

# A Needs Analysis of Postgraduate ESP Students Majoring in Hospitality Management in Iran

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## Abstract

The present study aimed at running a needs analysis concerning the needs and requirements of postgraduate ESP students majoring in hospitality management in Iranian universities. To do so, a descriptive survey was designed in which the data was gathered through interviews and the needs analysis questionnaire which was developed and validated for the purpose of the study. The participants of the study consisted of 20 PhD candidates and 30 master's students majoring in hospitality management in Iranian universities. The data gathered by means of the questionnaire were subjected to descriptive analysis and based on the results obtained, the most common issues stated by students were (a) the present status of the English language educational system is not satisfactory; (b) the general English textbooks do not meet the students' needs; (c) students' motivation for the English language is not boosted; (d) the number of hours dedicated to the English language is not adequate; (e) undue emphasis is paid to grammar which has led to the students' learning frustration; (f) the first and the most important needs for the English components are reading comprehension, writing, and translation, vocabulary and essay writing skills are highly required by the postgraduate students; (g) the content of the specialized English textbooks must be more relevant to the students' fields of study and specialized English courses should be taught by the ESP instructors. There is the hope that the findings and results of the present study help EFL curriculum designers and textbook developers to enhance English language instruction at universities in general, and in hospitality management discipline, in particular.

**Key words:** Needs analysis, Postgraduate students, ESP, Hospitality management

## **1. Introduction**

ESP is believed to be a "reaction against conventional foreign language instruction" (Stevens, 1977, p. 145). Needs analysis is part of four absolute characteristics of ESP and is referred to as "needs assessment" in Stevens's definition (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991, p. 116). Stevens (1977) also contends that ESP teaching can be viewed as a response to the requirement to study the learner and to analyze his needs and "to devise means of helping him to learn that which he wishes to learn, not just that which has been defined by some externally-imposed 'general' syllabus" (p. 152). An accurate needs analysis "aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English" (Robinson, 1991, p. 3). Though some needs analysis research have been done in the Iranian context (Amiri, 2000; Saffarzadeh, 1981; Shahini, 1988), no specific needs analysis have been conducted concerning the ESP needs, requirements, and wants of hospitality management students at the graduate and post graduate levels. The present article is an attempt to present the results of the need analysis done for the postgraduate ESP students majoring in hospitality management in Iranian context.

## **2. Context of the Study**

Iranian students experience almost seven years of English education within the framework of secondary education and spend a lot of time and money on studying English, meanwhile the outcome is not satisfactory (Amiri, 2000). The same trend continues at the university level and higher education centers. Though the importance of the English language in the academic domain cannot be neglected, its training has not been successful for various reasons such as "lack of the required background knowledge among the students, a little time allotted to the English language teaching at the university level" (Shahini, 1988, p. 6), and "paying little attention to writing speaking, and listening skills in university classes" (Farhady, Hezaveh, & Hedayati, 2010, p.3). Focusing on translation skill is another problem in this regard. "The way English is taught at the universities is often translation oriented because the main objective is to enable students in different majors to read and understand materials written in English in their own majors" (Farhady, et al, 2010, p.13).

The skills Iranian students are at least expected to gain relative mastery over are reading comprehension, translation, and writing (Amiri, 2000). However, Iranian learners in the postgraduate level find such skills problematic as the other skills and show poor performance in this regard. An assumption which could be phrased is students' lack of awareness about their own needs, wants, and requirements. The present study has mainly focused on the perceived needs of postgraduate ESP students majoring in hospitality management in Iranian context.

## **3. Literature Review**

West (1994) asserts that needs analysis was generally informal until 1970s and little research was carried out on this concept so that language teachers conducted needs analysis based on some kind of intuitive or informal analysis of students' needs. Richterich and Chancerell (1980) put forward some significant aims of needs analysis: to identify elements which will

lend themselves to training, to establish the relative importance, and to find out what is indispensable, necessary, or just desirable.

In a survey, Keyoonwong (1998) inquired about the needs and wants of English in the tourism industry in Chiang Mai. The results revealed that the tourism personnel gave priority to speaking and listening skills as most important and necessary, followed by reading, writing, and translation. In fact, the English language proficiency of the staff was not at a satisfactory level from the point of view of employers; the personnel needed more practice regarding the skills of listening, reading, speaking, writing, and translation.

Boonyawattana (1999) also focused on needs of tourism students learning English. The results revealed the importance of speaking as the most needed skill followed by listening, reading, and writing. An English language needs analysis of tour guidance students of Baskent University was carried out by Ekici (2003). Students, English instructors and curriculum coordinators were considered as the respondents in the experiment. The data collection instruments used were the attitude scale, students' needs assessment questionnaire and ESP identification form. The results indicated that speaking, listening, and specialist vocabulary should be given more priority to satisfy the ESP needs of tour guidance students.

This lack of needs analysis studies in literature together with the urgent need to design a syllabus, motivated Orang'i (2013) to conduct a needs analysis to identify the needs of learners pursuing tour guide ESP course in Kenya. According to him, "needs analysis can be done on one or on all the language skills depending on the scope of a particular study" (Orang'i, 2013, p. 35). Thus, he made an attempt to find out the target and language learning needs of tour guide ESP students as perceived by the learners, instructors, and firms' managers. Target situation analysis and present situation analysis (Munby, 1978) and Learning-Centered Approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) were used as the theoretical frameworks for the study. The results of the questionnaires and interview revealed that the learners considered speaking as the most important skill followed by listening, reading, writing, translation, and specialist vocabulary respectively. Indeed, Orang'i's results corroborated those of Keyoonwong's (1998) as employers were not satisfied with the English proficiency level of their tourism personnel.

Spivack (1997, p. 27) believes that the changes within the tourism and hospitality industry call for "skill development issues" necessary for the future managers. In order to employ new staff, skills should be given priority (Christou, 1999). Indeed, multicultural abilities and skills are more significant for employees in the hospitality industry (Sigala, 2001). A great number of researchers also believe that as globalization is happening for hospitality, specific skills would be of paramount importance for developing a career (Damitio, 1988; Damitio & Schmidgall, 1993; Hsu & Gregory, 1995; Knutson & Patton, 1992; Ladkin, 1999; Ley, 1980; Riley & Turam, 1989).

Hotel managers should have multiple technical skills (Baum, 1990; Finegold, Wagner, & Mason, 2000; Jauhari, 2006). Riley (2005) contends that a Food and Beverage (F&B) manager must be able to make a decision buying stocks, storing, costing, and processing. Ruddy (1990), Stutts (1995), and Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) argued that effective

communication skills are fundamental for career development in the hospitality industry. Technical, leadership and interpersonal skills (Kay & Russette, 2000) and managerial accounting skills (Damitio & Schmidgall, 1991) are also declared as significant for hotel managers.

As theoretical aspects are usually dominant in education, Harkison (2004) believes that future managers have to be able to apply theory in practice (work) and expand their work competencies. In this regard, many researchers have affirmed the advantages of internship and Career Educational Programs (CEP) as a cornerstone for hospitality students when they decide to join the industry (Jauhari, 2006; Posey, Carlisle, & Smellie, 1988; Ricci, 2005).

Previous research has acknowledged that hospitality management degrees usually lack importance in the real world (Harkison, 2004; Steele, 2003). However, Hospitality management students often consider the value of their degrees higher than what their employees do (Collins, 2002; Li & Kivela, 1989; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Regarding the importance of the needs analysis issue and lack of studies in EFL contexts, the present study makes an effort to analyze the needs of ESP students majoring in hospitality management at graduate level in Iran from the point of view of the students, instructors, and managers in order to fill the perceived gap among theory and practice.

#### **4. Research Questions**

The main research question of the study was:

What are the perceived needs of the postgraduate ESP students majoring in hospitality management in Iran?

This research question was divided into six minor research questions as follows:

What are the perceived needs of the M.A. students in terms of specific skills in English?

What are the perceived needs of the PhD students in terms of specific skills in English?

What are the perceived needs of the M.A. students in terms of general skills in English?

What are the perceived needs of the PhD students in terms of general skills in English?

Which topics are more interesting for the M.A. students to be included in their course books?

Which topics are more interesting for the PhD students to be included in their course books?

#### **5. Method**

##### *5.1 Participants*

The participants of the study were fifty Iranian EFL postgraduate learners (20 PhD candidates and 30 M.A. students) of Hospitality Management in Iranian universities, which equals 1/10 of the whole postgraduate students' population in this major. The participants voluntarily took part in the study and filled out the validated needs analysis questionnaire.

### *5.2 Instrumentation*

The data for this study were collected by using questionnaire which is the most common method used for gathering information in most of the survey-based researches. To this end, a needs analysis questionnaire (in Persian), was utilized to cover all the information sought for. The questionnaire was comprised of three major sections namely, students' ability in the English language, students' needs in specific and general skills in English, and topics which are more interesting for the students to be included in their course books. The first section includes five levels of ability including advanced, upper intermediate, lower intermediate, post-beginner, and beginner levels. The second section is comprised of 20 items in two subsets of "Specific Skills in English" including items; 1, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18 and 19, and "General skills needed by hospitality students" including items; 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17 and 20. The third part however includes 28 items which cover four areas; area 1 which contains hospitality management including items: 1, 6, 8,9,10, 23, 24, & 25, area 2 which covers hotel industry and management of hotels, including items: 2, 11, 20, 21, 26, 27, & 28, area 3 which is about main issues of tourism and hospitality, including items: 3, 4, 5, 18, 19, & 22, and area 4 which focuses on tourism, culture, and history including items: 7, 12, 13,14,15,16, &17.

### *5.3 Questionnaire Construction*

The following steps were taken to construct the questionnaires. First, the questionnaire was devised on the basis of the literature review and the results obtained from a pilot study which was conducted with 30 university students majoring in hospitality management. The instrument for the pilot study was the interview in which the researcher elicited the required information. Second, on the basis of the above-mentioned points, the items of the questionnaire were constructed, and then an impressionistic survey with the scientific board members of the hospitality management in Tehran University was carried out to examine and modify the preliminary versions of the items and determine the face & content validity of the questionnaires. Third, to make sure that the questionnaire items were unambiguous, clear, understandable, and relevant, another pilot study with 30 randomly selected teaching staff and students including graduate students of hospitality management was conducted at Tabriz University. As a result, some modifications were made on the questionnaire. Fourth, because of the interval data, the reliability of the questionnaire was established through Cronbach's alpha and  $\alpha=0.89$  was obtained.

### *5.4 Procedure*

The questionnaire was distributed among the students and in some cases it was emailed to them. Out of 100 questionnaires sent about 70 were returned of which 50 complete ones were selected. The data were analyzed and reported.

## **6. Data Analysis and Results**

### *Research Question 1*

What are the perceived needs of the M.A. students in terms of Specific Skills in English?

The MA students have identified writing (56.7%) as their highest need. This was followed by; reading comprehension (53.3%), translation (50%) and vocabulary and essay writing (46.7%). They also attributed great importance to translation and essay writing (50%) and grammar and reading comprehension (46.7%). Listening was their least important need (36.7%) and they also attributed little importance to listening (50%) and speaking (36.7%).

Table 1. MA Students' Specific Needs

Item		Choices					Total
		Very Little	Little	No Idea	Much	Very Much	
Reading	Count	0	0	0	14	16	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%
Writing	Count	0	0	0	13	17	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	43.3%	56.7%	100.0%
Speaking	Count	0	11	19	0	0	30
	% within Item	0.0%	36.7%	63.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Listening	Count	11	15	2	2	0	30
	% within Item	36.7%	50.0%	6.7%	6.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Vocabulary	Count	0	0	6	10	14	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	33.3%	46.7%	100.0%
Grammar	Count	0	5	8	14	3	30
	% within Item	0.0%	16.7%	26.7%	46.7%	10.0%	100.0%
Essay Writing	Count	0	0	1	15	14	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	50.0%	46.7%	100.0%
RC Journals	Count	1	1	9	7	12	30
	% within Item	3.3%	3.3%	30.0%	23.3%	40.0%	100.0%
Tables & Graphs	Count	2	4	8	13	3	30
	% within Item	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	43.3%	10.0%	100.0%
Summary	Count	2	3	9	12	4	30
	% within Item	6.7%	10.0%	30.0%	40.0%	13.3%	100.0%
Translation	Count	0	0	0	15	15	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	16	39	62	115	98	330
	% within Item	4.8%	11.8%	18.8%	34.8%	29.7%	100.0%

### Research Question 2

What are the perceived needs of the PhD students in terms of Specific Skills in English?

The Ph.D. students have identified writing, reading and translation (55%) as their highest needs. These were followed by vocabulary (50%) essay writing (45%). The participants also attributed great importance to essay writing grammar and summary writing (50%). Listening

was their least important need (30%) and they also attributed little importance to listening (50%) and speaking (35%).

Table 2. Ph.D. Students' Specific Needs

		Choices					Total
		Very Little	Little	No Idea	Much	Very Much	
Reading	Count	0	0	0	9	11	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Writing	Count	0	0	0	9	11	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Speaking	Count	0	7	13	0	0	20
	% within Item	0.0%	35.0%	65.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Listening	Count	6	11	2	1	0	20
	% within Item	30.0%	55.0%	10.0%	5.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Vocabulary	Count	0	0	3	7	10	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	15.0%	35.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Item Grammar	Count	0	3	5	10	2	20
	% within Item	0.0%	15.0%	25.0%	50.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Essay Writing	Count	0	0	1	10	9	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	50.0%	45.0%	100.0%
RC Journals	Count	1	1	5	5	8	20
	% within Item	5.0%	5.0%	25.0%	25.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Tables & Graphs	Count	1	2	6	9	2	20
	% within Item	5.0%	10.0%	30.0%	45.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Summary	Count	1	2	5	10	2	20
	% within Item	5.0%	10.0%	25.0%	50.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Translation	Count	0	0	0	9	11	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	9	26	40	79	66	220
	% within Item	4.1%	11.8%	18.2%	35.9%	30.0%	100.0%

### 6.3 Research Question 3

What are the perceived needs of the M.A. students in terms of General skills in English?

The MA students have identified ability to listen to news (40%) as their highest general need. This was followed ability to use a dictionary (36.7%). They also attributed great importance to ability of listening to the news (53.3%) and writing CV (40%). Writing emails (63.3%) and using the internet (40%) were the least important needs. They also attributed little importance to internet (46.7%) and learning the Basic English (40%).



Table 3. MA Students' General Needs

		Choices					Total
		Very Little	Little	No Idea	Much	Very Much	
Note-Taking	Count	16	14	0	0	0	30
	% within Item	53.3%	46.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Dictionary	Count	0	2	7	10	11	30
	% within Item	0.0%	6.7%	23.3%	33.3%	36.7%	100.0%
LC Reports	Count	1	9	18	2	0	30
	% within Item	3.3%	30.0%	60.0%	6.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Internet	Count	12	14	4	0	0	30
	% within Item	40.0%	46.7%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Item CV	Count	1	1	11	12	5	30
	% within Item	3.3%	3.3%	36.7%	40.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Presentation	Count	0	2	17	11	0	30
	% within Item	0.0%	6.7%	56.7%	36.7%	0.0%	100.0%
News	Count	0	0	2	16	12	30
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%	100.0%
Email	Count	19	11	0	0	0	30
	% within Item	63.3%	36.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Basic English	Count	0	12	18	0	0	30
	% within Item	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	49	65	77	51	28	270
	% within Item	18.1%	24.1%	28.5%	18.9%	10.4%	100.0%

#### 6.4 Research Question 4

What are the perceived needs of the PhD students in terms of General skills in English?

The Ph.D. students have identified ability to use a dictionary and listening to news (40%) as their highest general needs. They also attributed great importance to ability to listen to news, writing CV and presentation (40%). Writing emails (60%) and note-taking techniques (55%) were the least important needs. They also attributed little importance to internet (50%) and note-taking (45%).



Table 4. Ph.D. Students' General Needs

		Choices					Total
		Very Little	Little	No Idea	Much	Very Much	
Note-Taking	Count	11	9	0	0	0	20
	% within Item	55.0%	45.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Dictionary	Count	0	1	4	7	8	20
	% within Item	0.0%	5.0%	20.0%	35.0%	40.0%	100.0%
LC Reports	Count	1	5	13	1	0	20
	% within Item	5.0%	25.0%	65.0%	5.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Internet	Count	8	10	2	0	0	20
	% within Item	40.0%	50.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Item CV	Count	1	1	6	8	4	20
	% within Item	5.0%	5.0%	30.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Presentation	Count	0	1	11	8	0	20
	% within Item	0.0%	5.0%	55.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
News	Count	0	0	1	11	8	20
	% within Item	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	55.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Email	Count	12	8	0	0	0	20
	% within Item	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Basic English	Count	0	7	13	0	0	20
	% within Item	0.0%	35.0%	65.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	33	42	50	35	20	180
	% within Item	18.3%	23.3%	27.8%	19.4%	11.1%	100.0%

### 6.5 Research Question 5

Which topics are more interesting for the Ph.D. students to be included in their course books?

Majority of the Ph.D. respondents (80 %) believed that issues related to hospitality and management should be included in their textbooks. 20 percent of respondents have expressed no idea and no one disagreed with the inclusion of hospitality and management in their textbooks.

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages; Topics to Be Included in Textbooks (PhD Students)

MA		Choices			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
Hospitality & Management	Count	0	32	128	160
	% within Section	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Hotel Industry & Management	Count	0	57	83	140
	% within Section	0.0%	40.7%	59.3%	100.0%
Main Issues in Tourism and Management	Count	0	90	30	120
	% within Section	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Tourism, Culture and History	Count	75	55	10	140
	% within Section	53.6%	39.3%	7.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	75	234	251	560
	% within Section	13.4%	41.8%	44.8%	100.0%

A lower percentage (59.3 %) believed that issues related to hotel industry and management should be included in their textbooks, while about 40 percent of the respondents had no idea about this issue. A low percentage (25 %) believed that main issues related to tourism and management should be included in the textbooks. Majority of the respondents (75 %) had no idea, and finally; majority of the respondents (53.6 %) disagreed with the inclusion of topics related to tourism, culture and history in their textbooks while 39.3 percent had no idea and only 7.1 percent agreed with this idea.

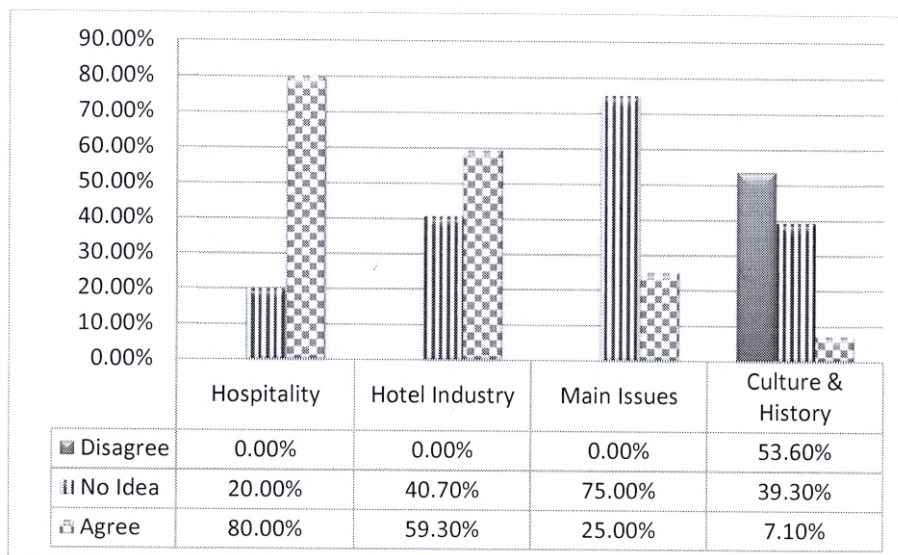


Figure 1. Ph.D. Students' Favored Topics

6.6 Research Question 6

Which topics are more interesting for the MA students to be included in their course books?

The majority of the MA respondents (96.6 %) believed that issues related to hospitality and management should be included in their textbooks. Only 3.4 percent had no idea about this issue.

Table 6. Frequencies and Percentages; Topics to Be Included in Textbooks (MA. Students)

Ph.D.		Choices			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
Hospitality & Management	Count	0	8	225	233
	% within Section	0.0%	3.4%	96.6%	100.0%
Hotel Industry & Management	Count	0	126	84	210
	% within Section	0.0%	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Main Issues in Tourism and Management	Count	0	138	42	180
	% within Section	0.0%	76.7%	23.3%	100.0%
Tourism, Culture and History	Count	100	96	14	210
	% within Section	47.6%	45.7%	6.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	100	368	365	833
	% within Section	12.0%	44.2%	43.8%	100.0%

A lower percentage (40 %) believed that issues related to hotel industry and management should be included in their textbooks, while about 60 percent of the respondents had no idea about this issue. A low percentage (23.3 %) believed that main issues related to tourism and management should be included in their textbooks. Majority of the respondents (76.7 %) had no idea. And finally; majority of the respondents (47.6 %) disagreed with the inclusion of topics related to tourism, culture and history in their textbooks while 45.7 percent had no idea and only 6.7 percent agreed with this idea.

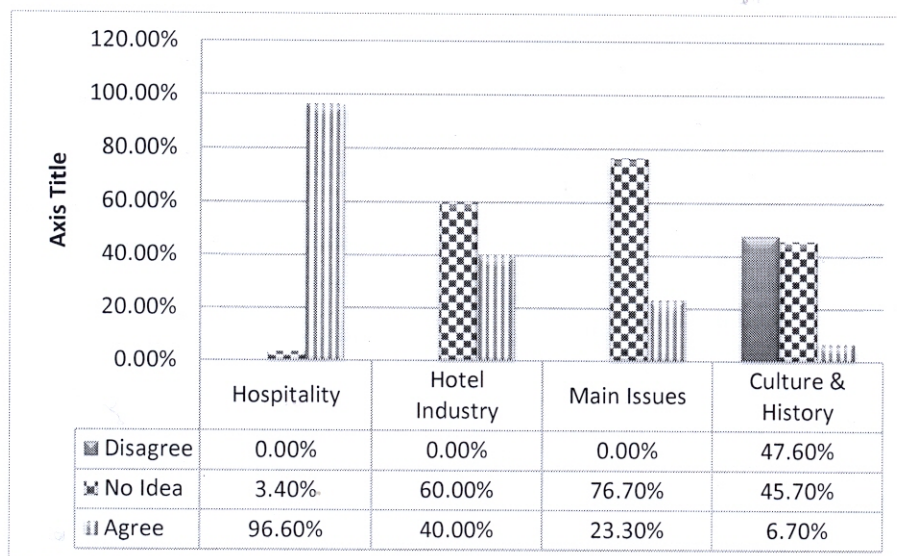


Figure 2. MA Students' Favored Topics

## Reliability Indices

The Cronbach's alpha reliability indices for the needs and topics were .74 and .91.

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Needs	.746	20
Topics	.917	28

Table 7. Item \* Choices Crosstabulation % within Item

	Item	Choices					Total
		Very Little	Little	No Idea	Much	Very Much	
	1	55.0%	45.0%				100.0%
	2		5.0%	20.0%	35.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	3	5.0%	25.0%	65.0%	5.0%		100.0%
	4	40.0%	50.0%	10.0%			100.0%
	5	5.0%	5.0%	30.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	6		5.0%	55.0%	40.0%		100.0%
	7			5.0%	55.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	8	60.0%	40.0%				100.0%
	9		35.0%	65.0%			100.0%
	Total	18.3%	23.3%	27.8%	19.4%	11.1%	100.0%

## 7. Conclusion

Both MA and PhD students have identified writing, reading and translation as their highest needs. This was followed by vocabulary and essay writing. They also attributed great importance to essay writing and summary writing. Listening was their least important need and they also attributed little importance to listening and speaking. Writing emails and using the internet were among the least important needs perceived. Majority of the Ph.D. and M.A. respondents believed that issues related to hospitality and management issues should be included in their textbooks. A minor percentage of respondents expressed no idea and no one disagreed with the inclusion of hospitality and management concepts in the textbooks. A lower percentage believed that issues related to hotel industry and management should be included in their textbooks and the same was mentioned about the issues related to tourism and management to be included in the textbooks. A lower percentage believed that issues related to hotel industry and management should be included in the textbooks while majority of the respondents disagreed with the inclusion of topics related to tourism, culture and history in their textbooks.

The most common issues stated by students were: a) the present status of the English language educational system is not satisfactory; b) the general English textbooks do not meet the students' needs; c) students' motivation for the English language is not boosted; d) the

credit/hour dedicated to the English language is not adequate; e) undue emphasis is paid to 'Grammar' which has led to the students' learning frustration; f) the first and the most important needs to the English components are: 'Reading Comprehension', 'Writing', and 'Translation', moreover, 'Vocabulary' and 'Essay Writing' skills are highly required by the postgraduate students; g) the content of the specialized English textbooks must be more relevant to the students' fields of study and Specialized English courses should be taught by the ESP instructors. There is the hope that the findings and results of the present study help EFL curriculum designers and textbook developers to enhance English language instruction at Universities in general, and in hospitality management discipline, in particular.

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