Needs-based Short-term Course Design: A case study of Indonesian students’ Ph.D. bridging program

Hsiu-Hui Su
Department and Graduate Institute of Applied English, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung City, Taiwan, R.O.C

Tsui-Ying Lin
Lecturer, Language Center, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung City, Taiwan, R.O.C

Abstract
This paper presents a case study, which was the short-term bridging course as part of the Elite Study In Taiwan (ESIT) program took place in the University in central Taiwan. The paper aims to investigate: (1) how do the courses meet the needs of the learners from the students and teachers’ perspectives; (2) how do the courses help the learners with English ability from the students and teachers’ perspectives; (3) What is the students’ satisfaction level towards the program? The bridging program, which involved with three Indonesian senior university lecturers in an academic context includes EAP, IELTS Preparation and Chinese Courses, which were designed based on the students’ needs analysis. The data were collected through two questionnaires, the interviews with the teachers and students, course reports from four language teachers and the researcher’s journal and classroom observation. The results highlighted the students and teachers’ evaluation showed the courses have met the students’ needs. In the students’ interview, they commented the most they gained were cultural exchange and English ability enhancement. The students were highly satisfied with the university facilities, teacher qualification and the course arrangement. However, they also suggested more international, Muslim friendly environment in the campus should be enhanced.

Keywords: Case study, Needs analysis, Course design, Short-term course
INTRODUCTION

This case study is a 3-month short-term bridging program. Time and money constraints have formed a need for cost-effective course with distinctly defined goals (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Many researchers, including Mehdi (2008), have asserted that needs analysis in any ESP course is a primary role. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), all decisions related to content and method were based on the learners’ reasons of learning when an effective ESP course was designed. Strevens (1968) also posited a similar view, indicating that ESP is derived to meet learners’ needs. Iwai et al (1999) have referred the term “need analysis” to the activities for collecting information, which is used as the basis for developing a curriculum to meet the needs of a particular group of learners. Needs analysis is the base of ESP and leads to a highly focused course (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Johns (1991) indicated that needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities. The outcome of the needs analysis indicates the learners have different goals, with respect to their target situation needs. The outcome also stresses the advantages of needs analysis (Chostelidou, 2010). The development and application of the needs-based course can be regarded as highly effective in improving the learners’ performance and promoting their achievement in ESP (Chostelidou, 2011). Therefore, awareness of learners’ needs should be encouraged and the identification of learners’ needs should be undertaken. In this study, needs analysis has focused on learners’ learning situation, present situation and target situation analysis (Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Deshields et al (2005) stated that higher education institutions were focusing on identifying and satisfying the needs and expectations of their students. Aldridge and Rowley (1998) also suggested the levels of satisfaction strongly affected the student’s learning.
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The customized bridging courses are part of the Elite StudyIn Taiwan (ESIT) program, which took place in the University in central Taiwan. According to the ESIT program office, ESIT program organized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) is to provide necessary services for the higher education cooperation that exists between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries as well as to create new opportunities. In May of 2011 the Taiwan and Indonesian Ministries of Education reached an agreement to promote and encourage Indonesian university lecturers, who have not yet already done so, to pursue doctorate degrees in Taiwan. The ESIT office has brought together 50 of Taiwan's universities and colleges to form the ESIT Consortium, members of which will offer English-language master's and doctorate programs in various fields. Part of its role is to provide a bridge between the students of Southeast Asian countries and the ESIT Consortium schools and allow more students who hope to come to Taiwan to study to learn more about Taiwan's high quality higher education system and assist the Consortium schools to promote their programs. In order to promote higher education cooperation between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries and further the objective of training international professionals, the ESIT office has created a program to assist the Indonesian government with public funded students who will be sent to Taiwan for education purposes (MOE, 2014).

In this study, the bridging courses were designed based on students’ needs analysis conducted by Language Center of the University involved with three Indonesian senior university lecturers in an academic context. After revisions, the final courses included EAP Course, IELTS Preparation Course and Chinese Course. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the customized short-term course, three research questions are proposed:
1. How do the courses meet the needs of the learners from the students and teachers’ perspectives?
2. How do the courses help the learners with English ability from the students and teachers’ perspectives?
3. What is the students’ satisfaction level towards the courses offered by Language Center?

THE STUDY

A comprehensive course needs analysis is definitely needed in order to design an effective bridge course for the target learners- three Indonesian university lecturers. Before the course was designed, the parameters of Dudley Evans and St. John (1998, pp.145-154) were reviewed and the courses were planned as an intensive pre-study one with a narrow focus, assisting three homogenous students to bridge their doctoral study in Taiwan in the near future, which was also considered as a delayed needs for the learners. However, the Chinese course was designed to meet students’ immediate needs to adapt themselves to the new environment. In addition, learner’s performance was assessed at the end of the program. The courses were taught by four language teachers. One was teaching Chinese while the other three were teaching English, whose roles were to provide knowledge and activities specific to learners’ professions and to Chinese and its culture. In line with the students’ needs analysis survey, which illustrated their needs were to write up the proposal for their future study of doctoral program, to enhance English proficiency level and to learn Chinese to survive in Taiwan, the courses were first designed in three parts: EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course, focusing on writing up research paper and academic presentation; EST (English for Science and Technology) course, an integrated skills course to improve their overall English language ability related to their professions and survival Chinese. However, after two weeks, the teachers were informed, that the students, requested by Indonesian government, also as the sponsor, had to obtain one
English proficiency certificate during their study in Taiwan. Though what leaners’ “needs” and what their government “wants” may conflict and also external constraints would restrict what is possible (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), the teachers had to take both the learners’ “needs” and the sponsor’s “wants” into consideration. The course was accordingly redesigned as EAP Course, IELTS Preparation Course and Chinese Course.

The Participants

Three Indonesian senior university lecturers, two males (John and Jack, under pseudonyms) and one female (Jane, under a pseudonym), aged 37-43, participated in this 3-month bridging program for their future doctoral study in the University in central Taiwan. Two of them are holding a master degree and teaching in Civil Engineering Department in Transportation College in a university in Indonesia. The other one has a higher degree and teach in Architecture Department in Urban Planning College in Indonesia. Moreover, they have been studying English for more than 10 years. Two of them hold TOFEL certificate, while one has IELTS certificate at band 5. Two of them took courses in the Department of Construction Engineering and one in Architecture Department at the University. Nevertheless, all of them took English and Chinese courses in the Language Center of the University.

Four language teachers involved in the study were three Chinese teachers and one native English-speaking teacher. The former were teaching Chinese and English as a second language, while the latter who used to be an IELTS official examiner was teaching the students’ speaking skill in IELTS class. Besides, they all have more than 10-year teaching experience and hold at least a Master’s.
**Data Collection**

The importance of data collection procedures is widely acknowledged as an essential stage for the development of ESP course design, aiming at the identification of the demands of the learners’ needs (Chostelidou, 2011). In this case study, only the data of courses offered by Language Center were collected and analyzed. In the beginning of the course, an adapted needs analysis questionnaire was distributed to the students to investigate the student’s situational needs. It was composed of three sections: learning situation analysis (LSA); present situation analysis (PSA) and target situation analysis (TSA). At the end, another adapted questionnaire of students’ evaluation of the program (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) was administered. Moreover, a focus-group interview with the students and the interview with the teachers were conducted to find out how the teachers and the students evaluated the courses. Also, what the students’ satisfaction level with the courses was. Due to time constraints, the data from the teachers’ interview were collected by correspondence. In addition, the course reports collected from four language teachers were analyzed to help evaluate the courses. The teachers’ course report, researcher’s journal and classroom observation were also adopted.

**Course Description**

The program was administered for 11 weeks, 77 hours in total. The EAP and IELTS preparation classes took place once a week and lasted for two hours respectively in the morning and afternoon. The Chinese class held once a week for 3 hours in the evening. To be in line with the results of students’ needs analysis, the courses were designed to offer 1 Chinese course and 2 English courses. Based on the needs of the students to survive in the new environment, basic Chinese language and cultures were introduced. As to the English courses, which were initially designed as EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EST (English for Science and Technology) courses. The former was concentrating on research paper
writing and academic or conference presentation to equip students with needed academic writing and presentation skills for doctoral study, while the latter was planned to enhance students’ overall language ability in their professions. However, after two weeks of the program, in order to adapt to Indonesian government’s request for the evidence of English improvement, EST course had to be redesigned for a test oriented one, IELTS preparation course, with focus on integrated testing skills, in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Two teachers were responsible for this course; one of them, a Chinese teacher, was teaching them to enhance their listening, reading and writing skills, while the other one, a native English speaking teacher, was preparing students for the IELTS’s speaking test.

The three courses were assessed at the end of the program on the basis of the student participants’ research papers and presentations in the EAP class, their short oral presentations for the Chinese course, and the results of the pretest and posttest for the IELTS course. Figure 1 presents the course framework of this bridging short-term program.
FINDINGS

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

The needs analysis questionnaire was distributed to the students to investigate their situational needs. The questionnaire consists of 14 questions with multiple responses and is categorized into two parts: Personal Background and Situation Needs. Then the latter is sub-categorized in three parts: Learning Situation Analysis (LSA); Present Situation Analysis (PSA) and Target Situation Analysis (TSA).

Learning situation needs

Learning situation needs are concerning students’ subjective feelings, process-oriented needs (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), and particularly learning styles. The results showed the students’ learning styles were either “I pick up things by listening” or “I like group work”.

Figure 1: Needs-based Course Design of the Study
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**Present situation needs**

The present situation needs estimate student’s strengths and weakness in language, skills, learning experiences, and what learners already know, from where we can deduce learners’ lacks (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Regarding the students’ experience in writing articles for publication, Jack and John had respectively drafted either 1-3 or 4-6 articles; while John had published 4-6 and Jack and Jane had published 7-9 articles.

As far as the most difficult areas in English are concerned, Jack found writing was the most challenging, Jane found it challenging in listening, and John in listening and speaking. Concerning the areas of English the students would most like to improve, John and Jack considered speaking and writing skills needed to be improved, while Jane felt four English skills needed to be improved. With respect to what they did to improve their English, three of them liked self-studying, English songs, subtitled English movies/ DVD, Internet English and English news, while only John also liked chatting with foreign friends to improve his English. In relation to the activities they needed English at work, writing research paper and doing presentations were indicated the most needed. In addition, they used English the most to communicate with teachers, friends and academic society. Moreover, regarding how often they use English, Jane responded using English 6 hours a day, while John and Jack indicated they rarely used English in their daily life. Three of them used English either 4 hours a day or rarely for chatting with friends.

**Target situation needs**

The target situation needs are regarding students’ objective, perceived and product-oriented needs (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). With respect to what the students needed English for, doing research was their major concern. In dealing with their short-term goals, they aimed to level up IELTS score, to improve conversation skill and to be
able to write a proposal. As to the long-term goals, they would aim to study a Ph.D. and to be able to write high quality research papers and eventually present their research results at an international conference.

**Program Evaluation Questionnaire**

The questionnaire of students’ evaluation of the program was in an attempt to reveal learners’ satisfaction level with the program. There were 9 items of each course, including “achievement of objectives”, “amount of input”, “level of input”, “participants’ contribution”, “teachers’ handouts”, “number of exercises”, “duration of course”, “the classroom” and “other facilities”. In addition, three students found EAP and IELTS courses were most useful, but John indicated the Chinese course could have been improved. Further examination of individuals’ satisfaction level with each course yielded the results showed below.

All three students were highly satisfied with “teachers’ handouts”, “the classrooms” and “other facilities” of the three courses. Considering the EAP course, three students were very satisfied with its “level of input”, while John and Jane were very satisfied with “achievement of objectives”, “amount of input”, “participants’ contribution” and “duration of course”, only Jack was satisfied with above-mentioned items. Worth noting is that in respect with “number of exercises” only Jane was highly satisfied, while John and Jack were satisfied.

In relation to the IELTS course, John and Jane were very satisfied with “achievement of objectives”, “amount of input”, “level of input”, “participants’ contribution”, “number of exercises” and “duration of course”, while Jack was satisfied with 5 items mentioned above, except the “duration of course”.
With respect to the Chinese course, only Jane was highly satisfied with “achievement of objectives”, “amount of input” and “number of exercises”, while John and Jack were satisfied. John and Jane were highly satisfied with “level of input”, “participants’ contribution” and “duration of course”, while Jack was satisfied. Particularly, Jack was the only one feeling fairly satisfied with “duration of course” of the three courses.

The data derived from the open-ended questions highlighted the insights of the students. With respect to the best sessions of each course, the students indicated as follows.

EAP Course
The sessions of writing research and academic proposal. John stated,
“It’s very useful. Open my eyes that there are several rules & guidance to follow in writing research proposal.”

IELTS Course
Jane mentioned the best sessions of IELTS course were reading, listening and speaking, while Jack thought the listening session was the best. John commented,
“One of the key factors for us of this course is to apply for Ph.D. program abroad.”

Chinese Course
Jack showed the game part of this course was the best session, while John specified that,
“The course is useful in socializing with native students and at market, etc.”

It is interesting that John particularly mentioned that all the teachers were very punctual. “All time punctuality. They’re all the best.” he said.
Regarding the least satisfactory sessions, the students had no comments, but Jack suggested that,

“The writing session in IELTS course should be given more sufficient time.”

As to the suggested improvement for repeating courses, Jane concerned with the duration of the courses, while John suggested EAP and IELTS courses should have “an advance communication about what the needs of the students” and “more useful daily conversation and expression” should be taught in Chinese course.

The students were also asked to list their outcomes of the courses as the followings.

EAP Course
Jack and Jane stated that the course outcomes were improving their skill in writing journal paper and ability to academic writing. John responded,

“knowing how to write research proposals. Better knowledge we never been taught before.”

IELTS Course
They mentioned the course had helped improve their English knowledge and language, which can apply to IELTS test. John specified that

“It’s a better understanding of the tricks and tips of IELTS.”

Chinese Course
Jack and Jane stated that the course has enriched their knowledge of Mandarin and have learned Taiwanese culture. John mentioned that,

“Chinese is an additional useful language to communicate with locals.”
Finally, the students added comments and suggestions to the courses. Jane commented that EAP and IELTS courses are good for her to prepare for Ph.D. program, while John remarked that, “Overall, they are really very useful courses! Thank you very much for all your help and understanding.”

Pertaining to the course arrangement by Language Center, Jack suggested the signs of learning environment and facilities should be bilingual, at least Chinese and English, while Jane concerned the course hour can be from morning to evening. John also noted, if possible, it would be better to have classes blended with local students. Overall, all three students found this program useful and rated 5 on a 1-5 scale, and rated 9 of their satisfaction level of the program based on a 1-10 scale of satisfaction.

**Interview with the Students (focus group)**

The focus group interview with the students was to acquire the learners’ views concerning: (1) if the learners’ needs have been met; (2) if the learners’ English ability has been improved; (3) if the learners were satisfied with the program; (4) suggestions of the courses and program.

The interview data showed what the students gained the most from this program were cultural exchange and enhancing English ability. In addition, the EAP course could benefit their future career. They indicated that they have obtained advantages of culture, academic and in social communication. To comment on studying at the University, they emphasized that the University has very good facilities; the teacher qualification is better than Indonesia. With respect to the arrangement made by the Language Center in terms of service, facilities and teachers/ staff communication, they highly praised for teachers and staff communication and service, as well as facilities. Largely speaking, they spoke highly of the courses arranged by the Language Center. Nevertheless, the
students suggested more internationally friendly environment should be made available. For example, the English version of the university web pages was insufficient, especially for the students with language barriers. Same as mentioned in the questionnaire, one student suggested the Chinese course should be focused more on survival Chinese for their immediate needs in Taiwan for such a short period of time.

Interview with the Teachers

Due to time constraints, the interview with only two teachers was conducted by correspondence. The interview with the teachers was to probe: (1) what are the personal benefits of the bridging program; (2) how the teacher adjusted course design based on learners’ needs; (3) whether the course has met the learners’ needs; (4) whether the learners’ outcome is satisfactory; (5) suggestions of the bridging program.

The teacher who taught IELTS preparation course believed she has benefited a great deal from the program, such as enhanced knowledge of IELTS and classroom experience of English used as the instructional medium and its difficulties. She also commented that because this course was designed based on learners’ needs she had to adjust content accordingly. Overall, the teacher agreed the course has met the learners’ needs. The interviewee explained the listening, reading and speaking skills were focused in IELTS preparation course, while there was limited time for improving students’ writing skills. In regard to the learners’ learning outcome, the interviewee found the learners’ three English skills mentioned above have improved; in particular, they were able to distinguish sound differences. The students’ IELTS official test results echoed the progress in these three language skills. Due to the limit of time, students only could practice little in writing. Thus, students performed better in the three skills than writing in IELTS. In the last part of the interview section, the interviewees suggested that a preliminary needs analysis of the learners and the stakeholders should be obtained before
designing courses to save time and seek consistency of the needs from the learners, teaching establishment, and the learners’ employers.

The researcher, the head of Language Center and the instructor of EAP course, also answered the interview questions. She has gained the most experience from designing the program based on the students’ needs and learned how to be flexible during the process of on-going needs analysis. In addition, she stated that her cultural awareness has been enhanced. Once the students asked to reschedule the classes on Friday afternoon to attend the pray ceremony in the only mosque downtown, she immediately changed the schedule to accommodate to their needs. The researcher believed the course has met the needs of the learners and was highly satisfied with the students’ overall performance. She also suggested the prior communication with the learners and their employer to understand their needs is essential.

**Teachers’ Course Report**

Four teachers were asked to write a course report to evaluate the students’ overall performance. EAP course was a 16-hour academic writing course, which provided the guideline and practice for students to write a clear, well-written research paper. The students have found the language conventions very useful for their academic writing.

IELTS preparation course was a 20-hour IELTS intensive reading and listening course. In order to examine the effectiveness of the course and understand the learners’ improvement of language ability, a pretest and a posttest were administered at the beginning and the end of the course. The results showed that all three learners’ listening and reading ability has improved, except one student’s reading score was dropped in posttest. The teacher assumed an unexpected field trip right before the posttest causing his distraction from the
test. As to the speaking part, the teacher commented and suggested below.

“John had wide enough range of vocabulary to discuss most issues in some depth and was coherent most of the time. He should be careful of hesitating too many times as this made him lose his rhythm when speaking.”

Jack “had many problems with grammatical accuracy although his fluency was quite good. He should possibly paraphrase questions more and know more expressive vocabulary.”, while “Jane can be very nervous at times, which reduces her performance quite considerably. She managed to keep going by repeating and hesitating.”

Chinese course was a 33-hour course to prepare students the basic daily conversation via Pinyin system. The teacher rated the students’ listening and speaking ability AA to A+A+. “They all showed their passion and tried their best to learn this new and unfamiliar language,” the teacher commented.

**Researcher’s Journal and Class Observation**

The researcher, also responsible for the program and the teacher of EAP course, documented her thoughts of the program and the class observation. Before the students arrived, the teachers co-designed the courses and split the teaching hours. Owing to the insufficient information, the teachers could only assume what the students’ needs were and came up with a preliminarily course plan. A needs analysis questionnaire was conducted in the first class. Based on students’ needs, the EAP course was focused on writing research and academic proposal. However, after two weeks, the teachers were notified that the student’s sponsor, the Indonesian government, requested the information of the program, the students’ learning outcomes, and their portfolios, as well as the evidence of the students’ English improvement such as IELTS certificate. Therefore, one of the courses, EST
had to be redesigned as an IELTS preparation course. The comment was noted that,

“In order to adapt to the learners’ sponsor’s wants, we had to change the course design. Is it really what the students need? I wondered.”

Observing the EAP class, she realized the students’ English speaking was not very fluent. Nevertheless, she noted,

“They are all experienced teachers in the universities and already have some ideas of research report writing, I decided to move the teaching a little faster.”

CONCLUSION

The research data highlight the success of the program in meeting the needs of the learners as the students have benefited from the program culturally, academically and in social communication in terms of cultural exchange and English development. The teachers are satisfied with the students’ performance. In addition, the students are highly satisfied with the courses provided by Language Center.

However, after cross-examining the findings, there are few issues that deserve more attention. First of all, the findings of the study indicate the students are troubled with the duration of the courses, the writing session in IELTS course in particular. It can be mirrored with the teacher’s view and the students’ lower score of the writing part showed in the official IELTS test due to insufficient writing hours. In addition, the Chinese course should focus more on useful basic daily expressions for the students’ immediate needs to survive in the new environment, instead of following the content of the textbook. It is also indicated that the prior discussion regarding the needs of students in course design is necessary. However, because of the short notice of setting up the program, it is impossible to discuss the students’ needs in advance. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggested needs analysis should be employed prior to the beginning of the
course, which is referred to as “initial needs analysis”. What’s more, according to the students’ interview accounts, they all spoke highly of the University and the facilities of its Language Center, teachers’ qualification and course arrangement. The study of Butt & Rehman (2010) showed the determinants such as teachers’ expertise, courses offered, learning environment and classroom facilities have significant and positive impact on students’ satisfaction in higher education.

Furthermore, the teachers’ major concern is the discrepancy between the learners’ needs and employer’s wants. Learners may have a clear idea of their needs and therefore have a view as to their lacks. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that the learners’ view will encounter with the perceptions of other stakeholders, the sponsors, in this case (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In Salazar (2011), for syllabus design purposes, objectives and goals were highlighted as a result of needs analysis based on the company’s needs and the course participants’ needs and wants. Afifi (1991) mentioned the identification of learners’ needs should be undertaken by three separate bodies: the learners, the teaching establishment, and the learner’s employer. Edwards (2000) stated that severe time constraints were very likely to make the program overly difficult. Hence, it is advisable to conduct a needs analysis survey in advance to both learners and the learners’ employer as it may minimize the inconsistency of needs and wants from both parties to make program design more effectively. Additionally, to attract more international students to study in the universities in Taiwan, more internationalized, religion-friendly campus should be established.
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS
First Author:

**Hsiu-Hui Su** is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Applied English Department at Chaoyang University of Technology, Taiwan. Her research interests lie in English for Specific Purposes and Remedial English Education.

Co-author:

**Tsui-Ying Lin** is a Lecturer of the Language Center at Chaoyang University of Technology, Taiwan. Her research interests are in Extensive reading and Language testing and assessment.