

# Needs Analysis Questionnaire

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Students' needs have always been an issue of great concern among teachers in almost all stages of education. Teachers are occupied with the question of how they could make their lessons not only more appealing to students but also more efficient so as to produce optimum results. Their basic tool has been the course book, which in many cases, as it has been proven through various studies, requires either amendments or additions to the existing material in order to enrich it and simultaneously reinforce those skills that require enhancement. This is particularly true in the cases, where English is taught for specific purposes and learners receive specialized instruction, so as to suit their future professional needs.

*Keywords:* specific purposes, learners, needs, course book

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to present the derived results from the questionnaire that the students completed, analyze the information gathered, and then evaluate the particular findings. The aim of this questionnaire was to extract data as far as students' present and future needs, attitudes towards learning and lacks are concerned with a view to planning the lessons, so as to better suit their needs and also improve their learning.

The respondents to this questionnaire were 31 adult students, learning English for specific purposes (ESP), 28 of them aged 19-23, one 25-year-old, and two aged 27. All of them are students of the Merchant Marine Academy in Preveza, Epirus, Greece, attending the 2nd semester of their studies after the completion of their first training voyage lasting about four to six months. English is among the most important subjects in their curriculum as they are called to serve on merchant ships trading all over the world and communicate in English almost exclusively throughout their voyages. Therefore, they will use the language learned in the near future to the outside world beyond the walls of the classroom as opposed to other learners who still attend school and the chances of using English outside the classroom are limited. The material we have at our disposal is a course book on Maritime English and a CD. As a result, the book they are being taught is designed, so as to prepare them for this field and it includes nautical terms, terminology, and texts containing useful information related to all aspects of navigation in an attempt to cover real interactions that will take place on board. Furthermore, even some topics of general knowledge, such as describing weather or clothing are presented in the context of Maritime English. As a consequence, the author would say that it is difficult to categorise them in levels as we do in other circumstances. Yet, as an attempt to do likewise, the author would suggest that most of them belong to B1 level.

As it was mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to present the data collected through a questionnaire whose aim was to identify students' needs as far as teaching and learning are concerned. Needs

analysis is regarded as very important because we, as teachers, want to discover not only how they feel about teaching and learning, but also what they need to learn in accordance with their interests and what skill they want to improve. The results of this enquiry will assist us in designing more purposeful, attractive and to the point lessons and through these our learners will gain the knowledge they seek and meet the demands of their future careers. Needs analysis dates back in 1960s (Richards, 2001, p. 51), because “The demand for specialized language programs grew and applied linguists increasingly began to employ needs analysis procedures in language teaching.” It can be inferred that a new trend in teaching arose and linguists were the field that undertook the responsibility of assessing learners’ specific needs in order the students to be qualified future individuals. They launched their efforts by carrying out needs analysis projects motivated by the current requirements of their time. One of their main concerns was the students and their learning desires.

### **Description of the Questionnaire**

When designing the particular questionnaire (see Appendix I) and according to the author’s teaching experience in the Academy, the author focused on some questions that would reveal valuable information as to what they can already do and what they need to do with English in their profession. The author also attempted to determine whether or not the existing course book and the activities carried out correspond to and fulfill their needs and if there are any areas that require special attention or improvement. The rationale behind these questions was to make them reflect more carefully on certain issues since they had completed their first training voyage and gained valuable experience from it. That means, they could answer in a more mature way after perceiving the language demands and difficulties they faced on the job. The questionnaire is anonymous, yet requiring some personal details to be disclosed, which give the background of these students. All of them learn English as a second language and for the same reason: They want to be able to communicate effectively with all the parties concerned while at sea. There is a combination of structured and unstructured questions which respondents could answer and understand quite easily. The reason for this choice was to bring onto surface their opinions about teaching, but most importantly about learning and at the same time, provide me with a comprehensive view of their needs and demands. Structured questions were easier to complete and they did not demand further analysis. On the other hand, unstructured ones were thought-provoking and some students even provided some kind of justification for their answers. That was really interesting as it not only declared their wish to be specific but it was also a sign of fully comprehending their situation.

Some of the questions deal with objective needs, such as language proficiency and specific purpose needs, while others deal with subjective needs, which relate to what they think should be done to help them acquire the foreign language more effectively (Brindley, 1989; Nunam, 1988; Tudor, 1996, p. 88, as cited in Ayakli, 2004). Currently, we are interested in what learners will be able to do at the end of the course and how they would perform successfully their roles as mariners. All of them belong to the interactive domain, as stated by Tudor (1996, p. 82, as cited in Ayakli, 2004, p. 93), which means they are all interested in communicative language and especially for occupational purposes. The author’s target was to discover their weaknesses, strengths, and preferences, which they have spotted first and attempt to place more emphasis on the part of the language that requires reinforcement.

### **Presentation of Main Results**

The results are quite reliable, because it must be noted, once again, that they had first-hand experience,

therefore their level of proficiency in English was tested in real life situations. There is no need to say, that the students were all really eager to respond and help me comprehend their expectations from the lesson. In fact, they found it most interesting and intriguing since it was something outside their daily routines. Some of them spent more time completing it than others and that was really amazing, because they tried to be as analytic as possible in their answers and reflected on their communicative needs. However, some of the findings stood out and showed that the learners had a clear view of their abilities. For instance, they could classify themselves as weak, good or very good students (Question 2), since sometimes learners tend to overestimate their potentials. That was evident in the next replies, too, where they clearly stated the skills they think important or need to get better at. The questions following Question 4 are related to the aspects of occupational purposes, as it is required from them to define which skill they consider as the most important, which one they want to improve and with whom they will interact mostly using English. Fourteen out of thirty-one (Question 5) find speaking as the most vital skill in their profession as it is imperative for them to communicate with the rest of the crew, through the very high frequency (VHF) appliance or with the local and port authorities, which were among the most popular answers (Question 10). That is the reason why more than one third of them (Question 6) replied that their speaking skills need improvement, so as to cope with the demands of their duties. Actually, four students added that by practicing speaking they could be understood better by colleagues of other nationalities, since there is a difference between learning a language in the classroom and using it in their everyday life. Next, came the writing and listening skills which help them understand the commands and fill in all the essential paperwork involved in their daily work.

Although, two-thirds of the respondents find the existing course book adequate and that it covers their basic needs (Question 7), they suggest that other activities should be added as well, thus indicating a wish for more practice and familiarization with authentic dialogues taking place on board. They demonstrated a preference for more speaking drills featuring real exchanges covering a wide variety of incidents in which they would definitely be involved. Taking their answers into account, it can be implied that they desire to be fully prepared to execute their duties and clearly shows how conscientious they are. Above all, it is a sign that cannot be ignored of how well they perceive their lacks and needs. What comes to support this view is that 22 students find performing dialogues useful for their training, while 15 of them go for vocabulary activities (Question 9), which complement speaking. This fact demonstrates the interactive and occupational domains they are interested in. Last but not least, 24 out of 31 students believe strongly that English teachers should be specially trained, so as to cope with the demands of the lesson for the specific profession (Question 3).

All in all, what is evident in most of their answers is their great need for speaking and listening as far as maritime English is concerned. What is provided through the course book does not seem to satisfy them totally.

### **Implications of Results**

The results obtained demand some changes not only in the curriculum development, but also in the materials design. Actually, there are quite some actions that could be taken in order to implement a more communicative approach. First of all, an extra hour could be added, so as to have more time for practice or alternatively, less time could be devoted to grammar, so as to pay more attention to the other areas that need reinforcement. One other thing that should be taken into consideration is to keep the present course book, since it is acceptable by most students, but add more speaking and listening activities. These could be comprised of transcripts of authentic dialogues taken perhaps from the archives of marine companies, covering a wide range

of incidents or accidents and the various accents of the officers on board the vessel. In line with the theory of linguistic and cognitive reinforcement, role plays could be performed based on prompts given through flashcards. Sample forms which are included in the ship's paperwork can be distributed to students to complete and, as a result, become familiar with this part of their duties. Instead, they could negotiate in groups as to what should be written in the form and how. What is more, documentaries and films without subtitles based on real incidents may prove helpful as they would call for their undivided attention to understand. After watching them, they could prepare and give an oral presentation of the events and even discuss over with their classmates as to what they think should have been done to prevent such unpleasant conditions. In order to carry out this task they would use language forms and expressions to argue, agree, disagree, give reasons, or conclude, therefore, using general English for maritime purposes. Open discussions could be initiated, as well, on the basis of these issues. Articles and reports can be utilised for the same purposes either by listening to them or expressing their opinions after reading. Their lexical repertoire can be expanded by presenting to them diagrams or pictures and assist them provide the appropriate topic vocabulary. The existing book uses this method and it has been proven that it is very useful and helpful for the learners to acquire new words.

### References

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## NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

## Appendix I

Title: Data regarding Merchant Marine Academy students' needs in the English language-Maritime English.

**Needs Analysis Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to gather data regarding Merchant Marine Academy's students' needs in the English language.

**Personal Details**

Age:

Gender: Male

Female

Other foreign languages known: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think that the level of proficiency you had before entering the academy was sufficient to help you cope with the demands of your job?

Yes

No

2. At English, you consider yourself as

Excellent

Good

Very good

Weak

3. Do you think that your English teachers should be specially trained?

Yes

No

4. For what purposes will you use English?

Educational

Occupational

5. Which skill(s) do you consider as more important for your profession? Number 1-4, 4 = "the most important"; and 1 = "the least important".

Speaking

Listening

Writing

Reading

6. Which skill do you need to improve?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you think your current course book covers your basic needs for your training voyage?

Yes

No

8. If your answer is No, which extra material/teaching aids you find useful?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What kind of activities do you find more useful for your training?

- Grammar activities
- Performing dialogues
- Writing
- Vocabulary activities
- Listening

10. Who do you think you will interact using the English language with?

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11. What extra activities would you like to be added?

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12. Do you use any other sources to find information concerning your field?

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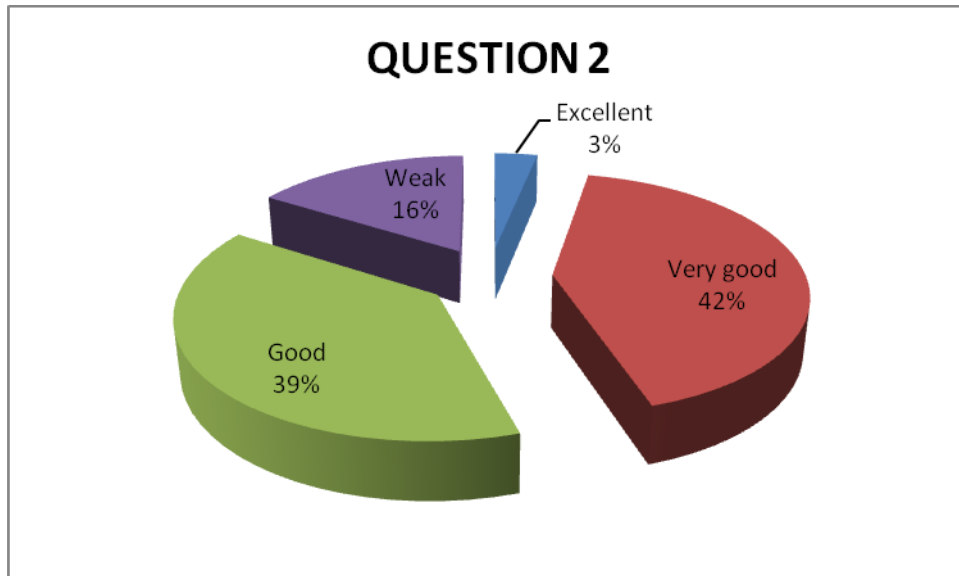
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13. Would it be helpful if you participated more during the lesson?

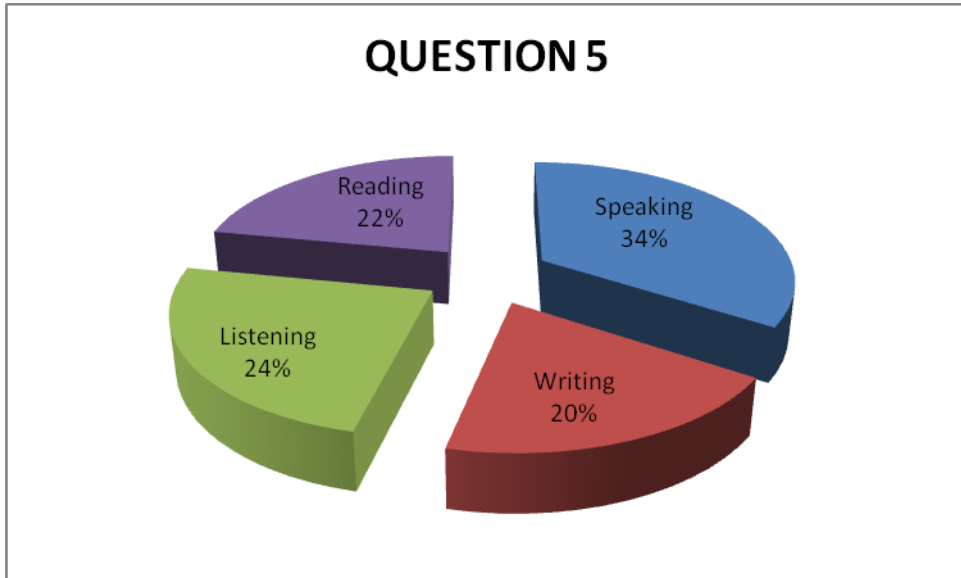
Yes

Thank you for your assistance.

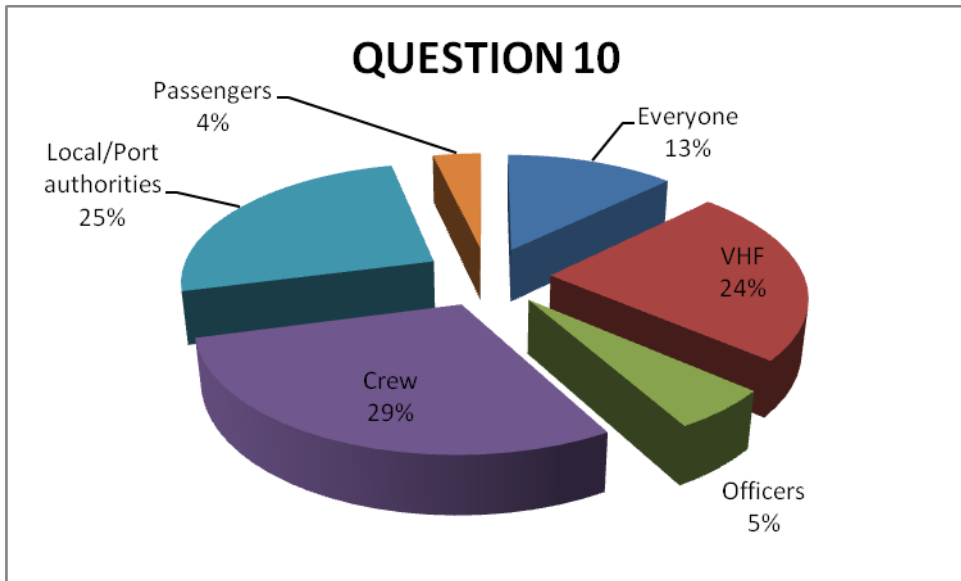
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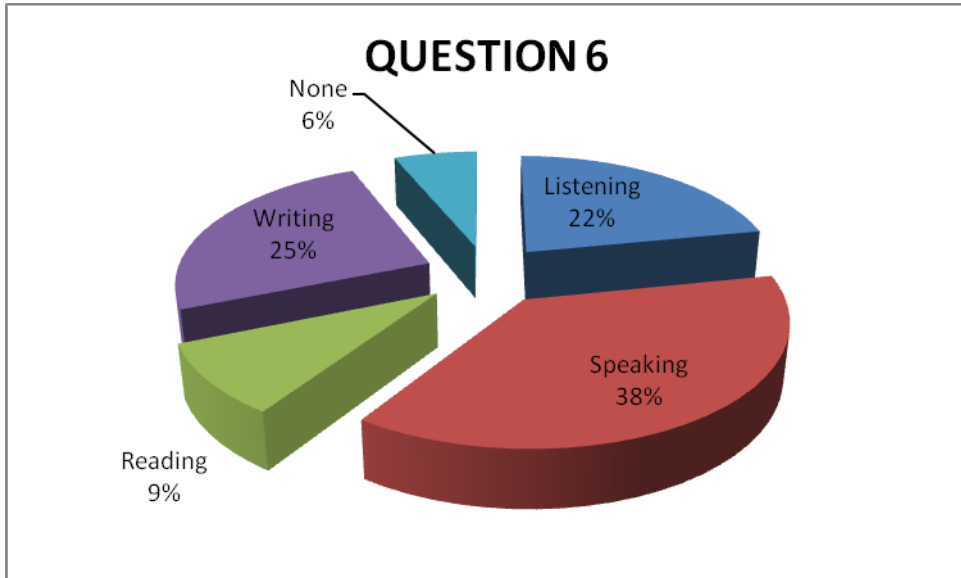
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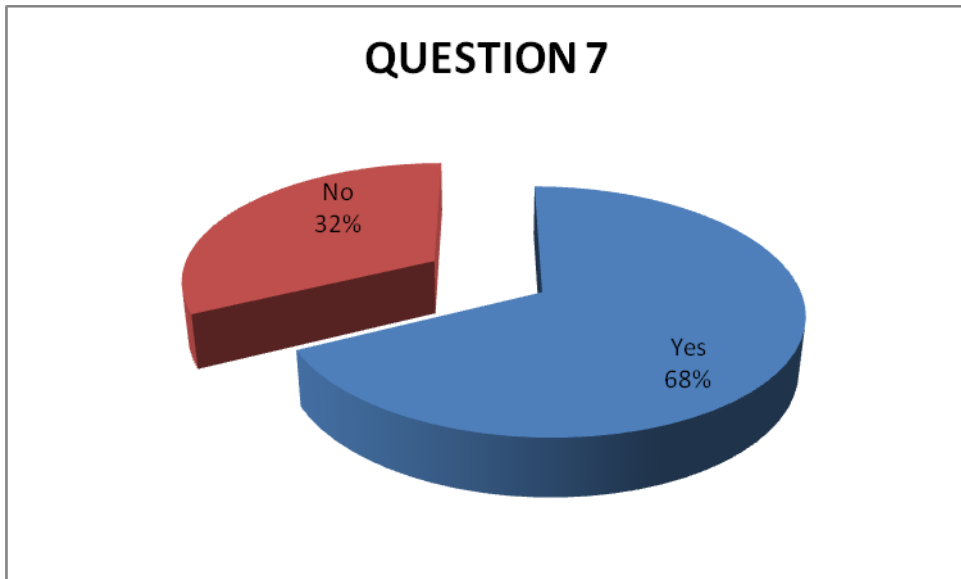
Appendix IV



Appendix V

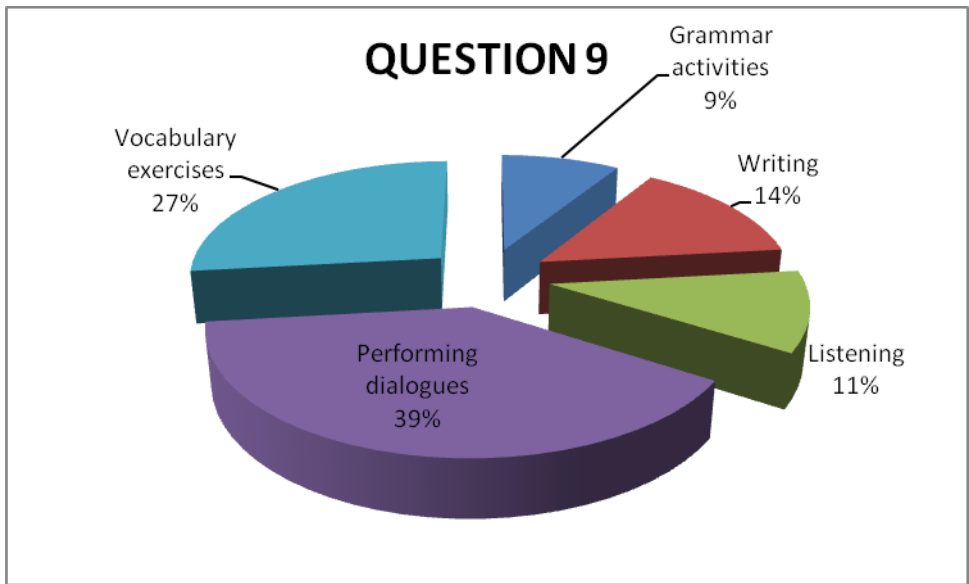


Appendix VI





Appendix VII



Appendix VIII

