# WHAT DOES THE INDUSTRY REALLY NEED? A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF INDUSTRY PERSONNEL'S PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS OF VOCATIONAL GRADUATES

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The current study was carried out as an attempt to find out the perceptions of the industrial personnel about developing an English module that complements the requirements of the industry. At present the University of Vocational Technology (Univotec) offers a module titled "Communication Skills" which is a composition of English for General Purposes (EGP). However, the students' examination results and the performance at the industry reveal that EGP does not seem to offer the skills the students need to succeed academically and professionally. This paper presents a segment of a much larger needs analysis conducted with all stakeholders involved in vocational English. In this paper I will present the perceptions of the industry personnel and how their perceptions can be utilized to develop a more suitable and up-to-date English language programme for vocational undergraduates.

The current research was carried out with 15 industrial personnel from the field of Mechatronics who employ the undergraduates of Univotec who follow Bachelor of Technology in Mechatronics for industrial training as well as in relation to job placements. At the heart of the study is a Needs Analysis (NA). The centrality of the NA lies in the crucial role it plays in developing a curriculum. The study incorporates the NA process of Brown (2009) due to its feasibility. As inspired by Richards (2005) who highlights that 'qualitative and quantitative data do not inhabit different worlds but are different ways of recording observations of the same world' (p.36), a mixed methods research design had been adopted in the study. Thus primary data collection methods such as quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (focused group discussions) methods were used. Both types of data collection were used for data triangulation as it helps to strengthen the collected data to increase credibility and validity. The sampling technique that is used in the study is purposive sampling and the sample consisted of both male and female participants and they were Sinhala and Tamil first language (L1) speakers. While a thematic analysis was carried out in terms of qualitative data, quantitative data was used descriptively

The results revealed that a majority of the industrial personnel laid a strong emphasis on language skills that would be more essential to perform a task at the industry level. The type of English that the industry highlights aligns with a more ESP content while some expressions supported a more EGP content. The perceptions of the industrial personnel recommend an inclusion of more authentic activities such as reading of manuals, e-mails, letters and procurement related

documents in the English curriculum.  The industry suggests a need for Technical vocabulary to be possessed by the vocational undergraduates.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for General Purposes (EGP), Needs Analysis (NA), language skills, Industry Needs

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