

An English Language Needs Analysis of University Preparatory School Students at a State University

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Abstract

This mixed-method study aimed to investigate the English language needs of preparatory (prep) school students in relation to their future departmental studies. The study was conducted at a state university in İstanbul, Turkey. Quantitative data came from a needs analysis questionnaire administered to 435 prep school students and were analysed by descriptive analysis. The qualitative data were gathered from a focus group interview conducted with randomly selected seven prep school students and analysed through pattern-coding. Findings revealed that students perceived all four language skills important, however speaking skill was perceived to be more important than the others. For the students, skill-specific tasks were generally significant for their future studies. The tasks receiving the highest ratings belonged to the listening and speaking skills. Finally, the students reported that they rarely or sometimes experienced difficulty in skill-specific strategies. Speaking strategies had higher mean scores compared to others, implying that students found using speaking strategies more challenging.

Keywords: needs assessment, preparatory schools, EFL students.

Introduction

‘Needs’ is defined as “the gap between the current performance and the desired results” and, as an umbrella term, embraces many aspects such as the goals, background and abilities of learners, their language proficiency levels, or preferred ways of learning and teaching (Hyland, 2019, p. 58). Needs assessment or analysis is concerned with the identification and analysis of learners’ needs which involve what they know, what they do not know or what they want to know (Brown, 2016; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Needs analysis emerged in language teaching through the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement in 1960s when there was a growing demand for specialized language programs (Richards, 2001). ESP is defined as “a language course or program of instruction in

which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 198). The ESP movement recognizes needs analysis as “the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made” (Belcher, 2006, p. 135). Although needs analysis started with ESP, it has become an integral part of language curriculum development in general English programs and provided the basis for lesson planning, syllabus design, materials development and evaluation, instructional design and assessment development (Richards, 1990; Widodo, 2017). As Long (2005) emphasized “[t]here is an urgent need for courses of all kinds to be relevant and to be seen to be relevant to the needs of specific groups of learners” (p. 19).

In an earlier definition, Nunan (1988) defined needs analysis as “a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design” (p.75). In Witkin and Altschuld’s (1995) definition, needs analysis was referred to as “a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources” (p. 20). Brown’s (1995) broad definition described needs analysis as a “systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situations” (p.36). Likewise, Sysoyev (2000) described needs analysis as, “having the aim of bringing together the required and desired needs, and of determining goals and objectives to conceptualize the content of the course” (p.13). In Graves’ (2000) words, “needs assessment is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about students’ needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs” (p.98).

Studies on Needs Analysis

Numerous studies have been conducted in both ESL and EFL settings to explore the needs of students to design or evaluate a specific language program. For example, in an earlier study with ESL learners, Zhao (1993) investigated the social and academic language needs of 195 international students at a Canadian University via a needs analysis questionnaire. Analysis of the data revealed that students prioritized their needs for English language for daily living and social interactions, followed by listening and speaking, and then reading and writing skills for studying. Similarly, Shen (2007) aimed to explore academic listening needs of 37 Chinese students in two Canadian universities. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Findings revealed that students’ perceived difficulty in academic listening stemmed from a linguistically and socially unfamiliar context. While acknowledging that listening was a necessary skill to be successful in academic contexts, the students also pointed out that they needed to improve their reading, speaking and writing skills as well. Nakaprasit (2010) gathered data from 17 students, six instructors and one administrator at a preparatory language school of a Canadian university. The main question to be answered

was whether students' academic English language needs were met. The results indicated that the prep school failed to meet students' needs and this was attributed to the administrative rather than instructional problems.

Students also stated that they lacked confidence in communication skills for both academic and social purposes. Samuel (2016) conducted a qualitative case study with five faculty members and 11 beginner level international students at a prep school in New England with the purpose of understanding the general needs of the students. The analysis of data suggested that the students needed both academic and social language skills. Speaking skill was given the most importance, yet students pointed out that they needed to identify speaking registers to be able to function more effectively in academic and social contexts. They also stated they were not proficient enough in their command of vocabulary and grammar.

In an attempt to investigate the academic needs of EFL learners enrolled in an intensive language program of a university in Oman, Al-Busaidi (2003) collected data from students and faculty via questionnaire, e-mail dialogues and interviews. Findings revealed that students expected the language program to cover academic skills that would help them in their future studies. In addition, they stressed the need for more intensive four language skills training in the program. Kirkgöz (2009) conducted a study to specify the academic language needs of EFL Turkish students enrolled at a prep program of a state university in Turkey. The study also aimed to assess effectiveness of the prep school program in preparing students for their future departments. The data were gathered from 220 students and 15 lecturers via a needs analysis questionnaire. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with 120 students and 15 lecturers. The results showed that the students found '*listening to a lecture*' and '*taking notes*' as the most frequently required skill, followed by '*writing a summary*' and '*asking and answering questions during lectures*'. Regarding the effectiveness of the prep program in preparing students for those academic requirements, most students stated that the education they received was not sufficient. In another study conducted in the Turkish context, Coşaner (2013) aimed explore the effectiveness of a state university's prep school program through a needs analysis survey. Two hundred and fifty students and two instructors took part in the study. The results suggested that the program was effective 'to some extent.' It needed improvement in content, materials and assessment. The students reported that they needed listening and speaking skills the most. They also highlighted the importance of vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Öner and Mede (2015) focused on the needs of A1 level repeat students at a private university in Turkey. A needs analysis questionnaire was used to gather the quantitative data. There were semi-structured interviews as well. The results showed that the program was effective in general; however, more importance should be given to the speaking skill in terms of content, materials and activities used in the classroom. Finally, in Akbulut's (2016) study, a need analysis was conducted with 75 intermediate level prep school students at a state university in Turkey. Both questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data. The results revealed students' demands on more practice in listening, speaking and reading skills in the program. As for the materials, students stated that they should be more authentic and engaging.

The present study, conducted in an EFL context, aims to contribute to the literature by analysing the perceived needs of prep school students who would study in English Medium Instructed (EMI) departments in relation to their future departmental studies. The following research questions were specifically addressed:

1. How do the prep school English language learners perceive the importance of the four language skills (Reading, Listening, Writing, Speaking) for their future departments?
2. How do the prep school English language learners perceive the importance of skill-specific tasks for their future departments?
3. How do the prep school English language learners perceive the difficulties they experience when performing skill-specific strategies?

Methodology

Setting

The present study was conducted at an English preparatory school of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey during the 2018-2019 academic year. Following their enrolment to the university, students are given a proficiency test prepared by the Prep School Testing Unit to determine their English proficiency level. The proficiency levels are set according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). In the proficiency test, the passing point 60 equals B1+ level proficiency in CEFR. The students who get 60 points out of 100 pass the test and start their education in their departments. The proficiency test is also used as a placement test and the students who fail the test are placed in the classes based on their proficiency scores. There are three levels in the Prep school program, i.e., A (A1 starters), B (A2 starters) and C (B1 starters).

The Prep school program is based on teaching four skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. The Curriculum Planning Unit is responsible for the determination of program objectives, content and selection of materials. In 2018-2019 academic year, all proficiency levels used a commercially available course book, a listening skills book, a grammar book and a supplementary book of tasks and exercises prepared by the Curriculum Planning Unit to support students' development of reading, listening, and writing skills.

Participants

At the time of the study, there were 900 students enrolled in the prep program. Out of 900 students, 435 of them could be reached and given the Needs Analysis Questionnaire (NAQ). There were 206 students from A1 Level, 142 from A2 Level and 87 from B1 Level.

All of the participating students would receive English-medium instruction in their future departments. The average age of the students was 19. Among the participants, three students

from A1 level, two students from A2 Level and two students from B1 Level were randomly selected for the focus group interview.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data came from a needs analysis questionnaire adopted from Mede (2012). The questionnaire consisted of 80 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to gather some demographic information about the participants while the second part focused on needs assessment. In the second part students were asked to evaluate the importance of four language skills and skill specific tasks such as *'reading articles for journals'*, *'listening to lectures'*, *'writing book reports'* and *'making oral presentations'* for their future departments. They were also asked to state how often they experienced difficulty in using strategies specific to each language skill. The strategies given in the questionnaire included, for example, *'guessing the meaning of an unknown word from context'* for reading, *'listening for specific information'* for listening, *'organizing ideas for argumentative purposes'* for writing and *'summarizing information in your own words'* for speaking. Prior to the study, the questionnaire was piloted with 40 students and the reliability coefficient was found to be .93. For analysis purposes, descriptive statistics were conducted to the data coming from the questionnaire using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0).

In order to support the quantitative data and gain insight into the reasons why prep school students perceived specific skills, tasks and strategies to be important or difficult, a semi-structured focused group interview was conducted with seven randomly selected learners. The interview was conducted in Turkish, the participating students' native language, and lasted 45 minutes. The goal of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights, and understandings (Patton, 2002). The interview data were transcribed and analysed by repeated reading to identify and report common patterns/themes and divergences within the data, following the procedure of Miles and Huberman (1994).

Results

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Four Language Skills for Their Future Departments

The first part of the NAQ asked students to indicate how important they viewed four language skills in relation to their future departments. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean score for each skill was higher than 4.00 indicating that students considered all four skills important for their future studies. Compared to other skills, the speaking skill received the highest mean score ($M=4.74$). 83.2% of the participating students believed that it was 'extremely important' for their departments. Similarly, for listening, reading and writing skills, the majority of the students (61.6 %, 52.9 %, and 45.3 %, respectively) opted for the 'extremely important' option.

Table 1

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Four Language Skills

Skills	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
Speaking	0.7	0.7	5.5	9.9	83.2	4.74	.65
Listening	0.7	1.8	10.3	25.5	61.6	4.45	.80
Reading	0.5	4.1	17.7	24.8	52.9	4.25	.92
Writing	0.5	5.5	17.7	31.0	45.3	4.15	.93

1: not important, 2: slightly important, 3: moderately important, 4: important, 5: extremely important

Similar to their responses in the questionnaire, during the focus group interview, the participating students stated that they considered speaking as the most important skill among the four language skills. One student said: "I believe the skill that we need the most in the prep school is definitely speaking. After all, if you can't speak a language, you can't claim to know that language."

When the students were asked about the reasons for the utmost importance they attached to speaking, they stated that improved speaking skills enabled successful communication in the target language, improved their self-confidence and were necessary for their future academic education.

In relation to successful communication, the students discussed that they needed to be able express themselves in English fluently and negotiate meaning to reach an understanding. One of the students said: "What I need the most from this year is the ability to express myself effectively in English. I want to speak fluently." The following comment illustrates another student's view:

"I think apart from academic English, I should also have a good command of general English so that I can easily raise my hand in the classroom when I don't understand the lecture and ask the teacher to repeat or clarify the information. Or I should be able to ask something related to our course."

For students, being able to speak fluently meant improved self-confidence. They admitted that sometimes they felt intimidated to speak in front of their peers due to their low self-confidence in relation to their speaking skills. This resulted in unwillingness to communicate in the classroom. They chose not to participate although they knew the answer of a question or had an idea about the discussion topic. They believed that as their speaking skills improved, their self-confidence would improve too. They also acknowledged that the only way to improve their speaking skills was to practice speaking more in the classroom. As one student pointed out: "I believe the ability to speak improves over time. The more we speak, the better we will get at it. We need to speak more to gain confidence."

Lastly, students discussed the relevance of speaking skill to their future academic studies. They said they needed to improve their speaking skills to be able to participate in – class discussions and give oral presentations in their future departments. The following excerpt illustrates their point:

“I have a friend who is a second year student at my department. She said they were making oral presentations all the time. I think this is a skill we need more practice in so that we could be better prepared for our departments.”

As students were discussing about the speaking skill, they also came up with some suggestions for the prep program they were enrolled at. One of the students stated that they “should have more speaking lessons.” Another student added: “I would rather have less reading and more speaking classes in a week.” Students also suggested that they should have more class hours with native speaker teachers and they should be forbidden to speak Turkish in the classroom. They thought that, only then, they would force themselves to speak English in the classroom. One of the students explained this situation as: “Even though I know that our native speaker is fairly proficient in Turkish, I still feel I can’t speak Turkish with her. I feel like I have to speak English with native speakers. It’s a mental orientation maybe.” And another student agreed by saying: “I would try harder to express my ideas in English if the instructors were not Turkish.” Lastly, one student commented as follows: “We can’t overcome this difficulty [in speaking] without practicing more. We need to have more speaking class hours. We need to become more fluent before we start our departments.”

Students’ Perceptions of the Importance of Skill-Specific Tasks for Their Future Departments

Reading Tasks

In an attempt to answer the second research question, the students were asked to rate the importance of skill-specific tasks for their academic studies in their future departments.

When the mean scores for the reading tasks in Table 2 are analysed, it can be said that students considered *reading lecture notes* ($M= 4.00$), *reading course handouts* ($M= 3.87$) and using reference tools ($M= 3.74$) ‘important’ while the remaining tasks as ‘somewhat important’ (mean scores ranging from 3.45 to 2.96). Among the given tasks, the task of *reading lecture notes* received the highest mean score and was considered as ‘extremely important’ by 41.4% of the students while *reading works of literature* received the lowest rating ($M=2.96$) and was perceived ‘not important’ (16.3 %) or ‘slightly important’ (23 %) by the majority of students.

Table 2

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Reading Tasks

Reading Tasks	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	M	SD
lecture notes	2.5	6.2	20.9	29.0	41.4	4.00	1.04
course handouts	1.8	8.0	21.8	37.7	30.6	3.87	.99
reference tools (e.g. dictionaries)	2.1	10.6	28.5	28.5	30.3	3.74	1.06
articles in journals	4.4	14.9	29.7	32.2	18.6	3.45	1.10
newspapers/magazines	4.6	16.1	30.8	26.4	21.8	3.44	1.14
texts on the Internet	2.8	14.7	34.7	33.1	14.7	3.42	1.00
instructions for projects	6.4	22.3	28.3	23.7	19.3	3.27	1.19
graphs/ charts/ diagrams/ tables	11.0	18.2	32.0	20.2	18.6	3.17	1.24
computer-presented texts	4.6	19.8	40.7	24.8	10.1	3.16	1.00
Textbooks	7.4	23.9	33.3	20.7	14.5	3.10	1.15
works of literature	16.3	23.0	24.4	20.7	15.6	2.96	1.31

1: not important, 2: slightly important, 3: moderately important, 4: important, 5: extremely important

The findings obtained from the questionnaire were supported by the students' comments in the focused-group interview. During the interview, the students emphasized the importance of *reading lecture notes* and *course handouts* for their future studies. One student said: "Next year, our materials will be in English. To be able to succeed in our courses, we need to read and understand course related materials."

Students also mentioned that *using reference tools* such as dictionaries and thesauruses helped to improve their vocabulary knowledge and facilitated their reading comprehension. One of the students stated that: "When I see a new word in a text, I look up its synonyms and try to memorize the word with its synonyms rather than its Turkish translation." Another student gave an example by explaining: "If there is an unknown word in the text I am reading, I try to guess its meaning from the context. If I can't, I use a dictionary. Learning its meaning helps me better understand the material."

In relation to their lower ratings of the task of *reading works of literature*, students stated that reading non-fiction rather than fiction was what they needed for their future academic studies. While talking about reading different types of texts, one student suggested that if they had read texts related to their departments, they would have been better prepared for the following year. He also added that the prep program could offer vocational English classes for few hours a week. Here are his opinions in his own words:

"If we read texts related to our fields in the prep program, we would feel less anxious when we start the department next year. The prep school can also organize vocational English classes. We come to school only for four hours a day. We would come extra hours for the vocational English classes. This is a need."

This idea of the student did not receive support from the other students. One of them stated that they learned new words every day. More importantly, they gained the habit of using reference tools for vocabulary learning. The following year, she said, they would learn content specific vocabulary using vocabulary learning skills and strategies. Similarly, another student made the following comment:

“We read about various types of topics. Sometimes about medicine sometimes law. It would be difficult and time-consuming to read a text about each department. This would benefit one or two students but others would have to learn irrelevant information.”

Listening Tasks

In the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate how important they found the given listening tasks for their future studies. The percentiles, mean scores and standard deviations of the listening items are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Students’ Perceptions of the Importance of Listening Tasks

Listening Tasks	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	M	SD
dialogues	1.6	1.1	11.0	25.1	61.1	4.42	.85
lectures	2.5	4.8	13.6	24.1	54.9	4.24	1.02
question/answer sessions	1.4	3.9	16.3	32.0	46.4	4.18	.93
class presentations	4.8	14.0	25.3	28.5	27.1	3.58	1.17

1: not important, 2: slightly important, 3: moderately important, 4: important, 5: extremely important

As can be observed in the table, students considered all four listening tasks as important. Among the tasks, *listening to dialogues* received the highest rating with the mean score of 4.42. 61.1 % of the students found it to be ‘extremely important.’ The task that received the lowest mean score was *listening to class presentations* (M= 3.58). Students found it ‘somewhat important.’

During the focus group interview, in order to support the quantitative data and to gather in-depth information about students’ needs in relation to listening, students were asked about the importance of listening tasks regarding their future studies. Even though the researcher intended to inquire about listening tasks, the students repeatedly preferred to talk about the content of the listening texts instead. They said they generally did not find the content of listening texts engaging and the listening texts were sometimes not relevant to the topic they covered in the classroom. One student commented as follows: “If I listened something related to my future profession, I guess I would be more interested in it.” Another student supported this idea by saying: “I don’t want to do a listening activity just for the sake of being

challenged. I don't want to listen to irrelevant stuff just because it is suitable to our level." One student talked about the importance of the consistency of topics among different skills: "If I read something about environment in the class, then I want to listen to something about environment as well."

Writing Tasks

The students were asked to rate the importance they gave to various writing tasks in relation to their usefulness in their future departments. With the highest mean ($M=4.14$) of the seven items, *writing essays in reaction to readings* was considered to be the most important for students. Almost half of the learners found it 'extremely important' for their future studies. However, *writing references for a report or project* had the lowest mean score ($M=2.68$). It was found to be slightly important for the students. Table 4 below presents the mean scores for each writing task in the questionnaire.

Table 4
Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Writing Tasks

Writing Tasks	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	M	SD
essays in reaction to readings	2.3	3.9	18.2	28.7	46.9	14.4	.99
essay-type questions	6.2	11.7	26.0	30.1	26.0	3.57	1.17
a resume (CV)	3.9	16.6	30.6	25.1	23.4	3.46	1.15
workbook exercises	8.7	17.9	28.7	27.4	16.8	3.24	1.20
book reports	12.4	21.1	27.6	23.9	14.0	3.03	1.26
term papers	19.5	18.4	24.8	20.5	16.1	2.93	1.36
references for a report or project	17.0	27.6	32.0	13.3	9.4	2.68	1.19

1: not important, 2: slightly important, 3: moderately important, 4: important, 5: extremely important

The findings of the focus group interview were similar to the results of the NAQ. The students stated that their writing classes were mostly based on essay writing. This was what they learned in the program and what they found most relevant to their future studies. During the discussion among each other, students mostly referred to process writing tasks such as brainstorming for ideas, writing an outline, and developing a paragraph and discussed that following these steps facilitated their writing process. One student explained the writing classes in detail: "First, our teacher presents the essay type and then we read sample essays. After that the teacher gives us an essay topic and we brainstorm for ideas together. Seeing example essays and writing step-by-step makes writing easier." Another student discussed the benefits of such practice as follows: "Writing about your opinions is an important skill we need at university. In the prep program, we practice different types of essay writing. I think these practices will help me with writing tasks in my future department."

Speaking Tasks

Lastly, the importance of speaking tasks was rated by the students for the second research question. The quantitative data derived from the analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Speaking Tasks

Speaking Tasks	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	M	SD
state opinions on different topics (discussions / debates)	2,8	2.1	10.3	17.5	67.1	4.43	.97
oral presentations	6.0	6.7	20.9	26.9	39.1	3.85	1.20
oral presentations using multimedia tools	6.2	11.0	25.3	28.5	28.0	3.58	1.22

1: not important, 2: slightly important, 3: moderately important, 4: important, 5: extremely important

It can be seen in Table 5 that students considered speaking tasks generally important.

The task that received the highest rating among the three was *stating their opinions on different topics* (M=4.43). The majority of learners found it 'extremely important' (67.1 %). Although the lowest ranking belonged to *making oral presentations using multimedia tools* with a mean score of 3.58, the majority of students found it 'important' (28.5 %) or 'extremely important' (28 %).

In the focus group interview, the students highlighted the importance of being able to *express their ideas* in English. This view was supported by one of the students as follows:

“I think what we essentially need is daily English. We need to speak English all the time in the lessons. Next year, it will be the same in our departments. So we should learn how to express ourselves effectively in English.”

Similar to their responses in the questionnaire, the students stated that more speaking opportunities with tasks such as debates and presentations could be beneficial in the prep program. One of the students expressed her ideas as follows: “Our teacher gave us a topic, we got into two groups and debated. It was a very good speaking activity. We had the opportunity to express our opinions. I think we should have more debates in the classroom.” Another student highlighted the importance of making presentations for their future studies as follows: “When we start our departments, we will be making lots of presentations but we don't make any presentations this year.”

Students' Perceptions of the Difficulties They Experienced When Performing Skill - Specific Strategies

The third research question aimed to illustrate how often the prep school students experienced difficulties in using the given skill-specific strategies. Analysis of the quantitative

and qualitative data coming from the NAQ and the focus group interview is presented for each language skill separately.

Reading Strategies

The prep school students were asked to rate the frequency of difficulty they had in carrying out the reading strategies listed in Table 6 below. When the percentages are analysed, it can be said that, the majority of students ‘rarely’ or ‘sometimes’ had difficulty in applying the reading strategies.

Table 6
Students’ Perceived Difficulty in Using Reading Strategies

Reading Strategies	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	NA*	M	SD
recognize words automatically	5.7	28.0	43.4	17.2	4.6	0.9	2.84	.96
go through a text quickly to get the general idea	14.7	25.7	25.7	21.8	10.8	1.1	2.84	1.25
guess the meaning of an unknown word from context	7.8	31.7	36.3	17.9	6.0	0.2	2.81	1.01
read quickly and selectively to find important information	16.1	25.5	26.7	18.2	12.4	1.1	2.81	1.28
understand information in a text when not openly stated	8.5	28.3	37.2	19.5	5.1	1.4	2.80	1.05
read carefully and understand the details of the text	11.7	27.8	31.5	17.0	9.9	2.1	2.79	1.20
recognize the organization of ideas to see their relationships	12.0	31.3	29.9	16.6	8.5	1.8	2.72	1.17
ask questions about a text	14.3	26.0	32.2	15.4	9.0	3.2	2.69	1.24
distinguish the main idea from the supporting detail(s)	13.1	30.1	34.3	14.5	7.1	0.9	2.69	1.11
identify cause-effect relationships	13.3	32.4	32.6	16.1	5.1	0.5	2.65	1.07
identify key information	14.7	33.8	24.8	17.5	7.6	1.6	2.64	1.19
read and respond critically	15.9	26.0	29.2	17.5	7.6	3.9	2.63	1.26
understand writer’s aim/attitude	16.3	29.4	29.9	15.4	6.4	2.5	2.58	1.19
predict the content of a text	27.1	28.3	16.1	15.4	12.4	0.7	2.55	1.37
distinguish fact from opinion	20.7	28.5	25.1	15.2	7.8	2.8	2.52	1.26
search for simple information	25.7	30.8	20.0	13.1	9.2	1.1	2.45	1.28

1: never, 2: rarely, 3: sometimes, 4: usually, 5: always, NA: not applicable

During the focus group interview, most of the students complained about not being able to read fast. They said, as they tried to understand the text word by word and paused reading when they encountered an unknown word, their reading was slow. As one student claimed: “I always have issues with time. I can never finish reading in time. I read very slowly.” Another

student talked about vocabulary related causes for his reading problems: “I can get easily distracted when I come across with a word I don’t know or if the sentences are too long.” One student discussed lacking necessary strategies to read effectively by saying: “To answer a reading question, we sometimes need to scan the text quickly but I find this hard to do. I try to understand the text word by word”

Listening Strategies

When the mean scores of students’ responses in the questionnaire were analysed, it could be observed that, students ‘sometimes’ experienced difficulty in the given listening strategies. The mean scores ranged from 2.95 to 2.63. The detailed results of the questionnaire for the listening section are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Students’ Perceived Difficulty in Using Listening Strategies

Listening Strategies	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	NA*	M	SD
understand information when not openly stated in a lecture	12.2	26.7	23.7	20.5	15.4	1.6	2.95	1.31
distinguish fact from opinion	10.8	24.4	29.0	23.2	10.8	1.8	2.93	1.22
listen for specific information	16.6	28.7	25.1	16.3	12.6	0.7	2.77	1.27
follow question / answer sessions	16.6	24.8	28.3	17.0	10.3	3.0	2.70	1.29
understand the subject matter of a lecture	15.6	32.0	28.5	15.6	7.8	0.5	2.66	1.16
listen to a lecture to take effective notes	13.8	27.8	30.6	16.6	7.8	3.4	2.66	1.22
understand spoken instructions	20.7	27.1	26.0	15.9	9.7	0.7	2.64	1.25
predict the content of a lecture	20.5	28.0	24.8	18.4	7.8	0.5	2.63	1.22

1: never, 2: rarely, 3: sometimes, 4: usually, 5: always, NA: not applicable

During the focus group interview, students stated that they did not have serious problems in understanding their teachers’ talk in English. Mostly, they said, the teachers adjusted their speech to students’ level in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pacing. One student said: “When the teacher is lecturing, I can follow her. She speaks slowly and uses easy English. I hope next year in the department I can understand the instructors, too.”

In relation to the strategy of *listening for specific information*, students discussed that pre-listening activities used in the classroom helped them to listen to the material purposefully and selectively. They believed this strategy would help them in their future departments as they would have to listen to and understand extended texts or teacher lectures and focus on certain points. Here is a comment of one of the students: “Our teacher always gives us time to read the

questions before we start listening to the audio, which creates an opportunity for us to think about the content of the listening and listen by focusing on certain information.”

Writing Strategies

In relation to writing, students’ responses revealed that they ‘sometimes’ had difficulties in using the given strategies except *writing references and quotations*, which received the mean score of 2.36, meaning that they ‘rarely’ found it difficult. When the mean scores are analysed, it could be seen that the majority of the students either selected the option of ‘rarely’ or ‘sometimes.’ Please see Table 8 for the details.

Table 8

Students’ Perceived Difficulty in Using Writing Strategies

Writing Strategies	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	NA*	M	SD
summarize information in your own words	11.3	25.5	31.3	20.7	10.6	0.7	2.91	1.18
organize ideas to describe events	13.6	22.5	32.6	21.8	6.4	3.0	2.76	1.20
organize writing to express major and minor ideas	13.3	27.6	29.2	19.3	8.3	2.3	2.74	1.21
organize ideas for argumentative purposes	12.4	28.0	33.8	16.3	6.9	2.5	2.69	1.16
organize ideas for compare and contrast purposes	14.9	27.4	31.0	16.8	6.9	3.0	2.64	1.20
organize ideas to show cause and effect relationships	16.1	27.1	29.4	17.2	7.1	3.0	2.63	1.22
combine information from multiple texts to prepare an assignment	20.5	26.7	23.2	16.3	10.1	3.2	2.59	1.33
write references and quotations	23.4	26.0	27.8	12.2	5.7	4.8	2.36	1.25

1: never, 2: rarely, 3: sometimes, 4: usually, 5: always, NA: not applicable

During the focus group interview, similar to their responses in the questionnaire, students stated that they sometimes found the strategy of *summarizing information in their own words* challenging due to their limited English. One student said: “Writing a paragraph on what we read or discussed is not always easy for me. I cannot be sure about the sentences I write.”

In relation to their perceived low language proficiency, they also discussed that when they were writing essays, they did not have difficulties in finding ideas or deciding what to write about. What they found difficult was forming sentences to express their ideas in English. One student commented as follows: “At first I think of Turkish sentences but when I try to translate them, I usually fail to express what I wanted to say in my mother tongue. It is difficult for me to form complex sentences.”

In relation to the strategies of organizing ideas for different types of writing purposes such as comparing and contrasting or arguing for/against something, students stated that using the strategy of creating an outline helped them organize their ideas effectively and plan their writing. They also added that receiving instruction on how to write for different purposes facilitates their writing process. As one student pointed out: “Before I start writing, I decide what I will write about in each paragraph. I start writing after I am satisfied with my outline.” Another student agreed by saying: “In the prep program, we learn about different types of essays. We write our essays following the writing rules for each type.”

Speaking Strategies

Students’ responses for speaking showed that each strategy given was ‘sometimes’ difficult to apply. The three strategies receiving the highest rating were *summarizing information in your own words*, *expressing your ideas in your own words* and *giving oral presentations* with the mean scores of 2.95, 2.93 and 2.90, respectively. Please see Table 9 for the details.

Table 9
Students’ Perceived Difficulty in Using Speaking Strategies

Speaking Strategies	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	NA*	M	SD
summarize information in your own words	12.9	22.3	30.6	22.8	11.0	0.5	2.95	1.20
express your ideas in your own words	15.4	20.9	28.7	21.6	12.6	0.7	2.93	1.26
give oral presentations	14.0	22.3	23.4	22.5	14.3	3.4	2.90	1.37
produce correct pronunciation	13.3	23.4	34.7	17.2	10.6	0.7	2.86	1.18
react to speech and lecture	16.8	23.9	27.4	18.6	12.6	0.7	2.84	1.28
participate in discussions/debates	16.6	20.7	19.3	22.3	15.2	6.0	2.80	1.48
provide solutions to given problems	12.9	26.7	31.3	19.5	7.8	1.8	2.77	1.18
ask relevant questions	17.2	26.2	26.0	18.6	10.3	1.6	2.73	1.27

1: never, 2: rarely, 3: sometimes, 4: usually, 5: always, NA: not applicable

When students were talking about the difficulties they had in speaking, they mentioned the difficulty they experienced in producing novel sentences in speech. Expressing opinions using their own sentences challenged them due to their perceived low English proficiency level. During the discussion, this concern was also associated with the difficulty of speaking fluently and accurately. Students pointed out that their desire to speak with few mistakes and constantly monitoring their grammar as they spoke resulted in unnatural speech. As one of the students commented: “I would like to speak fluently but I worry about my grammar too much. I make many mistakes when I try to speak fast.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the needs of prep school English language learners in relation to their future English-medium departments. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that, first of all, prep school students believed in the importance of four language skills for their future studies. The speaking skill was perceived to be slightly more important than the other skills. There were several studies with parallel results in the literature. For example, in the studies of Zhao (1993) and Samuel (2016), prep school students considered speaking the most important skill, followed by listening, writing and reading. In Nakaprasit (2010), prep school students also rated speaking as the most important skill. Similarly, in Öner and Mede's (2015) study, prep school students highlighted the importance of the speaking skill in the prep program.

Second, when students were asked to evaluate the importance of the given skill – specific tasks, they considered all tasks 'important' or 'somewhat important' for their future departments. The tasks receiving the highest ratings belonged to the listening and speaking skills. For the listening skills, the highest mean scored belonged to the task of *listening to dialogues and lectures*. In speaking, the students stated that *expressing their ideas in class discussions* and *making presentations* were very important for them. As for reading, students considered *reading lecture notes* and *course handouts* very beneficial for their future studies, while *reading works of literature* was rated as somewhat important. In writing, students regarded *writing essays* very important whereas *writing references for a project* received the lowest rating. Students' comments in the focus group interview supported their responses in the questionnaire. Students discussed the importance of the given tasks for their future studies and provided some reasons for their responses. Similar results can be observed in the relevant studies. For example, in a number of studies students considered reading-specific tasks such as *reading course handouts* and *reading articles in journals* important (Nakaprasit, 2010; Samuel, 2016; Zhao, 1993). Similar to the present study, the task of *listening to lectures* was found to be significant for students' needs in other studies as well (e.g., Nakaprasit, 2010; Samuel, 2016; Shen, 2007; Zhao, 1993). For writing, in many other studies too, the task of *writing essay type questions* was found to be important (Kırkgöz, 2009; Samuel, 2016; Zhao, 1993). In relation to speaking, the tasks receiving higher mean scores included *expressing ideas* (Doğan & Mede, 2017), *participating in class discussions* (Nakaprasit, 2010; Samuel, 2016; Zhao, 1993) and *making presentations* (Nakaprasit, 2010; Samuel, 2016).

Third, for the last research question, students were presented with some skill-specific strategies and asked to indicate how much difficulty they had in applying them. The mean scores revealed that students 'rarely' or 'sometimes' experienced difficulty in all skill-specific strategies. Speaking strategies had higher mean scores compared to others, implying that students found using speaking strategies more challenging. Qualitative data coming from the focus group interview shed a light on the reasons why students found some strategies more challenging. Common reason given by the students was their perceived low English proficiency

level. In Kırkgöz's (2009) and Coşaner's (2013) studies, students found, for example, the strategy of '*guessing meaning of unknown words from context*' difficult and *lexical incompetence* was the reason given to explain the experienced challenge. In Nakaprasit (2010), students had difficulties in '*using correct grammar*' while writing and this resulted in poorly written essays. In relation to speaking, *making presentations, participating in class discussions and answering questions* were considered difficult by students (Coşaner, 2013; Doğan & Mede, 2017).

To conclude, the findings of the present study contribute to the relevant literature by illustrating the needs of prep school students and provide insights into the existing English language prep program of the state university, where the study was conducted. Under the guidance of the findings, the prep program can be recommended to reconsider its syllabus design, materials development and evaluation, and instructional design to better match the needs of prep school EFL learners' language needs in relation to their future departments in English medium faculties.

In light of the qualitative data gathered from the students, future needs analysis studies could focus on collecting data about the needs of English language students regarding the content and the materials used in language classrooms as students in the present study stressed the importance of the content of listening texts and materials used in reading classes. In the present study the needs of students from all proficiency levels (A, B, C) are sought. Finding out the differences between the needs of different proficiency levels of the prep programme was not one of the purposes of this study. For future research, it is possible to compare the data from different proficiency levels in order to find out whether different proficiency levels have different needs. Finally, the needs of students from different departments could be compared in a further study. The perceptions of students in relation to their language needs might vary for each department and in return raise the necessity to implement different prep programmes for students of different departments.

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