

## **Graduates’ Voices: A Closer Examination of Graduate’s Perceptions of English Language Skills Needed for Effective Performance in the Industry**

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The current study was carried out in an attempt to explore the perceptions of the graduates of University of Vocational Technology (Univotec) about developing an English module that complements the requirements of the industry. Currently Univotec offers a module titled “Communication Skills” to help them cope with their degree programmes and this is a composition of English for General Purposes (EGP). However, as per the students’ examination results and the performance at the industry reveal that EGP does not seem to offer the skills the students require to succeed professionally. This paper presents a segment of a much larger needs analysis conducted with all stakeholders involved in teaching “Communication Skills” and the degree Bachelor of Technology in Mechatronics. In this presentation, the researcher will present the perceptions of the graduates and how their perceptions can be utilized to develop a more suitable and up to date English language programme for vocational undergraduates. The respective research was carried out with 30 graduates from the field of Mechatronics who have successfully completed the Bachelor of Technology in Mechatronics and are currently employed with various industries. The core of the study is a Needs Analysis (NA) and its importance lies in the crucial role it plays in developing a curriculum. The study has adopted a mixed method research design. The core of the study is a NA process of Brown (2009) which has been incorporated for its feasibility. Thus the researcher has utilized primary data collection methods such as quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (focused group discussions). The reason for the incorporation of the said methods of data collection is for data triangulation as it helps to strengthen the collected data to increase credibility and validity. 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 descriptively analyzed. The results revealed that majority of the graduates insisted that there is a strong need for English Language Proficiency which would be more essential to perform a task at the industry level. The graduates highlighted a need for an English Language module that would consist of a blend of both ESP and EGP. The perceptions of the graduates recommended the need for more of authentic activities that include such as reading of manuals, e-mails, letters role plays and procurement related documents in the English curriculum. There was a strong need for Technical English highlighted in the study to be effective performers at the industry.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for General Purposes (EGP), Perceptions of Vocational Students

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