

Bridging the Gap: A Study of Academic Language-Learning Needs of
Saudi International Students

by

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M.A., from University of Umm Al-Qura, 2005

B.A., from University of Umm Al-Qura, 1996

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Linguistics

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the current study examines Saudi students' perspectives, coupled with EAL instructors' views, regarding Saudi students' English language-learning needs. Two data collection tools were used, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study ($N = 172$) included samples of EAL learners ($n = 127$) and EAL instructors ($n = 45$) both in Saudi Arabia and Canada, Victoria. The mismatch between the skills identified as important and areas identified as needing support by the learners, in addition to the divergence between learners' and instructors' perceptions, underscores the necessity of triangulation when using needs analysis to discover language-learning needs. The study delineates oral communication (i.e., being able to interact by using the language appropriately and efficiently) as a language-learning need identified by both Saudi students and their language instructors. Quantitative (skill ratings) and qualitative (responses to open-ended questions and interviews) data suggest that both students and instructors view writing as a challenging area for Saudi English-language learners. The results also indicate issues that contribute to the challenges faced by Saudis in the process of learning English. Findings show the importance of educational background and cultural differences in the students' language development. Responses report that reading is devalued in the Saudi educational system and Saudi culture in general. Hence,

both Saudi students and instructors in Canada pinpointed reading as an area needing support. Based on the key findings, it is evident that the language-learning needs of Saudi students are shaped according to the requirements of their immediate study context and their prospective goals.

The study contributes crucial findings about participants' perceptions of the importance of skills and their assessment of skills status in Saudi Arabia and Canada. In addition to the implications for English language learning in Saudi Arabia, these findings can be informative for educational institutions and practitioners in the English-speaking world. Most importantly, the multi-level analysis confirms that language learning needs are context-specific.

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Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation for a number of people who have contributed to this work. First and foremost, my sincere thanks to Dr. Li-Shih Huang. Throughout my research journey, Dr. Huang has been more than the supervisor of my dissertation. Her guidance, advice, and invaluable suggestions have improved my work; her kindness, encouragement, and continuous support have helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel even at the darkest times. I owe her a special debt of gratitude for always being there. I am also thankful to Dr. Sonya Bird and Dr. Helen Raptis for agreeing to be members of my doctoral committee and providing insightful comments, valuable suggestions, and constructive criticism.

I am also thankful to the students and instructors who participated in the study. I really appreciate the time and effort they put into sharing their experiences, without which this work could not have been completed. I am also thankful to my teachers, my friends, and my little family in the department of linguistics. Their affection and words of support have always given me the strength to move forward. Special thanks are also due to the proofreaders who helped me fine tune my work.

I am infinitely indebted to my parents. Their unconditional love and constant prayers were the fuel that kept me going. They taught me to pursue my dreams and provided me with the courage to do so. I owe them my life and success. I am deeply grateful to my brothers and sisters for their love and support. They might be overseas, but they managed to make me feel as if they were around all the time.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my children, Hisham, Abdulrahman, and Leen; my lovely friends, helpers, and companions throughout my journey. They have always been a source of joy

and inspiration. Without their smiles, I would not have been able to take the pressure of studying and parenting responsibilities.

Last but not least, a special word of thanks to the one-of-a-kind person, my husband Yasser Brikeet. No words can describe my heartfelt gratitude for his love, moral, and financial support. His confidence that I would actually get through it all has supported me in many moments of doubt.

For all this and more, I thank God.

Dedication

To my parents, you have enlightened my path and guided me to reach my dreams.
I am where I am because of you.

إلى أجدد هدايا الرب

ومختصر نعيم الدنيا

أمي و أبي

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The trans-border flow of students who want to pursue studies abroad puts receiving countries under pressure to develop strategies to accommodate this academic diversity. When it comes to scientific and technical communication, the lion's share of students want English-language education because English is seen as the means to a high quality education. This increasing demand on English-speaking countries makes it challenging for practitioners/educators to meet students' English learning needs so that the desired results can be achieved.

Traditionally, English programs for international students have been designed with the purpose of developing students' language performance to match that of educated English as a first language (L₁) speakers (i.e., standard English) (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hewings, 2002). When the attention is shifted towards learners, however, the focus in designing such courses has been on understanding the needs of the students themselves (Belcher, 2006; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988). As Mauranen (2012) asserted, "there are no native speakers of academic language. . . . The acquisition of academic literacies and ways of talking involves much more than a few surface expressions and poses challenges in students' first languages as well" (p. 69). This fact becomes more important in international study programs where "the contact language gets shaped by the needs and contingencies of the situations" (p. 69).

Until now, there has been no research that has broadly investigated the academic English language-learning needs of Saudi international students, particularly, the challenges related to language skills in the Canadian context. A number of studies have investigated the language

needs of Saudi students in different fields, for example, technology (Almulhim, 2001), translation (Ben Salamh, 2012), and medicine (Javid & Umer, 2013); all those studies were conducted in Saudi Arabia. In this dissertation I report on my findings of research on the academic language-learning needs of Saudi international students from the students' and instructors' perspectives. Using different viewpoints, the present study aims to identify the academic English language-learning needs of Saudi learners by examining which language skills are considered important as well as those needing support from students and instructors perspectives. In addition to pointing out major challenges encountered in the language-learning process, the study analyzes learners' as well as instructors' expectations about language-support programs directed at Saudi students. Finally, it provides insight on the unique characteristics of international Saudis language learners.

1.2 Rationale and Context

The idea of this study grew out of my personal experience as a Saudi international student and the challenges I encountered throughout my journey as an English language learner (both in Saudi Arabia and in Canada). I used to believe that language was learnt through innate abilities supported partially by formal instruction but mainly by communication and actual use of language. However, when I started my studies in Canada, I realized how important it was to be aware of my own language needs/abilities and, more crucially, to connect this needs diagnosis to the process of language learning and development. Furthermore, being on the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), I realized the benefits of sharing these needs with English language teaching practitioners in Canada in order for learners to achieve the required goals in the shortest time possible (given the limited time sponsored students have to meet the English-

language requirement). This realization prompted me to examine the language-learning needs of Saudi international students from different perspectives.

Over the years, the Saudi government has invested in human resources because youth/individuals are seen to have an important impact on the nation's development at all levels. Accordingly, much effort and many resources have been put into developing the Saudi educational system. In addition to implementing a series of reforms, starting with making public education available for everyone, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Saudi Arabia aims to decrease illiteracy rates and create gender equality in education (MOE, n.d.). The goal of these reforms is to ensure that future generations will contribute to the nation's development in accordance with the principles derived from the religion (Islam) and culture.

A central objective of the educational system in Saudi Arabia is to create a knowledge-based society (as reported on the MOE website). Therefore, it is important to equip students with an international language (usually English) that gives them access to a wide range of knowledge in different fields. Nevertheless, English is only introduced as a subject at the intermediate stage (grade 7, age 11)¹ in public schools in Saudi Arabia. It has only been in the last few years that English has been taught in the sixth grade in some schools and in the fourth grade in others.

In 2005, at the initiative of King Abdullah, the MOE implemented KASP, which sends male and female graduate and undergraduate Saudi students to recognized universities throughout the world to pursue their education in various specializations. The program was initially designed as a five-year program but it has been extended twice to two more five-year periods. The goal of the program is to qualify and train Saudi youth to meet professional and

¹ Stages in Saudi educational system: Primary, intermediate, and secondary.

work demands in the government and private sector in Saudi Arabia. Scholarship students are given one year (extendable to 18 months) to improve their English language proficiency to the level that enables them to be admitted into a degree-granting program.

Although it has strict conditions and requirements, KASP is open to Saudis throughout the country, from big cities to small, poor towns. Besides full university tuition and a monthly stipend, KASP recipients are rewarded by the MOE for high GPAs and publications. In addition, the student and the accompanying family (spouse and children) receive full medical and dental insurance and round trip tickets to visit their home annually.

Given that the official language of instruction in Saudi Arabia, even at the post-secondary level, is not English (Al-Ahdal et al., 2014; Alqahtani, 2011), it is likely that the candidates have not had adequate exposure to English before entering the program (i.e. when they start their studies abroad). The students are faced with many language challenges that hinder the dreams and future plans they have. Some of them, after the 18 months, still do not reach the English proficiency level required for university admission. Deeply disappointed and with a taste of defeat, a lot of students (based on personal observation) have to return home after costing the government an enormous amount of money since the government's financial support is not limited to the student alone.

Recently, the Saudi student population has increased worldwide, especially with the start of KASP. According to 2012–2013 MOE statistics, there are 242,389 Saudi students studying abroad (MOE, n.d.). English-speaking countries (e.g., USA, Canada, Britain, and Australia) are the leading destinations for these students. It was reported that 22,079 Saudi students entered Canadian educational institutions across the country in 2012–2013 (MOE, n.d.), 91% (20,105) of them were KASP recipients.

According to one of the instructors, whatever the level of preparation students might have received at orientation workshops held prior to their departure from Saudi Arabia, Saudi international students encounter language- and culture-related challenges in their new environments (personal communication, July 2016). Being aware of the academic challenges of Saudi students will help educators provide these students with support that better addresses their language-learning needs and help them to achieve their goals. Through investigating the academic English language-learning needs of Saudi students, the current study helps to raise awareness of the challenges specific to this learner group.

Following the introduction, I have organized the dissertation as follows: In the literature review (Chapter 2), I introduce the concept of needs analysis (Section 2.1) and present the theoretical background and the historical development of needs analysis (Section 2.2). Some studies on language-learning needs conducted within an NA framework are then presented (Section 2.3). I conclude the chapter by stating the research questions and establishing the basis for them (Section 2.4). Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the methods used in the study and the tools I chose for data collection (Section 3.2), as well as the approaches I used for data analysis (Section 3.3). Results are presented and discussed in relation to the research questions in Chapter 4. Finally, the main findings of the study are summarized in a concluding chapter (Chapter 5). This chapter begins with a summary of key findings (Section 5.1), followed by a number of implications and recommendations for practitioners and researchers in the field (Section 5.2). The limitations of the study and future research directions are presented in Section 5.3. This chapter ends with some concluding comments (Section 5.4).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review consists of three parts. In the first part, operational definitions of “needs” and “Needs Analysis” (NA) are provided. In the second part, I lay out the historical development of NA in relation to the current study, including studies in the EAP (English for academic purposes) context that have been conducted within the framework of NA. The third part introduces a review of research in English teaching/learning NA.

2.1. What is Needs Analysis?

Before defining NA, it is important to determine the meaning of the word “need.” While it covers various meanings, the broad sense adopted in this study is that of the Oxford dictionary: “Something required because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable” (n.d.). In other words, in order to be fulfilled, identified needs require attention followed by action to meet those needs. In a narrow sense, the study focuses on what language learners need in order to successfully complete their program.

Within the literature, needs are classified in various ways (see Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991). From the various viewpoints, this study follows Berwick’s (1989) classification in which he distinguished between *felt needs* (or *expressed needs*) and *perceived needs*. He defined *felt needs* as “the expressions of a desired future state” (p. 55) and noted that these needs have sometimes been “devaluated” by being classified as *wants* or *desires*. In contrast, *perceived needs* are determined by the “judgments of certified experts about the educational gaps in other people’s experience” (p. 50).

By nature, human needs are not static. Learning needs are no exception. To make a connection between the changing needs of language learners and the content of language programs, ongoing investigation of these needs is of central importance. This growing interest in examining learners' needs has been behind much of the research focused on NA (e.g., Al-Fadly, 2004; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Alrabai, 2016; Atai & Shoja, 2011; Huang, 2013; Seferoğlu, 2001; Venkatraman & Prema, 2007).

Broadly speaking, NA could be viewed as a systematic process to collect information in order to achieve some objective (West, 1994). Kaufman (1994) defined NA as the process of identifying the causes of performance needs in order to select performance improvement solutions in a context. Considering that NA identifies *what is* and *what should be*, a need here is understood as the gap between present and target results (Kaufman, 1983). Hence, NA can be conducted either externally, that is, with a focus on the outcomes of organizational results (macro-level NA), or internally, with a focus on the gaps at the product and output levels (micro-level NA; Kaufman, 1977, p. 6). The current study takes an internal look at the challenges that language learners face as perceived by them and as identified by language instructors. Robinson (1994) divides the techniques used to collect data into two types based on the source of the information: 1) questionnaires, interviews, tests, and participatory NA (the source of information is the stakeholders such as learners) and 2) observations and case studies (the source of information is observing the target situation).

At this point, it is worth pointing out that in the literature a variety of terms are used, often interchangeably, to refer to the process of NA: needs assessment, needs analysis, front-end analysis, job-task analysis, training needs assessment, and task analysis (Graves, 1996, p. 12;

Morrison, Ross, Kemp, & Kalman, 2010, p. 32). For consistency, the term NA will be used throughout the study.

2.2. The Historical Development of Needs Analysis

As a result of the continuous demands to refine and improve productivity in public and private sector organizations, attention has focused on identifying the needs of target groups. According to Watkins, Leigh, Platt, and Kaufman (1998), “meeting the many requirements of clients, fellow associates, and society has become a requirement for organizational success” (p. 40). Consequently, NA has gained ground within the domain of organizational change and development because it can detect these needs. Recent research shows that NA has been employed in different organizations. NA is a very useful means to generate information that provides solutions for the performance problems of the target population whether in the educational, governmental, or private sectors.

The origin of NA can be traced back to 1952 (Moore & Dutton, 1978). NA boomed from 1966 to 1981 in the health, education, and social services sectors (McCullough, 2011). Large-scale NA was required to meet the conditions of federal granting agencies in different sectors (e.g., health and education). Its popularity dropped in 1981, especially in local education agencies in the United States, after NA ceased to be a mandatory prerequisite for federal grants (Witkin, 1994). Although NAs continue to be used, the objective and the process of their applications differ based on the beneficiary organization.

Despite the general agreement that a comprehensive NA should identify the needs based on societal objectives by determining discrepancies between present and target situations (Kaufman, 1988), there has been a tendency to involve different stakeholders in determining

objectives and identifying needs in NAs. Accordingly, different tools, for example, surveys (Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun, 2011), interviews (Dooley, 2010), tests (Read, 2008), and observations (Atai & Shoja, 2011) have been designed to specify objectives, collect data, analyze results, and prioritize actions.

Likewise, as Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001) noted, the important role of NA in the field of organizational development and change has led to the development of various models/approaches to NA (e.g., Berwick, 1989; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Kaufman & Stone, 1983; Long, 2005b; Munby, 1978). Under the umbrella of applied linguistics, Munby (1978) proposed a sociolinguistic model; *the Communication Needs Processor (CNP)*, which emphasizes that NA should move from identifying the learners' target language needs, to an analysis of the communicative activities they will perform and the linguistic forms via which these activities are realized. This means a profile of the learners' communication needs should be devised before developing the syllabus.

The CNP is comprehensive as it contains nine components related to the learners' communicative requirements such as *participant* (i.e., information about learners' identity and language background), *purposive domain* (i.e., establishing the purpose of using the target language), *setting* (i.e., the physical setting and the psychological environment in which the language will be used), *interaction* (i.e., specifying the learners' interlocutors), *instrumentality* (i.e., identifying the form in which the language will be used, e.g., spoken or written, and determining the channel of communication, e.g., face to face), *dialect* (i.e., different dialects that learners will have to interact with), *target level* (i.e., expected level of proficiency for different skills), *communicative event* (i.e., determining productive and receptive tasks), and *communicative key* (i.e., the manner in which the activities will be performed, e.g., politely).

However, CNP is described as impractical, inflexible, complex and time-consuming (West, 1994). It "collects data about the learner rather than from the learner" (West, 1994, p. 9). In addition, Tudor (1996) pointed out that the CNP focused on the target situation analysis and ignored deficiency analysis (i.e., what learners lack), strategy analysis (i.e., various strategies learners use to learn the language), and means analysis (i.e., issues related to the logistics and pedagogy in the learning/teaching environment). García Mayo (2000) also thought that NA should involve more than the list of the linguistic features of the target situation proposed by Munby.

A more systemic approach to identifying adult learners' needs is *the Systemic Approach* which was introduced by Richterich and Chancerel (1977). Unlike Munby's model, this approach is focused on the learners with regard to their present situations. Learner needs are examined before and during a course or training (Jordan, 1997). To decrease inflexibility, Richterich and Chancerel (1977) suggested the use of multiple tools for data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews, and attitude scales). In addition, they gave priority to the context of investigation and to the involvement of different perspectives. Jordan (1997) took issue with this approach as it relies too much on learners' perceptions of their needs. Long (2005a) also argued that learners are still not clear about their actual needs and made recommendations about using the two models complementarily. In addition, research (e.g., Holec, 1988, Nunan, 1996, and Benson, 2003) suggested providing learner training (i.e. training learners on how to learn) to increase learners' involvement in the learning process and, hence, to be in charge of their own learning.

Kaufman (1983) suggested that "an over-arching framework which considers and integrates available models, tools, and techniques will be useful for assuring the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational improvement attempts" (p. 3). *The Organizational Elements*

Model (OEM) presented by Kaufman and others (Kaufman, 1982, 1983; Kaufman & Stone, 1983) offers a holistic perspective which delineates the relationships between means (activities) and end (results). The OEM model incorporates five basic components: *inputs* (i.e., the existing starting condition), *processes* (i.e., the method to manage input), *product* (i.e., the results after application of input and process), *outputs* (i.e., the products an organization delivers to society), and *outcome* (i.e., the impact on clients of the delivered outputs). The holistic approach, however, was criticized as being "impractical and excessively difficult to operationalize" (Rodriguez, 1988, p. 25).

Contrary to the previous approaches, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) proposed that attention should be given to the learning process instead of focusing on language needs only. *The learning-centered approach*, which incorporates both target and learning needs, defines the target needs as "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" (p. 54) and classifies them into three categories: 1) *necessities*; i.e. "what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation" (p. 55), 2) *lacks*; i.e. "the gaps between what the learner knows and the necessities" (p. 56), and 3) *wants* which are the learners' perceptions of their needs. On the other hand, *the learning needs* cover diverse factors (including demographic information, learning background, and learners' attitudes toward language and culture). The learning-centered model also involves, for example, teaching/learning styles, effective/ineffective teaching and learning methods, time frame, and instructional materials and context. In line with the systematic approach, this model calls for the use of multiple tools to collect data, involvement of different perspectives, and considering NA as an on-going process.

Berwick (1989) and Brindley (1989) made valuable contributions to the field of needs analysis by introducing *the learner-centered approach*. According to this model, learners' needs

are approached in three ways. First, looking at needs from practitioners' perspectives, that is perceived needs, versus looking from learners' perspectives such as felt needs (Berwick, 1989). Second, learners' needs are interpreted in terms of the required target situation; i.e., *product oriented*, or in terms of learners' affective and cognitive response to the learning; i.e., *process oriented* (Brindley, 1989). Third, learners' needs can be identified before the course through factual information about the learners' real use of language (*objective needs*), or midway of the course through learners' affective and cognitive factors (*subjective needs*) (Brindley, 1989). The learner-centered approach not only considers learners' language needs, but also directs attention toward learners' attitudes and feelings.

Based on his view that teaching/learning should not be focused on specific structures or linguistic units (e.g., functions, lexical items, or grammar), Long (2005b) suggested taking a *task-based approach* to needs analysis. He believed that learners are "far more active and cognitive-independent participants in the acquisition process than is assumed by the erroneous belief that what you teach is what they learn, and when you teach it is when they learn it" (Long, 2005b, p. 3). The task-based approach identifies tasks as analysis units and collects samples from the performance of these tasks. The notion of tasks in the task-based approach resembles Munby's (1978) communicative events. However, the focus is on language variables in the former, whereas the focus is on sociolinguistic variables in the latter.

Although the literature on NA indicates its major contribution to the field of education (West, 1994), one cannot overlook its role in other sectors, both public and private. Brown (2002) suggested that training should be tailored to the specialized needs of the individuals as well as the organization. Others (e.g., Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) considered NA a decisive factor in selecting who should be trained and what they should be trained in. Learning English as

an additional language (especially for specific/academic purposes) is no exception. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) said it well: “Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need” (p. 8). Despite the belief that NA can serve as “fundamental to the planning of general language courses” (Richards, 1990, p. 13), general English course designers considered it impossible to define the needs of general English learners “partly because of a lack of literature on the practicalities of analyzing needs data in the context of General English” (Seedhouse, 1995, p. 59).

While teaching English (as a subject) for general use focuses on language form (e.g., grammatical structures), teaching English for specific/academic purposes (ESP/EAP) focuses on the language in function (i.e., in a context) (Savignon, 1997). Thus, learners’ needs and language functions are intertwined in ESP/EAP course design and instruction. This learner-oriented approach to language learning/teaching where courses are designed to meet learners’ needs and take into account their abilities and interests, makes learners more involved in their own learning (Nunan, 2013). In addition to conducting NA to determine the particular skill areas where learners need help and face challenges with the language, designing syllabi and implementing instructional strategies in ESP/EAP courses that will meet these needs can enhance academic progress (Kikuchi, 2006; Xiao, 2006).

Since NAs started to gain ground in the field of ESP/EAP, research has emphasized that a profile of learner needs should be the groundwork for course design and syllabus development (Belcher, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Evans & Green, 2007; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; West, 1994). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) maintained that awareness of the learners’ language needs should determine the potential content of a language course. Generally, language NA is used to empirically identify the needs that a specific group of learners require to succeed

in a specific target context. Besides considering NA the basis of curricular decisions, Belcher (2006) asserted that ESP professionals function as “needs assessors first and foremost, then designers and implementers of specialized curricula in response to identified needs” (p. 135). In addition, understanding learners’ needs helps teachers to gain insight not only into the challenges students face and the lacks they have, but also their strengths, and this can inform teachers as they adjust their instructional practices (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Although there has been a considerable amount of research on the language needs of language learners of different nationalities (e.g., Turkish [Seferoğlu, 2001], Iranian [Atai & Shoja, 2011; Eslami, 2010], and Chinese [Evans & Green, 2007]), scholarly research focused on Saudi international students generally, and in Canada specifically, has been limited. In addition, the number of Saudi students in Canada is increasing (MOE, n.d.). Hence, this study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the English language-learning needs of Saudi students in Victoria, Canada. Being a Saudi student in Victoria myself, my research provides an insider’s point of view of Saudi students’ language-learning needs and the challenges they face. Besides understanding the language and culture of the study context, being a Saudi national gives me the advantage of understanding the cultural connotations and clues of the students’ responses to open-end questions in Arabic. In order to address the lack of studies on Saudi students in the literature, the current study draws on research on other international student groups such as Huang (2010), Seferoğlu (2001), and Evans and Green (2007). To provide a broad overview of EAP research within an NA framework, a review of some relevant recent studies is called for.

2.3. A Review of Research in Needs Analysis

While designing a course/program for teaching English for general purposes (EGP) is language based, designing ESP/EAP courses/programs is based on two factors: the learner and the context (Hamp-Lyons, 2001, p. 126), though there is no standard way to investigate these factors. Selecting the appropriate way to examine them depends on the available resources such as time, money, expertise, and the target sample (West, 1994, pp. 7–8). ESP/EAP aims at helping learners to communicate in English in order to achieve their occupational/academic objectives; therefore, needs analysis is considered a crucial step in identifying learners' needs and selecting the skills to be the focus of ESP/EAP (Belcher, 2004). It is worth noting that EAP used to be encompassed by ESP and now it is an independent, well-established field. The development of EAP has been extensively covered in the literature (for a fuller review of the historical development of EAP, refer to Canagarajah, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2006). NA is a fundamental step in designing and developing language-learning programs directed to a particular group of learners. As Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) also stated

there is a general consensus that NA, the collection and application of information on learners' needs, is a defining feature of ESP and, within ESP, of EAP. . . . Needs analysis is the necessary point of departure for designing a syllabus, tasks and materials. (p. 178)

In order to meet the variety of learners' needs in the language-learning process, there are various approaches to collect the information that constitutes the basis of NA. As a well-acknowledged means for gathering information about students' learning needs (Liu et al., 2011), NA surveys have been used in numerous studies to investigate academic language needs in different contexts. To collect data from a large sample size, Liu et al. (2011), following

Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) classification of needs, developed a questionnaire to help them investigate student needs among 972 participants in several Taiwanese universities and the reasons they enrolled in EGP courses rather than ESP/EAP courses. The study showed that course selection (for EGP or ESP/EAP) was determined by the students' goals (long- and short-term) more than by their perceptions of their needs. In addition, the results also reflected conflicting student needs in EGP courses; that is, the areas they perceived as their weaknesses were not necessarily where they wanted to acquire knowledge. The results exhibited consistency with regard to ESP/EAP students' perceptions of what was most necessary and desirable in terms of their needs. Liu et al. (2011) accounted for this in terms of "the goal-oriented nature of ESP/EAP courses" (p. 277). They concluded that "curriculum design should take learners' perceptions and goals into consideration so that the courses [would] not only be more efficient, but also more motivating and engaging" (p. 277).

Liu et al. (2011) also called attention to the advantage of triangulation (the use of various methods) despite the high reliability indicated by their questionnaire results. According to Long (2005a), the questionnaire is considered the most commonly used technique in NA. Besides being a collection tool that is cost-effective and familiar to most respondents, it is one with which information can be collected in a standardized way from a relatively large sample. It also allows participants to remain anonymous which makes learners more willing to express, hopefully, more truthfully what they think (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Although Liu et al. (2011) involved a large sample size, relying on the questionnaire solely did not enable them to obtain deeper understanding of learners' needs.

In ESP/EAP research involving NA, interviews are direct, important means used to elicit detailed responses. However, they can produce biased and inconsistent results. Sometimes the

interviewee says what s/he thinks the interviewer wants to hear. Also, interviews may be affected by individual differences (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009, Patton, 2002). While some participants might feel more involved, others might feel threatened when being interviewed. Although interviews can be costly and time consuming, they allow for nonverbal cues “to convey clear messages and social meanings” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 141).

An example of an interview-based study is Dooley’s (2010) investigation of students’ perspectives of an EAP pathway program in a Western Australia university. She interviewed 13 international students from different backgrounds. The semi-structured interviews were carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the students were interviewed after they had completed the EAP pathway program to see how qualified they felt they were to study in Australia. In the second phase, after the first semester of tertiary study, the students were asked about the extent to which the EAP pathway program had prepared them for their studies. Students’ responses indicated that they considered the program generally helpful (academically and socially) for their transition; yet, they acknowledged that some difficulties remained (e.g., understanding different accents). Dooley (2010) made several recommendations on how to modify the EAP pathway program: changing the name of the program to one that referenced the requirement of academic literacy and tracking/streaming classes in accordance with the students’ intended level of study. Dooley’s (2010) work was focusing on learners’ perceptions and, as Long (2005a) noted, learners might not be fully aware of their needs. By involving different stakeholders (e.g., teachers), Dooley’s findings could have provided more comprehensive view of the challenges faced by the learners from another perspective.

As noted earlier, triangulation can help to obtain more in-depth insights, validate data, and strengthen the findings. Therefore, researchers tend to incorporate multiple methods in their

NA studies. Focus groups, tests, and observations are among these methods. In a focus group, the purpose is to obtain several views and experiences about a specific topic; researchers collect information by leading an interview-style discussion with a small group. Because the information obtained is considered qualitative (Berg & Lune, 2012), it is recommended that it be used in combination with other data collection tools. Since focus groups produce data through interaction among participants (Morgan, 1997), they are not recommended when seeking individual views or experiences during the process of identifying learners' levels of performance/proficiency. In such cases, tests (e.g., International English Language Testing System [IELTS]) are a better method to acquire diagnostic data that can help identify performance gaps (Abdullah, 2005).

In addition to providing authentic data, observations “allow direct, in-depth, contextualized study of what participants actually do . . . in their natural environment” (Long, 2005a, p. 42). Atai and Shoja (2011) incorporated nonparticipant (outside observer) observations in their study, which was an investigation of the present and target academic language needs of undergraduate computer engineering students in three major Iranian universities. Their intention was to develop “a detailed profile of academic English language needs of undergraduate students of computer engineering through a triangulated design which integrate[d] qualitative and quantitative research methods” (p. 306). There were four groups of participants (sources) in the study: undergraduate students, graduate students, computer engineering instructors, and ESP instructors. Atai and Shoja (2011) used various qualitative and quantitative data collection tools: 1) NA and self-assessment questionnaires (to elicit information about present and target needs), 2) a general English proficiency test (IELTS) and a self-assessment technique (to obtain information about the learners' proficiency levels), 3) semi-structured interviews (to gather

further information in order to cross-check perceptions of present and target needs), and 4) nonparticipant observations of ESP courses and the subject-specific courses (to gather information about the learners' present and target needs). The triangulation of these tools allows the researchers to obtain a comprehensive view of the Iranian undergraduate students' present abilities and the target language requirements. In order to minimize misunderstanding, the questionnaires for the four groups were piloted (and further refined) and written in the respondents' native language.

The undergraduate students were then asked to assess their general English proficiency level based on the six-point scale of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The results of this self-assessment were then cross-validated with the results of the general English proficiency test. Also, the instructors were asked to assess, using CEFR, the undergraduates' general English proficiency levels upon entry to their program. To compare students' perceptions and reactions with those of the instructors (gleaned from interviews), the student questionnaires ended with an open-end question about the major challenges they faced in their learning. A quantitative analysis was incorporated to cross-validate the results. Finally, content and construct validity were checked in the questionnaires as well. The semi-structured interview protocols were designed based on the same points addressed and examined by the questionnaires. Nonparticipant observation of present and target situations were collected by another researcher to enrich the qualitative content of the study (cf. Long, 2005a). Atai and Shoja (2011) concluded that the course designers ignored the students' language skills and abilities. Although the researchers called for redesigning the courses to encompass the viewpoints of the involved stakeholders, they did not suggest modifications/revisions in the light of their findings.

Atai and Shoja (2011) further suggested that their findings can serve as a helpful database to identify the academic English language needs related to the learner group they studied.

Based on the literature review, it can be seen that there is no one-size-fits-all method. Different methods can be used in NA; some of them require more work, others demand more resources. Some of them are suited for a specific context, while others are effective with specific participants. Although NA is context-specific, the outcome of these studies (i.e., comprehensive profiles of learners' language needs) offers service providers (instructors, administrators, curricula designers) a practical base for planning their programs by identifying the challenges learners encounter. For example, Evans and Green (2007) conducted a large-scale study to examine the study and use of English at one of Hong Kong's largest universities. The findings indicated that there were problems in specific areas: vocabulary, grammatical recourses, and oral fluency. In line with Long (2005b), Evans and Green (2007) suggested a task-based and content-driven framework for EAP programs. They concluded that EAP programs should be tailored to the identified needs of students. Furthermore, they asserted that "such a program would foreground work on lexis, grammar, and discourse, with reading and listening texts mainly used as input to activities and as models of performance" (p. 14).

Some studies (e.g., Belcher, 2006; Huang, 2013; Reder & Davila, 2005; Robinson, 1991; Seferoğlu, 2001) have drawn attention to the conflicts between the factors that play into determining language-learning needs (e.g., learners, context, instructors'/learners' perceptions and assessments, and learners' desired versus actual needs). For instance, Seferoğlu (2001) researched the English language-learning needs of graduate Turkish students in the US and prospective graduate students who were still in Turkey using questionnaires, interviews with the students, and videotaped classroom discourse. The study revealed contradictory results. While

the survey showed that both participant groups (in the US and in Turkey) perceived their academic needs as more important than their everyday communication needs and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) needs, the interviews in Turkey indicated that the immediate goal of the participants was to have a high TOEFL score. Furthermore, classroom observations indicated that instruction prioritized receptive skills and that teaching was mostly focused on grammar and vocabulary. In line with Morley (1991), who did not expect international graduate students to be aware, on their own, of the sophisticated oral and written skills required, Seferoğlu (2001) asserted that international graduate students would not be able to recognize their potential if they were deficient in their language skills or lacked confidence. Seferoğlu attributed the gap between the students' perceived needs and the classroom instruction to the insufficient time allotted to teaching the course. This conclusion supports Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) claim that "an ESP course is rarely long enough to cover all that learners need" (p. 127). However, the researcher did not provide any explanation for the contradiction between the findings derived from the survey and the interviews.

NA is very important in designing ESP/EAP courses. It is a key step for educators when they develop syllabi, find solutions, or implement changes to improve language learners' language performance. Nevertheless, one should not mistakenly think that there are conclusions or solutions that fit all contexts. Huang (2010), for example, asserts that "there is always a danger in considering learners a homogeneous bunch" (p. 535). She further argues that "efforts to seek findings' generalizability may be fruitless because NA is, by definition, context-dependent and context-specific, taking into account the very different linguistic cultures and the variety of institutional environments" (p. 535).

Although motivation is not the focus of the current study but based on previous work the connection between learners' motivation and NA has been well recognized. Learners might be motivated differently depending on their goals and/or future prospects ((Dörnyei, 1998; Seferoğlu, 2001; Springsteen, 2014). For example, the importance of relating language learning to the purpose for which students use the language is addressed by Akbari (2016). In her study which investigated medical Iranian EFL students' perceptions of their problems, needs and concerns about learning English, Akbari argued that reading, translating and writing skills were rated as the most needed skills by her sample. In regards to language needs, she observed differences in the needs among BA, MA, and PhD students. While BA students were content with basic reading skills, MA and PhD students were expected to delve into higher level readings to be able to write academically in English. Akbari confirmed the importance of the expectations and perceptions of learners in curricula design and in determining the success of ESP courses (p. 25). Unfortunately, according to Akbari, courses in Iran were offered without careful planning and systematic needs analysis. Akbari's (2016) study offered a comprehensive list for the uses of English in postgraduate education, including but not limited to publishing in refereed journals, writing emails and reading articles of highly specialized language. Furthermore, she addressed the need for speaking to communicate with potential foreign patients and take part in international conferences. She concluded her article by stating that students' language skills, learning strategies, and study skills should be developed from primary school to the end of high school and throughout their pre-university education. One of the limitations of the study seems to be subjectivity since the researcher was the teacher for the four classes and the one who collected and analyzed all the data. The researcher did not report the measures she took to minimize potential subjectivity.

Indeed, it is not enough that students know English; they are expected, regardless of their major, to use their English language skills to successfully perform academic tasks. Therefore, building awareness about students' language-learning needs is considered paramount in different disciplines. This recognition motivates NA research aiming at assessing language learners' needs in various academic contexts. For example, within the medical field, Naruenatwatana and Vijchulata (2001) examined the English language-learning needs of 297 medical students. In addition, the study incorporated perspectives of ten subject teachers and seven English instructors. Findings showed that reading-related skills were the most important skills for the students to successfully complete academic tasks. The three groups of participants also indicated that the textbook they used was inconsistent with their needs. Hence, the study concluded with a call for English courses tailored to the specific needs of those medical students. In the same vein, Al-Fadly (2004) investigated the academic English language needs at the faculty of medicine in Hadramout University (Yemen) from students' and teachers' perspectives. Both participant groups identified listening and speaking skills as the most important skills for students' progress. Based on the results, the study recommended that oral English communication skills (the ability to use English to communicate efficiently) should be the focus of English language program designed for medical students.

Within the science and technology field, various studies were also conducted to investigate the language-learning needs of specific student groups. In a study conducted at SASTRA University (India), Venkatraman and Prema (2007) examined engineering students' English language needs as well as their perceptions of their English instructors. The study involved 254 students who ranked listening as the most important skill for their studies followed by speaking. According to the students, their teachers should have discipline-specific

competencies compared to General English language teachers. Considering the findings, the researchers suggested that the language program for engineering students should prioritize oral communication skills. In addition, they recommended providing instructors with discipline-based training to promote audience oriented instructions directed to a specific target students group.

Similarly, Rahman (2012) studied the reading difficulties encountered by undergraduate students of computer science at Putra University (Malaysia). The study involved NA of the target, present, and learning situations of fifty students. The finding revealed that skimming for gist, scanning, and decoding meaning were the main problematic areas according to the students. In order to help the students, the researcher suggested that English courses geared for Computer Science students should prioritize reading skills, specifically in their discipline. Another research that focused on reading was carried out by Pritchard and Nasr (2004) who were interested in improving the reading performance of third-level engineering students at an Egyptian College of Technology. First, a needs analysis was conducted to reveal the major reading skills which cause difficulties according to the undergraduate students' and their instructors' perspectives. Second, based on the NA results, a reading improvement programme was developed, experimented with a group of students ($N = 66$), and compared with a control group ($N = 70$). The findings emphasized that using non-simplified (authentic) materials (in reading engineering texts) could help to improve students' reading skills; however, students needed moderate linguistic competence to achieve progress. Moreover, the study recommended grouping engineering students in a class where scientific and specialist texts are used and where teachers can negotiate meanings with the learners.

In a study that addressed the academic English needs of graduate students in six colleges of Isfahan University, Khajavi and Gordani (2010) examined the language-learning needs of 260

Iranian MA students. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that speaking is viewed by the students as the most important skill for students to achieve their goals. In addition, the students reported that writing abstracts and giving presentations in seminars were areas where they need instructional support. In conclusion, the researchers confirmed that the EAP program currently used in the investigated colleges did not match the perceived academic English needs of the students.

2.4. Needs Analysis Research on Saudi Students across Contexts

Considering the recent rise in the number of Saudi students studying abroad since the start of KASP, researchers' attention in NA has increased to investigate this learner group, especially, in English-speaking countries. In spite of the considerable dearth of research examining Saudi students' language-learning experiences, particularly in an international context, a number of studies have attempted to address the challenges they encounter while learning English. The majority of research (mostly dissertations) was conducted in different contexts and examined culture- or attitude-related challenges. For example, Alhazmi and Nyland (2010) studied the experience of Saudi international students in a mixed gender environment at Australian universities. The qualitative investigation, which involved in-depth interviews, indicated that Saudi students were encountering challenges in communication. Findings showed that Saudi students faced difficulties in transitioning from a gender segregated culture to co-educational institutions in Australia. It was hard for the students to relate to their peers in a co-educational environment. Along the same line, Alqefari (2015) focused on challenges faced by Saudi female students who study abroad. Data were collected from 30 participants through interview and questionnaire tool. The findings indicated high anxiety levels in female students

due to the presence of male classmates and teachers. Female students were reluctant to participate in the classroom, which hindered their language proficiency improvement. Moreover, participants reported feeling more confident and reassured in the presence of a male family member.

The role of culture in the language-learning process is also emphasized by Razek and Coyner (2013). Their study examined the Saudi students' academic achievement in light of their cultural background which differs from the American educational institutions they joined. In addition to field observations and reviewing documents related to international programs, open-ended interviews were conducted with participants (eight students, two administrators, and two professors) at one of the American universities. The student had been in the US for more than a year. The students in the study viewed themselves as a symbol of their religion, region, and country, and, therefore, they considered their actions as representative of their group rather than them as individuals. In addition, the students manifested lack of understanding in relation to social regulations and communication norms. In line with other research (Choi, 2006; Kagan & Cohen, 1990), the study showed that Saudi international students encountered difficulties in transition from their culture to the host culture, differences in educational practices, and social life. Besides classroom participation, missing the family/community support was found to be a major problematic area for Saudi students. Razek and Coyner (2013) included recommendations which might help the students to overcome these difficulties.

In the same vein, Alqahtani (2011) conducted a study to examine the academic English learning needs of Saudi students in Britain. The study focused on the influence of culture on students' achievement. A questionnaire was completed by 62 Saudi students at Southampton University. Later, interviews were held with three groups: graduate students, EAP students, and

EAP teachers. The data also included researcher's observations of some EAP classes. Responses showed that not only Saudi students were lacking information about the education system in Britain, but also EAP teachers were unaware of the Saudi culture. Moreover, the results indicated that students had weak writing and reading skills as well as limited vocabulary. Findings of the study suggested that Saudi students should be familiar with the cultural aspects of their new learning environment in Britain.

2.5. SLA Theories and EAP Pedagogical Approaches

In order to prepare learners to meet the global needs for improved language abilities, theories have been developed to understand how languages are learned. Based on these theories various instructional approaches were adopted to enhance the process of language teaching and learning. Certain teaching approaches tend to focus less on specific language domains because of the underlying theory. For example, grammar-translation approach focuses on the on reading and writing at the expense of the oral form of language (Mondal, 2012; Canale & Swain, 1980). Students use their L1 to translate grammatical rules to the target language and learn them by rote memorization. The goal of language study is to read its literature. Despite being criticised for the lack of students' active participation in the classroom as well as the absence of output in the target language, the grammar-translation approach continues to be used in language teaching around the world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, in the direct approach, which is sometimes referred to as the Naturalistic approach, the target language is used as medium of instruction, the L1 is never used, there is no translation, and culture is an integral aspect of learning the language. The assumption that learners can learn a second language in the same way they acquired their first

language is considered a drawback of the direct approach since the context and conditions of learning are different in each situation. However, this approach emphasises the development of oral skills and inductive teaching of grammar.

During the second World War, the foreign language programs the American universities prepared for military along with the rules these universities established for foreign students to be admitted into their programs paved the way for developing a new way to language teaching which was called the audio-lingual approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The audio-lingual approach emphasized the acquisition of structures and patterns through utterance repetition. Based on the behaviourist theory of learning, the audio-lingual approach viewed language as a form of behaviour which can be acquired through a process of habit formation. In spite of the focus on accurate pronunciation and control of structure, teaching vocabulary is not central to this approach. Unlike the grammar-translation approach, spoken language comes before written language in audio-lingual approach. However, ignoring the role of context to language learning and lack of attention to communicative competence are considered drawbacks of this approach. Among the many different approaches, the ones which are related to the current study's (EAP/ESP) context are introduced next.

With the increasing number of international students perusing their post-secondary studies in English, EAP gains more grounds in language teaching/learning's theory and practice. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) defined EAP as "the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research, or teach in that language" (p.8). Hence, EAP aims at teaching English in accordance to the social and linguistic demands of academic contexts by focusing instruction on the specific needs of the target context. Different EAP/ESP methodologies share the notion of purposeful and authentic learning (Flowerdew & Peacock,

2001), which emphasise approaches that are learner-based, task-based, and use authentic materials. The content-based approach is considered very influential in EAP teaching/learning especially in North America (Flowerdew, 1993). This approach focuses on topic or subject matter to develop linguistic ability through using the language within the specific context. This contextualized language instruction respects the fact that meaning could change depending on the context (Genesee, 1994). Besides getting the learners more interested and motivated, using the language to fulfil real purposes allows the students to be more independent and confident to use the language (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011). The popularity of the content-based approach in EAP stems from its role in developing valuable study skills (e.g., note taking and summarising) as well as thinking skills (e.g., getting information from different sources and synthesizing). This approach is supported by Cummins' (1981) work which claim that content should be taught while students are developing Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and postponing content instruction may not help language-learning process (cf. Cummins' work p. 95).

Communicative approaches to language teaching and learning gain grounds in the last two decades. Within this framework, the functional approach focuses on analyzing the language in terms of communicative situations in which they are used (Oka, 2004; Liamkina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2012). According to Halliday (1975) language is acquired through mastering linguistic functions. Language is visualised as a tool to deliver meanings and perform specific functions in various contexts in our lives (e.g., agreeing, making requests, or asking permission). Therefore, functional instruction, even at early stages, is focused on fixed expressions/structures which are taught in chunks based on their function. A number of studies supported the functional approach to second language instruction (e.g., Day & Shapson, 2001; Mohan & Beckett, 2003). These

studies concluded that the functional approach effectively helped language learners to use the language properly in their communicative interactions in real-world situations; hence, it could be used to teach grammar, the four language skills, vocabulary, and discourse analysis. Oka (2004) further recommended implementing both cultural and functional literacy in second language instruction in order to promote learners' cross-cultural understanding. This approach had been criticised as it is hard to decide in which order different functions should be presented, how to manipulate the different grammatical structures used to perform a function, and what to do at higher levels.

The amount of exposure to language is very important in helping learners to acquire new forms and to increase vocabulary; therefore, extensive reading is one of the approaches used in language teaching. Researchers (e.g., Grabe, 1991; Paran, 1996) agreed that extensive reading help in recognizing words and decoding the symbols in the texts as well as familiarizing learners with different topics. In a context, like SA, where the students are not immersed in an English-speaking environment, extensive reading could help in increasing the exposure to the target language. Encouraging students to start with reading simple texts (which gradually become more sophisticated) focusing in topics related to the target language/culture may help them to obtain knowledge and information fundamental to their language development. The extensive reading could provide exposure to real world English in the form of written text. For example, in their study which involved 40 Malaysian university freshmen, Krishnan et al. (2009) found that extensive reading seems to make a difference in the proficiency level of the learners and that students with positive attitude towards English read more and achieved better grades.

Among the approaches that focus on the outcome, rather than the process, the task-based approach emphasizes purposefulness and authenticity in language learning to connect what the

students learn to their real world. By engaging learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to complete tasks, this approach could help in promoting target language fluency and increasing students' confidence (Long, 2005a).

Despite focusing on oral communicative competence, task-based instruction encompasses all four domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Skehan (2003) claimed that task-based instruction is not used more widely because of the involved hard responsibilities on the teachers' part. Generally, communicative approaches stress the role of meaning in language and assign other elements a subsidiary role. However, the task-based approach considers tasks as means that facilitate language production and negotiate meaning as well as focus on forms and input processing (Long & Norris, 2000). Long (2016) noted that as part of task-based language teaching (TBLT) methodology "attention to grammar (or phonology, lexis, collocations, pragmatics, etc.) is not carried out as a separate activity, but during (and if necessary after, but not before) task work" (p. 17). Although traditional structural approaches did not emphasize meaning, one cannot claim that meaning was totally ignored too. It is important to note that paying attention to some elements at the expense of others will not achieve effective language acquisition. The roles assigned to meaning and linguistic form must be balance in language instruction.

While some language learning approaches focuses on the development of target language proficiency, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) uses subject-matter learning to develop language and literacy simultaneously. Lyster and Ballinger (2011) describe content-driven instruction as an "approach in which non-linguistic curricular content such as geography or science is taught to students through the medium of a language that they are concurrently learning as an additional language (p. 279). Kong and Hoare (2011) claim that CLIL integrate

both language and content objectives without jeopardizing the level of the academic content or the level of processing and knowledge reproduction. Since most teachers have been prepared to teach either language or a non-language subject area, but not both, research (e.g., Tan, 2011) draw attention to the importance of professional development when adopting CLIL approach. This growing need for educators to teach both language and content underscores many educational innovations and reform in teacher education programs (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011).

Dissatisfaction with learners' performance and learning outcomes is not exclusive to Saudi students. Saudi students start to study English at the age of 11 and they continue studying for six years, sometimes more if they choose a major that required English. In spite of that, the majority of Saudi students are unable to communicate effectively in English. An important question is to be asked here: Do educational practice and instructional approaches experienced by Saudi students play role in their learning outcomes. At this point, shedding light on English instruction in Saudi Arabia context would be helpful.

2.6. English Instruction in Saudi Context

As a result of globalization pressure accompanied with the growing need for English in different sectors such as health, industry, and trade, the ministry of education in Saudi Arabia started to give a special attention to teaching English at post-secondary level. The importance of English is associated with its role in acquiring and producing knowledge (Al-Jarf, 2008). As English is not necessarily used as a language of instruction in all majors in Saudi post-secondary institutions, Arabic is still the dominant language in most Saudi universities. However, English is, most of the time, considered to be a prerequisite in the university preparatory year in (public and private) universities/colleges (Al-Issa, 2011). In light of the recent social changes and

educational reform in SA, a growing number of post-secondary institutions use predominantly English. Moreover, specific specializations such as medicine and technology use English as the main medium of teaching. Despite the considerable amount of money Saudi government grants for improving education, the low level of performance among Saudi students raises concerns, especially, about the English language education in Saudi Arabia (Alkhazim, 2003; Al-Issa, 2011). Studies focused on the teaching of English in the Saudi context attributed the dissatisfactory level of Saudi English learners to a variety of factors, for example, the linguistic barrier and lack of motivation among teachers and students (Khan, 2011), teaching strategies (Alhamdi, 2014), and outdated curricula and methodologies (Syed, 2003). The traditional formal approaches which are used in the teaching of English in SA, in general, encompass grammar-based instruction which focus on introducing and practicing grammatical structures.

Ahmed (2012) claimed that "ESP teaching materials and the books prescribed in Saudi universities do not fully cater to the needs of the students because they have just been drawn from different sources regardless of student's level and their learning behavior" (p. 114). For example, at the Faculty of Computing and Information Technology (FCIT) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), where English is the language of instruction, students encountered difficulties because of the inadequate background in English they acquired in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Fadel and Rajab (2017) examined the English language needs of the FCIT's students. The researchers surveyed 135 female undergraduate students to learn about their perceptions of the importance of English language skills. In addition, the study reported on students' self-assessment of their language skills and preferences regarding the English preparation course. The findings showed reading and writing as the first and the second most important skills respectively, and, hence, identified the sub-skills related to these domains as the

most needed skills according to the students. The students also assessed themselves as being weak in communication and grammar skills. In conclusion, Fadel and Rajab (2017) called for the reevaluation of the structure and contents of the English course to better fit the students' language needs. These findings were consistent with another study which was conducted in a different setting to investigate the academic English needs of 42 Saudi male officers at King Fahd Security College (KFSC). In this study, Alhuqbani (2013) emphasized the importance of meeting the learners' language needs in EAP courses in order to prepare and help them in their prospective studies. The findings indicated that the annual English courses completed by the participants did not help them to improve their proficiency since they were not aligned with their EAP needs.

In an attempt to explore the main factors that contribute to Saudi EFL learners' low competence in English, Alrabai (2016) classified the factors into two categories: internal and external. The internal factors pertain to the learners' demographic characteristics, while the external ones cover the social, cultural, instructional variables and problems with the educational system. These factors were presented in light of the available literature on Saudi EFL learners. The lack of exposure to English was viewed as a major factor in difficulties faced by Saudi language learners. Besides the limited use of English among Saudis, this deficiency, according to Alrabai (2016), is partially attributed to Saudi EFL learners' lack of interest in making use of available social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, etc.) to develop their English language competency. When discussing the instructional variables and the learning environment in Saudi Arabia, Alrabai (2016) argued that "the teaching curriculum is not usually based on learners' goals, needs, and desires; rather, it is prescribed by university policymakers" (p. 25). This represented hindrance on the improvement of English by Saudi students. Furthermore, he

also discussed how adopting student-centered approach in Saudi education can facilitate the development of Saudi students' English competency. According to Alrabai (2016), classrooms in Saudi public schools tend to be overcrowded, teachers' training is inadequate, and a large number of classrooms lack proper teaching facilities which worsened the situation.

Alrabai (2016) proposed a number of suggestions for practitioners and education policy makers in Saudi Arabia to rectify these problems and to help improve EFL learners' language competence. For example, he urged the Ministry of Saudi Arabia to exert effort to address the existing problems in the educational system. It should introduce English in the first grade at public schools. Moreover, teachers should receive extensive training and should be consulted before the introduction of a new English curriculum. Teachers should also be regularly updated on the latest methods of teaching the English language. Regarding the curriculum, Alrabai (2016) stated that "curriculum design and material preparation, the curriculum should be reformed and shaped by teachers' perceptions and should be based on learners' interests, needs, goals, experiences, daily life activities, and real-world situations" (p. 32). He also encouraged teachers to abandon the old system of "teacher-centeredness" and "spoon-feeding" (p. 32). More involvement of students and less use of Arabic in the English class are needed to help improve the situation of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia.

Building on insights from the above review of research, which focused on learners' language-learning needs from different angles using various methods, this study reports findings from an NA survey and interviews that focused on the academic needs of Saudi international students in post-secondary institutions from the perspectives of these students and English language instructors in the Saudi and Canadian contexts. The survey examined students' needs as well as their skill levels in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This study is the first to

address the academic English language-learning needs of Saudi international students through a detailed, multi-level analysis.

2.7. Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the academic English language needs of Saudi international students from the perspectives of the learners and instructors. The following overarching research questions have been generated to serve this aim.

1. What academic language skills do Saudi students in Saudi Arabia identify as important and needing additional support?
2. What academic language skills do Saudi students in Canada identify as important and needing additional support?
3. What are the differences between the academic language-learning needs reported by Saudi students in Saudi Arabia versus those in Canada?
4. What academic language skills do instructors in Saudi Arabia and in Canada identify as important and as needing additional development among Saudi students?
5. What similarities and differences are there between the academic language skills that instructors identify as important and as needing additional development and those identified by students?

Chapter 3: Methods

In order to understand Saudi learners' needs and examine the challenges they encounter in learning English, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to address the research questions. In the first section I describe the participants involved in the research (Section 3.1). Following that, the instruments used for gathering data are introduced in Section 3.2. Finally, the data collection procedures and data analyses are outlined in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, respectively.

Mastering academic English is crucial for students as it enables them to achieve their objectives, specifically, to meet the scholarship program's goals. Hence, undertaking a systematic NA of the needs of these students can help institutions (inside and outside Saudi Arabia) in designing the required program/courses. In order to investigate the key research questions 1, 2, and 4 outlined in Section 2.4, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the academic English language needs of Saudi learners through addressing a number of follow-on components/sub-questions in relation to all participant groups (students and instructors):

- a. *Skill Importance*: What academic language skills do participants in Saudi Arabia and in Canada report as important for academic studies in English-speaking countries?
- b. *Skill Status* (hereafter it refers to needing help/support): What academic language skills do participants in Saudi Arabia and in Canada report as areas requiring support?
- c. What is *the relationship* between the skill importance ratings and the skill status ratings, as reported by the target participant groups?

3.1. Participants

In order to gain multiple perspectives, the participants were purposively and conveniently selected from four different pools: 1) Saudi students who have been granted the KASP scholarship but are still in Saudi Arabia, 2) Saudi international students in Victoria (students in Canada, hereafter), 3) EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia, and 4) EAL instructors in Victoria (instructors in Canada, hereafter). Including Saudi students in Canada was crucial because they are expected to have developed clearer perceptions of their language-learning needs through using English in an English-speaking country. The rationale behind including students who were still in Saudi Arabia was to capture the differences between their understanding of their language-learning needs and those of students who were already in an English-speaking country. Adding instructors' points of view was important in order to examine possible discrepancies between student and instructor perspectives.

Before Saudi students are accepted into a degree program in Canada, they must fulfill the language requirement of the university where they want to be enrolled—a satisfactory score on a standardized language proficiency test (required scores differ from university to university). For undergraduate admission, the University of Victoria (UVic) requires a minimum overall score of 90 for the internet-based TOEFL and 6.5 for IELTS. Some departments (e.g., linguistics) requires higher score. Most students who do not achieve the required score enroll in a language-preparation program. The sample in Canada included two groups, students in degree programs and those in language-preparation programs, in order to examine if differences in stages of learning play any role in the students' language-learning needs. By the same token, the sample in Saudi Arabia distinguished between two levels, undergraduate and graduate. By obtaining the different stakeholders' perspectives, the study includes multiple sources of data.

3.1.1. Students in Saudi Arabia (SA)

Forty undergraduate and 24 graduate students (24 males and 40 females) from different majors (see Table 1) participated in the study. Their specializations included accounting, education, computer science, and law. Almost 20% of the participants (out of the 370 respondents who opened the surveys) submitted completed surveys. Hence, their responses were used in the analysis. Most of the participants (92%) did not speak any language other than Arabic and English. Only five students indicated their knowledge of other languages. These included French, Turkish, and Korean. Seventy-eight of the participants first encountered English in grade 7 (as 11-year-olds), when they began studying it as a subject in public schools. However, 14 students reported that they learnt English at an earlier age (between 3 and 8 years old). All participants had studied (even at the post-secondary level) in Saudi Arabia where English was not the main language of instruction. All of them had never studied or lived in foreign countries. With regard to English language proficiency tests, 54% of the respondents indicated that they had completed one. Twenty-three students had taken IELTS ($M = 5.78$; $SD = .93$), whereas, five other students had taken the internet-based TOEFL ($M = 83.20$; $SD = 9.52$). Also, seven students mentioned that they had taken the Standardized Test of English Proficiency (STEP) ($M = 77.0$; $SD = 10.56$).² The rest of the students ($n = 29$) chose the non-applicable option.

Most of the respondents (53%) indicated USA as the place where they would want to pursue their studies. Canada (25%) was the second preferred study destination, and UK (20%) came in third place. One participant wished to continue his studies in Poland and another in

² STEP: English proficiency assessment designed by the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (Qiyas) in Saudi Arabia ($\geq 76\%$ Advanced; 61%-75% Above Average; 41%-60% Average; $\leq 40\%$ Low). http://www.qiyas.sa/Sites/English/Pages/default_1.aspx

Russia. The number of hours per day that the participants spoke English with fluent English speakers ranged from one to 10 hours ($M = 3.22$; $SD = 2.66$).

Table 1
Demographic Information (Students in SA, N = 64)

Gender	Male	24 (38%)	
	Female	40 (62%)	
Program Type		Undergraduate	Graduate
		40 (62%)	24 (38%)
		15 Male	9 Male
		25 Female	15 Female
Specialization	Accounting	5	1
	Applied science	2	2
	Biology	1	3
	Business administration	2	3
	Computer science	3	1
	Education	1	4
	Engineering	5	-
	English	2	2
	Health administration	3	-
	Law	3	-
	Marketing	1	1
	Medical studies	8	7
	Nursing	2	-
	Pharmacy	2	-
Study Destination			
	USA	33 (53%)	
	Canada	16 (25%)	
	UK	13 (20%)	
	Poland	1 (1%)	
	Russia	1 (1%)	

3.1.2. Students in Canada (CAN)

There are 63 students: 33 female and 30 male (see Table 2) who voluntarily participated in the study. The participants were from various specializations (e.g., education, computer science, and business). One student claimed to have basic knowledge of Japanese and another

two said they knew French. The rest of the participants did not speak any languages other than English and Arabic, their mother tongue. As expected, most of the participants (90%) began studying English as a subject at age 11 (grade seven), but six students indicated that they had started at ages five to nine. It is worth mentioning that even those who wanted to pursue graduate studies studied in universities where English was not the main language of instruction.

Before being accepted into a degree program as international students, the students must fulfill the language requirement, which is a satisfactory score in one of the language proficiency tests. Most of the students who did not achieve the required score joined a language preparation program. While 28 of the participants (44%) in this study were already enrolled in degree programs, 35 of them (56%) were registered in language-preparation programs.

In terms of study destination, the majority of the participants (65%) specified Canada as the place where they wanted to pursue their studies. Four of them mentioned that they wanted to continue their studies in Australia and three in the USA. The rest were uncertain at the time of the study.

The number of hours per day that the participants spoke English with fluent English speakers ranged from one to 12 hours ($M = 4.49$; $SD = 2.06$). Most of the students (65%) had tested their level of English language proficiency through IELTS ($M = 5.91$; $SD = .78$) and 8% of them through the internet-based TOEFL ($M = 82.20$; $SD = 12.36$).

Table2
Demographic Information (Students in CAN, N = 63)

Gender	Male	30 (48%)	
	Female	33 (52%)	
Program Type	Degree Program	28 (44%)	Language-preparation Program
		16 Male 12 Female	14 Male 21 Female
Specialization	Business and accounting	8	5
	Education	7	4
	Computer science	5	2
	Geography	-	3
	Engineering	2	4
	Linguistics	1	2
	Biology	-	2
	Chemistry	-	2
	Law	-	2
	Communication	-	2
	Mathematics	1	-
	Physics	-	2
	Psychology	1	-
	Human resource	1	-
	Not specified	2	5
Study Destination	Canada	41 (65%)	
	Australia	4 (6%)	
	USA	3 (5%)	
	Unspecified	15 (24%)	

3.1.3. EAL Instructors in Saudi Arabia (SA)

The number of instructors who voluntarily participated in the study is 22 teachers who had worked with Saudi students at the post-secondary level in English language teaching/learning in Saudi Arabia (see Table 3). There was only one male participant. Among all the participants, 10 were lecturers, seven were English instructors, two assistant professors, two part-time English language teachers, and one instructor of translation. When they were asked about their areas of

specializations in the demographic information section, they mentioned applied linguistics (6), linguistics (3), English language and literature (3), methods of teaching English (3), teaching English as a second language (2), teaching English as a foreign language (1), curriculum and instruction (1), TESOL (1), law (1), and adult education (1).

Table 3
Demographic Information (Instructors in SA, N =22)

Gender	Male	1
	Female	21
Experience	1-5 years	8
	6-10 years	5
	11-15 years	5
	16+ years	4
Specialization	Applied linguistics	6
	Linguistics	3
	English language and literature	3
	Methods of teaching English	3
	Teaching English as a second language	2
	Teaching English as a foreign language	1
	Curriculum and instruction	1
	TESOL	1
	Law	1
Adult education	1	
Current Status	Lecturer	10
	English instructors	7
	Assistant professors	2
	Part-time English language teacher	2
	Instructor of translation	1

Besides a mastery of English, the participants spoke French (4), German (2), Urdu (2), Uzbek (1), Turkish (1), Persian (1), Korean (1), and Somali (1). Arabic was the first language for 16 of the participants. The rest of the participants spoke various mother tongues such as Persian,

Turkish, and Urdu. Four participants had over 16 years of experience in English language teaching. The others ranged from three to 13 years of experience ($M = 10$). When asked if having students from different cultures affected their teaching, the majority of the responses ($n = 14$) were positive. Except for three instructors, there was an agreement that Saudi students were unique because they had a different background.

3.1.4. EAL Instructors in Canada (CAN)

Fifteen male and eight female participants chose to take part in the survey in Victoria. Seven of them were ESL instructors, whereas, six described themselves solely as EAL instructors in reply to indicating their current status. The group also included six general English instructors, three EAP instructors, and one IELTS instructor. Their areas of specialization varied: applied linguistics (2), ESL (11), academic English (6), teaching to grammar (3), and debate and presentation skills (1). The participants had a mean of 14 years of experience in English language teaching (see Table 4). English was the first language for 78% of the sample (18 participants). There was one participant who spoke Spanish, one Farsi, one Korean, one Arabic, and one Nepali, as his/her first language. Among the other languages they knew, the participants mentioned French, Japanese, German, Catalan, Hindi, Malay, and Sanskrit. Eighty-six percent of the responses ($n = 20$) indicated that working with students from different cultures had influenced their teaching experience. Only one participant thought there was no difference between Saudis and other international language learners.

Table 4
Demographic Information (Instructors in CAN, N =23)

Gender	Male	15
	Female	8
Experience	1-5 years	4
	6-10 years	2
	11-15 years	8
	16+ years	9
Specialization	Applied linguistics	2
	ESL	11
	Academic English teaching	6
	Grammar	3
	Debate and presentation skills	1
Current Status	EAL Instructors	6
	ESL	7
	EAP	3
	IELTS	1
	General English Instructor	6

3.2. Instruments

All participant groups completed a questionnaire in order to elicit their perception of the importance of specific language skills along with the status of those skills (Appendix A).

Although the questionnaire was adapted from Huang (2010, 2012, and 2013), modifications were made to reflect the context of the current study. As with Huang's original survey, the survey used in this study consisted of three sections: the participants' background, the ratings of individual statements in the four skill domains (i.e. reading, listening, writing and speaking), and open-ended questions. The three sections were adapted from instruments developed by Huang (2010, 2012, and 2013). Since the current study's questionnaire was directed at a different population than Huang's, the participants' background section of the survey differed accordingly. All the statements and the two rating scales were taken from the instrument developed by Huang (2012).

The number of ratable statements was set to be compatible with the diversity of academic

activities of the target sample (post-secondary Saudi international students at the university level). Finally, the open-ended question section (four questions) was changed in order to elicit information about Saudi participants' language-learning experiences. The modified version of the survey was piloted (administered to five randomly selected participants) to resolve any problematic areas before the main study commenced. For example, since English is not necessarily used in SA and is officially first introduced in grade 7 in public schools, the questions in the demographic section were changed to accommodate the Saudi context: "*How many hours per day you speak English with people who are fluent speakers of English?*"; "*At what age did you have your first contact with English in formal and informal learning context?*"; "*Where do you intend to pursue your study?*"

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire consisted of three parts. The 10 questions in the first section were designed to gather demographic information about the participants, for example, their current study status, their gender, and the age at which they were first introduced to English. It is worth noting that both genders are included in the sample, however, gender difference is beyond the scope of this study because the focus is on the transition of the students as a cultural group regardless of gender differences. The second section included 72 ratable skill statements: 18 were focused on writing, 19 on speaking, 19 on listening, and 16 on reading. The participants were asked to rank the various statements in terms of two different five-point rating scales: a) level of importance scale (from 0–not important to 5–extremely important), and b) level of support needed scale (from 0–would not seek help (skilled) to 5–would seek help (unskilled)). A score value (from 0 to 6) was assigned to each of the choices on the Likert scales, e.g., Not Important = 1; Extremely Important = 6; Would not seek help (skilled) = 1; Would seek help (unskilled) = 6; and Not Applicable = 0. Also, a not applicable (N/A) choice was available

in the event that the statement was not relevant in a specific learner’s context. Finally, the third section of the survey involved four open-ended questions (e.g., *Please describe some of the English language challenges you are encountering*) where participants could share information about their language-learning needs and challenges. The questionnaire was translated to Arabic and the students were given the choice of responding to open-ended questions in their first language (Arabic) to elicit as much input as possible. The administration of the questionnaire was online and paper-based. Responses were analyzed and coded in the language used by the participants.

To ensure the internal reliability of the questionnaire (i.e., whether it measures what is intended to be measured), Cronbach alpha (Cronbach, 1970) was calculated for the 72 ratable statements with respect to each scale for each sample response. First, for responses of student participants (in Saudi Arabia and Canada), the 72 ratable statements were assessed with respect to each scale (Table 5). For both importance and status ratings of the students in Saudi Arabia, all skill domains had a Cronbach α value greater than 0.90, indicating the high reliability of the questions (George & Mallery, 2003). Similarly, results for the students-in-Canada sample showed that all skill domains had a Cronbach α value equal to or greater than 0.90, indicating the high reliability of the questions.

Table 5
Reliability Test: Cronbach’s α Values for Student Samples (Saudi Arabia: N = 64, Canada: N = 63)

Skill Domains	Number of Skill Items	Skill Importance Scale		Skill Status Scale	
		SA	Canada	SA	Canada
Writing	18	0.92	0.95	0.91	0.90

Speaking	19	0.92	0.94	0.95	0.94
Listening	19	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.94
Reading	16	0.94	0.94	0.95	0.92

Second, to calculate the Cronbach alpha for the instructor samples (in Saudi Arabia and in Canada), the survey statements were assessed with respect to each scale (Table 6). Results of both scale ratings by participants in Saudi Arabia showed that all skill domains had a Cronbach α value greater than 0.90, indicating the high reliability of the questions (George & Mallery, 2003). Regarding the participants in Canada, Cronbach alpha values were equal or greater than 0.90 for importance and status scales, except for the skill importance ratings related to the writing domain, which read 0.87. Overall, the Cronbach alpha test indicated high reliability for all participant groups. Furthermore, choosing a well-defined cutoff point (a mean rating of 4.00 and higher) to determine the participants' perceptions of important skills as well as those needing improvement helped to maintain consistency in the scores of participants and how they judged the answers, and, accordingly, helped to decrease the inconsistency accompanying the use of Likert scales (Alderson, 1992; Block, 1998).

Table 6
Reliability Test: Cronbach's α Values for Instructor Samples (Saudi Arabia: $N = 22$, Canada: $N = 23$)

Skill Domains	Number of Skill Items	Skill Importance Scale		Skill Status Scale	
		SA	Canada	SA	Canada
Writing	18	0.95	0.92	0.92	0.91
Speaking	19	0.91	0.87	0.94	0.91

Listening	19	0.95	0.93	0.94	0.94
Reading	16	0.95	0.94	0.91	0.90

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted with nineteen of the EAL instructors in Canada so that they could share their thoughts about Saudi students' language-learning needs and experiences. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to focus on the targeted issues, and at the same time, give the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their responses (Berg & Lune, 2012). Allowing for more in-depth information made it possible for me to examine individual perceptions and beliefs. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on the feedback received from EAL instructors' responses to the questionnaire (Appendix B). Based on responses to the questions asked, further questions were raised to enable the instructors to express their opinions freely about relevant issues. Using this format helped to guide the interview process and to compare the responses (Patton, 2002).

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Having received UVic's ethical approval (Protocol Number 13-200), the following steps were taken to recruit study participants from English language centers and private language institutes:

- 1) An email invitation (Appendix C) was sent to the director of the English Language Centre (ELC) at UVic requesting her help in circulating the questionnaire among the Saudi students and the EAL instructors at the Centre. Private language institutes in Victoria were also asked to distribute the questionnaire among their Saudi students and EAL instructors. In addition,

an email was sent to the Saudi students' club in Victoria asking them to distribute the web-based questionnaire to its members via its mailing list.

- 2) Saudi international students who were still in Saudi Arabia were contacted via a twitter account for Saudis studying abroad or who were about to study abroad. The link to the web-based version of the survey was posted on this account.
- 3) An invitation was emailed to EAL instructors via BC TEAL,³ introducing the research and inviting them to participate. The email clarified that instructors who chose to voluntarily participate in the study would be asked to complete an online questionnaire and participate in a follow-up interview to share their thoughts about Saudi students' language-learning experiences. Moreover, the researcher visited English language institutions, in Victoria, (four institutes) introducing the project and inviting participants to take part in the study. After obtaining ongoing consents, individual interviews, which took 30 minutes, were conducted in a location that was convenient to the participant. The interviews were audio-recorded.
- 4) During July–August 2016, I went to Saudi Arabia and visited some post-secondary institutions (five institutes) to invite EAL instructors to take part in the research. I explained the project to those who are interested and clarified what they would be required to do before obtaining their informed consent (see Appendix D).

3.4. Data Analysis

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative data were integrated to gain comprehensive understanding of the

³ The Association of British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL).

phenomenon under study. The triangulated study design helps to validate, clarify, and interpret findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As Mason (2006) states, “mixing methods . . . offers enormous potential for exploring new dimensions of experience in social life. . . . It can encourage researchers to see differently, or to think outside the box” (p. 13). Furthermore, by examining the phenomenon from different perspectives, quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis can help triangulate the results obtained by both methods and enable a comparison of the results reached through each other (Howe, 2012).

Quantitatively, the data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0. The responses went through multi-level analyses: 1) group-level (undergraduate, graduate, language preparation, and degree), 2) skill domains level (writing, speaking, listening, and reading), and 3) individual skill statement level. Subgrouping of the students’ samples allowed the multi-level analyses to accommodate the context-dependent facet of NA. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Descriptively, the statistical procedures included calculating means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and standard errors (*SE*) for each skill item in relation to both rating scales (skill importance and skill status) for the participant groups (following Huang [2010]).

A mean rating of 4.00 and higher was selected as the cutoff point to determine the skill items that were important and the areas needing support, as perceived by the students. This was done for two reasons: 1) since the official language of instruction in Saudi Arabia, even at the post-secondary level, is not English, it was expected that the students studying internationally would encounter many linguistic difficulties and that they would need substantial language help and support; 2) English is first introduced as a subject in public schools in Saudi Arabia in grade 7 (age 11) until grade 12. The choices were arranged in ascending order in connection to numeral values to convey the increasing importance value. To illustrate, for the importance scale, the

cutoff mean rating ≥ 4.00 (important) indicated the skills that the students judged as important for their academic studies. Similarly, a mean rating ≥ 4.00 (would seek help [skilled]) in the skill status scale referred to skills for which language support was needed.

Inferential statistics were selected based on the distribution of the samples. The sample of students in Saudi Arabia ($N = 64$) proved to be normally distributed for skill importance ratings (Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) normality test: $D(144) = 0.05, p = 0.200$) and for skill status ratings (K-S normality test: $D(144) = 0.06, p = 0.200$). Similarly, the student sample in Canada ($N = 63$) was normally distributed for skill importance ratings (K-S normality test: $D(144) = 0.064, p = 0.200$) and for skill status ratings (K-S normality test: $D(144) = 0.088, p = 0.008$). With regard to the instructor samples ($N = 45$), normal distribution was also evident for skill importance ratings (K-S normality test: $D(144) = 0.11, p = 0.000$) and for skill status ratings (K-S normality test: $D(144) = 0.14, p = 0.000$).

For inferential statistics, to discover how importance ratings reported by student and instructor samples were related to their skill status ratings (to address component c which relates to *the relationship* between the skill importance ratings and the skill status ratings), a Pearson correlation test was conducted to correlate the two scale ratings for the two participant groups in each sample. Statically significant relationships were identified based on 2-tailed p value $\leq .05$. In addition, an independent sample t -test was used to examine if there were significant mean differences between the skill importance and skill status ratings of students in Saudi Arabia and those reported by students in Canada (research question 3), based on students' learning stage. By the same token, an independent sample t -test also helped in examining the difference between the perspectives of the instructors in Saudi Arabia and in Canada (research question 4). Since Saudi international students have to meet the expectations of the instructors in Canada, it is

important to compare the students' perspectives with those obtained from instructors in Canada. Hence, logistic regression, Pearson's chi-square test, and crosstabs were used to examine the level of agreement in their ratings (research question 5).

On the qualitative side, the goal of the open-ended questions was to elicit participants' perceptions of their language-learning needs in order to complement and clarify the information obtained through the skill statement ratings part of the survey. Participants' responses (regarding the challenges of language learning and their expectations of what the focus of academic language-support programs should be) and the interviews were transcribed fully. Participants' exact words were transcribed, as recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012). I captured the general sense reflected of the data by carefully scanning and reading through them (Creswell, 2013). Qualitatively, the responses to the open-ended questions as well as the interviews were analyzed via content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and then coded inductively to identify themes (6 themes from open-ended questions; 8 from interviews). For example, responses to open-ended questions generated the following themes: speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and other issues (i.e., issues not directly related to the four language domains). Each comment was assigned to its appropriate language skill domain. A Word file was created for each theme. Consequently, skill domains were arranged in a descending order of difficulty (as perceived by the participants) based on the number of comments in each skill domain in relation to the total number of comments, i.e., the most difficult had the largest number of comments.

Besides manual coding and producing themes inductively as explained above, the input from the follow-up interviews was also coded using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 11 Pro. Manual coding is valuable because it allows cross-validating the findings (intra-rater reliability with an agreement level of 95.6 %) and discovering words that might not be on the

frequently occurring list but are qualitatively important. To help eliminate researcher bias, key themes were inductively identified from the raw data (e.g., Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Mackey & Gass, 2005). First, the transcribed responses were arranged into groups based on the issues they were addressing. These groups were imported to NVivo as Word documents. NVivo ran a lexical frequency query (with stem words) for each document and generated 70 high-frequency words. Secondly, the initial themes, to which the textual responses were coded, were generated by tracking the occurrences of these high-frequency words and searching for the most frequent strings that appeared with them (word tree). Finally, cluster analysis was employed to group initial themes and create clusters using the Pearson correlation coefficient as a similarity metric. Each cluster was labeled based on conceptual overlap among the clustered words/themes. For example, a cluster that included words focusing on the learner's background such as "early," "foundation," "strong," "background," and "nationalities" was coded as "background" (NVivo 11 Pro).

Data had been obtained from multiple sources (i.e., students and instructors in different contexts) and via multiple methods (i.e., questionnaires, open-ended questions, and interviews). To ensure reliability, 50% of the qualitative data (responses to open-ended questions) were randomly selected and recoded by an independent researcher to check interrater reliability. The second researcher, who had a linguistic background, applied the same coding scheme to code the data. This resulted in an agreement level of 97.8 %. The researcher and the independent coder disagreed in judging comments that mainly related to the "Other Issues" category. These disagreements were discussed and resolved.

For comparison purposes, the learners' data was further divided into two categories: 1) undergraduate and graduate (for the Saudi Arabia sample), and 2) language-preparation program

and degree programs (for the Canada sample). The results (quantitative and qualitative) gained from the statement ratings part, the results from the open-ended responses, and the follow-up interviews were further corroborated and synthesized in the discussion (Berg & Lune, 2012 and Miles et al., 2014).

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the data analysis are presented according to the main research questions along with their subsidiary components and in light of how they can be answered using the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). To further understanding the data, the results of the skill importance ratings, as well as the skill status ratings, are interpreted and discussed in relation to the four skill domains (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) as perceived by different participant groups. Quantitative and qualitative data are also integrated and discussed in depth in order to provide a fuller picture of the academic language-learning needs of each individual participant group.

4.1. Students in Saudi Arabia

Responses of the students recruited in Saudi Arabia (research question 1) showed the following results.

4.1.1. Importance of language skills

The participants were required to rate 72 skill statements covering the major language skill domains (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) as they perceived their importance (component a) for their academic studies. As noted earlier, the discussion in this section focuses on the skill items with the mean rating ≥ 4.00 (i.e., “important”).

Undergraduate students’ perspectives. The results showed that 61 (out of 72) ratable skill items in the questionnaire (85%) were considered important by the undergraduate student participants. Item 1 in the reading domain, “the ability to understand the meaning of key words

or terms in the discipline of your choice” was the most important skill with the highest mean value ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.34$). On the other hand, skill item #19 “the ability to understand speech with various accents” in listening had the lowest mean rating ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.51$), indicating that it was perceived as the least important skill by undergraduate students. The top ten skill items judged important by undergraduate students are displayed in Table 7. Among the top ten important skills, four items belonged to speaking. The remaining six items are divided equally among reading, writing, and listening.

Table 7
Top Ten Important Skill Items Judged By Undergraduate Students (n =40)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	5.18	1.34
2	The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation).	Speaking	5.15	1.10
3	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	5.10	1.13
4	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	5.03	1.07
5	The ability to understand instructors’ spoken directions regarding assignments and duties.	Listening	4.98	1.07
6	The ability to answer an audience’s questions.	Speaking	4.88	1.47
7	The ability to read fluently, accurately, and in a good reading speed/pace.	Reading	4.80	1.36
8	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	4.75	1.88
9	The ability to understand important terminology related to the subject matter or topic.	Listening	4.75	1.08
10	The ability to defend a thesis.	Speaking	4.73	1.45

Graduate students' perspectives. Seventy (out of 72) items in the survey (97%) were perceived as important with a mean rating ≥ 4.00 . Both the most and the least important items identified by graduate students belonged to the reading domain. Skill item 1, “the ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice,” received the highest mean rating ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 0.58$), whereas item 9, “the ability to make critical evaluations of content,” received the lowest rating ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.88$). Table 8 presents the top ten skill items judged important by graduate students. The top ten important skills for graduate students included three items in the reading domain, three in speaking, three in listening, and one in writing.

Interestingly, both undergraduate and graduate students identified “The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice” from the reading domain as the most important skill. Rating it at the top of the ten important skills, students in Saudi Arabia (both undergraduate and graduate) stressed the importance of this skill for their future studies. Six of the top ten skill items identified as important by the undergraduate students overlapped with those selected by the graduate students (three in speaking, one in reading, one in writing, and one in listening), for example, “The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation)” and “The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.” Although writing was identified as the second most important skill at the domain level analysis (see Figure 1), the top ten important undergraduates’ skills included only one skill related to writing, namely, “The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).” Noticeably, speaking-related

skills were ranked at relatively low level of importance at the individual item level from the graduate students' points of view.

Table 8
Top Ten Skill Items According to Graduate Students (n = 24)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	5.58	0.58
2	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	5.54	0.83
3	The ability to understand rapid discourse on familiar topics.	Listening	5.33	0.96
4	The ability to gather information from various sources (e.g., libraries, the internet, and electronic databases).	Writing	5.33	1.01
5	The ability to understand the general idea of a seminar discussion.	Listening	5.29	1.00
6	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	5.25	1.03
7	The ability to answer a question from the audience.	Speaking	5.25	0.90
8	The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture.	Listening	5.25	0.94
9	The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation).	Speaking	5.17	0.82
10	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	5.13	1.03

At domain level, Figure 1 presents a comparison of the percentages of important skill items in relation to each skill domain as reported by undergraduate ($n = 40$) and graduate ($n = 24$) students. The important skills ($M \geq 4.00$) identified by undergraduate students included 17 skills in listening, 17 in writing, 16 in speaking, and 11 in reading. The important items with a

mean rating of ≥ 4.00 in the graduate group's responses included 19 skills in listening, 19 in speaking, 18 in writing, and 14 in reading. Overall, the responses of the two subgroups were comparable. Both undergraduate and graduate students agreed that listening was the most important skill, whereas reading was the least important one.

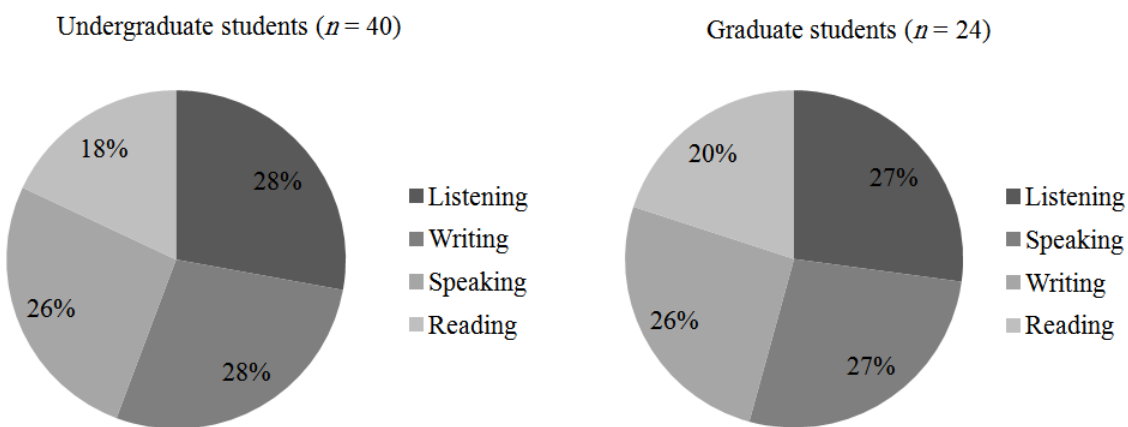


Figure 1. Comparison of percentages of important skill items between the two groups.

This was not surprising since participants in both groups came from (and were still studying in) an environment that did not support reading (Al-Qahtani, 2016). Findings indicate that graduate students attached more importance to oral skills (listening and speaking) than did undergraduate students. This might be related to differences in students' involvement in the classroom. While undergraduate students need to understand instructions and/or take notes, they tend not to ask questions, express their opinions, or participate in class discussions. Undergraduates also perceived the importance of writing skills in fulfilling course requirements, for example, homework, projects, and exams. Graduate students, on the other hand, understood the expectations of their studies (e.g., oral presentations, seminar discussions, and thesis defense)

and, hence, recognized the importance of oral skills in progressing satisfactorily in their degree programs. These results are in line with Khajavi and Gordani's (2010) study, which focused on examining the academic English needs of graduate students in six colleges. The participants in the study identified speaking as the most important skill for their studies.

4.1.2. Status of language skills

The exact same 72 skill items were subject to rating, once again, but with a different rating scale. The two participant groups were required to assess their skill status (component b) in the stated skill items in the four language domains (writing, speaking, listening, and reading). As noted earlier, skill items with a mean rating ≥ 4.00 were included in the results.

Undergraduate students' perspectives. Only two skills from the 72-item questionnaire were identified by undergraduate students as areas needing support (hereafter, needing support/help/development refers to the participants' perceived need for support). Notably, both skill items with mean ratings ≥ 4.00 were related to the writing domain. Item 18, "the ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master's/PhD theses)" ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.54$) and item 16, "the ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation)" ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.41$) had the highest mean ratings, respectively. Findings showed that skill item 4 in the listening domain, "the ability to understand the general idea of a lecture," was perceived as the area that least needed help as indicated by the lowest mean ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.77$) in the students' responses. Examples of the areas reported by undergraduate students ($M < 4$) as needing support are presented in Table 9.

Table 9
Skill Items Needing Help According to Undergraduate Students (n = 40)

	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to demonstrate competence with a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic.	Writing	3.98	1.39
2	The ability to convey complex ideas to nonspecialized/general audiences.	Speaking	3.95	1.54
3	The ability to make critical evaluations of content.	Reading	3.75	1.90
4	The ability to analyze and solve problems that arise in the writing process.	Writing	3.75	1.37
5	The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e., self-evaluate).	Writing	3.75	1.51

Graduate students' perspectives. Only one (out of 72) skill item in the survey was reported by graduate students as an area where support was needed ($M \geq 4.00$). Item 15 in the speaking domain, "the ability to defend a thesis," reflected the highest mean rating ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.77$) in this group's responses. In contrast, item 11 in reading, "the ability to distinguish factual information from opinions," obtained the lowest mean rating ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.38$), rendering it an area that did not need help or support according to graduate students. Table 10 exhibits examples of skill areas assessed by this group as needing support with mean ratings less than 4.00.

Table 10
Skill Items Needing Help According to Graduate Students (n = 24)

	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to demonstrate competence with a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic.	Writing	3.71	1.76
2	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	3.63	1.79
3	The ability to adapt writing to specific audiences.	Writing	3.58	1.56
4	The ability to answer a question from the audience.	Speaking	3.58	1.93
5	The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e., self-evaluate).	Writing	3.54	1.72

In accordance with Huang (2010), findings showed that students (both undergraduate and graduate) assessed themselves as being highly competent. The results imply that while students in Saudi Arabia were aware of their lack of competency in listening skills, they did not consider it an area where they would ask for support. Instead, they perceived some speaking and writing skills as areas where help was needed. These results are not surprising, however. As students from a non-English background with little, if any, exposure to the demands of academic English learning (such as reporting data, research structuring, and presenting papers), Saudi students (both undergraduate and graduate) might be too unaware of their needs to be able to assess them appropriately (Long, 2005a). This is what Howell (1982) called “unconscious incompetence,” that is, “the stage where you are not even aware that you do not have a particular competence” (p. 29). In learning a target language, much like acquiring any new skill, learners require time, effort, and persistence to move forward. Howell (1982) described “unconscious competence” as the stage where a person is able to perform a skill with little effort. Between these two stages,

learners could be “consciously incompetent,” aware of their lacks or mistakes, or “consciously competent,” working on improving their performance (Howell, 1982, pp. 29-33). It is not necessary that learners’ awareness of their incompetency regarding specific skill, or subskills, is at the same level for everyone.

Participants’ assessment of areas needing support was based on their immediate goal to fulfill their academic requirements (Liu et al., 2011). Hence, motivation seemed to play a role in students’ self-assessment. By pointing out their need of support in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., writing research papers) as well as in using standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, and sentence structure), undergraduates expressed their main concern about writing skills that would help them to succeed in their courses. On the other hand, a key requirement for graduate students is to successfully defend their thesis. Therefore, this area within the speaking domain was identified as needing support the most. At this point of their studies, graduate students are expected to have mastered the required writing skills so they need extra support in advanced speaking skills to allow them to achieve their goals.

4.1.3. Importance of language skills vis-à-vis status of language skills

A Pearson correlation test was computed to examine the relationship between skill importance ratings and their respective skill status ratings in both groups (component c). The results indicated a significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) between undergraduate students’ perceptions of importance and self-assessments in two domains, the speaking domain ($r(40) = .424, p = .006$) and the reading domain ($r(40) = .454, p = .003$). No correlation was found in writing or in listening. Regarding graduate student ratings, all four skill domains were not significantly correlated.

The results from examining individual skill items showed that in the undergraduate group's ratings, 23 (out of 72) skill items were positively correlated. This meant that increases in the respondents' perceptions of the importance of a skill item were correlated with increases in their perceptions of the same item as an area needing development. Eighteen of the correlated skill items were equally divided between speaking and reading domains. The five remaining skills with significant positive correlation belonged to the writing domain. There was no correlation between any of the skills that were perceived as important by undergraduate students within the listening domain and their perspective assessments as areas needing support.

In the graduate group, ten skills had a statistically significant positive correlation. The larger portion of those items (seven) belonged to the speaking domain. The rest was divided as between reading (two) and writing (one). Similarly, none of the correlated skill items belonged to the listening domain. Table 11 summarizes the Pearson-*r* values and significance *p* values of the overlapped correlated skill items between undergraduate students and graduate students. Notably, the overlapped items included seven skill items in the speaking domain, two in reading, and only one in the writing domain. For full list of the correlated skill items in the two groups, refer to Appendix E.

Table 11

Pearson Correlation between the Importance and the Status of Language Skills (Students in SA)

Skill Items	Undergraduate students ^a		Graduate students ^b	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
The ability to lead academic discussions. (Speaking)	.314*	.049	.624**	.001
The ability to speak effectively when making presentations at conferences. (Speaking)	.445**	.004	.487*	.016
The ability to defend a thesis. (Speaking)	.600**	.000	.456*	.025
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects. (Speaking)	.512**	.001	.448*	.028
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to give directions and instructions. (Speaking)	.635**	.000	.512*	.011
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to summarize information. (Speaking)	.773**	.000	.640**	.001
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to explain, clarify, and inform. (Speaking)	.609**	.000	.555**	.005
The ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text. (Reading)	.583**	.000	.463*	.023
The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice. (Reading)	.386*	.014	.417*	.043
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	.510**	.001	.536**	.007

^a *n* = 40, ^b *n* = 24* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Considering the results of the two subgroups, it seems that correlation between Saudi students' (in Saudi Arabia) understanding of their language-learning and their assessment of areas needing development was low. This outcome should not be surprising. It is arguable that learners are not clear enough about their real needs for educators and course designers to rely solely on learners' perceptions to determine their language-learning needs (Jordan, 1997; Long, 2005a). In addition, this mismatch could be related to issues such as "their self-knowledge, awareness of target situations, life goals, and instructional expectations" (Belcher, 2006, p. 136). As Liu et al. (2011) suggest, students might feel the desire to focus on or improve specific language skills not necessarily because they are incompetent in these skills. Alternatively, their perception might stem from the perceived benefits of these skills in their prospective goals (studies and/or career).

4.2. Students in Canada

Responses of Saudi learners studying in Canada (research question 2) revealed the following results.

4.2.1. Importance of language skills

The same comprehensive questionnaire covering the major language skill domains (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) was administered to the Saudi participants in Canada (Victoria). The target group was asked to rate 72 skill statements based on their perceptions of how important these skills were to their studies (component a). The mean rating ≥ 4.00 (i.e., "important") was considered the cutoff point in the discussion of this sample's results as well.

Degree program students' perspectives. According to the findings, 57 (out of 72) ratable skill items (79%) in the survey were perceived by the degree students as important with mean ratings of 4.00 and higher. Of all skill items listed in the questionnaire, item 10 in the writing domain, “the ability to understand and avoid plagiarism,” had the highest mean value (5.07), denoting that it was perceived by the respondents as the most important skill. The responses to item 15 in the writing domain, “the ability to monitor and assess one’s own progress as an academic writer (i.e., self-evaluation),” had the lowest mean (3.50), which could be interpreted as meaning that this was the least important skill item as perceived by the participants. Table 12 presents the top ten skill items judged important by the students in degree programs. Among them, three were in the writing domain, three in reading, three in speaking, and one in listening.

Table 12
Top Ten Skill Items According to Degree-Program Students (n = 28)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	5.07	1.74
2	The ability to skim the text for the general idea and to scan the text to locate information.	Reading	4.96	1.40
3	The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture.	Listening	4.93	1.59
4	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	4.89	1.71
5	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	4.89	1.45
6	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	4.89	1.45

7	The ability to understand the most important ideas in a text and to separate what is central and what is not.	Reading	4.89	1.40
8	The ability to express an opinion or idea with supporting details.	Speaking	4.89	1.50
9	The ability to answer a question from the audience.	Speaking	4.86	1.41
10	The ability to gather information from various sources (e.g., libraries, the Internet, and electronic databases).	Writing	4.82	1.49

Language-preparation program students' perspectives. Seventy-one percent (51 skill items) of the ratable skill items were considered important by the students in language-preparation programs. The students identified item 2 in the speaking domain, “the ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently” ($M = 5.06$; $DS = 1.21$) as the most important skill item needed for their academic studies. “The ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources” (item 11 in the writing section) scored the lowest mean value of 3.43, representing the least important skill item as indicated by the students’ responses. The top ten important skill items as perceived by language-preparation program students are presented in Table 13. The largest portion (four) of the top ten skills identified as important by the language-preparation students belonged to the speaking domain. The rest were divided among listening (three), writing (two), and reading (one).

Table 13

Top Ten Skill Items According to Language-Preparation Program Students (n = 35)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently.	Speaking	5.16	1.21
2	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	4.74	1.20
3	The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation).	Speaking	4.74	1.24
4	The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture.	Listening	4.68	1.00
5	The ability to express ideas and thoughts accurately	Speaking	4.68	1.25
6	The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.	Writing	4.58	1.54
7	The ability to identify the main points in a lecture.	Listening	4.58	1.58
8	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	4.58	1.54
9	The ability to understand the general idea of a seminar discussion.	Listening	4.58	1.43
10	The ability to analyze commonly encountered academic writing tasks and to determine the purposes of such writing tasks.	Writing	4.58	1.07

Three of the ten skill items identified as important by the language-preparation program students overlapped with those selected by degree-program students. These were “The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice” (reading), “The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture” (listening), and “The ability to speak

effectively when making presentations in class” (speaking). Considering their lists of the top ten important skills, it is notable that students in the language-preparation program were more focused on oral skills (speaking and listening), whereas, degree-program students were concerned with literacy skills (writing and reading). These results are consistent with Springsteen (2014) in indicating that students must be properly educated in reading and writing skills since they become more crucial as students advance in their studies.

Learners’ motivation was reflected in their decisions. In keeping with Alharby’s (2005) study, which examined the healthcare educational establishment and showed that students’ ESL needs were determined by professional interests, respondents in the current study made their choices in light of their goals/prospects. Because communication skills (i.e., being able to use English efficiently in various contexts) are fundamental for language-preparation program students who want to settle down and start their studies successfully, they viewed speaking as very important to their development. Therefore, they identified abilities like speaking effectively, making oneself understood, and expressing ideas and thoughts fluently and accurately as fundamental to their language learning. In addition, they considered listening skills (e.g., to understand the general idea and identify the main points) important in order to integrate/merge into the new environment because understanding native accents is essential to initiate fruitful and fluent communication.

Students who were enrolled in degree programs highlighted the importance of reading and writing (literacy skills) to meet the requirements of their programs. Similarly, in a study emphasizing the relationship between language learning and the expected purpose of using English, Akbari (2016) concluded that reading, translating, and writing skills were rated as the

most needed skills by her sample. This was supported by what students in the current study deemed important to achieving their goals: “The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation) and “the ability to gather information from various sources (e.g., libraries, the Internet, and electronic databases).” Furthermore, they acknowledged the significance of avoiding plagiarism in their academic work. It is in line with Rahman (2012) that reading is a basic component to academic studies. Hence, degree-program students were focused on skimming and scanning abilities and being able to distinguish between central and secondary information. They were concerned with understanding the meaning of discipline-specific terms.

Figure 2 depicts the percentages of important skill items in relation to each skill domain as reported by the two main participant groups. Whereas the degree students’ responses ($n = 28$) included 15 skills in speaking, 15 in writing, 14 in reading, and 13 in listening, with a mean rating of ≥ 4.00 , the language-preparation program students ($n = 35$) identified 15 skills in speaking, 14 in writing, 12 in listening, and 10 in reading as important ($M \geq 4.00$).

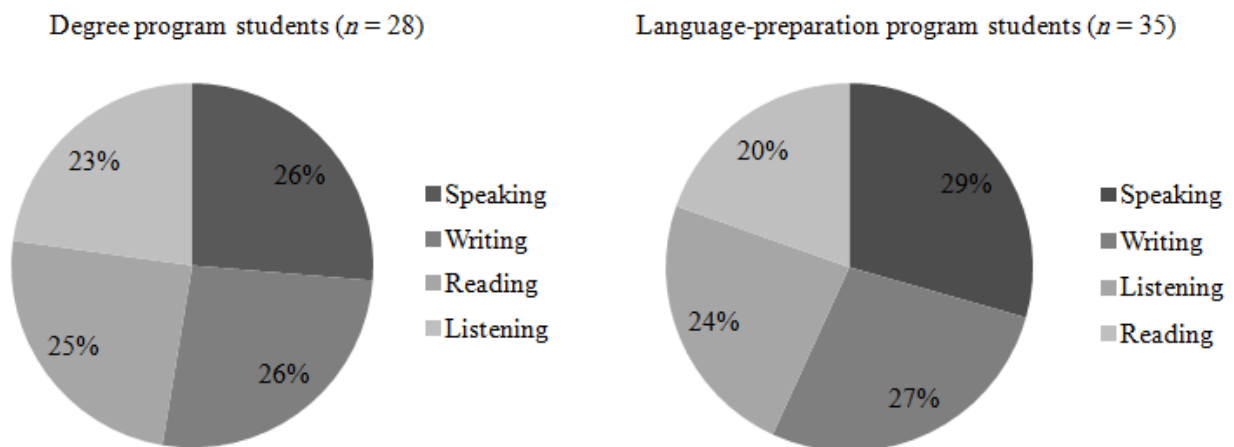


Figure 2. Comparison of percentages of important skill items between the two groups.

Overall, there was agreement between the two groups on the importance of productive skills (speaking and writing). The two participant groups agreed on the importance of the abilities that helped to improve the quality of writing, for example, writing appropriate thesis statements, generating ideas for writing tasks, taking notes, and demonstrating a command of standard written English. Yet, degree-program students indicated further interest in learning to fine tune their academic writing with skills such as understanding the importance of audience analysis and demonstrating competence in major discipline-specific tasks as well as in the range of topic-related vocabulary. With regard to speaking, the degree students were further interested in using standard English in teaching contexts.

In line with Liu et al. (2011), this consistency in the two sub-groups' perception can be justified in terms of the goal-oriented nature of academic programs in Canadian institutions. Educational institutions/programs usually aim at qualifying learners with potential to succeed in their prospective endeavours. Accordingly, the language skills required for successful academic and professional experiences are paramount in these programs. This objective was made clear to international students who enrolled in Canadian universities/colleges. As a result, students, whether in language-preparation programs or degree programs, recognized the importance of productive competencies (writing and speaking) in achieving success. These findings are compatible with Fadel and Rajab's (2017) study in which the students expressed their desire to have extra focus on speaking, writing, and technical vocabulary skills in academic English courses.

4.2.2. Status of language skills

The two participant groups were asked to rate the 72 skill items using a different rating scale. The participants were required to identify the areas in which they would seek help or support in the four language domains as they perceived them (component b). The results included skill items with mean ratings ≥ 4.00 .

Degree program students' perspectives. Surprisingly, all of the 72 skill items in the survey had a mean rating < 4.00 , indicating that none of the stated areas needed support according to this participant group. Responses to item 2 (in the speaking section), “the ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently,” was considered an area that did not need development as reflected by its lowest mean (2.50). Table 14 shows examples of the skill items ($M < 4.00$) where degree students considered themselves as unskilled but would not seek help. Notably, five of them were related to the reading domain. Learners became more conscious of the important role of reading skills in their academic development after they started their studies in Canada. As such, they identified it as an area that needed attention.

Table 14

Examples of Skill Items Judged as Needing Help by Degree Program Students (n =28)

	Skill Items	Skill Domain	M	SD
1	The ability to detect inferences that are between the lines and not directly stated.	Reading	3.96	1.69
2	The ability to understand the most important ideas in a text and to separate what is central and what is not.	Reading	3.71	1.78
3	The ability to determine what reasons or evidence the writer has provided for a claim (i.e., critical reading skills).	Reading	3.68	1.83

4	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	3.64	1.75
5	The ability to incorporate in one's work the main features of effective academic writing, including coherence, clarity, concision, logical development, and transitions.	Writing	3.64	1.68
6	The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.	Reading	3.64	1.81

Language-preparation program students' perspectives. The responses show that 15 (out of 72) ratable skill items (21%) in the survey were perceived by the language-preparation program students as areas needing development, with mean ratings 4.00 and higher. Of all the skill items in the survey, item 16 in the writing section, “the ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation),” had the highest mean ($M = 4.54$; $SD = 1.50$). Conversely, item 19 in the speaking section, “the ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to explain, clarify, and inform,” displayed the lowest mean value ($M = 3.11$; $SD = 1.94$), indicating that the students assessed themselves as needing no help. As Figure 3 shows, among the skill items indicated as needing support, the speaking domain had the highest percentage, indicating the area where students needed development the most. The students' self-assessments of their needs ($M \geq 4.00$) were as follows: seven items were related to speaking, four to reading, three to writing, and one to listening. This order was also reflected in the top-ten list of skill items judged as needing help by language-preparation program students (Table 15). Note that degree program students' mean ratings were below 4.00 and, thus, were not represented in Figure 3.

Language-preparation program students ($n = 35$)

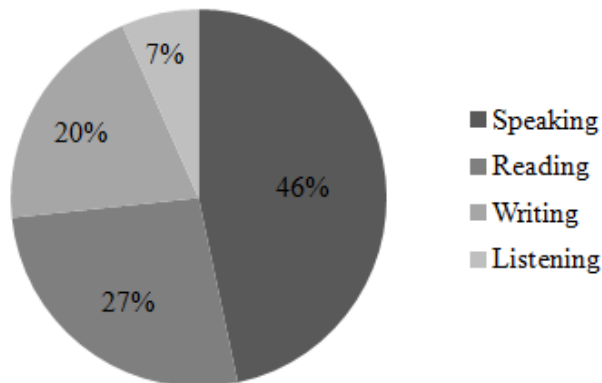


Figure 3. Percentages of skill assessments by language-preparation students.

Table 15

Top Ten Skill Items Judged as Needing Help by Language Program Students ($n = 35$)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	4.54	1.50
2	The ability to express ideas and thoughts.	Speaking	4.26	1.58
3	The ability to demonstrate competence with a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic.	Writing	4.23	1.11
4	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	4.23	1.52
5	The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice.	Reading	4.23	1.59
6	The ability to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal language according to the formality of the conversation.	Speaking	4.17	1.48
7	The ability to recognize cultural specific references.	Listening	4.11	1.43

8	The ability to defend a thesis.	Speaking	4.09	1.40
9	The ability to distinguish factual information from opinions.	Reading	4.09	1.58
10	The ability to present ideas in a logical sequence.	Speaking	4.06	1.68

In response to open-end questions (Section 4.4), students in Canada reported that due to their lack of confidence, they were reluctant to use English in their communication. Accordingly, students in language-preparation program wanted their courses to focus on speaking (Alqunayeer & Zamir, 2016). Besides the need to speak effectively in class or at conferences, learners showed that they needed support in adjusting their verbal and nonverbal language to match the formality of the conversation. In addition, they were concerned about making themselves understood and being able to express ideas fluently and in a logical sequence. Coming from a context where reading is not emphasized, Saudis studying in language-preparation programs in Canada felt behind in analytical reading skills. Areas where they assessed themselves as incompetent included summarizing and synthesizing, distinguishing facts from opinions, and understanding sociolinguistic and cultural references. General writing abilities, such as mastering standard written English, appropriate use of vocabulary, and analyzing and solving problems encountered in writing required improvement according to learners' self-assessment. Sensibly enough for a newcomer unfamiliar with the social context, Saudi learners called for help in recognizing culturally specific references.

4.2.3. Importance of language skills vis-à-vis status of language skills

To investigate the relationship between skill importance ratings and their respective skill status ratings in both groups (component c), a Pearson correlation test was conducted.

The results indicated a significant positive correlation ($p < .05$) between degree-program students' perceptions of importance and self-assessments in the writing ($r(28) = .390, p = .040$) and speaking ($r(28) = .381, p = .045$) domains. The other domains were not significantly correlated. The language-preparation student ratings were similarly correlated in the writing ($r(35) = .375, p = .026$) domain only.

At the individual skill item level, results indicated that 28 (out of 72) skill items were positively correlated in the language-preparation group's ratings. This meant that the skill items perceived as important by participants were also perceived as areas needing development. The majority of the correlated items (12) belonged to the writing domain. Reading came second in the number of correlated items (6). Ten correlated items were equally divided between speaking and listening domains.

For the degree-program group, the skills that had a statistically significant positive correlation were divided as follows: seven skill items in the speaking domain, five in writing, two in listening, and finally, two in reading. The Pearson- r values and significance p values of the correlated skill items shared by the two groups are presented in Table 16. The overlapped skill items belonged to the writing (4 items), speaking (2), and reading (1) domains. A full list of the correlated skill items in the two groups can be found in Appendix F.

Generally, evidence suggests that, for Saudi students, the overall understanding of language-learning needs did not conform to their assessment of areas needing development to a great degree. Responses of students in Saudi Arabia were positively correlated only in the

speaking and reading domains, while for students in Canada it was in speaking and writing. As mentioned earlier, Saudi learners came from a non-English background with little, if any, exposure to the demands of academic English learning (such as reporting data, research structuring, and presenting papers); therefore, they might be unsure or unaware of their needs.

These expected discrepancies between what language learners think they need and their assessment of areas needing development do not contravene the demands to incorporate NA as a crucial component in language-learning support programs. Besides making students aware of their language-learning needs, NA helps learners to feel more engaged and motivated. Moreover, using NA, rather than conventional placement tests, can be helpful in determining instruction foci for different learner groups as it highlights the specific needs for each group. That being said, practitioners should also be careful not to rely solely on learners' perceptions of their needs. Instead, they should combine multifaceted perspectives from different stakeholders in designing and implementing language-support programs (Huang, 2013; Liu et al., 2011).

Table 16
Pearson Correlation between the Importance and the Status of Language Skills (Students in CAN)

Skill Items	Language-preparation program students ^a		Degree program students ^b	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects. (Speaking)	.463**	.005	.761**	.000

The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to give directions and instructions. (Speaking)	.446**	.007	.675**	.000
The ability to make critical evaluations of content. (Reading)	.549**	.001	.481**	.010
The ability to take notes and to synthesize information drawing from various sources. (Writing)	.370*	.029	.457*	.015
The ability to use the most common genres in academic writing, including research papers/reports, definitional texts, essay exams, arguments, summaries, explanations, analyses, responses, evaluations, and instructions. (Writing)	.595**	.000	.585**	.001
The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing. (Writing)	.355*	.037	.612**	.001
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	.501**	.002	.490**	.008

^a $n = 35$, ^b $n = 28$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4.3. Students in Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis Students in Canada

An independent sample t -test, based on the hypothesis that students' perceptions did not differ whether they were in Saudi Arabia or already in Canada, was conducted in order to examine the difference in the skill importance and the skill status ratings of the participant groups across the four skill domains (research question 3).

The results of an independent t -test (Appendix G) showed that for students in Saudi Arabia there was no statistically significant difference between the importance and status ratings of graduate and undergraduate students, but for the student groups in Canada there was a statistical difference between the ratings of degree-program and language-preparation program

students. As such, the two groups in Saudi Arabia were combined to compare with the two student groups (i.e., the degree-program and language-preparation program students) in Canada.

4.3.1. Students in Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis language-preparation students in Canada

Importance of language skills. Overall there was no significance difference between students in Saudi Arabia ($M = 4.50, SD = 0.86$) and students in language-preparation programs ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.95$) in students' ratings of skill importance ($t(97) = -1.37, p = .172$). These results were supported by the domain level analysis where no significant difference was identified between the two groups. However, at the skill items level, the findings show statistically significant differences between the two groups' ratings of nine items. Students in Saudi Arabia reported significantly higher means than language-preparation program students in the ratings of six skill items in listening, two in writing and one in speaking (Table 17).

Table 17

Results of t-test: Significantly Different Skill Importance between the Two Groups

Skill Items	SA Students			Language-Preparation Program Students in CAN			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources. (Writing)	4.67	1.20	64	3.43	1.85	35	3.58**	49.88
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	4.64	1.42	64	3.80	1.71	35	2.62*	97

The ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners. (Speaking)	4.72	1.21	64	4.11	1.71	35	2.04*	97
The ability to understand rapid discourse on familiar topics. (Listening)	4.88	1.33	64	4.26	1.46	35	2.14*	97
The ability to understand the details of factual information. (Listening)	4.52	1.33	64	3.71	1.69	35	2.60*	97
The ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties. (Listening)	4.92	1.07	64	4.40	1.29	35	2.15*	97
The ability to understand important terminology related to the subject matter or topic. (Listening)	4.83	1.11	64	4.00	1.64	35	2.98**	97
The ability to recognize macro-cues in a talk, such as the introduction, review or preview information, presentation of new material, summary, and conclusion. (Listening)	4.64	1.36	64	3.74	1.62	35	2.93**	97
The ability to recognize micro-cues in a talk, such as repetitions, important information, non-verbal cues (e.g., emphasis, gestures). (Listening)	4.42	1.33	64	3.80	1.61	35	2.06*	97

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

It is worth noting that the majority of skills with significant differences between the two groups were related to listening. Particularly, qualitative data (Section 4.4) showed that following speech of different speeds and accents and taking notes pose difficulties for international Saudi students. According to Dunkel (1991), listening is a key skill that helps to increase fluency through expanding vocabulary, and, thus, contributes to reading comprehension. Although academic listening is recognized as crucial for academic progress and achievement, it has been overlooked in academic research (Flowerdew, 1994; Mauranen, 2012). This is also supported by Zaeri and Khalessi (2011), who claimed that most EFL contexts treat speaking and listening as less important skills than reading and writing. Learners in Saudi Arabia, where

exposure and use of English is limited, might recognize the fundamental role of listening when studying abroad as they need to understand what is going around them. Specifically, international Saudi students' micro-listening skills (e.g., coping with fast speakers, especially when they use contracted words, and recognizing how stress and intonation are used to convey meaning) and macro-listening skills (e.g., making inferences, distinguishing between literal and implied meanings, and detecting key words) (see Brown, 2006) involved in both conversational and academic listening merit attention.

Status of language skills. With regard to the skill status scale, the independent sample *t*-test also indicated an overall statistically significant difference ($t(97) = -2.81, p = 0.006$) between how students in Saudi Arabia ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.11$) and language-preparation program students ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.85$) assessed their skills level. At the individual items level, four items related to speaking, four related to reading, one item related to writing, and one related to listening proved to be significantly different (Table 18). Although most of the student mean ratings in Saudi Arabia were <4.00 (i.e., outside the cutoff point of the study), it is worth mentioning that language-preparation program students reported statistically significant higher mean ratings than students in Saudi Arabia in the listening ($t(88.46) = -3.15, p = .002$) and reading ($t(90.97) = -3.63, p = .00$) domains. This means that Saudi students in language-preparation programs in Canada were more aware that they needed support in reading and listening domains than the students in Saudi Arabia.

Students' perception of areas needing improvement differed significantly between participants in Saudi Arabia, who were ready to leave Saudi Arabia, and participants in Canada, who were in language-support programs, contributing to the fact that the students were not ready to directly enter degree programs in the host country. Respondents in language-preparation

programs reported higher mean ratings than those in Saudi Arabia in the reading and listening domains. Being in the Canadian context, language-preparation students realized the significance of receptive skills in their language development, while Students in SA lacked such realization.

Table 18

Results of t-test: Significantly Different Skill Assessment between the Two Groups

Skill Items	SA Students			Language-Preparation Program Students in CAN			t	df
	M	SD	N	M	SD	n		
The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation). (Writing)	3.89	1.56	64	4.54	1.50	35	-2.01*	97
The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation). (Speaking)	2.89	1.55	64	4.06	1.73	35	-3.43**	97
The ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently. (Speaking)	3.42	1.54	64	4.26	1.58	35	-2.56*	97
The ability to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal language according to the formality of the conversation. (Speaking)	3.20	1.69	64	4.17	1.48	35	-2.95**	78.16
The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class. (Speaking)	3.39	1.58	64	4.23	1.52	35	-2.56*	97
The ability to recognize cultural specific references. (Listening)	3.25	1.80	64	4.11	1.43	35	-2.62*	84.27
The ability to distinguish factual information from opinions. (Reading)	2.66	1.70	64	4.09	1.58	35	-4.10**	97
The ability to summarize and synthesize what one has read. (Reading)	2.72	1.66	64	4.00	1.33	35	-4.19**	83.74

The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice. (Reading)	3.09	1.72	64	4.23	1.59	35	-3.21**	97
The ability to read fluently, accurately, and in a good reading speed/pace. (Reading)	3.08	1.66	64	4.00	1.63	35	-2.65**	97

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4.3.2. Students in Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis degree program students in Canada

Importance of language skills. With regard to skill importance ratings ($t(90) = 0.75, p = 0.452$), results of the independent sample t -test exhibited an overall (across domains) statistically nonsignificant difference between the students in Saudi Arabia ($M = 4.50, SD = 0.86$) and degree-program students ($M = 4.34, SD = 1.13$) in Canada. At the domain-level analysis, none of the four skill domains indicated significantly different ratings between the two groups. The results were as follows: writing $t(90) = 0.807, p = 0.422$; speaking $t(90) = 1.100, p = 0.274$; listening $t(90) = 1.274, p = 0.206$; and reading $t(90) = -0.469, p = 0.640$. At the individual items level, nonetheless, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups' ratings of six items, two in the listening domain, two in reading, one in writing, and one in speaking (Table 19). Students in Saudi Arabia reported higher mean ratings than did degree-program students. This means that the students in SA's perceptions of these skills as important were greater than the degree-program students in Canada.

Table 19

Results of t-test: Significantly Different Skill Importance between the Two Groups

Skill Items	SA Students			Degree Program Students in CAN			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e. self-evaluate). (Writing)	4.45	1.45	64	3.50	1.90	28	2.64**	90
The ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners. (Speaking)	4.72	1.21	64	4.00	1.68	28	2.32*	90
The ability to understand important terminology related to the subject matter or topic. (Listening)	4.83	1.11	64	4.07	1.61	28	2.61*	90
The ability to recognize macro-cues in a talk, such as the introduction, review or preview information, presentation of new material, summary, and conclusion. (Listening)	4.64	1.36	64	3.82	1.72	28	2.44*	90
The ability to recognize an author's message, audience, and purpose. (Reading)	4.08	1.52	64	4.79	1.45	28	-2.09*	90
The ability to understand visual displays of data and/or results of data analyses (e.g., tables, charts, and diagrams). (Reading)	4.50	1.41	64	3.82	1.63	28	2.02*	90

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Status of language skills. The findings indicated an overall nonsignificant difference ($t(90) = -0.18, p = 0.855$) between students in Saudi Arabia ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.11$) and degree-program students ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.11$) in Canada in relation to the participants' perceptions of skill areas needing help. Similarly, no significant difference was found at the domain level analysis of the two group's skill assessments: writing $t(90) = 1.049, p = 0.297$; speaking $t(90) = 1.308, p = 0.194$; listening $t(90) = 0.078, p = 0.938$; and reading $t(90) = -1.595, p = 0.114$. At the

individual items level, however, the two groups reported significant differences in their ratings of five skill statements (two in writing, two in speaking, and one in reading). All associated mean ratings were less than 4.00 (i.e., outside the cutoff point of the study) (Table 20).

Table 20
Results of t-test: Significantly Different Skill Assessment between the Two Groups

Skill Items	SA Students			Degree Program Students in CAN			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources. (Writing)	3.36	1.53	64	2.61	1.77	28	2.07*	90
The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e. self-evaluate). (Writing)	3.67	1.58	64	2.64	1.95	28	2.46*	43.33
The ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently. (Speaking)	3.42	1.54	64	2.50	1.75	28	2.53*	90
The ability to defend a thesis. (Speaking)	3.86	1.73	64	2.82	1.85	28	2.60*	90
The ability to summarize and synthesize what one has read. (Reading)	2.72	1.66	64	3.54	1.97	28	-2.05*	90

* $p < .05$

Comparisons between student participant groups indicated no significant difference between perceptions of students in Saudi Arabia and of those in degree programs in Canada either in terms of important skills or in terms of areas needing help. Likewise, when compared with students in Saudi Arabia, language-preparation program students produced similar results

with regard to skill importance. However, in the domain-level analysis, students in language-preparation programs reported higher ratings than students in Saudi Arabia in receptive skills (listening and reading), meaning that they perceived these skills as more important than students in Saudi Arabia.

It could be the case that in Saudi Arabia, the educational system is more strictly structured than in Canada, and receptive skills are an essential component in teaching English since these skills are rarely used outside the classroom context. Since English is a foreign language that is not commonly used in SA, there is a general agreement that there is no sufficient exposure to language input in SA (Alamri, 2011; Alqahtani, 2011; Alrabai, 2016; Khafaji, 2004; Shaw, 2009). Therefore, educators and course designers in SA feel obliged to provide an overt, adequate instruction towards receptive skills. Hence, learners in SA think they receive enough reading and listening instruction. On the other hand, considering that English is an official language in Canada and learners are exposed to it everywhere and every day, language-preparation programs in Canada might not give (explicit) attention to reading and listening skills, or at least may consider them less important than productive skills which have to be taught. The language program syllabi might not focus on reading and listening components based on the assumption that learners will be naturally encountering English every day in Canada. Taking into account what Alqahtani (2011) found about EAL teachers in Britain, it is highly possible that practitioners in Canada are unaware of the devalued status of reading in the Arabic culture. Hence, they may assume that learners are interested in reading and will spend their leisure time reading.

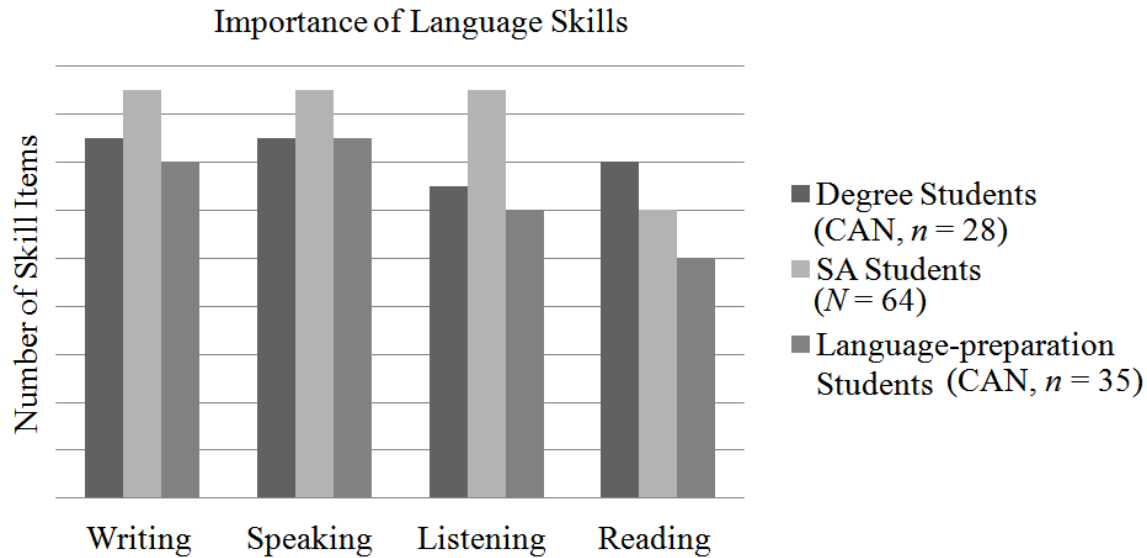


Figure 4. Skill importance comparison among three participant groups.

Figure 4 compares importance ratings of students in Saudi Arabia with those in Canada (both in degree and language programs). All skill domains, except for reading, reflected the same pattern. These findings were later supported with results from qualitative data analysis (see Figures 9 and 10). Students assigned more importance to reading skills only after they enrolled in degree programs in Canada when they discovered the importance of reading in achieving their educational objectives in that it improved other skills, such as vocabulary building and recognition of different grammatical patterns (Plakans, 2009). Overall, as Figure 4 shows, students in Saudi Arabia attained high scores in all skill domains (except in reading), while, language-preparation students had the lowest scores in all domains.

4.4. Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended questions were designed to provide an in-depth view of the students' challenges and needs, as they perceived them. To complement the information obtained through the skill ratings (part two of the questionnaire), the open-ended questions focused on the challenges and other issues (i.e., issues unrelated to the four language skill domains) that make learning English difficult for Saudi students. Besides comments related to problematic areas, participants' responses to the open-ended questions provided insight into the students' expectations of the focus of English language-support programs.

In line with the skill rating results, the perspectives of the two student samples (in Saudi Arabia and in Canada) are presented. This section begins with a presentation of the learning challenges that are organized under the following themes: speaking, listening, reading, writing, and vocabulary. Second, learners' expectations of the foci of language-support programs are introduced. Finally, the section ends with an overview of other issues related to the participants' language-learning experience.

4.4.1. Students in Saudi Arabia

Learning challenges. The responses consisted of 187 comments reporting the challenges students encountered in the process of learning English. Speaking and writing were the top two sources of difficulty for both undergraduate and graduate students. Undergraduate students reported that speaking was a big challenge for them (21 comments). The majority of responses referred to the lack of practicing speaking English for a variety of reasons. The contexts where a person has to use English in Saudi Arabia are very limited. Even in formal learning contexts (i.e., classes), most of the teachers are not English-as-a-first-language (L₁) speakers and most of the

conversations outside of the classroom are not carried out in English. For example, participant #53 stated that “finding a conversation partner is hard.” Graduate students (17 comments) indicated that the articulation and pronunciation of English sounds added to the difficulty they face in initiating conversations. In addition, using the correct tense and applying grammatical rules while speaking was troublesome for some students in this group.

Almost all the participants emphasized that writing was very important to their studies (31 comments). Graduate students in Saudi Arabia mentioned 20 times that writing was a major source of difficulty for them. Besides differences in grammar and writing systems between Arabic and English, the participants highlighted that practicing academic writing was usually very limited (i.e., only in formal instruction contexts) in Saudi Arabia. Students also indicated difficulties with specific skills such as taking notes, analyzing a text, and summarizing main points. A participant from this group (#30) was worried about how to express his voice in his writings. In addition to coming up with ideas and putting them in grammatically correct sentences in a limited time (e.g., in a timed exam), undergraduate students reported that thinking in Arabic while writing in English led them to write in a poor style, for example, using more descriptive words than needed (11 comments).

Responses showed that vocabulary was a major challenge for students in both the graduate and undergraduate groups. Vocabulary was mentioned in 16 comments by graduate students, who indicated having difficulties in understanding, memorizing, and using new terms. Additionally, they stated that culturally based expressions and idioms were challenging. Finding synonyms and replying with appropriate terms were among the points identified in the responses of this group. Finally, students drew attention to the fact that academic words were not used in everyday life and, hence, their practice opportunities were limited. Undergraduate students (3

comments) were concerned with the appropriate use of new words and admitted their lack of academic vocabulary.

Listening was identified 12 times as a learning obstacle facing the students in Saudi Arabia. Undergraduate students reflected that they were not used to listening to English outside the classroom, which posed a problem when they needed to use the language outside the classroom (six comments). They were mostly concerned about slang and colloquial speech. In addition, their teachers were not L₁ speakers and might, therefore, not be able to teach accurate pronunciation. Similarly, graduate students expressed their inability to follow and understand explanations from L₁ speakers (six comments). Fast speaking and different articulations and pronunciations might be the reasons, they explained. Students also reported having problems with understanding different accents.

Based on the responses, reading seemed to be the least problematic skill reported by Saudi students (four comments). Undergraduate students admitted that they tended to translate word by word while reading and since their lexicon was limited they ended up with poor comprehension. Similarly, graduate students' responses identified reading as an area that needed the least support. Figure 5 shows the comparison of the percentages of language-learning challenges reported by the two groups in the open-ended questions. These are clearer differences than what we have seen before.

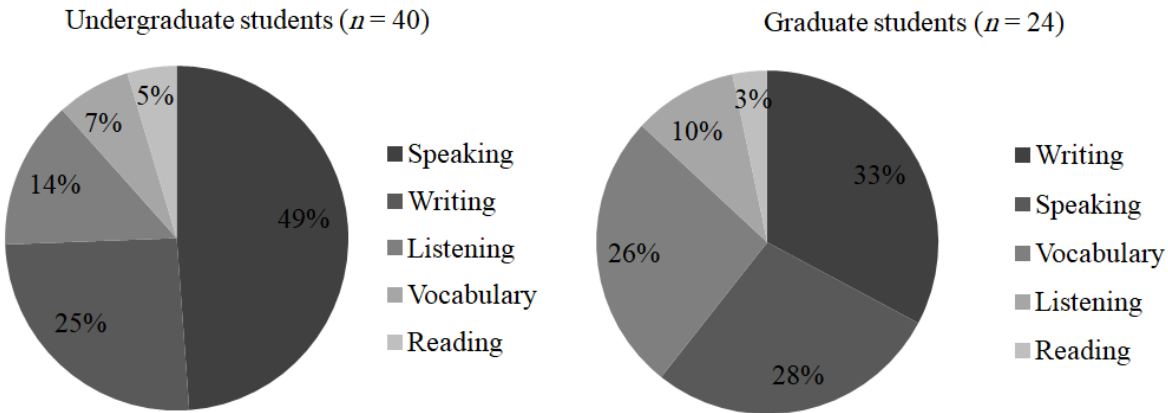


Figure 5. Qualitative data: English challenges reported by students in Saudi Arabia (N = 104).

Teaching focus. When the learners were asked about their opinions in response to the question, “What should an academic English language-support program focus on?”, several foci were suggested. All of the students in Saudi Arabia stated that the focus of an academic English language-support program should be on speaking (31 comments). Graduate students drew attention to the fact that people speak their mother tongue before they write it. They also suggested that discussions with the students be initiated to give them the chance to speak and express themselves. These discussions, the students indicated, should include the topics of their academic papers as well as everyday life since, being in the Saudi Arabian context, the students rarely used English in everyday life. Moreover, a number of students suggested that instructors whose first language was not English (e.g., Arabic) should be obliged to speak English when answering course-related questions or inquiries outside the classroom. Besides their lack of conversational and public speech skills, the students indicated their inability to use grammar correctly while speaking. According to the students, they would have avoided being hesitant to make mistakes while speaking publicly if they have had English incorporated into the early

stages of their public education. Undergraduate students referred to the importance of teaching students how to speak fluently. Knowing how hard it is to find L₁ speakers outside the classroom, the focus should be on practicing conversation and dialogues students might encounter in everyday life in addition to using academic expressions, students noted. This would encourage them to speak and communicate more in English.

The second focus the students agreed on was writing (21 comments). Graduate student responses emphasized the importance of practicing academic writing and applying grammar correctly. They indicated that spelling mistakes and incoherent writing were prominent problems in most students' writings. "Attention should be on writing academic papers," a student reflected. The students suggested having to write an essay each week and writing in a group (the essay to be discussed and shared later) as ways to improve their writing skills. Most of the undergraduate students, however, expressed their desire to learn more about differences between Arabic and English in terms of grammatical rules and writing style.

Listening and reading had the same number of comments (11 comments each), which suggests they require similar level of attention/focus based on students' perception. Graduate student responses focused on talking clearly to the student and maintaining clear tone when giving instructions or directions to the students (7 comments). In addition, the students thought that language-support programs should familiarize them with different accents to help them understand L₁ speakers. Normally one hears the language before being able to learn or speak it; therefore, students thought that focusing on listening should start at early levels of language teaching/learning. Finally, the students recommended watching television and listening to radio

in English as much as possible to make up for hearing the language spoken naturally around them.

Similarly, undergraduate students stressed supporting listening comprehension. They thought that attention should be given to teaching the students to understand what they were asked to do without external help. They also referred to the benefits of watching and listening to shows in English regularly, as reinforced by participant #20 who said, “Watching [English] movies without subtitles and then watching them again with Arabic subtitles helped me to improve my understanding as well as increasing my vocabulary.”

With regard to reading, the participants indicated that they were not good readers even in their first language (11 comments) even though they speak it fluently. Being a cognitively challenging skill, reading could be included under what Cummins (1999) called *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP) which he distinguished from *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS). Cummins (1999) argued that the development of CALP in L₁ and L₂ are related. Graduate students (seven comments) were more specific in indicating the areas needing support within the reading domain. They reported that students need more practice in skimming and scanning skills. In addition, they indicated that reading aloud was neglected in language-support programs. By the same token, undergraduate students noted that reading comprehension should be emphasized in language-support programs. They recommended reading daily, whether that be an interesting book or social media (e.g., Reddit).

The least number of comments related to students’ expectations about the focus of language-support programs belonged to vocabulary (nine comments). Graduate students highlighted the importance of increasing students’ vocabulary bank. Both academic and

everyday vocabularies should be included in discussions and conversations. Therefore, instructors should choose a wide variety of words and expressions when they speak and also use the words frequently. The responses also suggested that watching movies could be beneficiary in expanding one’s vocabulary. Participant #6 stated that “each student should focus on the vocabulary needed in his/her specialization.” Undergraduate students were mainly interested in focusing on the most frequently used words. Also, they wanted to increase the practice time for using academic vocabulary. Percentages of the expected teaching foci of language-learning support programs as suggested by the two groups are represented in Figure 6. It is interesting how the students’ perceived challenges (Figure 5) are quite different but focus expectations are more similar.

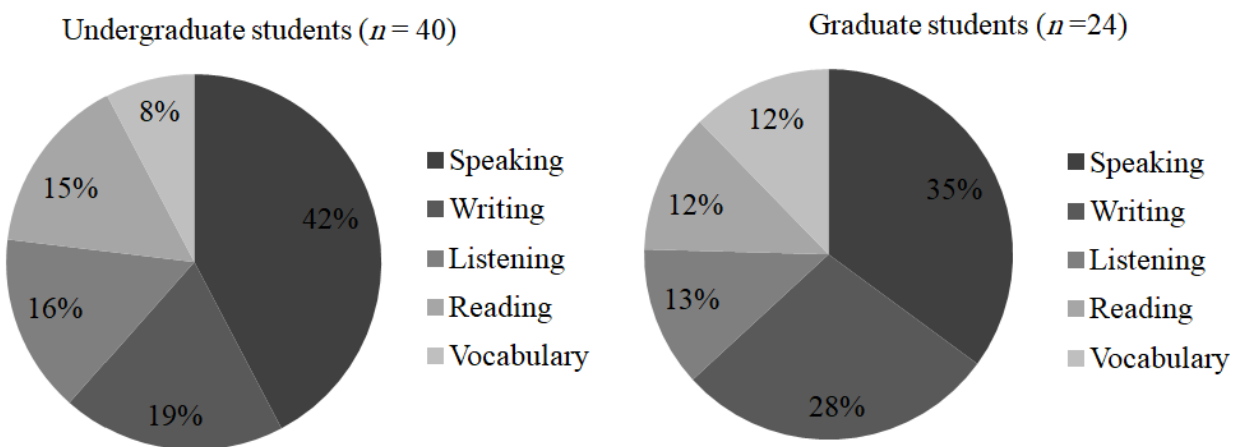


Figure 6. Qualitative data: Language-support program focus expectations in Saudi Arabia (N = 83).

Other issues. In addition to language related challenges and expected teaching foci, students’ responses in both groups included some issues that were not directly related to the four

language skill domains. These other issues were viewed by the students as challenges to their language-learning experiences. There was a consensus among the students that a lack of practice was a big hindrance to improving their language skills.

Some students talked about the personal qualities and characteristics and how they could hinder or help them. For example, participant #41 confessed that “in an environment that is used to laughing at and being sarcastic about others’ mistakes, one gets afraid of failure and shy of making mistakes.” This reluctance of students may affect their performance. Identifying individual weaknesses and addressing them are important to students’ learning; therefore, students suggested regular assessments to monitor their progress.

Another issue that concerned most of the students was language instructors. Almost all the teachers were not L₁ speakers. Most of them were Arabic in origin; therefore, the conversations outside the classrooms were mostly conducted in Arabic. In addition, the students indicated that instructors’ pronunciation and articulation were not like that of first language speakers. The routine used in teaching was boring and failed to hold students’ attention. Based on the students’ feedback, instructors focused on teaching grammatical rules and asking students to memorize and apply them. Responses encouraged English institutions to have qualified, creative teachers who combined activities with fun to facilitate the teaching process.

Additionally, participants frequently referred to the fact that English was not introduced to students early enough for them to immerse themselves in the language. As a result, students tended to think in Arabic but speak and write in English. Finally, in line with Fadel and Rajab (2017), the students thought that the time allotted to teaching English, whether as a subject in public schools or as an EAP course, was inadequate.

In agreement with Alqunayeer and Zamir (2016) who investigated the target needs of EFL female Saudi students at a Saudi university and found that students studied English because they wanted to improve their communication skills, findings of the current study indicated that students in Saudi Arabia gave prominence to the speaking skill. Alqunayeer and Zamir (2016) also noted that students “give more importance to the practice of speaking . . . during the course. They want to be able to speak English confidently with fluency and without any grammatical errors. [Their] second preference is . . . the listening skill as they think that they need to understand the native accent in order to be fluent in communication” (p. 101).

No one can minimize the significant role of speaking in academic settings (Giddens, 1984; Mauranen, 2012; Wenger, 1998). Lectures, seminars, conferences, along with supervision and faculty meetings, are all academic practices that involve spoken discourse. In addition, this great interest in oral skills is justified given that Saudi language learners’ main goals of mastering English include building effective relationships with the world around them, getting better jobs, and being able to continue their studies abroad (Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015).

In accordance with the general tendency in the academic world to view writing as the principal concern in academic studies (Huang, 2010; Rosenfeld et al., 2001; Swales, 1990; Trimble, 1985), there was also a general agreement among students in SA that writing was an important skill and an area needing support. A major issue shared by the students was their lack of critical thinking skill which is, as Elyas (2008) claimed, still foreign in Saudi Arabia. Having adequate knowledge in the four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) alone would not guarantee successful academic performance. Therefore, it is not surprising that responses reflected the students’ need for instructional support in specific academic writing skills

such as writing abstracts, analyzing a text, synthesizing, conducting research, and being able to evaluate biases.

Surprisingly, although the students were aware of the importance of the listening skill, they did not highlight it (in scale ratings or open-ended questions) as an area where they need support. Both graduate and undergraduate students rated listening as the top important skill while calling for instructional help in speaking- and writing- related skills. Other studies in the Saudi context also generated similar findings. Almulhim (2001) investigated the language needs of the college-of-technology students at a Saudi university and concluded that participants viewed listening as the top important and needed skill. Furthermore, these results were supported by research in other countries as well. For example, in his study, Al-Fadly (2004) reported on the English language needs of medical students at Hadramout University. The students indicated that listening and speaking skills are the most important ones to achieve their goals. Similarly, Venkatraman and Prema (2007) showed that the students of Engineering and Technology at SASTRA University (India) ranked listening as the highest required skill for their education and future career.

It was not unexpected that students in SA, both quantitatively and qualitatively, judged reading as the least important skill as well as an area that required little, if any, instructional attention. On the opposite side, in a study that combined students', subject teachers', and English instructors' perspectives, Naruenatwatana and Vijchulata (2001) concluded that, in spite of acknowledging the necessity of all language skills, reading skills and sub-skills were identified as the most important by all participant groups. The results of current study also contradicted Akbari's (2016) research in which EFL Students in different medical specialties identified reading as having an eminent role in the academic setting. While undergraduate students were

content with basic reading skills, graduate students are expected to delve into higher level readings to be able to write academically in English.

4.4.2. Students in Canada

Learning challenges. The participants pointed out the challenges they encountered throughout their language learning in 148 comments. Responses showed that writing was a major challenge facing Saudi students in Canada (30 comments). Other than taking notes, academic writing challenges identified by the students in language-preparation programs concern the pre-writing of academic essays (17 comments). They reported that due to the influence of their first language, it was difficult for them to be organized and to present new ideas correctly. Students also admitted not having enough background or information to write about some topics. They found it difficult to write about unfamiliar topics in a limited time period. Degree-program students, on the other hand, encountered difficulties in the use of transitional words and punctuation as well as in maintaining a logical flow in writing. Some students were also concerned about the level of writing required to meet publication standards and how to critique academic articles.

Coming in second place, speaking was reported by participants in Canada as a source of difficulty in their language learning (25 comments). Based on scale ratings, speaking was perceived as the top important skill. The language-preparation students faced various difficulties in speaking (14 comments). First, the majority reported that the time allocated to practice speaking in class was insufficient. In addition, their lack of courage to speak English meant they spoke Arabic with their friends outside of the class, which decreased their chances of practicing with English speakers. They noticed hardly any improvement as they progressed through the

different levels. Second, they found it hard to communicate with L₁ speakers. Lastly, the students admitted having difficulties in using appropriate intonation as well as pronunciation. (The sound /p/, /b/, and /r/ were mentioned specifically.)

Similarly, the responses of the students in degree programs showed that speaking was a major challenge (11 comments). Besides being unsatisfied with not having enough practice with English speakers, the students were worried they would make mistakes when speaking English. Because of their lack of confidence in speaking in front of an audience, they preferred to communicate with other Saudi students. Moreover, they reported that it was hard to express new ideas and to maintain a fluent conversation. Some student felt embarrassed when their interlocutor did not understand their accents, and their fear of making mistakes made them hesitant to speak publically.

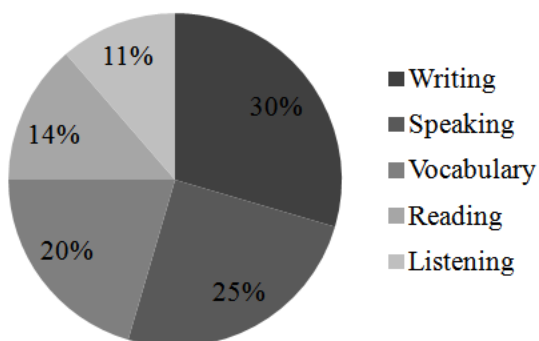
As for reading (22 comments), the majority of participants stated that they came from a background where reading skills had been de-emphasized. Because of their poor vocabulary inventory, language-program students found it impossible to read without frequently stopping to look up definitions (16 comments). Participants reported that this negatively affected their overall reading comprehension. Having little, if any, background on topics they were reading about, the students found it hard to understanding quickly. Finally, they reflected on their weaknesses in skimming and scanning skills. It seemed that reading posed less of a challenge for degree-program students (six comments). The students mainly expressed dissatisfaction about reading academic articles but not being able to understand them as they were expected to. “Saudis are not used to read[ing]; therefore, this skill should be enforced on them,” participant #41 stated.

With regard to vocabulary (20 comments), language-preparation students reported having difficulty choosing the appropriate words for the context (11 comments). The students suffered from a general lack of academic vocabulary which made finding synonyms even harder for them. “Our limited vocabulary bank impedes us from finding synonyms,” participant #7 explained. In building up their vocabulary, they found it hard to memorize new words related to their intended field of study. By the same token, students in degree programs expressed their frustration about having limited vocabulary in specific topics discussed in class. “Some of the topics we discuss in class are just so unfamiliar to us,” participant #21 said. Another stated that “it is hard to learn academic vocabulary because I do not know how to practice them” (participant #16). They also found it difficult to understand and remember complicated terms and idioms.

Listening seemed to be the least problematic skill area for the students in Canada (six comments only). There were instances among degree students where listening was mentioned as a learning obstacle (five comments); fast-speaking English speakers with different accents were difficult to understand. Since Saudis may not think of listening to Arabic as a skill to acquire, they reported that it was challenging for them to follow a lecture or a philosophical discourse. Understanding other international students while they were talking was the only listening-related problem the language-preparation students identified.

Figure 7 shows the comparison of the percentage of language-learning challenges reported by the students in the language preparation period and those reported by students who were already enrolled in a degree program. The largest difference between the two groups lied in listening.

Degree-program students ($n = 28$)



Language-preparation students ($n = 35$)

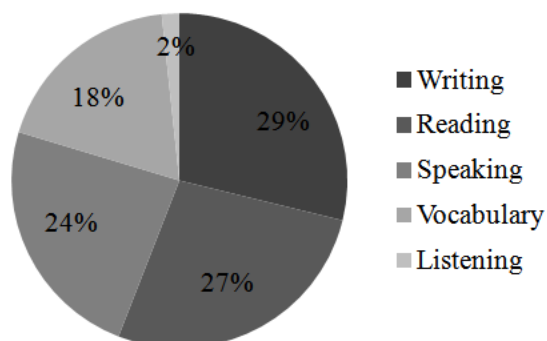


Figure 7. Qualitative data: English challenges reported by students in Canada ($N = 103$).

Teaching focus. In response to the question “What should an academic English language-support program focus on?”, the participants proposed several foci. Most of the students (38 comments) believed that the focus of an academic English language-support program should be on writing. In addition to the common requests to elaborate on grammatical rules (e.g., present grammatical rules in contexts and incorporate real communicative activities) and to focus on spelling drills, language-preparation students were keenly interested in developing other research-related writing skills (e.g., presenting information, arguing, and synthesizing; 25 comments). Student #49 suggested that learners should write at least a paragraph a day to help improve their writing. Another proposed that “it would be good if we learn more about figurative language” (student #46).

One of the interesting comments (out of 13 comments) from a degree-program participant recommended taking into account the learners’ fields of study in designing the writing tasks (e.g., writing reports for engineering students) and in outlining language-support program

syllabi. Participants also stressed the importance of good quality writing in publishing academic research. Therefore, they recommended that language-support programs focus on teaching the proper use of transitional words and punctuation, rather than only on grammar. They hoped for more time to practice academic writing, since they thought that other skills could be learned/practiced in everyday life.

For speaking-related foci (24 comments), there was an agreement among the language-preparation program students that speaking was the primary factor in achieving language proficiency (16 comments). As such, it should be the focus of any language-support program. A number of students even believed that mastering speaking would help to improve other skills. Thus, students stressed the importance of practice speaking and proposed including activities involving L₁ speakers and assigning an hour for practicing conversation after class. Degree-program respondents suggested increasing academic discussions, focusing on public speaking, paying attention to pronunciation, and practicing with L₁ speakers (eight comments). In addition, they pointed out that improving communication and presentation abilities were important for academic success.

With regard to reading, 22 comments related to reading improvement. Language-preparation students (14 comments) thought that language-support programs should encourage fun and interesting reading whether in class or during free time. “It is important to raise students’ awareness of the importance of reading and analyz[ing] with deep understanding of the context,” participant #58 explained. Student suggestions also included adding short stories and magazines to course syllabi, and increasing practice time.

Growing up where reading was undervalued, one degree-program student (out of the eight comments) pointed out that “encouraging students to read 30 minutes to one hour every day, even at their free time, is not a bad idea to help them get into the habit of reading” (participant #10). Moreover, students noted that Saudi students with little reading experience should be reading about different topics from a variety of sources.

Twelve students recommended vocabulary as a teaching focus in any language-support program. Besides training students how to master new words (meaning and spelling), the degree-program students thought that the focus should be on the most common academic terms students encounter in their academic studies (eight comments). They also proposed dividing students into groups based on areas of specialization and choosing the course vocabulary accordingly to help students improve their language ability. In the course of exploring new terminology, the students should not forget to practice nonacademic words as well. Participant #16 suggested that “learners must memorize more than 20 words daily (spelling, pronunciation, and use).”

Similarly, to improve vocabulary, language-preparation students recommended coaching learners on how to figure out and memorize new words along with choosing discipline-specific vocabulary items for the course (four comments). One student claimed that the lack of vocabulary made mastering other skill domains difficult (participant #35).

Finally, students in language-preparation programs referred to listening as a preferred and expected teaching focus (four comments). The students identified taking notes and conversations with L₁ speakers as areas that needed to be stressed in language-learning programs. Degree-program students, however, recommended listening to radio and TV shows as much as possible (two comments). Participant #41 referred to the importance of listening in gaining the

information and knowledge that helps students with productive skills (speaking and writing).

Percentages of the expected teaching foci of language-learning support programs as suggested by the two groups are represented in Figure 8.

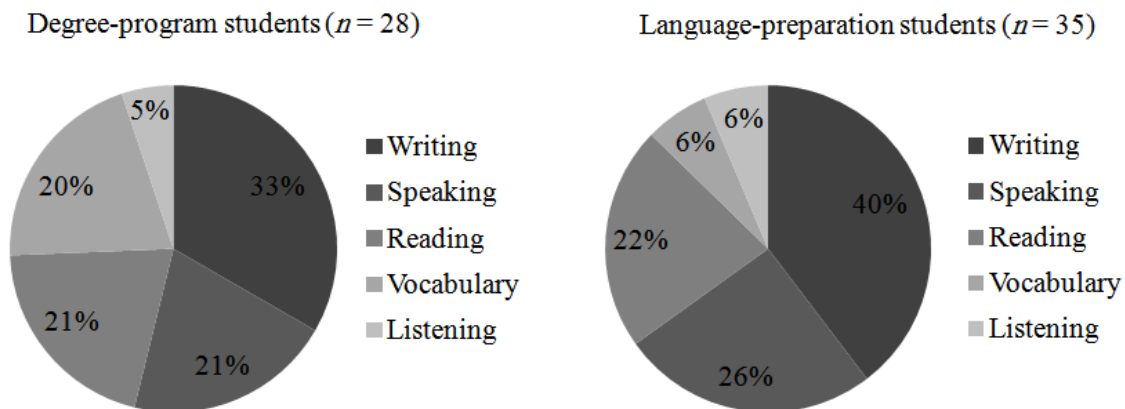


Figure 8. Qualitative data: Language-support program focus expectations in Canada (N = 102).

Other issues. Besides skill-specific challenges, the students reported other issues that made English difficult for Saudi international learners that were not related to language skill domains. These other issues posed challenges to their language-learning experiences.

A common issue among the students was not being in contact with English early enough in Saudi Arabia. Even for those who encountered English earlier, their use of English was limited to basic communication (e.g., greetings) and, in most cases, no corrective feedback was provided when they used the language incorrectly. Responses also indicated that, besides adjusting to a new culture, the students found themselves pressured for time (they had to

complete the language requirement in 18 months) and were stressed about being accepted into a university. Furthermore, the majority of the students shared concerns about being afraid of tests. This fear affected their performance and, consequently, their achievement. Difficulties outside school (e.g., daycare, banks, and official offices), lacking patience, and feeling uncomfortable talking about their weaknesses in public were also among the reported factors that hindered their language learning. One student stated, “In addition to feeling lost because of differences between Arabic and English language systems, I fail to translate my weakness to skill areas that I can work on!” (participant #21).

In the teaching-learning context, students reported a gap between the focus of the language-preparation courses and the skills required in university degree programs. Participant #30 pointed out that “not understanding students’ needs or their desire to learn specific skills, made language programs focus on some things and leave more important things out.” In addition, students communicated their dissatisfaction about not being properly prepared to use available research resources nor practice using them. Class organization where the students found themselves with classmates who were either at a higher or lower level hindered them from appropriately evaluating their own language abilities. Finally, some students attributed difficulties in their learning process to teachers’ explanations and the strategies and teaching aids they used. Participant #25 said, “teachers depend mostly on typical activities, I would like to practice activities, for example, that require me to roam around the city and interact with people I do not know, not only with students.” Others attributed their weaknesses to the cultural differences along with being unaware of the social context and the background necessary to understand and be involved in discussing some topics.

Qualitative data, in general, showed that Saudi students perceived speaking and writing as the most challenging domains in their language-learning experience. Moreover, students identified them (i.e., speaking and writing) as anticipated focal points in language-learning programs. This indicates that students were anxious about their immediate need to be productive in using English. An interesting outcome of the participants' responses to open-ended questions is related to vocabulary. In line with Evans and Green (2007), the participants identified vocabulary as a learning challenge in and of itself. Students complained about not having sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas fluently in English. They felt slow and unmotivated because they had to stop, think, and search for the correct words to use. The students believed that vocabulary was critical for both writing and reading comprehension and requested that vocabulary practice time in class be increased and that strategies to develop their lexicon be implemented. Among the vocabulary-related challenges, they mentioned limited vocabulary inventories, finding synonyms, and understanding subject-specific terms. Pedagogically, these findings have an important implication. As Evans and Green (2007) concluded, "EAP program design should place a great deal of stress on the teaching and learning of subject-specific and common core lexis" (p. 14).

Based on learners' perceptions, overall findings (quantitative and qualitative) of the current study reflect a clear consensus that the language needs of Saudi students (whether in Saudi Arabia or in Canada) were mainly related to the speaking and writing domains. This congruous perception is understandable considering the central role of writing in their academic studies (i.e., assignments, tests, and research papers are all in written form). Not only in international programs, but also in the first-language context, academic writing is not a skill that

can be improved or practiced through everyday activities. Evans and Green (2007) confirmed that “most students will have received little formal instruction in specialist academic genres such as project reports and case studies before entering university” (p. 10). Given this, it is not surprising that academic writing attracted the greatest attention in the field of academic research (e.g., Evans & Green, 2007; Huang, 2010).

In addition, recognizing speaking by Saudi students as an important skill needed to succeed in their studies is justified. Besides being the primary means of communication, no one can minimize the significant role of speaking in academic settings (Giddens, 1984; Mauranen, 2012; Wenger, 1998). Lectures, seminars, conferences, along with supervision and meetings with faculty members are all academic practices involving spoken discourse. The overall findings reflect a common feeling among Saudi students that speaking did not occupy the place it should in English-language-support programs. However, degree students did not acknowledge speaking as an area needing development. Some studies (e.g., Jackson, 2005) have accounted for such a lack of focus on speaking in terms of teachers’ tendencies to overlook erroneous communication and appoint marks to the right content. Nonetheless, the unexpected challenges in speaking contexts caused anxiety for Saudi students (in line with Evans and Green’s [2007] findings) for whom mastering speaking was an important step in the development of other skills. As participant (#17) reported,

I quit ordering a croissant with my coffee in the morning because I do not pronounce it right and no matter how many times I repeat it, they do not understand me. I feel so embarrassed and this makes me hesitant and unsure about opening conversations with people I do not know.

Overall, a comparison between participants in the two student samples (in Saudi Arabia and Canada) showed that the students had similar perception patters about language skills except for reading (Figures 9 and 10). In accordance with results from the skill ratings (Section 4.2.2), qualitative input resulted in interesting findings about reading (cf. Figure 4). Language-preparation students showed a higher perception of the importance of reading than those in degree programs in Canada or students in Saudi Arabia. This should not be surprising when considering the new educational environment the students experienced (i.e., Western culture). Soon enough the students became conscious of the importance of reading skills and their role in language learning. Coming from a different context, students were not sure about their role or the teacher’s role in the classroom. Therefore, it was expected that students would lack experience in effective reading strategies.

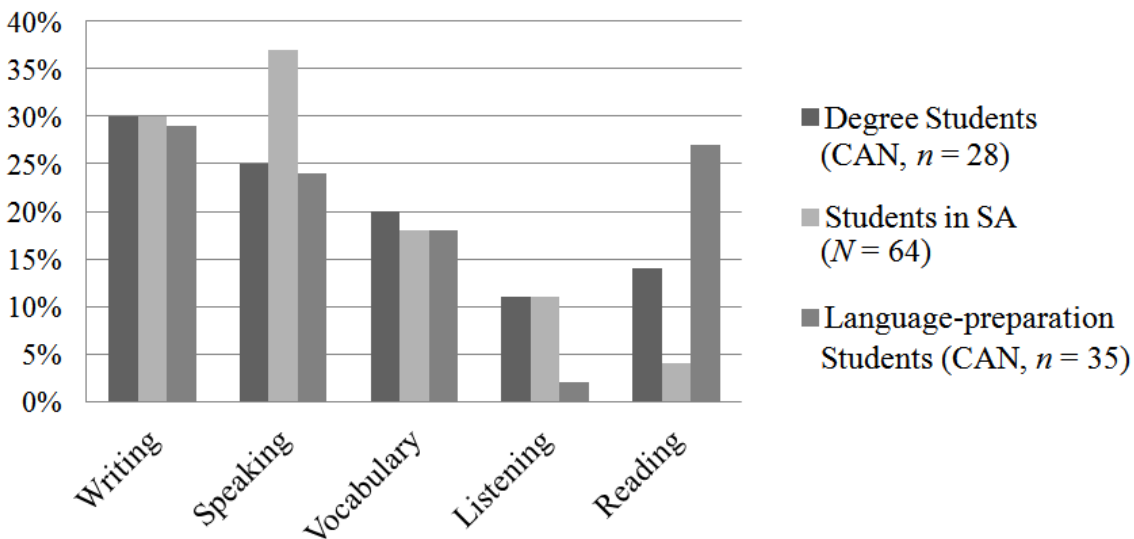


Figure 9. Qualitative data: Percentages of challenges among the three groups.

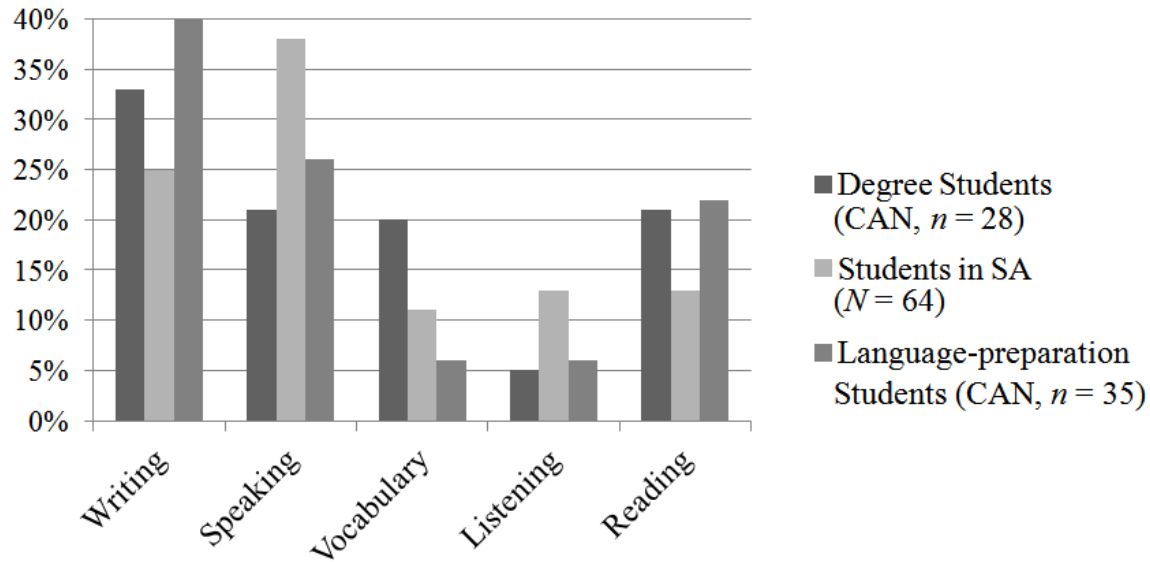


Figure 10. Qualitative data: Percentages of focus expectations of the three groups.

In addition, most international students are slow readers in English (Hellekjær, 2009) as they struggle with new vocabulary and cultural-specific underpinnings. Saudi international students who did not meet the requirements to enter degree programs and, instead, went through a language-preparation period, recognized the role of reading in the new context and in prospective studies. In her study of undergraduate and graduate students' language-learning needs, Huang (2010) also noted that "both instructor and student respondents across divisions and levels pointed out issues with reading, specifically critical reading" (p. 532). These findings were consistent with what Rahman (2012) found when he examined the difficulties the students faced in reading in English for academic purposes. The students in the study reported skimming for gist, scanning, and decoding meaning as being challenging while reading.

4.5. EAL Instructors

This section presents the results addressing the fourth research question focusing on instructors' points of view.

4.5.1. Importance of language skills

Using the same survey that the students completed, the 72 skill statements (which cover the writing, speaking, listening, and reading skill domains) were rated by the participants as they perceived their importance in English-language teaching/learning. Only the skill items with a mean rating ≥ 4.00 (i.e., "important") are included in the results.

Perspectives from Saudi Arabia. Responses showed that 77% of the skill items (56 statements) were considered important by EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia (mean ratings ≥ 4.00). Item 9 in the listening domain, "the ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties" had the highest mean rating ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.04$), reflecting its perceived importance. However, speaking item 13, "the ability to speak effectively when making presentations at conferences," was the least important skill item as indicated by the lowest mean rating ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.26$). Table 21, which presents the top ten skill items judged important by EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia, includes four items from listening, three from writing, two from speaking, and one from reading.

Table 21

Top Ten Important Skill Items Judged By EAL Instructors in Saudi Arabia (N =22)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties.	Listening	5.32	1.04
2	The ability to understand important terminology related to the subject matter or topic.	Listening	5.23	1.02
3	The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture.	Listening	5.14	1.04
4	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	5.05	1.13
5	The ability to summarize and synthesize what one has read.	Reading	5.00	1.15
6	The ability to identify the main points in a lecture.	Listening	5.00	1.07
7	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	5.00	1.54
8	The ability to present ideas in a logical sequence.	Speaking	4.95	1.17
9	The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation).	Speaking	4.95	0.72
10	The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.	Writing	4.95	1.65

Note. Bolded items represent overlapped important skill items between instructors in SA and CAN

Perspectives from Canada. Fifty-nine out of 72 items were reported as important with mean ratings ≥ 4.00 by this group. The highest mean ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 0.66$) was scored for item 16 in the writing domain, “The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation),” making it the most important skill item perceived by this group. In contrast, item 16 in speaking, “The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects,” was perceived as the least important item with a mean rating of $M = 2.22$, $SD = 2.37$.

The top ten important skills included five items related to writing, two to speaking, two to reading, and one to listening (see Table 22).

Table 22
Top Ten Important Skill Items Judged By EAL Instructors in Canada (N =23)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	5.57	0.66
2	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	5.52	0.99
3	The ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties.	Listening	5.35	0.65
4	The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.	Reading	5.30	0.77
5	The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.	Writing	5.30	0.82
6	The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing.	Writing	5.26	1.18
7	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	5.22	0.90
8	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	5.09	0.90
9	The ability to incorporate in one's work the main features of effective academic writing, including coherence, clarity, concision, logical development, and transitions.	Writing	5.09	1.00
10	The ability to express an opinion or idea with supporting details.	Speaking	5.04	0.83

Note. Bolded items represent overlapped important skill items between instructors in SA and CAN

The two groups overlapped in four skills (bold-faced in Tables 21 and 22), three of which were in the writing domain: “The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation),” “The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism,” and “The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.” EAL instructors in Canada were more focused on writing skills related to mastering standard written English and effective academic writing, drafting, and revising.

Considering that English is a foreign language and not a second language in Saudi Arabia, language instructors in Saudi Arabia, understandably, were worried about the amount of learners’ English language input. Students are not exposed to English in their immediate environment. Furthermore, they do not have to use it in daily life situations or in real contexts. Consequently, instructors in Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of listening skills such as understanding lectures and important terminology. Also, understanding instructors’ directions and remarks is crucial for students to complete their assignments. Since Saudi students (domestic and international) shared a common background, it is reasonable that listening was identified by the instructors as the most important skill at the domain level analysis.

Figure 11 shows similar perceptions of skill importance in the two samples. The percentages of important skill items in relation to each skill domain as identified by participants in Saudi Arabia included 16 skills in listening, 15 in writing, 13 in reading, and 12 in speaking. Similarly, the important items with a mean rating of ≥ 4.00 identified by instructors in Canada included 18 skills in listening, 15 in writing, 15 in reading, and 11 in speaking.

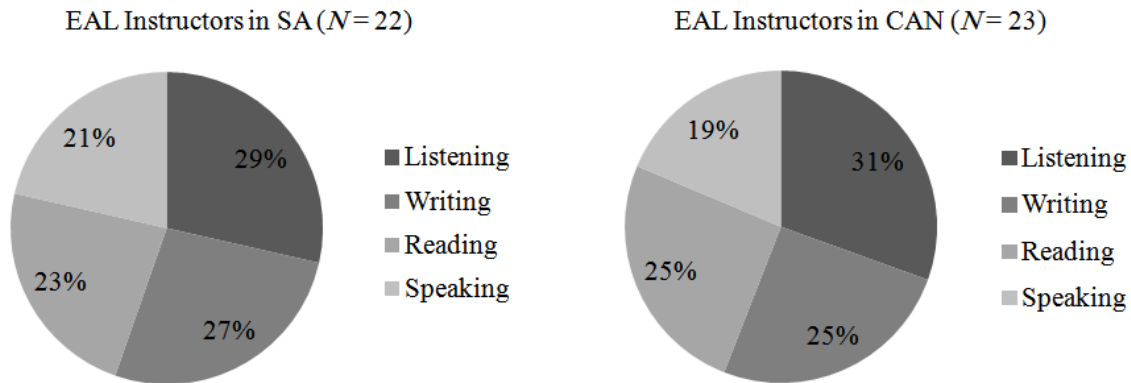


Figure 11. Comparison of percentages of important skill items between the two samples.

This shared perception that comes from two different contexts (the two instructor groups) confirms that Saudi students were facing major challenges in these domains (listening, writing, reading, and speaking). Since the exposure of students in Saudi Arabia to spoken English is limited, most of time, to the classroom, instructors ranked listening as most important. Similarly, instructors in Canada were aware of this issue; therefore, they also acknowledged the importance of oral English input.

4.5.2. Status of language skills

The participants were asked to rate the same 72 survey statements but with a different rating scale. Participants were required to report their assessment of the stated skill items related to the four language domains (writing, speaking, listening, and reading). As previously noted, a mean rating of ≥ 4.00 was considered the cutoff point.

Perspectives from Saudi Arabia. Thirty-six skill items (50%) were identified by EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia as areas where learners needed support. Skill item 14, “The ability to draft, revise, and edit one’s writing” in the writing domain was the area where help was needed the most, based on its mean rating ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 0.95$). Speaking item 13, “The ability to speak effectively when making presentations at conferences,” had the lowest mean rating ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 2.19$), indicating that no help was required in that area. Table 23 shows the top ten areas judged by EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia as needing help.

Table 23
Top Ten Skill Items Judged as Needing Help by EAL Instructors in Saudi Arabia (N =22)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to draft, revise, and edit one’s writing.	Writing	5.05	0.95
2	The ability to analyze and solve problems that arise in the writing process.	Writing	4.73	1.03
3	The ability to understand important terminology related to the subject matter or topic.	Listening	4.59	1.40
4	The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master’s/PhD theses).	Writing	4.55	1.57
5	The ability to understand speech with various accents.	Listening	4.55	1.57
6	The ability to analyze commonly encountered academic writing tasks and to determine the purposes of such writing tasks.	Writing	4.50	1.14
7	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	4.50	1.37
8	The ability to express ideas and thoughts accurately	Speaking	4.36	1.65

9	The ability to understand the general idea of rapid discourse on unfamiliar topics.	Listening	4.32	1.76
10	The ability to present ideas in a logical sequence.	Speaking	4.32	1.46

Note. Bolded items represent overlapped skill items between the two groups

Perspectives from Canada. Respondents identified only 13 (out of 72) skill statements with a mean rating of ≥ 4.00 as areas needing support. The item that needed the most attention belonged to the writing domain (item 17, $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.36$): “the ability to demonstrate competence with a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic.” In speaking, item 18, “The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to summarize information,” obtained the lowest mean rating ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 2.21$), rendering it an area that did not need support. Table 24 exhibits ten skill areas ($M < 4.00$) assessed by this group as needing attention.

Figure 12 shows that the participants shared the opinion about writing being an area where they needed help the most. Additionally, the majority of the top ten skills requiring support belonged to the writing domain. Moreover, participants in both groups reported that listening was less of a challenge for Saudi learners. Skills assessed as needing help by participants in Saudi Arabia included 14 in writing, nine in listening, seven in reading, and six in speaking. Participants in Canada selected six skills in writing, three in reading, three in listening, and one in speaking to focus on in the process of teaching English to Saudi students.

Table 24

Top Ten Skill Items Needing Help According to EAL Instructors in Canada (N = 23)

Rank	Skill Items	Skill Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation).	Writing	5.57	0.66
2	The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism.	Writing	5.52	0.99
3	The ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties.	Listening	5.35	0.65
4	The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.	Reading	5.30	0.77
5	The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.	Writing	5.30	0.82
6	The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing.	Writing	5.26	1.18
7	The ability to speak effectively when making presentations in class.	Speaking	5.22	0.90
8	The ability to understand the meaning of key words or terms in the discipline of your choice.	Reading	5.09	0.90
9	The ability to incorporate in one's work the main features of effective academic writing, including coherence, clarity, concision, logical development, and transitions.	Writing	5.09	1.00
10	The ability to express an opinion or idea with supporting details.	Speaking	5.04	0.83

Note. Bolded items represent overlapped skill items between the two groups

Following the general tendency to overemphasize writing in academic settings (Huang, 2010; Rosenfeld, Leung, & Oltman, 2001; Swales, 1990; Trimble, 1985), instructors in the study identified writing as the first area where learners needed help in spite of their agreement on the importance of listening skill to Saudi learners' language development (ranked first). Figure 11 shows that instructors reported listening as the most important domain for students' language

development, whereas writing was identified as the top area needing attention and support (Figure 12).

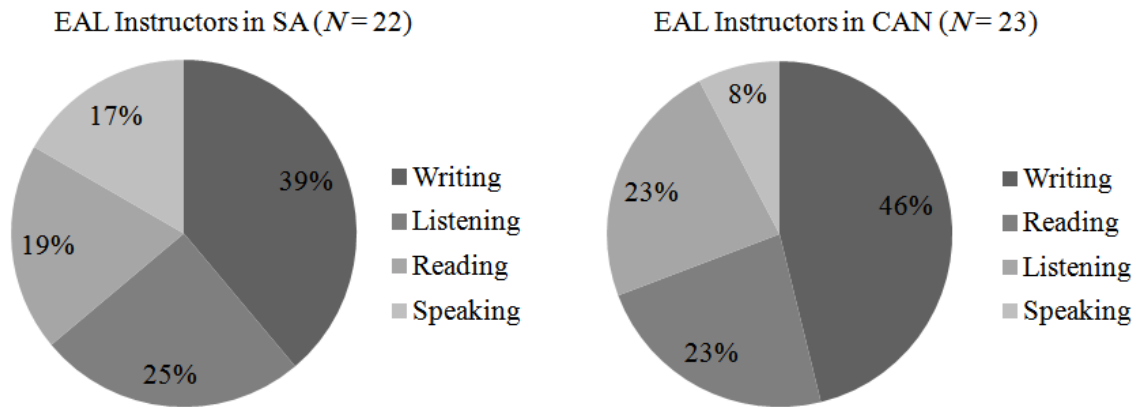


Figure 12. Comparison of percentages of areas needing help between the two groups.

In contrast to students’ overall perception, which identified speaking as a major challenge, instructors thought that speaking was not an obstacle for Saudis’ language-learning development. This could be plausible in the Saudi classroom context where written exams are the main evaluation method and where progress is based on student performance in writing (exams, assignments, and projects) not speaking (Flaitz, 2003). Instructors in Canada believed that Saudi students were competent communicators and faced no difficulties in expressing themselves; therefore, speaking was last in the list of important skills as well as those needing further attention. These findings are also compatible with Huang (2010) who noted that “far more attention has been paid to the development of writing skills in academic settings than other language skill domains” (p. 532).

4.5.3. Perspectives from Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis perspectives from Canada

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to examine the difference in both the skill importance and the skill status ratings of the two instructor groups across the four skill domains. Based on the hypothesis that perceptions of EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia did not differ from those in Canada, the test revealed the following results.

Importance of language skills. There were six items with statistically significantly different ratings between the two participant groups (see Table 25). Most of the items, which are mostly related to speaking, had mean ratings of <4.00 (i.e., outside the cutoff point of the study). The EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia, however, had significantly higher mean ratings than those in Canada. Overall, there was no significant difference between importance mean ratings ($t(43) = -0.14, p = .886$) of EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia ($M = 4.43, SD = 0.85$) and those in Canada ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.73$).

Table 25

Results of t-test: Significantly Different Skill Importance between the Two Groups

Skill Items	Canada Instructors			Saudi Arabia Instructors			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to defend a thesis. (Speaking)	2.26	2.36	23	4.00	2.00	22	-2.67*	42.40
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects. (Speaking)	2.22	2.37	23	3.68	1.67	22	-2.40*	39.60
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to give directions and instructions. (Speaking)	2.26	2.45	23	3.91	1.90	22	-2.53*	41.25

The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to summarize information. (Speaking)	2.26	2.45	23	3.91	1.69	22	-2.64*	39.12
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to explain, clarify, and inform. (Speaking)	2.35	2.52	23	3.77	1.77	22	-2.20*	39.57
The ability to understand the details of factual information. (Listening)	5.00	0.67	23	4.32	0.99	22	2.68*	36.74

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Status of language skills. There was no overall significant difference in how the group in Saudi Arabia ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.94$) and the group in Canada ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.84$) assessed the skill statements ($t(43) = -0.72$, $p = .094$). At the skill items level, the findings show statistically significant differences between the two groups' ratings of twelve items, only seven of which had means of ≥ 4.00 . Notably, the EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia reported significantly higher mean ratings than the EAL instructors in Canada in three items in writing, two in listening, one in speaking, and one in reading (see Table 26).

Table 26
Results of *t*-test: Significantly Different Skill Status between the Two Groups

Skill Items	Canada Instructors			Saudi Arabia Instructors			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to adapt writing to specific audiences. (Writing)	3.04	1.58	23	4.00	1.45	22	-2.11*	43
The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism. (Writing)	3.17	1.44	23	4.23	1.72	22	-2.24*	43
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research)	2.65	2.50	23	4.55	1.57	22	-3.06**	37.21

papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)									
The ability to take turns while participating in debates/discussions. (Speaking)	3.13	1.46	23	4.05	1.50	22	-2.08*	43	
The ability to understand the general idea of rapid discourse on unfamiliar topics. (Listening)	3.13	1.74	23	4.32	1.76	22	-2.28*	43	
The ability to understand speech with various accents. (Listening)	3.48	1.78	23	4.55	1.57	22	-2.13*	43	
The ability to understand visual displays of data and/or results of data analyses (e.g., tables, charts, and diagrams). (Reading)	3.09	2.00	23	4.32	1.39	22	-2.41*	39.39	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

It seemed that instructors in both Saudi Arabia and Canada perceived Saudis' language-learning needs similarly. There was no statistically significant difference among their responses. This agreement stems from the fact that both instructor groups in SA and in Canada experienced teaching English to Saudi students. Such unified views should be taken seriously when designing a course/program to teach English to Saudi learners. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating instructors' views in designing language-support programs. In this regard, NA is generally believed to have an important role in the field of language learning since it enables practitioners to obtain greater input about learners' language-learning needs from multiple perspectives and to maximize educational outcomes through tailoring language courses to the students' specific needs (Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015; Evans & Green, 2007; Liu et al., 2011; Long, 2005a).

4.6. Results from the Qualitative Data

To elucidate the views gained through the skill ratings, EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia and Canada were required to answer some open-ended questions. These questions were designed to allow participants to share their thoughts about the challenges (159 codes) that Saudi students encounter in learning English as well as the foci (106 codes) that EAL instructors would prioritize in language-support programs directed to this learner group. The responses also shed light on matters (106 codes) that were not directly related to language skills, but affected the experience of language learning.

The qualitative data were further enriched by arranging follow-up interviews with 19 EAL instructors in Canada who agreed to share insights about their experiences with Saudi students (372 codes). The participants based their input on the time duration ($M = 5.19$ years) in which they worked with Saudi students. To synthesize the findings, results from the qualitative input provided by EAL instructors are integrated and discussed in relation to the research questions. The common themes are presented as follows.

4.6.1. Learning challenges

EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia. Responses included 55 comments where the instructors identified challenges encountered by English language learners. In 19 of the comments, writing was a major concern for language instructors. A number of instructors rationalized the students' inability to start a writing task by stating that they thought in Arabic and then translated to English. In addition, they were unable to connect their paragraphs using good transitions or build to a larger point. Other problems Saudi learners had included "misuse of helping verbs and choosing proper tense[s] which leads to ill formed sentence structure," as

one participant (#16) said. Producing grammatically incorrect sentences with erroneous structure made it difficult for the instructors to understand their writing at times. In addition, responses drew attention to the students' need to improve their critical thinking as well as their ability to synthesize.

Speaking was the second domain in relation to participants' comments about learning challenges (11 comments). The largest number of comments pertained to the lack of speaking opportunities and the limited use of English. Since English is neither the first nor official language in Saudi Arabia, its use is restricted to classes. Instructors described difficulties that the learners had in expressing themselves orally and related them mostly to mispronunciation and the inability to utter sentences fluently. Similarly, learners' experience of listening (nine comments) to spoken English was not better than speaking it in Saudi Arabia, especially in using English in real contexts. "This fact made it hard for them to follow fast pacing speakers," as participant #1 stated. Other instructors pointed out that learners had comprehension issues when listening to texts or audio files.

According to the instructors, fluency in reading was a challenging task for many students who struggled to read with automaticity and accuracy (nine comments). Besides not practicing reading due to lack of opportunities, students tended not to pay much attention to what they were reading when they did read. Another area that instructors viewed as related to reading was vocabulary. The students were overwhelmed with new words and they did not have the proper means to develop their terminology. Instructors also thought that this deficiency led learners to misuse vocabulary and fail to express themselves properly (seven comments).

EAL instructors in Canada. Responses revealed that instructors considered writing the greatest challenge faced by Saudi language learners (73 comments). Since they do not tend to use writing much even in their first language, Saudi students have difficulty in conveying their ideas without translating from Arabic, which results in structural errors (Alrabai, 2016; Ankawi, 2015). Even at the beginning stages of writing, such as organizing material, and the ability to bridge from where they are to where they are going mentally, learners seemed to need help. Participants pointed out that the writing systems between the two languages were substantially different. Arabic is written from right to left and students are sometimes not familiar with English alphabet letters and the system associated with English language. Participant #7 noted that students need constant assistance in writing thesis statements, supporting details with facts and examples, and concluding paragraphs and essays. Beside the metaphoric use of language in English, learners faced difficulties with functional skills such as audience analysis, register, proofreading, editing, and sharing writing with others. Grammar, especially verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and use of articles, posed obstacles for Saudis as well. The lack of any frame of reference in terms of sentence structure and sentence variety were other weaknesses of Saudi students' writing. Moreover, learners often had problems with the effective use of research sources. This included things like choosing appropriate and relevant quotations, paraphrasing, and properly citing sources. Lastly, "critical analysis of written literacies is also a challenge for some; especially when concepts are more abstract or they are not clear" as participant #15 reported. According to instructors, Saudi students were on opposite (weak and strong) ends of these two skills. Although their writing skill was low, Saudi students were capable of articulating themselves very well in speech. This was further supported by the discrepancy in the IELTS score of most Saudi students, an instructor explained. He noted that "a student can score an 8 in

speaking and 4.5 in writing, which is fairly common for Saudi students” (instructor #4).

Instructors talked about problems with basic grammar and syntax. One participant declared that “for students hoping to get the IELTS score, it’s the writing that holds them back” (instructor #8).

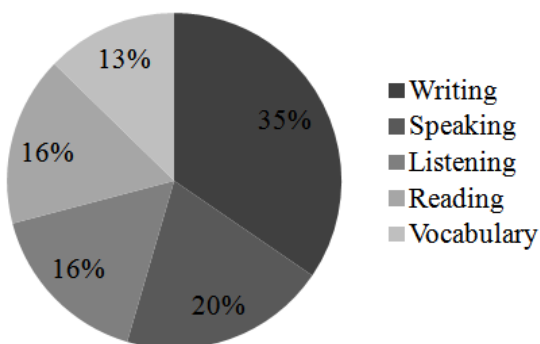
Second, responses revealed instructors’ concerns with regard to speaking (27 comments). In general, learners were inexperienced in discussion and argument styles. Participant #6 found that “even at the academic level, some students are still unable to sound out words.” This might be due to their very limited, if any, knowledge of phonetics, rhythm, stress, and intonation. Sometimes, the learners were unable to differentiate between the pronunciations of the sounds; for example, Saudi students across the board struggle with /p/ and /b/ sounds. In addition, the fact that every syllable in English needs a vowel is also a foreign concept (Alqahtani, 2011; Fisher, 2004). Besides poor pronunciation, students did not follow the punctuation rules, like taking a pause after periods. Finally, instructors indicated that it was very challenging for Saudis to regulate the speed of their speech.

Participants shared the idea that Saudi learners progress slowly in reading (25 comments). Although students from other cultures also read in a different direction or use different characters, their studies are focused on written English before they come to Canada. Saudis seem to have more experience with spoken English and lack training in written English (Alqunayeer & Zamir, 2016; Shaw, 2009). The fact that reading was entirely opposite made apparent the physical challenge of learning how to read left-to-right from the beginning. According to the instructors, students were often asked to read instructions or a text out loud, which was challenging for some students. Besides not following the punctuation rules, students struggled to recognize even common multi-syllable words and, as a result, they had difficulty

with pronunciation. Moreover, few of them had an adequate vocabulary to read fluently at an academic level, which affected their reading speed, as illustrated by participant #11, who reported that “learners struggled with understanding the author’s argument, particularly when the argument must be inferred.”

According to instructors’ perceptions, vocabulary (15 comments) and listening (14 comments) were the least challenging areas for Saudi learners. Data showed that students’ inadequate vocabulary made them unable to read fluently at an academic level which led to struggles with understanding an author’s argument, particularly when the argument had to be inferred. Furthermore, students’ lack of lexical variety, as well as incorrect use of new words, caused numerous errors in their language production. With regard to listening, responses indicated that the ability to listen for different functions, whether instructional language or questions about their opinion or experience, was very problematic for Saudi learners. For example, instructor #21 pointed out that students often had difficulty identifying what they were being told or asked to do or share. Many claimed they could not catch the details while listening and so only understood portions of lectures. Additionally, they lacked sufficient understanding of sound-grapheme correspondence. The percentages of language-learning challenges identified by the two participant groups are represented in Figure 13. Although writing and speaking were the ranked as top challenging skills (respectively), there was a great difference in the percentages between instructors’ perception in Canada and Saudi Arabia.

EAL Instructors in SA ($N=22$)



EAL Instructors in CAN ($N=23$)

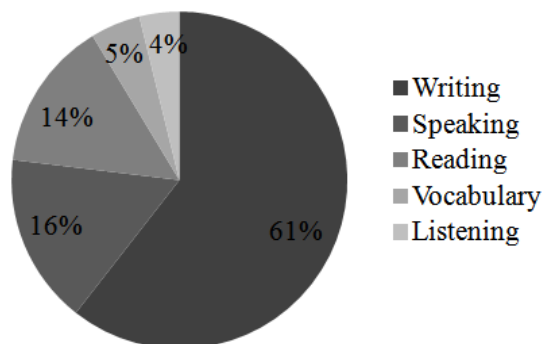


Figure 13. English challenges according to EAL instructors ($N = 159$).

4.6.2. Teaching focus

EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia. There was an agreement among instructors that a language-support program should focus on all language skills in an integrative way following a diagnosis test to tailor it to the students' needs both in level and skill. Nevertheless, a number of comments identified writing as a preferred focus for such programs (18 comments). Instructors stressed the importance of teaching the students how to express their thoughts successfully and how to write them correctly. Instructors called for prioritizing the development of academic writing skills. Learners must be aware of the qualities of coherent writing as well as the significance of correct grammar. In addition, participants illustrated that skills such as note taking, which are needed in any field, should be emphasized. Including writing tasks on different topics would help the students to practice more and, hence, improve their language skills.

Reading can help to improve all language aspects enormously, 11 instructors noted. In their opinion, attention should be given to developing learners' academic reading and providing authentic material to encourage the students to read more. Instructors also pointed out that

speaking is a very important aspect of language (10 comments); therefore, students should learn how to express themselves clearly and accurately. Any program should include tasks where students can productively use what they learn.

Since learners' exposure to English outside the classroom in Saudi Arabia is very limited, some instructors preferred listening to be the focus of language programs (seven comments). Target language input is a vital component in learning a new language. Only two comments mentioned vocabulary as a proposed teaching focus. "Vocabulary knowledge is a key element in mastering the required language skills and achieving competence in English," as participant #19 clarified. Hence, instructors called for increasing students' lexical repertoire by including a wide variety of vocabulary in the teaching curriculum.

EAL instructors in Canada. By and large, results suggested that the focus should be on the skills the students will need to succeed in a North American university, principally writing and reading skills. According to instructors' points of view, preparation for academic study should focus on aspects of expected academic outcomes; hence, it must deal with English writing skills (34 comments). Helping students with academic writing in class and writing support centers were some of the supports that students can be provided with on a continuous basis, they advised. Participant #11 claimed that critical thinking should be the primary focus. Students must learn to summarize, paraphrase, and be reflexive using self-analysis and self-correction outside the classroom if they are to continue to advance. In order to develop this, a number of participants proposed a task-based approach to writing where learners would be encouraged to do tasks such as analyzing their mistakes in writing, or editing and revising their essays before submitting them.

Looking at the fundamental role of writing in the academic world, instructors not only agreed on emphasizing grammatical knowledge in language programs but also drew attention to the need to encourage the students to apply this knowledge to elaborate in sentence structures. Since Saudi students tend to use short simple sentences, instructor #12 suggested “getting the student to spend 30 minute[s] every day writing sentences, not simple sentences but practicing compound and complex sentences.” Furthermore, some instructors noted that many Saudis need a basic orthography class. They do not know how the English alphabet works or how to form the letters properly. Therefore, Saudi students need extra help with printing and writing in English. Equally, classes that specifically teach spelling rules could be helpful as well.

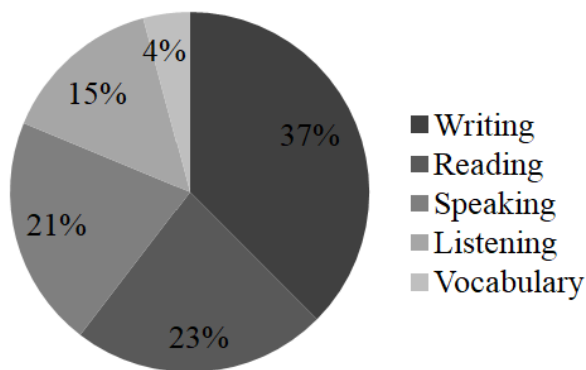
As mentioned earlier, if a student hopes to study at a North American university, proficient reading skills are a must. Thus, responses also identified reading (20 comments) as a preferred teaching focus in English language programs. Instructors also said that support with second-language reading is a necessity for learners’ progress in language learning and that reading comprehension should be emphasized through a task-based approach to reading in the student's discipline. In addition, students must engage in reading outside the classroom.

Listening and vocabulary had the same number of comments (12 comments each), which indicates that they require the same level of attention, as reported by instructors. Most Saudi students, especially beginners, do not differentiate between English sounds, specifically those not found in their language. They do not know how the sounds work individually or in a sequence. Therefore, the majority of comments advocated giving attention to phonics and to developing phonemic awareness. For proper retention of lectures, discussions, and meetings, it is important for learners to have adequate listening and note-taking skills, according to the instructors.

Developing vocabulary is a fundamental area to use any acquired language. If students are able to understand the words they are reading or hearing, they are better able to understand content and the writer's/speaker's intent. Although they did not acknowledge vocabulary as a major challenge, instructors believed that how words are used in context is paramount and called for familiarizing learners with high-frequency words. Moreover, language programs, they affirmed, should focus on helping students to demystify the language by working with vocabulary and using different parts of speech to build on. The right usage of words in a sentence as well as the ability to shift word forms are key skills for writing that should be taken into account in developing language programs. Finally, responses stressed that students must be able to build vocabulary by understanding prefixes and suffixes and how they affect syllable stress.

Instructors pictured speaking as the least problematic area for Saudi students. The majority of the students were open, friendly, and confident in their speaking compared to other learners (e.g., Asian). Only in ten comments was the suggestion made that speaking should be the teaching focus. In order to ensure a successful academic experience in Canada (or any North American university), students need communication skills, according to the instructors. Since group work is part of the instructional practice in Canada, learners should have understandable pronunciation to be capable of studying cooperatively in groups with their student cohort. Therefore, attending to proper pronunciation is a must in language programs. Figure 14 shows the comparison between the percentages of teaching foci reported by the instructors in Saudi Arabia and in Canada.

EAL Instructors in SA ($N= 22$)



EAL Instructors in CAN ($N= 23$)

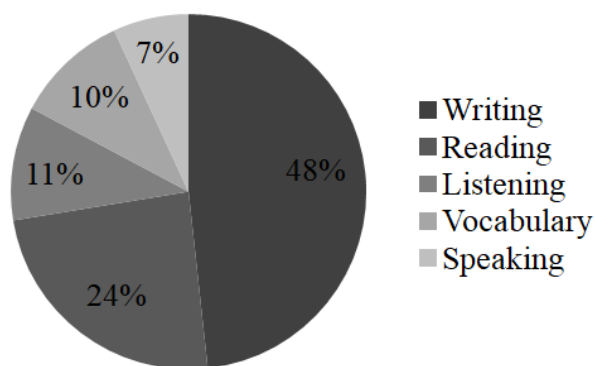


Figure 14. Language-support program focus expectations of EAL instructors ($N = 106$).

Overall, responses to open-ended questions were consistent among instructors both in Saudi Arabia and in Canada. The focus expectations identified by the two groups were relatively similar despite the big percentage difference with regard to the challenges faced by Saudi learners. The instructors identified productive skills as the most challenging ones for Saudi students. At the same time, they agreed that literacy skills (writing and reading) should be the focus of teaching in language programs directed to Saudi students. It is undeniable that instructional approach plays a role in students' language learning and development. The way English is taught and the way literacy skills (reading and writing) are viewed in Saudi Arabian education relate to challenges in the development of these literacy skills in the target language (L_2). There is no doubt that the Saudi education system focuses on communication skills and grammar while reading and writing are considered as passive skills (inside and outside the classroom). Saudi learners tend to view reading and writing as study-related skills, and thus, they have a general preference not to read or write outside school times even in their L_1 (Heyn, 2013; Shaw, 2009). It is rare to see a Saudi carrying a book or a notebook and pen for fun or leisure

activity. This general environment and first language practices could play a role in Saudi students' literacy performance in English (Cummins, 1999). Therefore, instructors (both in Saudi Arabia and Canada) agreed that attention should be given to literary skills. Furthermore, as instructors were concerned with communication and fluency (being the major goal for learning a new language), they were aware of the prospective difficulties arising when learners advance in their studies while still weak in reading and writing.

4.6.3. Issues Related to Language Skills

When instructors shared their insights about language-support programs directed to Saudi students, they attributed students' performance in different language domains to various factors (128 comments). Writing had the largest number of comments followed by reading. Responses referred to differences between the two languages as playing a crucial role in these difficulties. Arabic and English languages differ dramatically. These differences include orthography and reading and writing direction, and are the major challenges in reading and writing for Saudi language learners. Meehan (2013) asserted that

the increasing volume of literature suggests that perhaps the Arab learner of English faces a more arduous task than other EFL learners, particularly when it comes to writing. One of the most widely cited reasons for these difficulties is the vast differences between the linguistic systems of Arabic and English. (pp. 7–8)

The students need to learn a completely new alphabet, a different writing direction, and completely new sounds. Consequently, instructors in Canada thought that Saudi students also needed training in rudiments of writing.

The structures of the two languages diverge significantly, which results in numerous errors for Saudis who rely heavily on translation. As a result, one would expect the transfer of linguistic features from L₁ to L₂ to be reflected in Saudis' language learning (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). Instructors noticed instances of Arabic transfer to English, specifically in pronoun usage or doubling the subject as in "*The man, he is my friend.*" In cases of complete overlap or complete difference between Arabic and English, the students manage very well, but when there is partial similarity, things start to be missed and more mistakes are generated. Furthermore, because words in English can sound the same but be spelled differently, English spelling caused additional confusion for Saudi learners.

By the same token, instructors indicated that reading is a major challenge for Saudi learners. Al-Arfaj (1996) claimed that the difference between the two languages in the writing systems (including directionality) resulted in problems with reading and writing for Arab ESL and EFL learners. He further noted that Arab learners require a longer time to read, not only than native English speakers, but also than learners of other languages that use the Latin alphabet because they need to adapt their eyes and minds to the new letters. According to Smith (1994), while reading, the brain controls the eyes' movement "provided it understands what it needs to find out" (p. 81). This is also reinforced by Henderson's (1984) findings. He compared the reading abilities of native Arabic-, Spanish-, and English-speaking college students. Findings indicated that Arabic students read slower and comprehended less than Spanish students who, in turn, were slower than native English readers.

Accordingly, instructors suggested that language-support programs for Saudi students should prioritize reading comprehension. They also stressed that vocabulary development (both everyday and academic terminology) in context would help students to distinguish between

general English and academic English. To be able to use the language successfully and express themselves, students must possess an ample lexicon. According to instructors, learning vocabulary from readings will help students to expand their glossary and retain new words. Getting a solid grasp of academic vocabulary, word form shift, and understanding lexical chunks or phrases play a big part in academic skills such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and reporting.

By and large, instructors viewed Saudis as more talkative and verbal in the classroom than other international learner groups. Contrary to learners' self-assessment as lacking confidence, instructors thought that students' confidence in their speaking abilities allowed them to be more willing to talk and open to discussion, which helped them to progress quicker in oral communication than in reading or writing. As instructor #5 (CAN) explained, "the students are often very eager to discuss and debate in class; they are much more vocal about their opinions."

On the negative side, instructors mentioned that Saudi students face challenges in pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm which deviate from Arabic. The sounds of English that do not exist in Arabic, for example, the phonemes /p/, /b/, /v/, and schwa, were common issues for Saudi students. Instructors reported that Saudi students also have problems with rhythm: "there is no concept of stopping for them" (Instructor #12, CAN). These difficulties indicate a gap in the education Saudi learners receive in terms of how English works, specifically, how sounds work, and how intonation and stress are marked in English. Therefore, some instructors drew attention to the fact that Saudi language learners should be provided with basic knowledge of English phonetics early on in language programs. According to the instructors, Saudi students lack this kind of phonological awareness, which is crucial to strengthen their pronunciation.

Responses included a few comments related to listening abilities. Generally, instructors thought that Saudis possessed efficient listening abilities. Coming from an oral culture, Saudi

students were good at comprehending the language by listening to people. Their level of listening comprehension (to speech with accents) was acceptable, according to the instructors. In comparison to other language learners, Saudi students were better at catching the language by listening, quickly and improve in speaking. They get the structure, memorize it, start using it, and become fluent after a while.

Instructors' comments suggest that Saudi learners possess basic interpersonal communicative skills; they can speak, answer questions, and negotiate while talking or speaking. But this does not happen when they are writing. It is important that instructors and practitioners pay attention to these unique characteristics of Saudi learner groups; otherwise, the students might be disappointed to the extent of being less active with their peers in class and/or losing motivation to learn (Kaewpet, 2009). Listening is rarely recognized as a hindrance to language-learning development. However, listening has a major role in achievement at the academic level. In educational settings (e.g., at a lecture), students must be able to not only get the information, but also understand nuances in the information they receive. They must be able to listen and take notes simultaneously, which is difficult for Saudi students.

Another point that instructors mentioned as being vital in academic life was competency in analytical skills. Instructors indicated that Saudi students struggle with getting past the initial surface evaluation to a deeper level of analysis; therefore, it becomes difficult for them to understand the underlying issues. In addition, instructors claimed that Saudis often encountered problems with their ability to be objective in their writings and pointed out that the students needed training in rudiments of writing.

4.6.4. Issues Related to Learning Strategies

With regards to learning strategies (97 comments), instructors had two different opinions. The first view was that Saudis lack knowledge about strategies that could help them to learn. Others thought that Saudis had the knowledge but were unwilling to seriously try. Either way, learning how to learn is a critical part of any language class. Instructor #4 (CAN) indicated that “we need more support for this, in [the] ESL industry. We teach students little techniques here and there to help them learn, for example, strategies for building vocabulary.” Since they noted that Saudi students lack studying and learning techniques, a number of instructors thought that part of an effective program for Saudi students should be clear instruction on self-directed studies and how to develop study skills, for example, scheduled study times.

Although instructors viewed Saudi students as very sociable, they noticed that generally the students seem to be more cloistered and tend to spend more time with Saudi students than with other students. Just as Razek and Coyner (2013) noted, “the degree of connectedness of Saudi students sometimes hinders their ability to socialize and build new social relationships outside of their group” (p. 110). As a result, Saudi students’ language practice outside the classroom becomes problematic. As any other skill, language can be improved by practicing and using it repeatedly. Instructor #6 (SA) claimed that “teaching is not the most important part of the language-learning process.” As reported by instructors, authentic interactions that put the students into situations that require them to use the language they have learnt could promote their performance. Another point that instructors made was to encourage students’ interaction and break down the walls that might otherwise separate them (cultural, religious, or personal differences) so they could enjoy learning. This would keep them excited and interested. To promote good learning habits, instructors further recommended taking the time to prepare and

deliver engaging and creative activities which encourage students to put more effort into practice the language. For example, project-based or community-based assignments where students collaborate by incorporating various skills in a context that makes sense in English language and culture. Responses also suggested that learners could be engaged in meaningful situations (e.g., extra homework or task-based exercises) as a scenario to practice in a comprehensive structure where all four language domains are integrated. Lastly, instructors advocated allowing more practice time in class because practice is crucial for learners' progress.

In line with research by Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva (2013), instructors indicated that the environment around the learners and their relationship with their teachers contributed to their improvement as well. Creating a comfortable and stimulating classroom environment can help students feel included and stay motivated to learn. Shaw (2009), who investigated Saudi students' educational experiences in the United States, reported that students found differences in classroom practices and educational environments challenging, and often marginalizing. International students are far away from their country and may feel tired and homesick; therefore, they need emotional as well as educational support which would make them feel included and important. Instructors also agreed on the value of keeping the students' attention through creating a fun atmosphere instead of a dry class so students are not bored and skip classes. For instance, instructor #5 (CAN) proposed "asking students to do a field trip and write a report on that or to write paragraphs on simple things will keep them energized."

4.6.5. Issues Related to Background and Culture

Responses referred to educational background and cultural difference as major factors that played an important role in Saudis' language-learning, especially, in a foreign culture (183

comments). For instance, participant #1 (CAN) asserted that the ability to bridge where they are to where they are going mentally is essential for learners' progress. Instructors noted that the effect of cultural and educational difference was manifested in various ways. Stephens (1997) stated that "misunderstandings that can occur between people of different cultures may not be reducible exclusively to language difficulties, but may be also attributable to different sets of experiences, different expectations and even profoundly different ways of thinking" (p. 123).

The educational experience and expectations of Saudi learners diverged from the educational methods and expectations they encountered when they came to Canada, North America. Saudi students have a weak foundational knowledge in English since they start learning the language in public schools at a late age (age 11–12), and instruction in school only covers the basics (Al-Ahdal et al., 2014; Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015). Furthermore, the students have different cultural expectations about their role and their instructors' role in the classroom context. Classrooms in Saudi Arabia are teacher-centered where instructors present information without supplying learners with a syllabus. In contrast, North American educational practices rely most of the time on self-guided study habits, which tend to encourage learners to be more involved in and responsible about their own learning (Heyn, 2013; Shaw, 2009). Hence, Saudi students are not accustomed to the interactive, student-centered teaching practice found in most Canadian institutions. Instead, Saudi learners are more familiar with the role of students as passive receivers of that knowledge (Flaitz, 2003; Silverman & Casazza, 2000). This view is supported by Shaw's (2009) work which focused on the educational experiences of Saudi students in the United States. The student-teacher relationship in the Saudi classroom is a formal one and often contains a component of fear (Abdal-Sabur, 2011). In Saudi contexts, students are used to working independently and resort to rote memorization as the main learning strategy,

written exams are the chief assessment method, and co-education do not exist. Religion and culture are the main forces shaping Saudi society and life and since gender separation is a religious requirement, classes are segregated in Saudi Arabia (Prokop, 2005). This means that most, if not all, students lack experience in being taught by or working with someone from the opposite gender. Saudis are not extensively accustomed to instructors' western culture and vice versa.

Another manifestation of how cultural difference reflects on Saudis' language learning is their lack of understanding of cultural references that first language speakers innately acquire in their university readings. In addition, in order to use the language efficiently, L₂ learners should understand the cultural implications of oral communication that includes physical posturing, verbal and nonverbal gestures, and things that are specific to the target culture. Notably, there is no explicit instruction to develop cultural competence; nevertheless, researchers have stressed that acculturation calls for individual courses designed to provide students with the required cultural knowledge (e.g., Göbel & Helmke, 2010; Harumi, 2002).

The crucial role of cultural awareness in language learning suggests that intercultural competence should be integrated as a component in language programs instead of only touching on it incidentally during a course. Intercultural competence is related to one's ability to live in a new country, adapt to a different culture, follow educational objectives, and communicate efficiently and properly in an intercultural context (Baumann & Shelley, 2006; Rathje, 2007; Sercu, 2004). Although defining intercultural competence is controversial, Greenholtz (2000) argues that it is a "crucial predictor of success in working and living in cross-cultural environments" (p. 411). (See Deardorff [2006] for a model and an elaboration of the components of intercultural competence). Since everybody brings their own culture and background to the

classroom, it is not enough to teach the students about the target culture and background. The final point instructors made in relation to helping Saudi learners was providing language instructors with workshops to understand the students' culture and how they could help them better.

4.7. EAL Instructors' Perspectives vis-à-vis Students' Perspectives

Since the focus is on how students can meet the language requirements in order to pursue academic studies in Canada, it is important to compare the Saudi students' perspectives (both in SA and in Canada) with that of Canadian language instructors. Results of these comparisons are presented to address research question five.

4.7.1. Students in Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis EAL instructors in Canada

This comparison was conducted because the study aims at helping students in Saudi Arabia be prepared to come to Canada and commence their academic studies without engaging in language related studies for a long period of time (more than 18 months). In comparing the two groups at the level of individual items, there was 73.61% overlap (53 items) between their perceptions of skill importance across the four language domains. However, there were six extra skill items that only instructors reported as important: one in writing "the ability to adapt writing to specific audiences", two in listening "the ability to recognize cultural specific references" and "the ability to understand speech with various accents", and three in reading "the ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text", "the ability to make critical evaluations of content", and "the ability to determine what reasons or evidence the writer has provided for a claim, that is, critical reading skills". Six out of the ten items identified by the students as

important, but that were not shared with instructors, were related to the speaking domain, for example, “the ability to defend a thesis” ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.43$). Three of those items belonged to the writing domain, for example, “the ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources” ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.20$), and only one item was related to listening “the ability to identify the variety of registers, that is, differences in formality, in English” ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.47$).

Results from logistic regression showed that eight skill items were statistically significantly different between the ratings of the students in Saudi Arabia and instructors in Canada (Table 27). However, the crosstab and chi-square analyses showed that the difference in proportion was significant ($p < .05$) for only three items (out of the eight). The first significant difference in proportion, $X^2(6, N = 87) = 24.10$, $p < .01$, was between the students (84.38%) and the instructors (43.48%) who rated the writing item “the ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master’s/PhD theses)” as important. Similarly, the listening item “the ability to identify the variety of registers (i.e., differences in formality) in English” was rated by 78.26% of the instructors (versus 68.75% of the students) as important. The difference between the two was significant, $X^2(6, N = 87) = 13.81$, $p < .05$. The last significant difference, $X^2(6, N = 87) = 12.84$, $p < .05$, was between the students (68.75%) and the instructors (95.65%) who rated “the ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text” in the reading domain as important.

Table 27

Skill Importance: Logistic Regression between Students in Saudi Arabia and EAL Instructors in Canada

Skill Items	Students SA (%)	Instructors Canada (%)
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	84.38%	43.48%
The ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners. (Speaking)	82.81%	65.22%
The ability to understand the details of factual information. (Listening)	76.6%	100%
The ability to recognize micro-cues in a talk, such as repetitions, important information, nonverbal cues (e.g., emphasis, gestures). (Listening)	79.69%	82.61%
The ability to understand background knowledge and various contextual clues that might improve comprehension. (Listening)	71.88%	95.65%
The ability to identify the variety of registers (i.e., differences in formality) in English. (Listening)	68.75%	78.26%
The ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text. (Reading)	68.75%	95.65%
The ability to summarize and synthesize what one has read. (Reading)	75.00%	95.65%

Note. Bolded items represent skill items with statistically significant difference in proportion

Regarding skill status, there was no overlap at the individual skill item level since the students' mean ratings of all skill items were less than 4.00 (see Section 4.1.2). Based on the instructors' views as previously presented (see Section 4.5.2), 13 skill items, the majority of which were in writing, were assessed as needing support. Notably, only one item in the speaking domain, "the ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently" ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.41$), was recognized by instructors as needing support. Logistic regressions comparing the two groups' assessments indicated eight items with a significant difference in the proportion of responses.

Seven of these skill items were identified by crosstabs and chi-square analyses as statistically significantly different ($p < 0.5$) across the four language domains (Table 28). Among those, four items were in writing, two in speaking, and one in listening.

Table 28

Skill Status: Crosstabs and Chi-Square Tests between Students in Saudi Arabia and Instructors in Canada

Skill Items	Students ^a SA (%)	Instructors ^b CAN (%)	Chi-Square Test
The ability to analyze commonly encountered academic writing tasks and to determine the purposes of such writing tasks. (Writing)	56.25%	65.22%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 20.90, p < .01$
The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences. (Writing)	57.81%	69.57%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 14.66, p < .05$
The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing. (Writing)	51.56%	73.91%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 14.53, p < .05$
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	71.88%	43.48%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 20.95, p < .01$
The ability to make oneself understood (pronunciation). (Speaking)	46.88%	69.57%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 13.13, p < .05$
The ability to take turns while participating in debates/discussions. (Speaking)	59.38%	39.13%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 15.91, p < .05$
The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture. (Listening)	40.63%	60.87%	$X^2 (6, N = 87) = 20.28, p < .01$

^a $N = 64$, ^b $N = 23$

4.7.2. Students in Canada vis-à-vis EAL instructors in Canada

In order to help improve the academic services provided to Saudi international students, it is crucial for practitioners to know whether there is a gap between perspectives of Saudi students in Canada and the perspectives' of the instructors in Canada. Individually, there were 48 items (66.67%) that both the students and instructors considered important. Only one of the six items identified solely by the students as important belonged to writing "the ability to understand the importance of audience analyses and the potential effects of such analyses on writing", $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.41$). The rest were related to speaking. The instructors, on the other hand, identified 11 items as important. Those were divided among listening (6 items), reading (3), and writing (2).

Results from logistic regressions showed that five items in the reading domain, four in writing, and one in listening indicated significant rating disagreement between the students and instructors (see Table 29). However, crosstabs and chi-square tests identified three of them with statistically significant differences in the proportion of ratings. Only one of those belonged to the reading domain where 95.65% of the instructors (versus 77.78% of the students) reported "the ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text" as important with significant difference in portions, $X^2(6, N = 86) = 14.89, p < .05$. The other two items that showed divergence belonged to the writing domain: 1) "The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing" was rated by 91.30 % of the instructors (versus 66.67 % of students) as important, and 2) "The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master's/PhD theses)" was rated by 43.48 % of the instructors (versus 69.84 % of students) as important, with a statistically significantly difference of $X^2(5, N = 86) = 18.45, p < .05$ and $X^2(6, N = 86) = 14.83, p < .05$, respectively.

Table 29

Skill Importance: Logistic Regression between Students in Canada and EAL Instructors in Canada

Skill Items	Students ^a CAN (%)	Instructors ^b CAN (%)
The ability to understand the importance of audience analyses and the potential effects of such analyses on writing. (Writing)	80.95%	69.57%
The ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources. (Writing)	66.67%	65.22%
The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing. (Writing)	66.67%	91.30%
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	69.84%	43.48%
The ability to recognize micro-cues in a talk, such as repetitions, important information, non-verbal cues (e.g., emphasis, gestures). (Listening)	66.67%	82.61%
The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases. (Reading)	80.95%	95.65%
The ability to recognize an author's message, audience, and purpose. (Reading)	82.54%	86.96%
The ability to detect inferences that are between the lines and not directly stated. (Reading)	77.78%	82.61%
The ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text. (Reading)	77.78%	95.65%
The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice. (Reading)	65.08%	60.87%

^a*N* = 63, ^b*N* = 23

At the individual items level, the only item that both students ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.54$) and instructors ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.44$) pointed out as an area requiring help was “the ability to demonstrate a command of standard written English for academic purposes (e.g., grammar, phrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation)” in the writing domain. As mentioned earlier, the instructors reported 12 skill items across domains as areas needing support that were not shared with the students (five in writing, three in listening, three in reading, and one in speaking). Results from logistic regressions showed that the two groups significantly differed in their ratings of seven items; four in speaking “the ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently,” “the ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners,” “the ability to defend a thesis,” and “the ability to use standard English in teaching contexts [as a teaching assistant] to summarize information,” two in writing “the ability to adapt writing to specific audiences,” and “the ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks [e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and master’s/PhD theses],” and one in listening “the ability to understand the general idea of rapid discourse on unfamiliar topics.”

Crosstabs and chi-square analyses identified four of them with a significant difference in ratings proportions between the two groups. The proportion of students who rated “the ability to understand the general idea of rapid discourse on unfamiliar topics” in the listening domain as needing support was 63.49% (versus 39.13% of instructors); the difference in proportion was significant, $X^2(6, N = 86) = 33.03$, $p < .001$. In assessing the following items in the speaking domain as needing support, the following rating portions were identified for the two groups: “the ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently,” 57.14% of students versus 65.22% of instructors; “the ability to defend a thesis,” 65.08% of students versus 30.43% of instructors; and “the ability

to use standard English in teaching contexts [as a teaching assistant] to summarize information,” 60.32% of students versus 26.09% of instructors. The differences in portions were statistically significant, $X^2(6, N = 86) = 20.71, p < .01$, $X^2(6, N = 86) = 29.40, p < .001$, $X^2(6, N = 86) = 28.84, p < .00$, respectively.

In line with Huang (2010), the findings of the current study indicate an apparent overlap between the students’ and instructors’ perceptions of important skill items. This concurrence reflects students’ awareness of language skills that instructors and language programs in Canada consider important benchmarks for attainment. The differences instructors had with students in Saudi Arabia (mainly in listening-related skills) and in Canada (mainly in reading-related skills) were analytical in nature, for example, recognizing micro-cues, understanding background knowledge and contextual clues, detecting inferences, summarizing, and synthesizing.

The lack of overlap between students and instructors with regard to skills that needed development indicated a gap between perspectives of Saudi students and the perspectives of instructors in Canada. Logistic regressions showed that the major differences were identified in writing-related (for students in Saudi Arabia) and speaking-related (for students in Canada) skills. It is worth noting that the differences between students’ and instructors’ perceptions regarding skill importance were focused on receptive skills, while their differences regarding areas needing help were related to productive skills. This finding is generally in line with Eslami (2010), whose study focused on EAP teachers’ and students’ visions of the language-learning process. The researcher found a significant variance of understanding between teachers and students and concluded that “instructors may not always be the best judges of students’ needs and challenges” (p. 7).

Chapter 5: Key Findings, Implications, Limitations and Future Directions

This chapter includes four main subheadings: summary of key findings, implications, limitations and future research directions, and conclusion. First, it summarizes the main findings. In the implications part, I present the empirical, methodological, pedagogical, and practical implications. The chapter also presents a number of limitations of the study and proposes future research directions.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

In keeping with the prominent place English has gained in Saudi Arabia, and in the world in general, interest in English language learning and teaching is growing in the Saudi educational system. English is looked at as an effective means to access wider and greater knowledge, to initiate cultural relationships with other countries, and to attain standards of competing in a global market. Accordingly, determining the academic English needs specific to Saudi learners is an essential step to help improve their English and teaching practices inside and outside Saudi Arabia. To date, there is noticeable dearth of research examining these needs, especially in an international context; therefore, a systematic NA of the language-learning needs of Saudi students was conducted in an attempt to address this gap. Using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the current study examined Saudi students' perspectives coupled with their EAL instructors' views about Saudis' English language-learning needs and produced the following main findings:

- Findings from the present study make a crucial contribution to the understanding of international Saudi students' language-learning needs as they perceive them as well as how language instructors, both in Saudi Arabia and Canada, assess these needs.
- The multi-level analyses of the study confirms the context-specific nature of needs analysis and highlights the importance of including different contexts (e.g., SA versus Canada; language-preparation versus degree programs) and eliciting information from different sources in order to obtain better understanding of learners' needs and, consequently, provide the required help.
- The study provides valuable language-learning input for education in Saudi Arabia, as well as for educational institutions and practitioners in Canada, and other English-speaking countries, with regard to designing and implementing language-support programs or courses for Saudi learners.
- Quantitative and qualitative data show that both students and instructors viewed writing as a challenge for Saudi English-language learners in one way or another. Writing difficulties range from low-level writing skills, such as sentence structure and grammatical accuracy, to higher order skills, such as analyzing academic writings, synthesizing information, and supporting arguments with details and evidence.
- The study advocates that academic writing should be prioritized in language programs since it is not a skill that can be acquired naturally or mastered through everyday activities, especially with international students such as Saudis coming from oral culture.
- The results broach a number of issues (e.g., educational background, cultural differences, and instructional environment) that contribute to the challenges Saudi students face while learning English.

- Responses identify cultural differences as a major factor affecting learners' adaptation and language development. Speakers need to resort to social experience and cultural knowledge in order to express themselves properly and understand each other correctly. Besides being linguistically competent, a person needs to know what to say, how, and to whom to say it, based on the context of the interaction.
- Findings indicate that reading was acknowledged as an area needing support by both the Saudi students and the instructors in Canada. Students encounter problems with reading-related skills, ranging from reading aloud to more advanced skills such as skimming, scanning, summarizing, synthesizing, and detecting implied inferences.
- Language-learning needs of Saudi students are shaped according to the requirements of their immediate study context and their prospective goals.
- The study also asserts that learners' perception of their language needs, their goals, and motivations should be considered in designing curriculum to make the students feel involved and stimulated.
- This study sheds light on the lack of correlation between learners' perceptions of important skills and their self-assessments of these skills. This inconsistency underscores the need to triangulate the findings to reach a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the learners' language-learning needs.
- Findings also indicate a significant difference between Saudi and Canadian instructors' perceptions of the importance of reading and listening as well as their assessments of writing and speaking as areas needing attention and point out the significance of bridging the gap between instructors and students.

- Differences in the educational experiences between teacher-centered and learner-centered environments hinder the development of Saudi students' language skills.
- Cultural literacy is a major factor that enables students to adjust to a new language and culture.

5.2. Implications and Recommendations

This section highlights the implications of this study which concern four important aspects: empirical, methodological, pedagogical, and practical. The empirical implications provide in-depth aspects the study makes in relation to the existing literature review. As for the methodological implications, they address the research methodologies employed in this study. The pedagogical implications tackle the teaching and learning aspects of the language teaching in the English language programs. Finally, the practical implications concern policy makers and the workshops conducted to prepare Saudi learners before they start the English language programs.

5.2.1. Empirical Implications

There is paucity of research that addresses the Saudi language-learning needs. Therefore, the current study helps to address the absence of Saudi students' voices in the international education literature, especially in Canada. Moreover, the little available literature on the Saudi context, the majority of which focus on cultural aspects, is outdated. Hence, many changes are expected to have occurred in both the educational as well as the social contexts. As result of globalization and modernization Saudi Arabia exerts efforts to develop the society domestically

and internationally. Hopefully, this study fills in the gaps and presents more recent views about this understudied area of research.

In accordance with previous research on NA, this study confirms the context-specific and context-dependent nature of NA. To this end, this study unveils the multidimensional nature of language learning, which could differ in accordance with various aspects such learners' motivation and concerns not directly related to the language-learning process in the new context (Alqunayeer and Zamir, 2016). For example, although EAL instructors judged Saudi learners as competent speakers, students in language preparation program viewed speaking as very important since they want to settle down and start their studies in the host country.

The discrepancy between instructors' and students' perspectives, supported by a number of other studies (e.g., Atai & Shoja, 2011; Huang, 2010, 2013), suggests that instructors might not be the best judges of learners' learning needs. This mismatch points out the significance of bridging the gap between instructors' and students' expectations.

Differences in the educational experiences between teacher-centered and learner-centered environments hinder the development of Saudi students' language skills; therefore, students need explicit guidance on how to become independent learners, something that is overlooked in many language-support programs. Similarly, considering its crucial role in enabling students to adjust to a new language and culture, cultural literacy should be integrated as a vital part in language programs designed for international students.

Responses show that the ability to use the language in different contexts and situations makes the students feel more confident and further motivated. According to Alharby (2005), most international students want to learn the language to be able to use it to achieve their goals, not to acquire native-like competency. Fundamental knowledge in communication and

interpersonal skills will teach the learners how to use the language properly. Taking that into account, it is important to first equip the students with the language they are going to use in their everyday lives, and later to introduce specialized content related to their majors or their careers. As such, language programs should emphasize the actual utility and practicality of what is being taught by focusing on communication and comprehension, vocabulary building, and to great extent, listening.

In addition to the divergence between learners' and instructors' perceptions, this study sheds light on the lack of correlation between learners' perceptions of important skills and their self-assessments of these skills. This inconsistency underscores the need to triangulate the findings in NA to reach a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the learners' language-learning needs (Atai & Shoja, 2011; Long, 2005b). Therefore, incorporating various methods, sources, and analyses is crucial in NA.

5.2.2. Implications Related to Methods

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative analyses, enabling a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. The sample used in this study has multiple sources of data. It involves Saudi English language learners who are in Saudi Arabia as well as those who are already starting their studies in Canada. This allows for various perspectives depending on the educational context. The study also sought views from EAL instructors in Canada and those in Saudi Arabia. This serves to compare and contrast various views and gives indications about the needs of Saudi students in different instructional environments. Further, the questions in the questionnaire were translated into Arabic to facilitate proper understanding of the content of each question and to make it comfortable for the respondents to express their

views freely. The students were also given the choice of using Arabic when responding to open-end questions to encourage them to better express their opinions in their first language.

In spite of the unquestionable advantage of using NA to identify learners' needs in the ESP/EAP field (e.g., Liu et al., 2011; Long, 2005a), the detailed questionnaire used in the study was lengthy, which discouraged many people from participating or completing (see Section 3.1). Nevertheless, to maximize the benefit of using detailed questionnaires in such studies without losing the richness of the responses, it is important to consider an in-person application of the instrument. Administrating a survey in person, as the experience of the current study indicates, results in a larger response than an online survey would. Participants are more likely to complete them in an in-person context since being there to answer any questions could facilitate the process.

5.2.3. Pedagogical Implications

In a globalized world, English has become more and more important in the lives of Saudis both regionally and internationally. Some of the major language-learning challenges identified by the study stem from learners' lack of an English language background and early educational experiences. Late exposure to English affects Saudi students' abilities and generates extra difficulties for them (Al-Ahdi et al., 2014). Therefore, it is logical to consider including English as integral part of Saudis' early education. With the changes that have already begun in Saudi Arabia, hopefully, the coming generations will have a more advantageous start in learning English. The Ministry of Education has come to see how the pedagogical practices used in English instruction in Saudi schools have negatively impacted the proficiency of Saudi students who are sent to study abroad, and it has recognized the necessity of adding English to the

curriculum as early as first grade, if not sooner. In addition, instead of relying on rote memorization and teacher-centered practices, instructors in Saudi Arabia will have to adopt new pedagogies that train students to become self-directed in their learning (Alamri, 2011).

The teaching environment and instructional practices in Saudi Arabia have an indisputable effect on Saudis' reading competency. Since Saudi students are used to a different educational system where reading is a devalued skill, they experience difficulties when they start their studies in a new international context. Besides drawing the students' attention to the importance of reading and its vital importance in academic studies, educators can use different strategies to promote good reading habits. Strategies suggested by researchers include incorporating quizzes into their courses (Fernald, 2004; Leeming, 2002; Marchant, 2002), granting points for participation, allowing students to make summary cards to be used in exams (Green & Rose, 1996; Roberts & Roberts, 2008), and giving them a chance to choose from among strategies or tasks (Lewis & Hanc, 2012). Additionally, deciding on an engaging reading topic is a key factor for reading improvement (Kashef, Pandian, & Khameneh, 2014). Choosing interesting materials and selecting topics related to their fields of study may help to increase international students' motivation (D'Aloisio, 2006). These strategies are compatible with the challenges identified by the students (coming from a background where reading is devalued, fear of tests, unfamiliarity with topics, and feeling uninvolved in their learning process). Educators in the ESP/EAP field should prioritize reading for Saudi students since it was flagged as needing development by both participant groups.

This study highlights that student-instructor differences regarding skill importance focused on receptive skills, whereas differences regarding areas needing help were related to productive skills. As such, exercises that integrate skills, such as reading-based writing, that

develop both critical reading skills and writing skills deserve consideration for inclusion in the curriculum. In addition, it is important that instructors use various strategies and different teaching methods to ensure that students are in line with whatever learning objectives they set out. Instead of relying mainly on tests, teachers could evaluate students' performance based on their progress, that is, on comparing the quality of an assignment to previous assignments. They could point out students' mistakes (grammatical, syntactic, or spelling mistakes) and encourage them to look at their previous assignments to compare, for instance, the number of subject-verb agreement errors, and to see what kind of errors they tend to make. In this way, students will feel involved, keep track of their weaknesses, and be responsible for developing self-correction strategies. On the other side of the desk, teachers will identify what students are struggling with.

The qualitative data also revealed a number of other issues that can further help or hinder students' performance. These issues have some important pedagogical implications. Attention should be given to raising awareness among students about their role as learners. Additionally, encouraging learners to work individually on their weaknesses and to focus on their learning gaps (i.e., what they achieved versus what they were expected to achieve by a specific period of time) will get them to be more involved in their own learning. Language-support programs are required to promote skills that are important for academic attainment (e.g., critical thinking).

Since findings emphasize the important role of background and culture in the language-learning process of Saudi international students, educators in Canada (and other host countries) should be careful to build cultural competency into courses, focusing on both cultural and linguistic facets of English. Practitioners should be conscious of cultural differences in the way they prepare courses for Saudi students as well. Specifically, instructors should take the cultural aspects into account in determining their teaching objectives and lesson planning, for example, in

grouping male and female students in classrooms and in male-female interactions when assigning parts in role-play or group work. In addition, instructors who use music, drama, and games in their teaching must be aware that some of these activities might not be suitable for most Saudi students because of their religious/cultural background. Therefore, it becomes crucial to design language programs that embrace intercultural competence along with linguistic skills.

In light of the information gained from the NA in this study, it is suggested that the focus of English-language programs directed to Saudis should be in two phases; the first phase should take place in Saudi Arabia while the second one may commence in Canada. First, in the **provision phase** of six months, which is the approximate preparation period needed for the scholarships recipients to leave Saudi Arabia, oral communication could be reinforced by exposing the learners to authentic patterns of language use at a point when they are highly motivated since the main goal of learning a language is to communicate effectively. Thus, the oral-oriented learners would be able to pick up structural patterns, perceive new sounds, and acquire new words. Most importantly, they would feel confident and motivated.

In the second phase, the **cultivating phase** which may last about six months since the time frame allotted (by sponsors) to meet language requirement is 18 months, explicit instruction that focused on more complex, analytical, academic-related skills could take place. After being equipped with these tools, the students would be ready to take responsibility in their learning that instructors could build on. Improving writing skills should be given most of the attention at this stage. Building arguments, supporting them with evidence, and synthesizing material are among the top writing skills that Saudi students need to improve on. Leading the learners through increasingly complex texts would help build their reading skills, which are core skills to achieving success in their academic studies. Reading challenging texts that focus on their areas

of interest would enable learners to expand their field-specific lexicon and help them to recognize complex structures.

5.2.4. Practical Implications

A considerable number of Saudi students on scholarships are unable to fulfill the language requirement within the timeframe determined by their sponsors and are forced to return home without completing the English requirement. Students' failure might be attributed to the dearth of NA-based or research-based syllabi/curricula in language programs. Drawing on perspectives from language learners and language instructors, in this study I have attempted to provide a greater understanding of Saudi students' language-learning needs and, at the same time, help instructors and language programs in Canada to establish relevant curricula that meet these needs. Findings provide in-depth information about the perceived English language-learning needs of Saudi students that could help educators and practitioners in designing courses and syllabi for language-support programs. It is also hoped that instructors will structure their teaching according to the students' distinctive needs by enriching the classroom with activities that fulfill these needs. As Saudi Arabia continues to send thousands of students to study abroad, the context of this study is of special interest to administrators and educators of language-support programs in Canada. It is recommended that NA be used to determine teaching goals, pedagogy, and instructional strategies in order to tailor language programs to learners' diverse needs and to help them to succeed.

The second practical implication relates to the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and scholarship officials in preparing the selected students before they leave the country. It is a prerequisite that scholarship recipients attend, prior to their departure, an obligatory one-day

workshop that is mainly concerned with the cultural matters of the target language context and touches on life coping issues in the new country. It is important to bridge the gap between EGP and EAP to decrease the time students need to enter the target degree program. Further, students may benefit from attending a series of workshops (instead of a single one) that include an academic portion where potential students could know what learning English is like, what the process of learning English is, what they could expect in the classroom abroad, what the teacher's role in the classroom would be, what the expectations are in terms of the amount of study time, and what kind of commitment they need to make in order to maximize their learning experience. In addition, drawing on insights from the current study, which combines perceptions of learners and instructors, educators in Saudi Arabia can design a course that meets the prescribed needs in order to provide the students with the tools they need to succeed. This course could include fundamental aspects not necessarily taught in the English-speaking countries. For example, it could familiarize students with the English alphabet, basic grammar, simple sentence structure, printing, and handwriting. This would save the government a huge amount of money it now spends on Saudi students (and often their dependents).

ESP/EAP educators and practitioners in Victoria may be motivated to re-evaluate their curricula and determine whether their syllabi achieve the goals they set out for the program (as similar studies, e.g., Jackson [2005], have shown). They could redesign syllabi to meet the needs of different learner groups. In order to improve learners' productivity, instructors should consider students' feedback and pay attention to students' needs, goals, and differences while building the course and designing the curriculum (Alqunayeer & Zamir, 2016). This would increase students' motivation, that is, as the study reveals, an influential pedagogical aspect in learning English (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Dörnyei, 2009; Liu et al., 2011).

Language-learning needs may differ based on the different motivations for acquiring the target language (Alharby, 2005; Liu et al., 2011). This being the case, practitioners and course designers should not neglect the role of motivation in L₂ learning and take it into account, along with learners' needs, when planning language programs and designing syllabi.

It would also be helpful to incorporate one-on-one meetings between the language teacher and the student into the program design to reflect on individual strengths and weaknesses. This could promote self-regulated learning and learner engagement. These could be used to give the students advice, show them where they are at, and tell them what they need to improve. Finally, results obtained from open-ended questions indicated that investigating learners' expectations about language-support programs can also help in developing and evaluating ESP/EAP programs (Basturkmen, 1998). Simultaneously, it is vital to note that cultural differences influence pedagogical practice decisions too. Therefore, culture-related workshops could be provided familiarize instructors in the host countries with the culture of their Saudi students at least in areas such as coeducation that might have an impact on the learning process.

With regard to reading, it is recommended to raise awareness of practitioners in Saudi Arabia to bridge the EGP and EAP by starting to foster the students rather than waiting until they leave. Consequently, instructors in the destination country can build on that later on. Instead of analytical, sophisticated, and overwhelming reading assignments, getting learners while in Saudi Arabia to read short, interesting texts that address cultural norms of the new society and classroom practice would be beneficiary in two aspects. On the one hand, learners would become acquainted with the new environment and culture and be aware of their role in the new classroom. On the other, they would make connections between sounds and words, observe

grammatical rules, gain new vocabulary, and learn spelling which are basics that are not necessarily taught by L₁ instructors.

5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Going through the literature, it is evident that most of the language-learning needs of Saudi learners remain underexamined. The current study examines Saudi English learning needs in relation to the four language skills. Future research focusing on the language-learning needs within a specific skill domain (e.g., reading and listening), will further enrich the existing literature. Moreover, future studies which investigate the NA related to a particular language skill could contribute in developing teaching materials and learning strategies for enhancing that skill.

Although the current study encompasses learners' and teachers' perceptions, it does not involve perspectives from other stakeholders. Seeking viewpoints of administrators and policymakers about learners' language-learning needs could also be the focus of another study. In addition, examining learners' opinions and assessments concerning course materials (e.g., textbooks, teaching aids, supplementary reading material, or exercises) and instructional and evaluation strategies would also be useful in implementing and improving English language-support programs.

Despite the fact that there is no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of instructors in SA and in Canada, it is an area that future researches may want to further explore in terms of L₁ instructors' and L₂ instructors' perceptions and how you can bridge students' learning experience in their home country versus in the target language culture/country.

Furthermore, there is the limitation of self-reporting data. The learners might not self-diagnose themselves accurately. They may think they are skilled, but maybe they are not. Given the importance of always starting to teach where the learners are (e.g., Belcher, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Evans & Green, 2007; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; West, 1994), understanding learners' perceptions is very crucial in language learning. Moreover, the mismatch between participants' perceptions of important needs and assessments of these needs as well as discrepancies among participants' perspectives (students versus instructors) indicate that educators/practitioners should be careful when they design language-support programs and devise curriculum in light of findings from NA research (Huang, 2010). In the same vein, this difference signifies that instructors alone may not be the best judges of the challenges their students actually encounter.

The study focuses on the needs and the transition of Saudi learners as a cultural group; therefore, it did not tackle gender differences. Consequently, findings did not indicate similarities or differences between male and female language-learning needs. Certainly, further analysis might have raised instructors' awareness of how their Saudi students' (male or female) needs may differ. However, in the Canadian context Saudi learners are taught as a whole rather than separately and you do not have two sets of pedagogies to teach male versus female students. Nevertheless, gender difference is an area which could be explored in the future. It would also be interesting to know if females' situations and roles in Saudi Arabia are reflected in their perceptions of their language-learning needs.

Moreover, this study does not cover the affective/emotional challenges encountered by Saudi students. There are many emotional aspects of learners' viewpoints that have surfaced during the interviews but they are out of the scope of the study. For example, Saudi students,

who are equipped with hope and excitement and sacrifice leaving everything behind to chase their dreams and future, are forced to go back home heartbroken and devastated if they do not meet the language requirement's deadline. This is one area that future research can deal with in order to raise instructors' awareness of Saudi language learners' challenges. In addition, future studies tackling the factors (e.g., the time constraints, family pressure, sponsors' expectations, and the Saudi culture) affecting Saudi students' progress and performance could help in providing more guided help to this learner group.

Data for the study were collected from the participants at a specific point in time. That is, the information represents their perceptions at that point and accounts for the phenomenon in that context. A longitudinal study may reflect the participants' learning/teaching experience over a period of time and provide information about the development and/or progress of the language-learning/teaching process. Such studies would yield insights about fruitful techniques learners used to improve or efficient strategies instructors used to help facilitate the learning process. Furthermore, data gained from a longitudinal study would be informative with regard to the changes in participants' perception, needs, and priorities over the duration of their programs.

Although the NA (questionnaire) can help learners to be aware of their needs, practitioners need to be careful when applying findings of NA in designing language programs and curriculum. It is essential for future NA research to triangulate data sources and involve multiple perspectives since learners may not be clear about their actual needs (Long, 2005a). Furthermore, learners' awareness of their level of competency regarding specific skills or subskills, can vary from one person to another (Howell, 1982).

5.4. Conclusion

The current study contributes to the literature of NA and Saudi international language learners. Among the literature that deals with language-learning needs, this study is one of the first that focuses on Saudi students in the Canadian context and examines their English language-learning needs in a detailed, multi-level analysis.

This study provides in-depth information about the perceived English language-learning needs of Saudi students in order to help educators and practitioners in language-support programs. The hope is also that the findings will inform instructors in their approach to teaching students with distinctive needs by enriching the classroom with tasks and activities that meet these needs. Since Saudi Arabia continues to send thousands of students to study abroad, the context of this study is of special interest to administrators and educators in language-support programs in countries where English is the language of instruction. Likewise, it would be economically prudent for the scholarship program's policy makers in Saudi Arabia to integrate academic English and cultural components in the orientation workshop already provided to scholarship recipients before they start their studies abroad.

Quantitative and qualitative data reveal that oral communication and writing are major challenges for Saudi students in their learning of the English language. On one hand, Saudi students and EAL instructors in Canada agree on reading as an area that requires support. On the other hand, the results indicate a significant difference between the ways EAL instructors in Saudi Arabia and in Canada perceive the importance of reading and listening, as well as in the way they assess writing and speaking as areas needing support. These findings draw attention to the importance of bridging the gap between instructors' and students' perceptions.

Since English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, English instruction would help to equip students with broader background in relation to knowledge, literature, and culture. The perceived value of English language learning could encourage educators and policy makers in Saudi Arabia to consider earlier exposure to English, since prolonged exposure could help to improve learners' language skills. Further, attention should be drawn to the importance of embracing innovative methods, materials, and tools that are congruent with current practices in language teaching and supported by empirical evidence as methods that promote learners' motivation.

Future research should build on current study and broaden the NA umbrella to include the examination of variables such as motivation, goals, and cultural and educational background. Study of the instructional context's requirements in situations where the learners hope to pursue their studies is also needed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' various needs. Kumaravadivelu (1991) asserted that "the more we know about the learner's personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our intervention will be" (p. 107). Accordingly, in addition to an emphasis on language skills, language programs designed for international students may consider incorporating cultural literacy that enables students to adjust to a new language and culture.

Though NA is situational, triangulation through including different stakeholders' perspectives and the use of more than one method to assess and analyze learners' needs is crucial to the gathering of reliable information about language-learning needs and the provision of the needed support on the basis of the identified information. Moreover, the mismatch between the skills identified as important and areas identified as needing support by the learners, and also the

divergence between learners' and instructors' perceptions, suggest that caution should be exercised in the application of findings derived from NA.

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Appendix A: The Questionnaire ⁴

Demographic Information

Here are sample questions used to obtain demographic information from students.

1. Please indicate your current status of your study. الدراسة / البرنامج الحالي
 English language preparation Undergraduate student
 Graduate (Master's) student Graduate (Doctorate) student
2. How many hours per day you speak English with people who are fluent speakers of English? عدد ؟
ساعات ممارسة اللغة الانجليزية يوميا مع الذين يتحدثونها بطلاقة
 1 hour 2 hours 3 hours 4 hours 5 hours 6 hours
 7 hours 8 hours 8 hours 10 hours 11 hours 12 hours
3. Where do you intend to pursue your study? الدولة التي ترغب في استكمال دراستك بها ؟
(e.g. Canada, US, UK, etc.)
_____.
4. At what age did you have your first contact with English in formal and informal learning context? في اي
عمر كانت بداية تعلمك للغة الانجليزية ؟
 Age 11/12 (grade 7 اول متوسط)
 Other, please specify _____.
5. Have you ever completed or are you currently enrolled in an academic English language preparation
program? هل اتممت او ما زلت تدرس في اي برنامج اكايمي لتعليم اللغة الانجليزية ؟

Here are sample questions used to obtain demographic information from instructors.

1. Please indicate your current status at your institution.
_____.
2. What is your area of specialization? and since when have you been working with/ teaching English to
international students?
Area of specialization: _____ Since: _____.
3. What language skill would you prioritize for improving English learners' performance?
_____.

⁴ To obtain a full version of the original questionnaire, please contact Li-Shih Huang (lshuang@uvic.ca.)

4. In EAL teaching/learning context, is there a difference between Saudis and other international students? in which aspects?
-

Sample Statements of the Ratable Skill Items in the Four Language Domains

1. Writing

1. The ability to take notes and to synthesize information drawing from various sources.

القدرة على أخذ ملاحظات والربط بين المعلومات المستمدة (المأخوذة) من مصادر مختلفة.

2. The ability to write appropriate thesis statements and topic sentences.

القدرة على كتابة جملة تلخيصية (ملخصة) للموضوع إضافة الى جمل افتتاحية ملائمة للموضوع العام.

3. The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing.

القدرة على عمل مسودة ومراجعتها وتنقيحها.

2. Speaking

1. The ability to express ideas and thoughts fluently.

القدرة على التعبير عن الافكار بطلاقة

2. The ability to participate in academic group discussions.

القدرة على المشاركة في نقاشات اكااديمية جماعية

3. The ability to present ideas in a logical sequence.

القدرة على تقديم الافكار بتسلسل منطقي

3. Listening

1. The ability to understand rapid discourse on familiar topics.

القدرة على فهم المحادثات السريعة في المواضيع المألوفة

2. The ability to understand the general idea of a lecture.

القدرة على فهم الفكرة العامة للمحاضرة.

3. The ability to understand instructors' spoken directions regarding assignments and duties.

القدرة على فهم توجيهات المعلم (الشفويه) المتعلقة بالواجبات والمهام.

4. Reading

1. The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.

القدرة على فهم التلميحات النصية لاستنباط معاني الكلمات والعبارات الجديدة / الغريبة

2. The ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text.

القدرة على معرفة طريقة تنظيم ودعم المعلومات خلال النص.

3. The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice.

القدرة على فهم الإشارات اللغوية المرتبطة بالثقافة والمجتمع حسب مجال الدراسة.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Interview Questions.

- 1) How long have you been teaching English for Saudi students?
- 2) In your opinion, is there any difference between Saudis and other international students?
Please explain.
- 3) What do you think the instructional framework for language-learning support program directed to Saudi students should be?
- 4) How could practitioners help Saudi students to develop their language-learning skills?

Appendix C: Invitation E-mail

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project

Dear ,

Thank you for considering my email. My name is Douaa Alkutbi, and I am a PhD student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Victoria. I am interested in examining the academic language-learning needs of Saudi international students. Since research in this field has been limited, the goal of this study is to close the gap in the literature by examining the academic language-learning needs of Saudi students' and instructors' perspectives. I have recently completed my candidacy exam (the pilot phase of my doctoral research), which involved the completion of a survey by Saudi international students (in Victoria), and I have also shared the findings at the Regional BC-TEAL Conference as well as at our department's Annual Candidacy Paper Research Forum. I am now beginning to gather the perspectives of instructors both here in Victoria and at universities in my home country.

The participation by you and your colleagues in this study is critical to the success of the project and to the work involved in improving the services provided to the growing number of Saudi international students on campus. Instructors who choose to participate in the study will be asked to complete an online survey (approximately 30 minutes) and have a follow-up interview to share their thoughts about Saudi students' language-learning experience at the English Language Center (approximately 30 minutes).

Please be assured that I will take the measures necessary to safeguard all participants' identities. The data collected will be kept completely confidential and used solely for the purpose of this research. The participants' identities will remain undisclosed. Each participant will be identified by a number code to ensure privacy, and the data collected during the course of the research will be coded only with a number corresponding to the respondent's name. No names will be identified when disseminating the results.

I would be immensely grateful if you could pass this invitation on to your colleagues. Please also feel free to contact me if any further information is required. You can also verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Research Ethics Office at 1-250-472-4545.

Thank you in advance for your time and your continued support.

Sincerely, Douaa Alkutbi

Appendix D: Information and Informed Consent

Students' Consent

Bridging the Gap: A Study of Academic Language-Learning Needs of Saudi International Students

Survey Information and Informed Consent

Thank you for considering participation in this survey. This survey is designed for Saudi international students who are studying English for Academic Purposes. My name is Douaa Alkutbi, a PhD student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Victoria. The collected information will be used in a research project on Saudi international students in Canada, specifically at the University of Victoria.

The purpose of the study is to obtain a detailed profile of the academic English language needs of Saudi international students at the post-secondary level in order to help educators to meet their academic language-learning needs. Although there are studies on international students, research focused on the academic language needs of Saudi international students, especially in Canada, has been limited. The importance of this research lies in its capacity to address this gap in the literature through in-depth examination of the academic challenges faced by Saudi students.

As an English-as-an-additional-language student you are being invited to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, I'd greatly appreciate your completion of this 30-minute survey.

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study, and you have the right to refuse to take part in this study and to withdraw at any time. Although there is no anticipated direct benefit to you, your participation in this study is very important for the success of the study, since the study helps to develop a better understanding of the academic language-learning needs of Saudi international students such as yourself.

The collected data will be treated as confidential. It will be used only for the purposes of the study. Participants' real names are not required. The results of this study may be shared at professional conferences and/or in journal publications. When the results are disseminated, pseudonyms will be used. The data from this study will also be destroyed five years after the

research has completed and the results have been published. Papers will be shredded and files will be deleted.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me by email at dalkutbi@uvic.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Li-Shih Huang, at (250) 885-0359 or lshuang@uvic.ca. You can also verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Research Ethics Office at (250) 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

I would be very grateful for your participation and support of this important project. If you voluntarily accept to participate, by completing and submitting the survey online, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and it indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study.

I understand the above conditions of participation in this study and hereby give my free and informed consent.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgement:

This survey is adapted from an instrument developed by Huang (2011), and in a project that was partly

Instructors' Consent

Bridging the Gap: A Study of Academic Language-Learning Needs of Saudi International Students

Survey Information and Informed Consent

Thank you for considering participation in this survey. This survey is designed for English instructors. My name is Douaa Alkutbi, a PhD candidate in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Victoria. The collected information will be used in a research project on Saudi international students in Canada, specifically in Victoria.

The purpose of the study is to obtain a detailed profile of the academic English language needs of Saudi international students at the post-secondary level in order to help educators to meet the students' academic language-learning needs. Although there are studies on international students, research focused on the academic language needs of Saudi international students, especially in Canada, has been limited. The importance of this research lies in its capacity to address this gap in the literature through in-depth examination of the academic challenges faced by Saudi students.

As an English-as-an-additional-language instructor/an EAL administrator you are being invited to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, I'd greatly appreciate your completion of this 30-minute survey. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study, and you have the right to refuse to take part in this study and to withdraw at any time. Although there is no anticipated direct benefit to you, your participation in this study is very important for the success of the study, since the study helps to develop a better understanding of the academic language-learning needs of Saudi international students. As a way to compensate you for your valuable time or any inconvenience related to your voluntary participation, you will receive a 50 CAD upon the completion of the follow-up interview part of the survey.

The collected data will be treated as confidential. It will be used only for the purposes of this study. Participants' real names are not required. The results of this study may be shared at professional conferences and/or in journal publications. When the results are disseminated, pseudonyms will be used. The data from this study will also be destroyed five years after the research has completed and the results have been published. Papers will be shredded and files will be deleted.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me by email at dalkutbi@uvic.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Li-Shih Huang, at (250) 885-0359 or lshuang@uvic.ca. You

can also verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Research Ethics Office at (250) 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and consent to participate in it by completing the attached survey. Thank you very much for your participation and your valuable input in this project!

I understand the above conditions of participation in this study and hereby give my free and informed consent.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgement:

This survey is adapted from an instrument developed by Huang (2011), and in a project that was partly

Appendix E: Results of Pearson Correlation between the Importance and the Status of Language Skills in student groups in Saudi Arabia

Skill Items	Undergraduate students ^a		Graduate students ^b	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
The ability to participate in academic group discussions. (Speaking)	.505**	.001		
The ability to lead academic discussions. (Speaking)	.314*	.049	.624**	.001
The ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners. (Speaking)	.354*	.025		
The ability to speak effectively when making presentations at conferences. (Speaking)	.445**	.004	.487*	.016
The ability to defend a thesis. (Speaking)	.600**	.000	.456*	.025
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects. (Speaking)	.512**	.001	.448*	.028
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to give directions and instructions. (Speaking)	.635**	.000	.512*	.011
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to summarize information. (Speaking)	.773**	.000	.640**	.001
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to explain, clarify, and inform. (Speaking)	.609**	.000	.555**	.005
The ability to use contextual clues/information to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases. (Reading)	.388*	.013		
The ability to recognize an author's message, audience, and purpose. (Reading)	.489**	.001		

The ability to detect inferences that are between the lines and not directly stated. (Reading)	.338*	.033		
The ability to see how information is organized and supported in a text. (Reading)	.583**	.000	.463*	.023
The ability to make critical evaluations of content. (Reading)	.426**	.006		
The ability to determine what reasons or evidence the writer has provided for a claim (i.e., critical reading skills). (Reading)	.366*	.020		
The ability to generate one's own list of questions about the text. (Reading)	.678**	.000		
The ability to summarize and synthesize what one has read. (Reading)	.355*	.025		
The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice. (Reading)	.386*	.014	.417*	.043
The ability to understand the importance of audience analyses and the potential effects of such analyses on writing. (Writing)	.454**	.003		
The ability to use the most common genres in academic writing, including research papers/reports, definitional texts, essay exams, arguments, summaries, explanations, analyses, responses, evaluations, and instructions. (Writing)	.494**	.001		
The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing. (Writing)	.455**	.003		
The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e. self-evaluate). (Writing)	.508**	.001		
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	.510**	.001	.536**	.007

^a $n = 40$, ^b $n = 24$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Appendix F: Results of Pearson Correlation between the Importance and the Status of Language Skills in student groups in Canada

Skill Items	Language-preparation program students ^a		Degree program students ^b	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
The ability to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal language according to the formality of the conversation. (Speaking)			.415*	.028
The ability to participate in academic group discussions. (Speaking)			.434*	.021
The ability to lead academic discussions. (Speaking)	.359*	.034		
The ability to convey complex ideas to non-specialized/general audiences/listeners. (Speaking)	.361*	.033		
The ability to speak effectively when making presentations at conferences. (Speaking)	.469**	.004		
The ability to defend a thesis. (Speaking)			.529**	.004
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to describe objects. (Speaking)	.463**	.005	.761**	.000
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to give directions and instructions. (Speaking)	.446**	.007	.675**	.000
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to summarize information. (Speaking)			.500**	.007
The ability to use standard English in teaching contexts (as a teaching assistant) to explain, clarify, and inform. (Speaking)			.485**	.009
The ability to detect inferences that are between the lines and not directly stated. (Reading)			.414*	.028
The ability to skim text for the general idea and to scan text to locate information. (Reading)	.362*	.033		

The ability to understand the interrelationships among the key ideas within a text. (Reading)	.417*	.013		
The ability to make critical evaluations of content. (Reading)	.549**	.001	.481**	.010
The ability to determine what reasons or evidence the writer has provided for a claim (i.e., critical reading skills). (Reading)	.461**	.005		
The ability to generate one's own list of questions about the text. (Reading)	.680**	.000		
The ability to understand sociolinguistic and cultural references specific to the discipline of your choice. (Reading)	.452**	.006		
The ability to generate ideas for a writing task (e.g., brainstorming, clustering, listing, and mapping). (Writing)	.370*	.029		
The ability to take notes and to synthesize information drawing from various sources. (Writing)	.370*	.029	.457*	.015
The ability to understand the importance of audience analyses and the potential effects of such analyses on writing. (Writing)	.525**	.001		
The ability to adapt writing to specific audiences. (Writing)	.601**	.000		
The ability to use the most common genres in academic writing, including research papers/reports, definitional texts, essay exams, arguments, summaries, explanations, analyses, responses, evaluations, and instructions. (Writing)	.595**	.000	.585**	.001
The ability to incorporate in one's work the main features of effective academic writing, including coherence, clarity, concision, logical development, and transitions. (Writing)	.512**	.002		
The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism. (Writing)			.420*	.026
The ability to use discipline-specific style guides and to properly acknowledge sources. (Writing)	.440**	.008		

The ability to select the most appropriate support/sources in the development of ideas and to refer to them properly. (Writing)	.498**	.002		
The ability to analyze and solve problems that arise in the writing process. (Writing)	.410*	.014		
The ability to draft, revise, and edit one's writing. (Writing)	.355*	.037	.612**	.001
The ability to monitor and assess one's own progress as an academic writer (i.e. self-evaluate). (Writing)	.560**	.000		
The ability to demonstrate competence in major discipline-specific tasks (e.g., research papers, thesis proposals, grant proposals, and Master's/PhD theses). (Writing)	.501**	.002	.490**	.008
The ability to understand the details of factual information. (Listening)	.366*	.031		
The ability to recognize macro-cues in a talk, such as the introduction, review or preview information, presentation of new material, summary, and conclusion. (Listening)	.384*	.023		
The ability to recognize micro-cues in a talk, such as repetitions, important information, non-verbal cues (e.g., emphasis, gestures). (Listening)	.470**	.004		
The ability to recognize the use of examples, anecdotes, jokes, and digressions. (Listening)	.586**	.000		
The ability to understand the differences among communicative functions (e.g., suggestions, advice, directives, and warnings). (Listening)			.447*	.017
The ability to identify the speaker's attitude toward the topic and audience (e.g., tone, voice, humor, and sarcasm). (Listening)	.336*	.049		
The ability to recognize cultural specific references. (Listening)			.384*	.044

^a $n = 35$, ^b $n = 28$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Appendix G: T-test Results (Students in SA)

An independent sample *t*-test, based on the hypothesis that students' perceptions did not differ based on whether they were at undergraduate or at graduate levels, was conducted. It examined the difference in both the importance and the skill status ratings of the two participant groups across the four skill domains. The results revealed the following

Importance of language skill (undergraduate students versus graduate students):

Overall there was no significance difference between undergraduate ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.87$) and graduate ($M = 4.69, SD = 0.83$) students' ratings of skill importance ($t(62) = -1.37, p = .176$). However, at the skill items level, the findings show statically significantly differences between the two groups' ratings of six items. The graduate students reported significantly higher means than the undergraduate students in the ratings.

Skill Items	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
The ability to analyze commonly encountered academic writing tasks and to determine the purposes of such writing tasks. (Writing)	4.25	1.41	40	5.04	1.04	24	-2.57*	59.18
The ability to gather information from various sources (e.g., libraries, the Internet, and electronic databases). (Writing)	4.43	1.45	40	5.33	1.01	24	-2.95**	60.52
The ability to understand and avoid plagiarism. (Writing)	4.75	1.88	40	5.54	0.83	24	-2.31*	58.17
The ability to ask appropriate questions that can advance the flow of the discussion. (Speaking)	4.18	1.24	40	4.92	1.21	24	-2.34*	62.00
The ability to understand rapid discourse on familiar topics. (Listening)	4.60	1.45	40	5.33	0.96	24	-2.20*	62.00
The ability to understand the general idea of a seminar discussion. (Listening)	4.70	1.04	40	5.29	1.00	24	-2.23*	62.00

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Status of language skill (undergraduate students versus graduate students):

With regard to the skill status scale, the independent sample *t*-test also indicated an overall non-significant difference ($t(62) = -1.330, p = 0.20$) between how undergraduate ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.08$) and graduate ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.15$) students assessed their skills level. Noticeably, most of the students' mean ratings were <4.00