

# An Assessment of the English for Academic Purpose Course Offered to Law Students in Benin: A Case Study

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Dossou Flavien LANMANTCHION<sup>①</sup>,  
Estelle MINAFLINO<sup>②</sup> &  
Codjo Charlemagne FANO<sup>③</sup>  
*Université d'Abomey-Calavi*

**Abstract** – This article evaluates the language skills and components of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) textbooks offered to law students at the Faculty of Law at the University of Abomey-Calavi. It aims at investigating the extent to which these EAP courses have been successful in fulfilling the expectations of prospective professionals of law in Benin. For the first purpose, the first and second year law students' EAP textbooks have been studied and their linguistic components and skills identified. Regarding the second purpose, a "Needs Analysis questionnaire" was sent to the same category of students. The results of the needs assessment reveal that the EAP courses proposed to law students in Benin seem to make the grounds for prospective lawyers. However, these courses are not sufficient to account for specific job requirement of individual professionals. Based on the results of needs analysis questionnaire undertaken in this study, a proposed model of "skill based syllabus" for first and second year law students has been suggested.

**Keywords:** English for Academic Purposes (EAP); Needs Analysis; English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Skills

**Résumé** – L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier le contenu du manuel d'anglais juridique proposé aux étudiants des premières et deuxièmes années à la faculté de droit de l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi afin d'en dégager les compétences linguistiques qui s'y retrouvent pour voir dans quelle mesure ces compétences répondent aux besoins, c'est-à-dire aux attentes des futurs professionnels du droit. Dans un premier temps, le manuel a été étudié et ses composantes linguistiques identifiées. En second lieu, un «questionnaire d'analyse des besoins» a été envoyé aux étudiants de la 1<sup>ère</sup> et 2<sup>ème</sup> années afin d'identifier leurs besoins réels. Les résultats de l'évaluation des besoins révèlent que le contenu du manuel proposé aux étudiants d'une manière ou d'une autre répond aux besoins des étudiants. Cependant ce manuel présente des insuffisances pour rendre compte des conditions d'emploi spécifique de ces futurs professionnels. Sur la base des résultats de l'analyse des besoins entreprise dans cette étude et sur le feedback de l'interview, un modèle de programme basé sur les besoins de l'heure et du futur des étudiants de 1<sup>ère</sup> et 2<sup>ème</sup> années en droit a été suggéré.

**Mots clés :** Anglais pour besoin académique, Analyse de besoin, Anglais spécialisé, Habiletés

## 1. Introduction

Globalization and online communication have brought dramatic and on-going changes in the programs that many West African universities, more specifically, Benin universities offer today. The English language has become compulsory and is taught in every graduate or undergraduate study programme. For five years now, it has been taught in the Faculty of Law at the University of Abomey-Calavi. An immediate interest for the students is the fact that they may have some professional relations with their colleagues from Nigeria or Ghana, or have to deal with clients from those countries or other English-speaking African countries. Added to this is

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<sup>①</sup> flavienlam81@yahoo.fr

<sup>②</sup> bankestelle@yahoo.fr

<sup>③</sup> chcodjo@yahoo.fr

the fact that some of them may have the possibility to pursue their studies after graduation in an English speaking country. Another contributory factor is that most good law books are written in English. Thus, for global collaboration to function effectively, Benin Universities may need to re-assess the degree to which their students' future career needs are being met by the existing language programs, so that policy and resources may be adjusted accordingly. The concern is that the English language courses should adequately enable students to communicate effectively in contexts that graduates are likely to encounter in their future professional career. This study sets out to explore which English-related skills are needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century lawyers and appreciate how students in law are being prepared to use English efficiently and effectively in their profession.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

There is a common belief among many first and second year law students that English courses offered to them at the University of Abomey-Calavi are not always helpful. In other words, it is believed that the ESP courses offered to students suffer from a kind of inefficiency because they fail to account for the learners' future job requirement. When the learners graduate and start their job, they realize that their English is insufficient to fulfill their job purposes. Beninese magistrates, for instance, when, during a trial, it happens that the case is about Nigerian people, they are obliged to call a translator despite the time they have spent studying English. Therefore,

At the same time the English language is seen as the key to gaining access to global markets by non-English speaking countries. Many employers today require their employees to be proficient in English. Whether it is to do business with English speaking countries, or to operate in other markets where English is used as a lingua franca, English remains the language of international business. As a result, employees in international companies are increasingly expected to use English, not only with their international clients but also for internal communication with their own colleagues from other languages backgrounds.

Additionally, is that the expanding area of the 21<sup>st</sup> century information-based employment means that those entering the workforce need far more knowledge than simple information about their area of expertise. This suggests that new graduates need to enter the workplace with a repertoire of applied skills (Lohmann, 2006).

## **3. Objectives of the study**

Based on the problem statement, this study, attempts to examine the objectives of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses taught specifically to law students and then to investigate the target situation needs of first and second year law students in order to see whether the objectives of the EAP courses are in line with the subject target needs, if not, where the discrepancies lie. Eventually, it aims at proposing a model of "syllabus design" based on the subjects target situation needs

mentioned by them in order to point out those linguistic components and skills which need to be emphasized in the ESP course. To serve these purposes, the study tries to examine the EAP courses for first and second year law students. The research questions to be considered are as follows:

- a. What language skills and components are mostly focused on in EAP texts books for first and second year law students?
- b. What language skills and components of ESP textbooks are in line with target needs of prospective lawyers?

#### **4. Previous Studies**

ESP is viewed as a cover term for teaching and learning English for multiple specific purposes: EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) and others. The rationale behind ESP courses is the diversity and specificity of learners' objectives and needs for learning English. Considering these factors, it seems important to conduct an in-depth needs assessment before planning and implementing ESP courses. "Needs Assessments" consists of the procedures designed to gather and analyze information about the target language needs for a specific group of learners in an existing or proposed setting so that inferences about curriculum can be drawn and informed decisions can be made (Purpura & King 2003). A study of the situation in which the learners are supposed to work after graduation may help to assess the target needs.

Literature on Needs Analysis reveals that the concept of "need" has been considered through different perspectives. Berwick (1989: p 41) defines need as the 'discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future one. The related research offers other dichotomies on "need", for example, "target" versus "present situation needs", "felt" versus "perceived needs", "subjective" versus "objective needs", etc. Additionally, Hutchison and Waters (1987) define "target needs" as those required by the learners in the context of use. They identify target needs as necessities and distinguish them from wants (what the learners believe they need). Although wants are more subjective, both necessities and wants should be considered in the process of "Needs Analysis".

Regarding the diversity of needs and their unique and situation-based nature, needs analysis has been considered as a prerequisite to the process of course design. It enables the curriculum planners to see to what extent the existing programs are in line with the learners' real language needs. This kind of evaluation not only helps administrators plan language courses which are more satisfying to the learners in terms of fulfilling their needs but also may improve the existing programs in terms of objectives, topics, and materials. Moreover, according to Kuter (2000), asking learners about their needs can motivate their participation. However, it has been frequently mentioned in the literature that needs analysis should be an on-going process carried out during the life of each course since the learners' needs may be changing too (Robinson 1991 : P. 91)

## 5. Methodology

The research instruments used here consists of a brief overview of the ESP textbook used for first and second year law students and then a collection of data based on a subjects' needs analysis questionnaire. The questionnaire had the intention of collecting information on learners' future jobs, the extent to which they will use English for their daily job purposes, the language components and the skills they will mostly deal with. We can also add the probable pre-service or in-service English courses that they have passed; the language skills and components that those courses have focused on, and finally their needs related to the learning of English. Some of the questions were open-ended and others just required the learners' selection of relevant choices out of a certain number of responses. These questions were adapted, basing on Westerfield's (2012) needs analysis questionnaire and was addressed to both present and former Law students. (For more details on the questionnaire see the appendices)

## 6. Results

This section is divided in two main parts. The first part will be an overview of the textbook of first and second year Law Students and the second will be about the feedback on the needs analysis.

### 6.1. A bird view of EAP textbooks for first and second year Law Students

The ESP textbook (used for both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year law students) is entitled *English for Law Students*, and consists of four main parts:

- **Part one:** Words study: Definitions (from page 7 to page 26 and from page 39 to 40)
- **Part two:** Official letters (from page 27 to 30)
- **Part three:** Curriculum Vitae (from page31 to page32)
- **Part four:** Specimen for questions training (from page33 to page38)

In the first part, some legal expressions in English are given and their meanings have been translated into French. In the second part, four examples of an official letter have been detailed, in the third part a layout of a curriculum vitae has been developed, and the final part is a reading passage followed by some "True or False" questions and some detailed questions.

The aim of this overview was to have an outlook of the content, linguistic components and language skills of the textbooks used in order to see to what extent they are in line with the law students' needs. Regarding the main purpose of this research that is observing the extent to which Law ESP textbooks can fulfill learners' future job requirements one point seems necessary to be mentioned here. The primary focus of the book is on the translation of law terminologies. There are long reading passages accompanied by some comprehension exercises. There is no trace of listening and speaking.

## 6.2. The feedback of the needs analysis

**Table 1.** Students' Needs Analysis

<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Reading</b>
Talking with lawyers in English	Listening to authentic materials	Standard letters	Reading law materials and professional articles
Attending meetings and conferences in English	Listening to native speakers	Emails	Reading contracts, and Agreements
Making an oral presentation of current issues in the justice system	Listening to non-natives	Writing reports, contracts, Research abstracts	Reading articles of association, law dictionaries
Making phone calls and presenting research.		Writing a résumé/ curriculum vitae	Reading journals, Periodicals, acts and magazines.

## 7. Discussion

The analysis of the first and second year law students textbook (which is not a published book) reveals that the focus of EAP textbook offered to law students is mostly on study of words and their meanings. However, as the study has confirmed, none of the learners mentioned study of words only as their felt needs. This means that law students' textbook is not in line with their expressed needs. Many things still need to be adjusted in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in the Law Faculty at Abomey Calavi University. Abomey Calavi teachers of English are faced with various complexities and problems due to lack of the knowhow of designing effective courses that will cover the specific language needs of their students. Within the landscape of ESP teaching in Benin republic, many ESP teaching and especially of course design are often ad-hoc and not entirely based on comprehensive needs analysis. Besides, we notice that the course is constant every year and nothing is changed at all. A course should be a matter of constant experimentation with a view to revising it from time to time according to changing needs of learners. The needs analysis is not a process administered once for all at the beginning of the course; rather it should be an on-going process repeating the life of a language program (Westerfield 2012; p 56)

Furthermore, the percentage of former students (81%) who admit that the course does not help them to communicate efficiently in real situation is higher than the percentage of those who think the contrary. These results are an indication that Law

students are not well- prepared for this 21<sup>st</sup> century communicative skills. The answer to my research questions is that the textbook used with them does not match with students future realities and does help meet today and tomorrow century communicative skills.

## 8. Suggestions

Based on the “needs analysis” undertaken in this study, the following skill-based syllabus is designed. This syllabus offers a combination of communication and language skills and can be suggested for those who need to use English in an international legal environment.

**Table 2.** A proposed model of a “skill based syllabus based on the authors’ needs assessment

Skills	Sub Skills	Strategies	
Reading	Reading professional books and articles	Skimming, scanning	
	Reading catalog		
	Reading		
Writing	Writing effective reports	Learning about writing conventions and different parts of a letters, reports, contracts, introduction, body, conclusion.	
	Writing emails		
	Writing standard letters		
Speaking	International conferences	Presentation strategies: opening, giving reports.	
	Making phone call		Getting through taking and leaving messages
	Talking with English lawyers		
Listening	Listening to non natives	Decoding, using Top down and bottom up strategies	
	Listening to authentic materials		

The principal trends identified in the Needs Assessment are:

- a) The use of English to teach discipline or career-specific content;
- b) A move towards a Communicative Language Teaching;
- c) A rise in the use of project-based learning and authentic materials;

Educational institutions must reinvent themselves to engage students successfully and provide students with the skills needed to compete in an

increasingly global world. EAP course for University students should account for the idiosyncratic needs of individual people with individual prospective job.

## 9. Conclusion

This study sets out with the dual aims of analyzing the textbook used by first and second year law students and the law students' needs. The combination of past studies and analysis of the outcomes supports the idea that many things still need to be adjusted in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in the Law Faculty at Abomey Calavi University. Our universities need a continuous program of course improvement to meet the problems posed by our complex culture in this ever-changing world. A course cannot be regarded as fixed for all times. It should be a matter of constant experimentation with a view to revising it from time to time according to changing needs. The bounds of human knowledge are constantly expanding, and therefore, it is essential to add its significant new items and weed out from it whatever has ceased to have direct significance for the students and their immediate and future life. As Lanmantchion (2013) citing Dewey has rightly put it "If we teach today's students like yesterday's we rob them of tomorrow".

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## Appendice

### Needs Assessment Questionnaire

Dear students, in order to provide better courses for you and prospective learners, we have provided a questionnaire in which your answers will be very helpful.

1. For what immediate purposes do you need to learn/improve your English?
2. PUT IN RANK ORDER OF PRIORITY.

#### RANK ORDER

a. FOR STUDY	
b. FOR RESEARCH	
c. FOR SOCIAL PURPOSES	
d. FOR TRAVEL	
e. FOR JOB OR PROFESSION	
f. FOR STUDY ABROAD	
g. OTHER PLEASE SPECIFY	

2. What activities do you, or will you soon have to carry out in English?  
PUT IN RANK ORDER OF PRIORITY.

#### RANK ORDER

a. READING	
b. LISTENING	
c. WRITING	
d. SPEAKING	
e. NOTE TAKING	

3. Please specify these activities in more detail. Put a check (v) beside the activities you have to do, or will soon have to do.

**a. Reading:** What do you have to read, and why?

1. Textbooks
2. Journal articles
3. Magazine or newspaper articles
4. Instructor lecture notes
5. Workbook instructions
6. Laboratory or computer manuals
7. Exam questions
8. Reading where subject matter is very complicated



9. Reading to get information specifically required for assignments
10. Other reading activities (please specify)

**b. Listening:** What do you have to listen to, why?

1. Lectures
2. Seminars
3. Instruction
4. Videos
5. Other listening activities (please specify)

**c. Writing:** What do you have to write, and why?

1. Essay-type assignments
2. Research papers
3. Report of experiments.
4. Work book exercises
5. Exams answers
6. Other writing activity (please specify)

**d. Speaking:** What kind of speaking do you have to do, why?

1. Asking questions in class
2. Answering questions in class
3. in group discussions
4. Presentation to class
5. Discussing academic questions with staff
6. in oral exams
7. Conducting seminars
8. Lecturing
9. Other speaking activities (please specify)
10. Which of the above activities do you have difficulty with? MARK WITH A STAR (\*). Describe the problem below.
11. Do you have longer-term purposes for learning English? If so what are they?  
What activities will you have done in English?
  - A. travel aboard
  - B. study aboard
  - C. for your job or profession here
  - D. for your job or profession abroad
  - E. for social purposes
  - F. other (please specify)
12. What difficulty have you had with learning English in the past?
  - A. teaching methods
  - B. textbooks
  - C. atmosphere
  - D. other (please specify)

13. What are your interest, hobbies, etc? Would improved English help in any of these?

14. What aspects of English would you like your English course to cover?

**PUT IN RANK ORDER OF PRIORITY**

a. faster, more effective reading		
b. pronunciation		
c. fluency in speech		
d. speaking with grammatical correctness		
e. listening and understanding		
f. spelling		
g. punctuation		
h. specialized vocabulary		
i. general vocabulary		
j. writing grammatical sentences		
k. creating well organized paragraphs		
l. note-taking from lectures		
m. note-taking from books, etc.		
n. other (please specify)		