs analysis for labor export. We regarded foreign language for labor export with a view that all decisions in instructions are based on the learners' reasons for learning. As a case in point, we studied the language needs for labor export of laborers in Thua Thien Hue province. A task-based needs analysis approach [17] was utilized due to its methodological cogency. 45 laborers who were working abroad participated in our study. Five were interviewed and 40 were surveyed to elicit the foreign language needed for everyday life tasks and occupational domains. The results outlined export laborers language needs in regards to everyday survival (i.e. language at the supermarket, hospital, etc.) and vocational tasks (i.e. understanding employer's requests, interacting with customers/clients, etc.). The findings of this study inform the design of an English language curriculum for labor export and serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating existing language programs for labor export. The research also affords implications for future designs of task-based needs analysis.

Keywords: *language needs analysis, task-based needs analysis, labor export*

1. Introduction

In the recent decades, labor export has presented itself as an important solution to the reduction of unemployment in Vietnam as well as an essential contribution to the country's economic development. In a 2018 report from the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Vietnam has sent more than 134,000 laborers to foreign markets [22]. With the recognition of labor export's potentials and promising growth, MOLISA set a specific goal to help around from 100,000 to 120,000 workers to experience abroad working in 2020. To improve quality of the country's workforce in international market, 80% of the candidates are required to undergo several training courses on professional skills and foreign language.

For workers to successfully undertake employment in foreign countries, language proficiency is crucial. In other words, workers equipped with awareness of the necessity of language training seem to adapt better in new working environment, achieve higher efficiency compared to ones who never experience any aspects of language knowledge [8]. Adequate proficiency in the foreign language, therefore, is understood to be one of the vital factors for Vietnamese laborers working abroad. In our study, we focus on examining the communicative tasks in which Vietnamese laborers need to engage in while working in a foreign context.

Hutchinson and Waters [12] indicated language varies in different contexts, methods and contents of second language teaching should vary to meet the needs of learners in specific situations. Language for labor export falls in the discipline of language for specific purposes and requires a specific curriculum catered for the learners. In order to design such a curriculum, it is necessary to understand clearly the learners' needs. This study is a needs analysis of English language training for export laborers as case study set in the context

of Thua Thien Hue Province. Laborers currently working abroad, returnees, and English teachers are the main participants of this investigation. Workers in international environment, as well as returnees can provide important information on their daily communicative tasks and professional tasks, which provide valuable insights into the language required to perform these tasks successfully. The results of this needs analysis will provide a baseline for the design of an English curriculum for export labors. The findings from this study will also build theory on needs analysis and teaching English for specific purposes.

Thus, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the language needs for everyday survival for Vietnamese laborers working abroad?
2. What are the language needs for occupational purposes for Vietnamese laborers working abroad?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English for specific purposes (ESP)

The term English for specific (ESP) was first introduced in 1974 [14]. ESP is an approach and is not a specific kind of language nor does it consist of a certain type of teaching material [12]. This analysis comes from an initial identified need on the part of the learners to learn a language. In other words, ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as in content and methods are based on the learners' reasons for learning. In addition, ESP requires careful research and design of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of learners within a specific learning context [11].

2.2 Needs analysis and its importance

Needs analysis is a vital step aiming to systematically collect subjective and objective information from the learners, which assists in the process of identifying and validating curriculum goals [6]. In other words, all the elements of teaching methodology, learning contents, as well as learning goals can be affected by the needs of learners. Brown [6] noticed that needs analysis is the most important part during the process of designing any language training course. Similarly, Nunan [25] interpreted needs analysis as a set of techniques to carry out the process of information collection for a syllabus design. Sharing the same view, Richards [26] indicated that needs analysis is a process utilized when there is a demand for understanding what the learners' needs are. In this study, needs analysis is seen as a systematic process of data collection from relevant participants on the purpose of investigating what students need and want to learn English [17].

Needs analysis is not a new concept and has experienced a long history and has been continuously evolving and redefining itself. Before the 1970s, it was based on teacher intuitions and sometimes informal analysis of students' needs [32]. Currently, needs analysis is viewed as the foundation on which all other decisions surrounding curriculum development and implementation are made. The process helps ESP teachers and course designers to identify specific needs of language learners before and even during the course that learning needs in particular continue to evolve [2].

If the needs are clear, the learning objectives can be expressed at ease and the language course can be conducted in a motivating way to get the final goals of learning process. If the language learners' needs are not taken into consideration, the course might be built up from irrelevant materials, leading to the fact students will be under the pressure of instructional value as well as doubt on their language learning capability, which demotivates the learning process [20]. The nature of needs also varies depending on learners' different level of language ability, professional activities, the centrality of language and skills, as well as situational specificity [12]. For this reason, content of the language courses should consist of materials or texts, which represent real-life situations interpreted from students' language training needs. As Long [17, p.1] emphasized, "[j]ust as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without a thorough needs analysis".

2.3 Principles for analyzing learner needs

Based on a survey of existing literature on language needs analysis [3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23, 25, 26, 27, 31] learner needs should be examined by the following principles:

Communication needs should be prioritized. Communication needs can be defined as ‘what learners are taught should be specifically what they really use in the real world’, and this should be one of the factors determining the content of ESP courses [10, 23]. Long [17, 18] noticed the mastery as in the target language, English in particular, is insufficient. There should be an addition of communicating ability referring to understanding the discourse practices in which the language is situated and learners must operate. In other words, language learners need to have opportunities to exposure not only specific knowledge, but also the “situationally authentic” materials.

Learning needs should be given equal attention. Basic learning needs include essential learning tools, such as literacy, oral expressions, numeracy, and problem solving, as well as the basic learning content, like knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. These factors together contribute to the process of full development, and learning. Specifically, cognitive and affective variables as well as learning situations are significant in determining the manner in which a language is learned or should be learned [3, 5]. Hutchinson and Waters [12] also supported study of communication needs is not enough to enable someone to learn a language, but learning situations should be also taken into consideration.

Context is one of the most important elements to be considered. Context makes a big contribution to the process of teaching and learning ESP [14, 27]. To emphasize the importance of context in language teaching and design, Long [18] pointed out that without identifying particular groups of students, it is likely to be inefficient, and inadequate. There are two ways to look at context in language teaching and design for learners. The first one is technical knowledge which relates to their working positions in the target countries [12]. For example, Vietnamese laborers might work at factories with machinery systems and are required to possess certain technical language items. The other factor to consider is societal factors [26], which involve expectations of employers’ English standard for employments.

Needs analysis process needs seeing from multiple perspectives. Both learners and researchers have their own expectations and perceptions about English learning and teaching, which partially affects designing and developing the ESP courses’ content [3, 5, 31]. Therefore, it is significant to ensure that the researchers need to look through different judgments from learners and make reference on various authors when it comes to the stage of interpretation of findings.

There is a need to utilize multiple data collection methods. Implementing multiple data collection methods is recommended when dealing with complex needs and for validating data [11, 12, 13, 27]. Interviews are the most direct way of determining what stakeholders will think about learner needs [17]. Using structured interviews, questions concerning learner needs that have been carefully constructed can be asked repeatedly to focus all stakeholders on specific concerns [10, 19]. Surveying with a well-designed questionnaire will afford data collection at a wider scale and offer generalizations of the needs of a particular pool of learners [19]. Instructional materials will need to be evaluated to ensure that they correspond to learner needs, reflected real language uses and facilitate the learning process [9].

Needs analysis should be considered as an ongoing activity. Learner needs should be treated as an ongoing basis because they are likely to change over time, depending on contextual and human affective variables [6, 12, 25, 27]. Because the purpose of needs analysis is to identify learner needs, taking place at a relatively theoretical level outside of classes, yielding recommendations on how a course should be designed, it is understandable needs analysis should take a role of ongoing activity.

2.4 Approaches to needs analysis

Perceiving the importance of needs analysis in the area of ESP, a number of researchers have laid out methodologies for conducting needs analysis. The following are the more prominent ones among others:

The Sociolinguistic Model was introduced by Munby [23]. It focuses on analyzing students' profiles with particular information in the mediation of speaking, writing, etc. This model requires each student to fill in a profile, talk about any communicative events during the day. After the profile is created, students' needs are transferred to the syllabus [23]. West [32] commented the sociolinguistic approach "collects data about the learner rather than from the learner" [32, p. 9]. In addition, Jordan ([14] criticized the model for considering "implementational constraints", such as the number of trained teachers available only after completion of syllabus specifications.

The Systematic Approach, created by Richterich and Chacerel [27], focuses on covering the shortcomings of the sociolinguistic approach by paying more attention to the learner itself. The authors of the model plan to understand learners' needs, making assessments before, during, and after the learning processes in assistance with one or two collection methods, such as surveys, and interviews. Even though this model received less criticism compared to the former, there are concerns with the lack of learners' real-world needs and an over-reliance on learners' perception [14, 17].

The Learning-Centered Approach, developed by Hutchingson and Waters [12], focuses greatly on the language needs students have. The authors have developed a learning-centered approach with the purpose of creating a model which can easily analyze students' needs from the very beginning up to the target situation. Students' target needs involve the necessities of referring to what students have to know in order to be able to perform their responsibilities. However, Basturkmen [1] pointed out some drawbacks of this approaches, and the most obvious one is learners' needs tend to make very little contribution to the process of instructional material design. Moreover, this model is considered not flexible, which is opposite of the nature of learners' needs analysis.

The Learner-Centered Approach was carried out by Berwick [3] and Brindley [5] which analyzes the needs from students from their attitudes and expectations. There are three ways to look at learner needs, which are offered by the researchers: perceived vs. felt needs, product vs. process oriented interpretations, as well as objective vs. subjective needs. A problematic characteristic of learner-centered approaches is that a needs analysis is dependent on students' attitudes and feelings.

The Task-Based Approach was introduced by Long [17], describing needs analysis as a desire to examine the particular situations in which learners want to participate. ESP scholars and task-based researchers have argued for the theoretical and practical advantages of using *task* as the meaningful unit around which to organize lessons [24]. In addition, for adult learners, it has been proven that they do not learn a new language in an isolated nature but in a nonlinear fashion in which words and target structures and functions are intertwined and embedded in a complex network of relationships [16]. Hence, using tasks is effective in linking form and function, situated in a communication context which can be found naturally occurring in real-life.

According to this approach, data should ideally be collected from two or more sources using two or more methods to ensure reliability and validity. Serafini, Lake and Long [29] stress the importance of consulting a stratified random sample for increased credibility but also acknowledge the difficulty in time and access constraints. With the task-based needs analysis approach, open-ended procedures such as unstructured interviews should be carried out prior to quantitative, deductive instruments, such as questionnaires. This can ensure the chance to elicit the array of needs which the researchers might not have considered. The top-down procedure deploying a questionnaire can be useful for generalizing the findings to a larger sample. In this study,

we utilized Long's [17] task-based needs analysis approach in designing research instruments, data collection and analysis methods. The task-based needs analysis approach not only meets the principles of needs analysis but is also methodologically rigorous with triangulation of data ensure its validity.

2.5 Language for overseas employment

In recent years, various researchers have examined language for working abroad in a foreign country in varying contexts. Chatsungnoen [7] explored English language needs of Thai undergraduate students in the food science and technology discipline for both academic and occupational purposes. Results from the study showed that reading and translation were regarded as more important skills in the academic context, but oral skills (speaking and listening) were needed more in occupational context. Serafini and Torres [28] examined language learners' needs of Spanish for business at an American tertiary institution, utilizing Long's [17] task-based approach. Their aim was to provide information for the design of Spanish for specific purposes curricula which meet learners' communicative needs in varying contexts. The researchers were able to identify major target task types which are utilized to build course objectives and lessons' tasks, including: writing formal correspondence, summarizing and analyzing case study, developing and present a marketing strategy, writing a report and presenting data in a formal setting. Martin and Adrada-Rafael [21] conducted a replication study of Serafini and Torres' 2015 research. They also employed the task-based needs analysis approach and were able to specify five over-arching target tasks comprised of 21 smaller and more detailed tasks, such as being able to write a curriculum vitae/ resume, write a cover letter or interview for a job. The task categories afforded more clarity for language teachers who are non-experts in the particular discipline. Borszéki [4] examined English needs for Border Guards in the European context. Through a series of interviews with the border guards, the researcher was able to identify the specific-purpose English required for this profession; such as communication with foreign colleagues during work and at training courses or communication during border checks and with migrants. Le [15] conducted a needs analysis of English for mechanical engineers in the Vietnamese plurilingual and pluricultural workplace contexts. The researcher carried out semi-structured interviews and questionnaire as a means of collecting data on the participants' language needs. The findings indicated a high need for a range of communicative tasks related to technical side of their occupation, and those possessing higher proficiency were considered to have 'expert power' and thus, possess more authority and influence. Thus, with the specific scope of this study, the findings can shed light on the communicative tasks related to the survival and employment of Vietnamese laborers living and working in a foreign context. By utilizing such a comprehensive list of tasks devised from the study, language training programs can be designed which meet the needs of targeted group of export laborers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological approach

The purpose of the study was to investigate language needs for labor export of laborers from Thua Thien Hue Province. For this purpose, an attempt was made to identify tasks of daily and occupational activities which require language. To achieve this, we utilized Long's [17] task-based needs analysis approach in designing research instruments, data collection and analysis methods. The task-based needs analysis approach not only meets the principles of needs analysis but is also methodologically rigorous with triangulation of data.

3.2. Participants

All the participants in our study are Thua Thien Hue locals. Five participants were interviewed and 40 were surveyed. We had initial contacts of several participants due to personal connections and were introduced to other participants by the 'snow-ball effect' where participants introduced us to other potential candidates for survey. The majority of the participants (Male=15; Female=25) were from 18-38 years old. The

domains of our participants included: factory (N=12), office (N=9), service (N=4), farm (N=10), nursing (N=2) and construction (N=3). The participants were working in the US (N=4), Malaysia (N=4), Romania (N=1), and Japan (N=31). We note that data from laborers working in non-English speaking countries like Japan were also accepted since our distributed survey for them was in Vietnamese and probed foreign language needs in general rather than specifying the target language as English.

3.3. Data collection instruments:

Semi-structured interview: A semi-structured interview was employed with five returnees. It consisted of open-ended questions that elicited information on the language needs of export laborers, specifically in terms of language for survival and language of vocational purposes. Specific themes and questions were designed based on adaptations from previous literature in the discipline [4, 7, 15, 21, 28].

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the needs of English training for export laborers, in particular, their language needs regarding daily routines and survival (e.g. language needs for daily life activities; at the restaurant; at the post office; at the bank; at the hospital; at the market/supermarket; and at the airport/station) and professional domains (interactions with employers/managers; with colleagues; with clients/customers; and with documents/machinery). The questionnaire was designed based on relevant frameworks and previous studies that tackle the learners' language needs in regards to vocational and labor migration purposes [4, 7, 15, 21, 28]. In addition the information from the semi-structured interview also served as the basis for construction of the questionnaire, especially regarding the specific contextual factors of Vietnamese laborers. The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese to eliminate any misunderstanding due to language barriers.

3.4 Data collection procedures

Based on the obtained data from initial interview with export laborers and based on existing literature, a questionnaire was designed to gather information at a bigger scale. A total of 40 laborers completed the questionnaire via Google Form. The data collection period lasted approximately two weeks.

3.5 Data analysis procedure:

Both qualitative and quantitative procedures were used in the study. The data collected through open-ended interviews was analyzed qualitatively by coding and categorizing data into salient themes, which later informed the derivation of the questionnaire. The data from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively on the basis of descriptive statistical analysis, i.e. using frequency and mean scores to highlight findings.

4. Results and Discussion

In the following section, we describe and discuss the results gathered from the survey in the salient themes regarding language needs for everyday survival and specialised language for their occupations. The survey statements were designed based on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree). Our questionnaire's internal consistency was deemed reliable with the Cronbach alpha of $\alpha=0.89$.

4.1 Survival language

4.1.1 Language needs for daily life activities

Table 1. Language needs for daily life activities (N=40)

		M	SD
1	To say greetings	4.23	0.935
2	To introduce myself	4.15	0.910
3	To talk about the time	4.28	0.922

4	To talk about the weather	3.93	0.959
5	To talk about holidays and plans	4.15	0.910
6	To ask for directions	4.15	0.989
7	To look for an apartment	4.03	1.012
8	To deal with transportation	4.20	0.954
9	To call for help	4.20	0.927
10	To deal with different kinds of utility bills	4.08	0.959
11	To talk about clothes/ uniforms	3.85	0.963
12	To talk about basic household appliances	3.95	0.999
13	To talk about sports	3.65	0.937

Table 1 presents the summary of data gathered from the first domain of language needs: language for daily life activities. Overall, the tasks in this category were deemed necessary with the exception of talking about sports, weather, clothes and uniforms and household appliances, which received lower mean scores. The categories which received the highest agreement are language for greetings, talking about time, dealing with transportation and calling for help. Introducing oneself, talking about holidays and plans and asking for directions were also regarded as necessary. From the results, it can be understood that language to talk about accommodation and uniforms/clothes were not reported as essential, and we assume that for labor export, these amenities are provided by employers. Domains related to small talks such as weather or sports were also deemed unnecessary. Thus these topics should be eliminated in the process of curriculum design if they do not reflect the specific situational needs of learners [12].

4.1.2 Language needs at the restaurant

Table 2. Language needs at the restaurant (N=40)

		M	SD
14	To make a table reservation	4.00	0.775
15	To understand the menu	4.13	0.748
16	To order a meal/ a drink or a snack	4.18	0.771
17	To talk about unusual requests	4.10	0.768
18	To ask for extra spices/sugar/milk...	3.90	0.889

Participants' views on language needs at the restaurant are presented in Table 2. The results show that participants believe language training regarding making table reservation, understanding the menu and ordering a meal or drink are important. However, optional request for extra spices/sugar/milk has a lower rate of agreement.

4.1.3 Language needs at the post office

Table 3. Language needs at the post office (N=40)

		M	SD
19	To send and receive letters/packages	4.25	0.487
20	To make international calls	3.68	0.905
21	To fill in forms	4.20	0.458

With the post office domain (Table 3), participants did not show a need for language to make international calls. This could be explained that personal communications nowadays is more automated and convenient with the availability of the Internet and personal mobile devices, which do not require face-to-face interactions with native speakers.

4.1.4 Language needs at the bank

Table 4. Language needs at the bank (N=40)

		M	SD
22	To open or close an account	4.08	0.818
23	To make a withdrawal	4.18	0.771
24	To transfer money to another account	4.18	0.771
25	To exchange money	3.88	0.842
26	To report a lost/ stolen credit card	4.10	0.768
27	To ask for a loan	3.48	1.118
28	To register services (Internet/Mobile banking)	3.90	0.768

From Table 4, we can view participants' opinions on language needs for different tasks at the bank. Among these tasks, opening and closing an account, making a withdrawal, transferring money and reporting a lost/stolen credit card received the highest agreement. However, they did not report the need to know language to exchange money, to ask for a loan or register services.

4.1.5 Language needs at the hospital

Table 5. Language needs at the hospital (N=40)

		M	SD
29	To make an appointment	4.05	0.740
30	To talk about the symptoms of the illness	4.23	0.758
31	To talk about private medical insurance	4.00	0.866
32	To talk about treatments	4.18	0.738
33	To ask for advice on alternative treatments (lifestyle, diet, etc.)	4.20	0.748

Most participants reported the need for English to talk about treatments, illness symptoms, and scheduling an appointment to see a doctor. These tasks are essential to secure the laborers' well-being so they could continue to work. However, language to talk about private medical insurance or alternative treatments were not needed as much. Perhaps laborers would have had insurance as a prerequisite to working abroad. It is also possible further private insurance or alternative treatments are unappealing to laborers due to financial reasons and thus language for such tasks was not as needed.

4.1.6 Language needs at the market/supermarket

Table 6. Language needs at the market/supermarket (N=40)

		M	SD
34	To talk about available/ unavailable items	4.15	0.760
35	To check-out items at the counter	4.15	0.726
36	To locate the shelves of different items	4.03	0.821
37	To make a bargain at the market	3.85	1.038
38	To make payments	3.93	0.818

Most of the language tasks at the market or supermarket were deemed necessary, with an exception to bargaining at the market with a lower mean score and high standard deviation (M=3.85, SD=1.038). It could be explainable by two reasons. First of all, laborers could be inhibited by bargaining due to limited language proficiency. The second reason could be due to the fact that in most of the countries where participants work at, the culture of bargaining does not exist or is not prevalent. Making payments were overall deemed as necessary but with a lower mean score (M=3.93, SD=0.818) perhaps because in most of the countries where participants worked at, automated checking counters are available at supermarkets which would eliminate the need to converse with native speakers.

4.1.7 Language needs at the airport/station

Table 7. Language needs at the airport/station (N=40)

		M	SD
39	To talk about the luggage	4.10	0.700
40	To go through immigration	4.13	0.748
41	To buy/ change a ticket	4.15	0.691
42	To make a request for desired seat	4.03	0.758
43	To talk about the check-in process	4.05	0.705
44	To locate the gate for the flight/ trip	3.95	0.773
45	To talk about the food on the plane/ train	3.93	0.721
46	To understand flight/ train schedules	4.08	0.787

Language needs pertaining to tasks such as talking about luggage, going through immigration, buying and exchanging tickets, talking about the check-in process and understanding flight and train schedules were more apparent in the domain of transportation (Table 7). The data shows that optional communicative tasks relating to one's comfort, such as requesting certain seats or talking about food offered, were of less importance. Procedural tasks which can be often done without requiring communication, such as locating gates and platforms, also had a lower agreement rate.

4.2 Specialised language

4.2.1 Language needs for interactions with employers/managers

Table 8. Language needs for interactions with employers/managers (N=40)

		M	SD
1	To talk my work experience	4.23	0.689
2	To discuss my shift hours	4.23	0.724
3	To discuss my duties/ responsibilities	4.23	0.689
4	To discuss working conditions	4.23	0.724
5	To understand job descriptions/ requirements	4.23	0.724
6	To discuss salary	4.25	0.733
7	To discuss days off and holidays	4.25	0.733

Table 8 shows the agreement rate on statements relating to laborers' interaction with their employer. In sum, all of the tasks presented were deemed important. Therefore, with this particular domain, aside from specific jargons relating to individual professions, it is important that laborers receive language training on producing interrogative sentences and understanding imperative sentences.

4.2.2 Language needs for interactions with colleagues

Table 9. Language needs for interactions with colleagues (N=40)

		M	SD
8	To ask for help/ guidance	4.18	0.703
9	To exchange ideas in a meeting	4.13	0.748
10	To give constructive comments	4.08	0.787
11	To discuss shift changing	4.05	0.740
12	To talk about duty division	4.13	0.714
13	To response to feedbacks from co-workers	4.10	0.735

In regards to language needs for interaction with co-workers (Table 9), participants, overall, showed less needs compared to interactions with their employer. The language needs which received the highest

agreement rate were related to ask for help, exchange ideas and duty division. Statements about needing English to ask for shift changing had the lowest mean score. One possible explanation is that this communicative task is often carried out between the laborers and their employers, rather than with co-workers.

4.2.3 Language needs for interactions with clients/customers

Table 10. Language needs for interactions with clients/customers (N=17)

		M	SD
14	To answer the telephone	4.00	1.029
15	To give out instructions	4.12	1.022
16	To offer options	4.06	1.056
17	To ask for confirmation	4.00	1.029
18	To talk about procedures	4.06	1.056
19	To introduce available sales	4.00	1.029
20	To deal with complaints/ reports	3.94	1.056

Among the participants taking the survey, only 17 reported needing to interact with clients and customers. The tasks which participants stated to require language the most were giving instructions and talking about procedures and options.

4.2.4 Language needs for interactions with documents/machinery

Table 11. Language needs for interactions with documents/machinery (N=28)

		M	SD
21	To read/write reports	3.57	1.015
22	To write memos	3.93	0.884
23	To read/ answer faxes	3.54	1.180
24	To read machine manuals	3.93	1.067
25	To understand terms on machines/ tools	4.18	0.889
26	To read/ listen to news/ media	4.00	1.069
27	To understand the timetables/ schedules	4.07	1.033
28	To write contracts	3.43	1.208

Table 11 shows the mean scores for statements related to written skills such as reading and writing. In our study, 28 participants reported needing to interact with documents or machinery. Understanding terms on machines/tools was considered the most relevant task. Unlike studies of Serafini and Torres [28] or Martin and Adrada-Rafael [21] in which the target context was professional business settings, for our study, participants were involved in mainly blue collar work. This reflected lower needs to read/write memos, reports, faxes, or contracts.

The survey also inquired laborers' beliefs on how such a preparation language program for labor export should be implemented. All 100% of the participants believed that oral skills such as listening and speaking were most important for their success in working abroad. Reading and writing skills were regarded as less important at 85% and 74%, respectively. However, the high figures still suggest a desire for training in all four skills, focusing on oral skills. This finding is congruent with Chatsungnoen's [7] and Le's [15] studies which also highlighted the necessity of speaking and listening skills in an occupational context. The finding is also justified by the nature of work of most labor export professions surveyed where spoken interactions are predominant compared to written ones. 97% of participants stated that prior language training before going to work abroad is useful. The majority believe that the training should last from 3-6 months. The contents they considered important in training include topics such as greetings, money,

numbers, time and date, working (jobs); basic grammar and vocabulary; and a focus on speaking and listening.

5. Conclusion and implications

In our study, we seek to explore and analyze language needs of Vietnamese laborers working in an overseas environment on tasks related to their daily life and their profession. Through inductive and deductive methods with semi-structured interviews and larger-scale questionnaire deployment, we have outlined the main communicative tasks which are essential to successful integration in a foreign workplace for laborers. As Long [17, 18] noted, learners are often unmindful of the specific tasks required in their future profession. Thus with our study, data collected from laborers who are working abroad provide reliable responses which are based on their lived experience. The results of the study serve as the foundation on which an English language training curriculum can be developed to prepare workers for labor migration. The particular tasks in each highlighted domain which received higher agreements should be focused on when learning aims and objectives of the curriculum are designed. Findings also offer insight on particular linguistic knowledge required in the curriculum, such as vocabulary domains and grammatical structures to serve the needs of the communicative tasks. Aside from language content, the research findings have also outlined essential language skills needed. The results also shed light on relevant principle themes and constituent topics which are appropriate to be included in said curriculum. Pedagogical considerations pertaining to instructional approach which places focus on oral interactions rather than written ones; time allotment of three to six months; and learning preferences gathered from participants such as preferred topics such as greetings, money, numbers, time and date, working (jobs) and basic grammar and vocabulary.

Our study did not satisfy all criteria for valid and reliable needs analysis [17, 18, 29]. The biggest limitation of our study was the lack of variety of occupational domains. Due to limited time and access, we relied on a convenience and purposive sample. Thus, we do not attempt to generalize the findings of our study to all vocations. We call for other studies to examine different occupations. As stated, ESP targets learners in specific contexts, and while all export laborers encounter more or less the same communicative tasks for basic survival in a foreign country, it would be irrational to claim that their occupational language tasks are all the same. We propose further inquiry on this topic with different domains and stakeholders such as ESP teachers, employers and labor export recruiters to further triangulate with our findings. Such research will provide a sound basis for the development of a language curriculum which targets the most essential needs of labor export. In addition, with time, different needs may surface and needs reported to be relevant at the time of survey may become irrelevant [28]. Thus, utilizing complementary instruments such as open-ended surveys carried out at different points in time and continual evaluation can help ensure a more versatile approach to curriculum design.

6. References

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Tóm tắt

Phân tích nhu cầu của người học được xem là một bước vô cùng quan trọng đầu tiên trong quá trình xây dựng và phát triển một chương trình đào tạo [26]. Chương trình học cần đáp ứng đúng nhu cầu học tập thực tế của người học về trình độ ngôn ngữ, sở thích và mối quan tâm. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu và phân tích nhu cầu ngôn ngữ cho xuất khẩu lao động của người lao động Việt Nam, cụ thể là lao động trên địa bàn Tỉnh Thừa Thiên Huế. Từ đó, có thể cung cấp cơ sở khoa học để xây dựng chương trình đào tạo bồi dưỡng năng lực tiếng Anh phù hợp với đối tượng là nguồn nhân lực xuất khẩu lao động của địa phương. Phương pháp phân tích nhu cầu ngôn ngữ được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu này là phân tích nhu cầu dựa trên nhiệm vụ (tasked-based needs analysis) [17]. 45 lao động đang làm việc ở nước ngoài đã được phỏng vấn và khảo sát về ngôn ngữ cần thiết cho các nhiệm vụ trong cuộc sống hàng ngày và lĩnh vực nghề nghiệp. Nghiên cứu đã cho thấy các nhu cầu ngôn ngữ của người lao động xuất khẩu liên quan đến cuộc sống hàng ngày (như ngôn ngữ tại siêu thị, bệnh viện, v.v.) và các nhiệm vụ nghề nghiệp (hiểu các yêu cầu của chủ lao động, tương tác với khách hàng, v.v.). Kết quả nghiên cứu tạo cơ sở khoa học cho việc thiết kế một chương trình giảng dạy ngôn ngữ cho đối tượng xuất khẩu lao động.

Từ khóa: phân tích nhu cầu ngôn ngữ, phân tích nhu cầu dựa trên nhiệm vụ, xuất khẩu lao động

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