

A Comparison of College Learners' Needs in General English with Academic Achievement

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This study was conducted to compare college learners' needs in General English (GE) with their academic achievements in order to suggest some considerations for GE curriculum design. For the purpose, questionnaires were administered to 796 university students taking GE courses at the beginning of the semester and achievement tests were conducted twice, in the middle of and at the end of the semester. The results of need analysis were compared with the learners' academic achievements evaluated by the instructors of each GE course. Five considerations were analyzed in this study; the goal of GE, the time frame during college years, mediated language during instruction, the focused language skills and the preferable GE contents. This study shows that college learners, who have attained higher grades from GE, present needs on the concurrent use of both Korean and English, and high interest in the instructional contents. Regardless of learners' grades, they prefer to take integrated language skill based instruction as well as GE instruction with the goal of communicative competence. Based on the results, some considerations for curriculum development were mentioned.

[needs analysis/General English (GE)/curriculum design/
요구분석/교양영어/ 교육과정설계]

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of distress about GE courses among professors, instructors, and students due to ineffectiveness (Jeongsoon Joh, 2002; Yungsuk Jung & Youngsung Cheuh, 2002; Yaesheik Hongmi Lee & Lim, 2005; Sangok Park, 1988). With overwhelmed English programs in the universities, students still

spend their extra-time and money to look for better private language institutions or English learning programs in English dominated countries. Students have found GE difficult because of its common curriculum, which does not change from the elementary level. Since all curriculums for public education are designed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), students are hardly exposed to the various and challenging curriculums except those used at private language institutions. Moreover, GE courses, the mandatory courses for graduation in the universities, scarcely considered the requests and desires of students. Thus this neglect by curriculum designers and administrators forced students to take off-campus English courses (Sangok Park, 1988).

Many researchers like Hyunjin Kim and Myeonghee Seong (2006), Kyunghye Choi (2006), and Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang, and Hyunjin Kim (2007) conducted needs analysis for university students, proposing alternative GE curriculums such as proficiency based instruction and instruction with English for Specific Purposes (ESP). However, it was hardly mentioned how needs analysis influences learners' academic achievements. The fundamental belief for making alternative curriculums for GE is related to its effectiveness. And the effectiveness of instruction reflects the academic achievement.

In the pedagogical aspects, all researchers, teachers, and students believe that high motivation classified with attitudes, interests, and desire (Crookes & Schmidt, 1998) facilitates language acquisition. According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1991), there is an integrative motivation subsumed by a learner's desire, interest and attitude, as well as a role to elaborate the effectiveness of instruction. Although there is a difficulty in defining how motivation develops academic achievement, it is believed that high motivation and positive attitudes toward the target language and its community help acquisition of the target language (Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005). Under the belief of the role of motivation, which is reflected in the results of needs analysis in GE instruction, this study extended the results from the previous one, 'Needs analysis of university students for the GE' (Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang, & Hyunjin Kim, 2007) toward 'comparison between needs of university students of GE and their academic achievements'.

The purpose of this study is to offer some suggestions for GE curriculum development on the basis of the comparison between the needs and academic achievements. This study is developed with five considerations; the goal of instruction, design of time frame, mediated language, focused language skills, and preferable contents for GE instruction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is much literature about curriculum design. One distinctive technique for planning a curriculum was introduced by Taba (1962), and seven steps were illustrated. They are the diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, selection and organization of content, selection and organization of learning experiences, and the determination of what to evaluate and ways and means of doing it. Taba's advice was later supported by Grave (2000) who outlined six stages to be considered for curriculum design.

The first stage is needs analysis for learners, regarding their attitudes, desires and interests as well as the background information of the learners, so that it allows needs analysis to propose the current level of learners along with their expectation of instruction.

The second stage is the integration of needs analysis with the contents of instruction. During this stage, educators and administrators who are in charge of curriculum design carefully regard needs analysis to establish the proper goal of instruction, which is a primary concern of curriculum design (Brown, 2001). As a series of design, the first and second stages are considered as stages for setting a goal of instruction.

In the third stage, the knowledge of intercultural communicative competence is appended. Berry and Sam (1997) introduced acculturation stages for an alien to become a member of another language community. They mentioned that the target language learners, who overcome the feeling of marginalization and separation would acquire their target language. Because learners are attaining the target language to escape from the feeling of difference. Therefore the input with intercultural contents, including both learners' native and target cultures, provides the moment to facilitate the language acquisition and these intercultural based contents are regarded as an important factor for curriculum design (Hyungji Chang, 2007).

The fourth stage concerns the function of instruction such as developing communicative competence. With an announcement of MEHRD in 1997, the gravity of communicative competence along with approach of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was encouraged, and there were many conversation courses with native speakers in the universities. It was conducted to provide practical English instruction, which met the national curriculum by MEHRD (Jeongsoon Joh, 2002; Hyeonkh Kim, 2007; Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang,

& Hyunjin Kim, 2007). Therefore the review of a language function is also an important stage to be considered for curriculum design, regarding the usage of language for the community.

For the fifth stage, the lesson plan is appended by the integration of learners' needs, major contents, intercultural knowledge as well as the function of language. In the last stage, teaching materials are appended, completing the design of curriculum.

Considering the suggestions for curriculum design by Grave (2000), five deliberations stood out in the area of GE curriculum design. They are categorized by the goal, contents, function of instruction, learning experiences and learner's motivation. First of all, the goal of instruction is needed because it is the fundamental element that can change the whole process of curriculum design. According to Hyowoong Lee (1996), GE provides not only the basic knowledge to become a member of the elite group of that language community, but also to the pre-operational courses for major studies in college, particularly with the practice of textbook translation. The alteration of the goal of GE is related to the role of English which provides a basic knowledge of Western culture or medium of the courses like a bridge over preliminary and major courses (Oryang Kwon, 1995; Hyowoong Lee, 1996). Yaesheik Lee and Hongmi Im (2005) also added the definition of the goal of GE on the basis of needs analysis, and mentioned that the integrated GE course can meet the needs of learners keeping the balance of listening, reading, writing and speaking within all GE instruction.

The second consideration is related to time consumption, because it is regarded as important as a goal of instruction during the curriculum design. With the belief of intercultural competence by Berry and Sam (1997), the more exposure to the target culture on the basis of the contents would lead to more academic achievement during the school semesters, and the longer time frame, which provides more cultural exposure would have an effect on students' achievements (Hyungji Chang, 2007). In addition, Schumann (1976) stated that second language learners have shown the optimal distance between their native and target languages, which inspires more target language acquisition to overcome the situation of culture shock and feeling of separation (Berry & Sam, 1997). Therefore the assumption that greater exposure to the target culture would lead to greater target language acquisition is discussed in this study.

The third and fourth considerations are related to the learner's linguistic competence. Since the process of acculturation propels the learner's communicative competence (Hyungji Chang, 2007), mediated language during the instruction is

assumed by another factor to accelerate the learner's language acquisition. In the review by Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang, and Hyunjin Kim (2007), learners' needs on preferable language skills were mostly recognized through the four integrated language skills. Although college students prefer to achieve speaking, listening, writing, and reading competence simultaneously during GE instruction, it is recognized that the 7th National Curriculum (NC) by the Ministry of Education enforces spoken language acquisition firstly in the sequence of NC, because the 7th NC encourages communicative competence rather than the formation of linguistic knowledge, which is completed by writing and reading instruction. Therefore the needs of integrated instructions, which allows the balanced acquisition of language skills, are selected to be compared with academic achievements in order to propose an effective curriculum of GE.

The last consideration regards the learner's level of motivation toward instructional contents. The relation of motivation to academic achievements is considered by SLA researchers (Youngsuk Kim, 1996; Hyowoong Lee, 1996; Seongwon Lee, 2004). According to them, learner's motivation is regarded as one distinct factor to facilitate language acquisition. However, there are some struggles to measure the level of motivation. Ellis (1994) mentioned that evaluating learner's motivation would face difficulties because most evaluations are conducted by a self-reporting questionnaire, where learners' subjective responses mostly dominate. According to Gardener and MacIntyre (1991), active learners would achieve more during instruction rather than passive learners, providing evidence from their case studies. In addition, Crookes and Schmidt (1998) introduced the idea that interest is one of the main elements of motivation that allows teachers to expect learners' high participation in the instruction. Teachers consider the active participants as highly motivated learners. Therefore the role of the teacher was that they have to sustain learners' interest during the instruction as much as possible in order to produce a positive academic achievement at the end of the semester. So the presentation of needs about the contents of GE is regarded as the measurement of learner's level of motivation.

Accordingly, there exist increased demands on the alternative curriculum design of GE, adjusting to the needs of learners, administrators and instructors. Taba (1962) insisted on the importance of the diagnosis of needs at the first stage of curriculum design, and thus needs analysis is an unavoidable process. Kyunghee Choi (2006) introduced two kinds of needs, objective and subjective needs, on the study of needs to develop the curriculum for students majoring in tourism. The objective need originates from the facts learners receive from their

surroundings verified and proven by judgemental aspects, while the subjective need considers the learner's self-esteem required to complete one's internal requests. This study complements needs analysis, which is mostly categorized by the subjective needs conducted by learner's self-reporting survey toward GE instructions, and it appended needs analysis with objective needs, which are reported by the judgemental views of instructors.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

1. Subjects

The subjects were students enrolled in GE instruction for their first year course in the university. The number of subjects was 796 (265 male and 531 female students), and they were divided into two groups depending on their test results; Group A with the students who received over 80 points (i. e. 100 is the highest score and 80 is the average score) and Group B with the students who received below 80 points. The research combines majors in Health (i. e. Radiology, Optometry, Physical therapy, Dentistry, etc.) and non-Health majors (i. e. Tourism management, Internet Information, etc.). However, learners' majors were not analyzed in this study, because GE in this study provided the same curriculum without regarding students' majors. Students were mostly taking both English conversation class with native instructors and College English class with Korean professors, who mostly delivered the knowledge of English Grammar and test preparation skills.

2. Methods and Process

This study was to supplement the results of the previous research, 'Needs Analysis of University students for the General English Curriculum Development' (Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang, & Hyunjin Kim (2007), which suggested the needs of the university students to GE. In summary, students prefer to take the GE course with the goal to develop communicative competence, two-year framed curriculum, concurrent use of native and target language during the instruction, integrated instruction of four language skills, as well as practical English contents based instruction. Regarding the needs of college students, this research was

conducted to examine the relation between learners' needs and their academic achievements.

The five questions were compared with learners' test results, which were selected to make further assessments of needs analysis for GE curriculum design. For the process to examine the relation between needs and academic achievements, this study reduces the number of questions to be compared from 10 to 5 from the previous research, considering the suggestions for curriculum design by Grave (2000). The questions were about the goal of GE, time frame, mediated language during the instruction, focused linguistic skills, and the interest in instructional contents. The data of learners' needs was collected by their self-reporting survey. Learner's academic achievements were reported by each of the GE instructors. The self-reporting survey was conducted at the beginning of the semester, while the academic achievements were evaluated twice, midterm and final respectively. The Chi-square test was used to compare needs analysis with learners' academic achievements.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Needs analysis of Goal of GE

The response to the question about the goal of GE indicated that more than 50% of students put their goal of GE to improve communicative competence rather than career preparation, learning American culture and English skills. This response supported the opinion by Yaesheik Lee and Hongmi Im (2005) that most university students indicated their goal of learning English was to develop communicative competence. In the question of the goal of GE, the comparison of the students' academic achievement showed that both groups of students had the equivalent needs toward the goal of GE which is the communicative competence with the evaluation by percentage. The result of the Chi-square test illustrated the comparison between the goal of GE and learners' academic achievement, and they didn't make any significant effects on each other. In other words, all level of learners make an emphasis on having the same goal of GE, the development of communicative competence. Following Table 1 illustrates the statistics.

Table 1
Goal of GE to Academic Achievements

	Reading comprehension	Communicative competence	Cultural competence	Linguistic competence	Career preparation
Group A (n=570)	22 3.8%	316 55.5%	43 7.5%	31 5.5%	158 27.7%
Group B (n=226)	7 3.0%	130 57.5%	13 5.6%	18 7.9%	59 25.9%
Total (n=796)	29 3.5%	446 56.2%	56 6.9%	49 6.3%	217 27.1%

2. Needs analysis of Time Consumption

On the need of preferable time consumption, the distinctive difference was recognized by the way of percentage. 37% of students, group B, below the score of 80, preferred to take GE until the 2nd year of college, while 36% of students, group A, over the score of 80, preferred to take GE until the 4th year of college. This response reflected the situation of university students who spent most of their college years to prepare for the certification test, particularly in the junior and senior years. It is assured by the students' schedule in most colleges that junior and senior students are spending most of their time to prepare for the qualifying test for graduation. Comparing the learner's preference of time consumption of GE courses by their academic achievements, no significance was recognized by Chi-square test. In the comparison of academic achievements, however, simply it was observed that the highly ranked students showed high interests and positive attitudes toward GE, indicating a longer time frame. This result supports the assertion by Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) that highly motivated learners would facilitate their language acquisition.

Table 2
Needs of the Time Frame to Academic Achievements

	Up to 1st year	Up to 2nd year	Up to 3rd year	Up to 4th year
Group A (n=570)	56 9.8%	204 35.8%	103 18.1%	206 36.2%
Group B (n=226)	28 12.4%	90 39.8%	26 11.3%	82 36.5%
Total (n=796)	84 10.7%	294 37.2%	129 15.8%	288 36.5%

3. Needs Analysis of Language Use

The need in language use during the instruction indicated that 80% of students preferred the instruction mediated by both Korean and English as opposed to a target or native language itself. It suggested that, during the target language learning instruction, learners' native language played a critical role to facilitate the learners' language acquisition. Since the highly preferable language use is two languages, target and native language, the comparison between the need of both language use and learner's academic achievement was analyzed by the statistic data. And it was proven that the need on both languages use made an impact on learner's academic achievements. Thus this study suggests that students with higher academic achievements prefer to take GE mediated by both languages rather than the group of students with lower academic achievements. Table 3 illustrates the results of comparison.

Table 3
Language Use to Academic Achievements

	English only	Korean only	Both languages
Group A (n=570)	143 25.1%	6 1.1%	465 81.6%
Group B (n=226)	39 17.3%	4 1.9%	165 73.0%
Total (n=796)	182 22.5%	10 1.6%	630 75.9% *

* $\chi^2 = 7.12$, $p < .05$

4. Needs Analysis of Linguistic Competence

For the question about focused linguistic competence through the instruction, 58% of students stated their preference for the integrated instruction of the four language skills-listening, reading, speaking and writing-rather than instruction focused on one skill. In the responses, besides the choice of integrated instruction, the 2nd prior competence was speaking, ranked by 30% of students, supporting the students' goal of GE, improvements of communicative competence. The need in linguistic competence, which learners aim to reach during GE instruction, was also compared with their academic achievements. Although most

learners would like to attain four-integrated language skills through the GE courses, their achievements didn't show a significant difference between the two groups. In other words, the learner's targeted competence are equivalently estimated within all levels of students. Table 4 illustrates the results of comparison.

Table 4
Needs on Linguistic Competence to Academic Achievements

	Four skills	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Group A (n=570)	335 58.7%	170 29.8%	38 6.6%	23 4.0%	5 0.9%
Group B (n=226)	131 57.9%	71 31.2%	14 6.0%	10 4.5%	1 0.4%
Total (n=796)	466 58.4%	241 30.3%	52 6.4%	33 4.1%	6 0.8%

5. Needs Analysis of GE Contents

The last question was asked to know the learner's level of motivation toward the GE contents, and they showed distinctive results. 49% of participants in their self-reporting survey presented no-response. It was an outstanding case in this study, because only this question indicated a high rate of absence. Half of the students didn't answer this question, which implied the learner's level of interest, one of the motivation scales by Crookes and Schmidt (1998), was low. Furthermore, for students with over 80 points in their grade, the results showed in lower interest toward the contents of GE. In the statistic comparison, the need in the contents of GE made its impact on learners' academic achievements. Therefore, some students who actively expressed their opinions have attained lower scores than ones who showed a low level of interest in the contents of GE with no response. This implies that students with active attitudes like highly motivated students toward the instructional contents would attain lower academic achievements through the course. Table 5 illustrates the results.

Table 5
Needs on the Contents of GE to Academic Achievements

	Practical English	Textbook Reading	Grammar	Integrated linguistic skills	TOEIC	No-response
Group A (n=570)	216 37.9%	34 6.0%	14 2.5%	13 2.3%	35 6.2%	257 45.1%
Group B (n=226)	59 26.3%	13 5.6%	2 1.1%	5 2.3%	15 6.8%	130 57.8%
Total (n=796)	275 34.0%	47 5.9%	16 2.0%	18 2.3%	50 6.4%	387 48.4%**

** $\chi^2=14.56$, $p < .01$

V. CONCLUSION

The comparison between the learner's needs and their academic achievements concludes that some of the needs from the learners play a role in accelerating their academic competence such as the learner's preferable language use and the level of interest in the instructional contents.

According to the result, students stated that their preferred goal of GE is to develop their communicative competence regardless of their grades. It reaffirms the proposal for proficiency based instruction for GE by Jongsoon Joh (2002), Myeonghee Seong, Hyungji Chang, and Hyunjin Kim (2007), Myeonghee Seong and Hyunjin Kim (2006) and Seikyung Cho, Sungchul Moon, and Kanghyuck Lee (1997). According to them, since GE instruction consists of a heterogeneous group of students, they would be rearranged and reorganized in terms of learner's the level and individualized purpose of language learning. However, the result of this study indicates all levels of learners prefer to have the equivalent goal, developing communicative competence. Therefore it implies one consideration for GE curriculum design that GE learners need to share their goal with all academic levels of students. The designers or planners of GE have to regard these needs during the process of curriculum design.

In addition, there is a need to take the integrated instruction of four language skills, rather than to take a course with isolated language skills or one specific skill focused instruction, since learners of all academic levels prefer to take the integrated one. According to the 7th NC by MEHRD (1997), spoken language

competence like listening and speaking are the prior knowledge to be attained before the acquisition of written language competence. It is assured by the contents of the textbook. The textbook for the elementary level in the public schools provides listening and speaking based contents for the 1st and 2nd year of school, eliminating written and reading skill-based contents. The instruction in the elementary school emphasizes spoken language acquisition at the beginning and expects confidence with written language late. Likewise, at the college level, many GE courses provide English conversation courses as mandatory ones for graduation. Therefore, the freshmen, who demand the integrated instruction of four language skills in this study, are forced to take the one language skill focused instruction.

An interesting finding from the comparison was also recognized in the question of the use of language during the instruction. Generally, it is expected that more confident language learners prefer to take the course with the target language, but they presented the preferable instruction with spontaneous use of target and native languages. It brings to mind the review of the recent disciplines by research in several areas such as the English immersion program, and increase of native speakers in the educational institutions.

Considering the level of motivation, the last question made a suggestion for GE curriculum development in another aspect. Learners with the higher level of academic achievements reported the low interest in the contents of instruction. It aroused a contention toward the assumption by Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) that highly motivated students would achieve more academic competence than low motivated students.

In sum, the objective need evaluated by the judgemental view (Kyunghee Choi, 2006) showed some correlation with learners' academic competence. They are the needs of GE about the mediated language, and the level of interest in the contents. Therefore this study suggests the considerations for GE curriculum design in order to develop the learners' academic achievements as followings: They include instructions with the target and native language and encouragement of interest in contents of GE. There exist, however, some limitations to apply this result to the GE curriculum design directly, because the study was only conducted by five questions. Therefore, it has to be modified with the development of more research questions, which consist of five categories of questions to consult needs from the students and if it is allowed, the study is completed by the appended research with the aspects of administrators and

instructors, and then it would meet the concrete condition of curriculum development for GE.

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