

## NEEDS AND LACKS IN SPEAKING SKILL AMONG GENERAL MEDICINE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF HANOI MEDICAL UNIVERSITY – A SURVEY REPORT

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### ABSTRACT

**Methods:** In a cross-sectional survey utilizing a self-reported structured questionnaire, a sample of 277 general medicine first-year students from Hanoi Medical University agreed to be enrolled.

**Results:** The majority of general medicine students achieved the low marks, ranging from 1 – 5, for their English placement test, accounting for 68.6%, whereas there was only 6.1% of students' having good points, ranging from 8 – 10.

57.4% and 37.1% of participants considered English-speaking skill to be “very important” and “important” for their career development, respectively. And 48.3% and 39.7% of students stated that English-speaking skill was “very important” and “important” for further studying in the future.

82.2% of students were not confident enough to speak in English with others. And “lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures” was raised by 69.3% of participants as a reason for their in-confidence.

78.3% of students did not know how to paraphrase the prompts during practicing the speaking skill. 72.5% and 54.1% of students had difficulty in giving explanation and giving examples, respectively, for their main ideas.

Activities including giving presentations, speaking on telephones, speaking at meeting, speaking at medical setting and speaking at social settings were all stated to be important in students' speaking practice.

72.5% of participants expected the high frequency of practicing pronunciation in the next term. Following were the oral presentation skill (62%), discussion skill (55.5%) and conversation skill (55.2%).

**Keywords:** Learning needs, wants, lacks, speaking skill, Hanoi Medical University, Vietnam.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Definition of Needs and Types of Needs in ESP

Need analysis is the process of examining "what the learners know already and what they need to know" [1]. Another definition proposed by Nunan is that needs analysis was stated to refer to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design [2]. Relatively similar with Nunan's definition, Brown stated that needs analysis (also called needs assessment) is the process of gathering information functioning as the basis for developing curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students [3]. According to Robinson, ESP course is based on a need analysis [4]. In other words, need analysis plays an utmost important role in the development of the closely relevant ESP course. It helps the curriculum designers take relevant and useful things to learn into consideration whenever developing the curriculum. Like Robinson, needs analysis is also

considered as a crucial component of systematic curriculum development. In Brown's systematic curriculum development model, needs analysis is the first phase of an ongoing quality control process, which notices that needs analysis is a crucial starting point for curriculum development. Brown reported that needs can be stated in terms of goals and objectives which, in turn, can serve as the basis for developing tests, materials, teaching activities and evaluation strategies [3]. In brief, needs analysis is vitally important in designing a course, and therefore, in developing or choosing materials. In this study, learners' needs were sought for in order to shed the light on the extent to which the textbook meets with the learners' needs. Up to now, there have been a variety of dichotomies on needs introduced by different researchers: situation needs versus language needs; objective needs versus subjective needs [3]; target needs versus learning needs [5]. Among these dichotomies, target needs and learning needs have been widely used in literature; therefore, they were chosen to be in use in this study.

### **Target Needs**

Target needs are defined as "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" [5]. In order to have clearer sight into this broad term, it is wise to look into it regarding to necessities, lacks and wants.

### **Necessities**

According to Hutchinson & Waters, necessities are what the learners have to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, medical students might need to find information for their studying of medical subjects at the university, s/he might need to be able to deal with necessary reading skills, medical terms and grammar structures commonly used in these kinds of specialist documents. After graduation, for instance, they might need to communicate effectively with foreign patients. In this situation, s/he might need the ability to speak clearly and listen correctly so that s/he can make the proper communication. Therefore, s/he might need to learn how to deal with communicative situations commonly happen between health care workers and patients in hospitals.

### **Lacks**

Hutchinson & Waters reported that the identification of necessities alone is not enough in ESP. It is wise to know "what the learner knows already, so that you can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks" [5]. The gap of the matching process between the learner's target proficiency and the existing proficiency can be referred to as the learner's lacks. Medical student, for example, needs to read the medical documents so as to find needed information effectively. S/he is currently well equipped with medical terms and grammar structures commonly used in medical context. However, s/he does not know how to deal with reading sub-skills so as to find the needed information quickly and efficiently. These difficulties in reading skills are student's lacks.

## **Wants**

Target needs are considered not only in terms of necessities and lacks but also in terms of wants. Wants are what the learners feel they need. It is discussed that "a need does not exist independent of a person. It is the people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment" [5]. Wants perceived by learners may conflict with necessities perceived by sponsors or teachers.

## **Learning Needs**

Learning needs are linked with the "route" to the destination set by target situation. It is naive to base the course design and the whole ESP program merely on target needs [5]. Learning needs aim at the personal concerns of the learners including methodological, administrative and psychological needs. Like target needs, they influence and affect the overall ESP program ranging from syllabus designing to testing and evaluation. ESP learning is not a mechanical project to be imposed mechanically on the learners. The whole ESP program is an enjoyable, pleasing, manageable, generative, creative and productive activity. If needs analysis is the major distinction of ESP program, the learning needs then have the pivotal role to play in needs analysis. Any need analysis without involving learning needs may be a weak model, excluding the major psychological, sociological and methodological concerns of the ESP learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design and Setting**

This study conducted a cross-sectional survey using a self-administered structured questionnaire to assess first-year general medicine students' needs and lacks in English speaking skill. The survey was conducted in January, 2023 at Hanoi Medical University (HMU). The university is located in Northern Vietnam, one of the leading universities in the country, and a leading medical education institution among eight medical universities in Vietnam. HMU, which is an important source of high-quality health workers for the whole country, trains general practitioner and specialist doctors, traditional Vietnamese medicine doctors, nurses, medical technicians and public health workers at both the undergraduate and graduate level. For many years, HMU has been a focal point for creating and disseminating innovations in medical education and medical research.

### **Participants and Sampling**

Subjects surveyed were first-year students majoring in general medicine in Hanoi Medical University. The sampling frame for students was derived from a list of all undergraduate general medicine first-year students attending the 2022-2023 academic year, except for some students who were allowed not to attend the English subject classes thanks to their standardized international certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL or equivalents.

## Measurements

The students' placement test results and if students were confident to speak in English were measured by close-ended questions with different response choices and students were asked to choose one option. Reasons for students' in-confidence to speak in English with others; students' difficulties during speaking practice sessions and students' wants regarding to speaking skill practice activities in the next term were measured by close-ended questions with different response choices and students could choose more than one options. The importance of English-speaking skill and the importance of some practicing activities in English-speaking skill was measured on a 4-point semantic scale (from *very important* to *unimportant*). Other opinions and wants were recorded by an open-ended question in which they were free to write down their ideas.

## Research Ethics and Data Collection

The survey was approved by the HMU Management Board, Department of Science and Technology, HMU and Department of Foreign Languages, HMU; then all attending general medicine students were informed of the survey objectives and invited to participate in this survey voluntarily. Both male and female medical students were anonymously surveyed, filling out the survey on their own. Due to the uncontroversial nature of this study, there was no requirement for a formal approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of HMU. 277 questionnaires were distributed to students and 277 were completed, giving a 100% response rate.

## Statistical Analysis

Data was entered using EXCEL, and then transferred into STATA 10.0 for analysis. After cleaning the data, descriptive statistics were calculated for analysis.

## RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the marks which students achieved in their English placement test conducted at the beginning of the academic year. The majority of general medicine students achieved the low marks, ranging from 1 – 5, accounting for 68.6%, whereas there was only 6.1% of students' having good points, ranging from 8 - 10.

**Figure 1: Students' placement English test results**

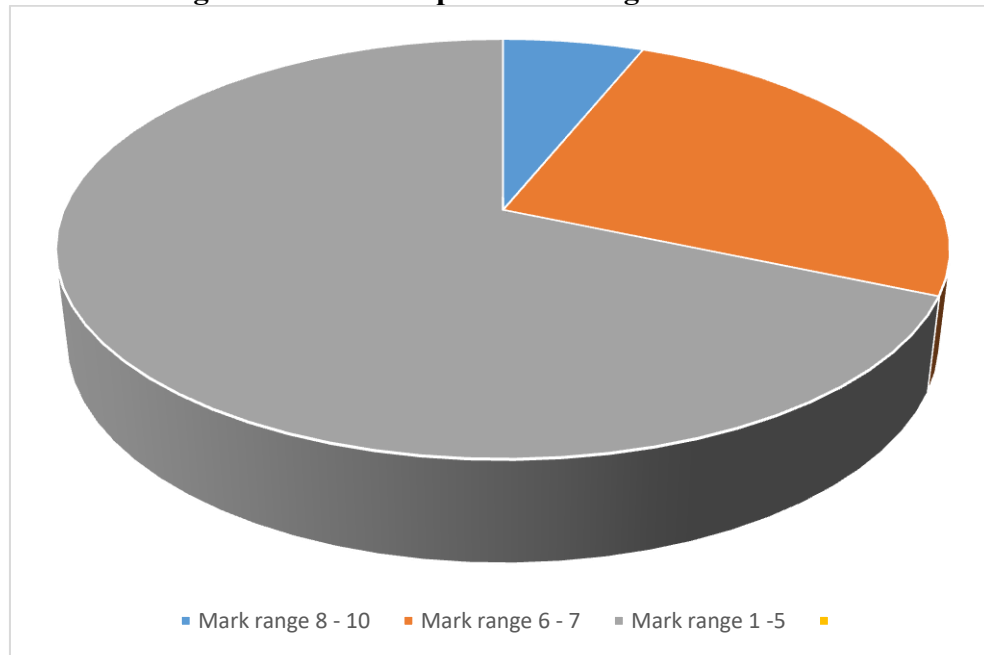
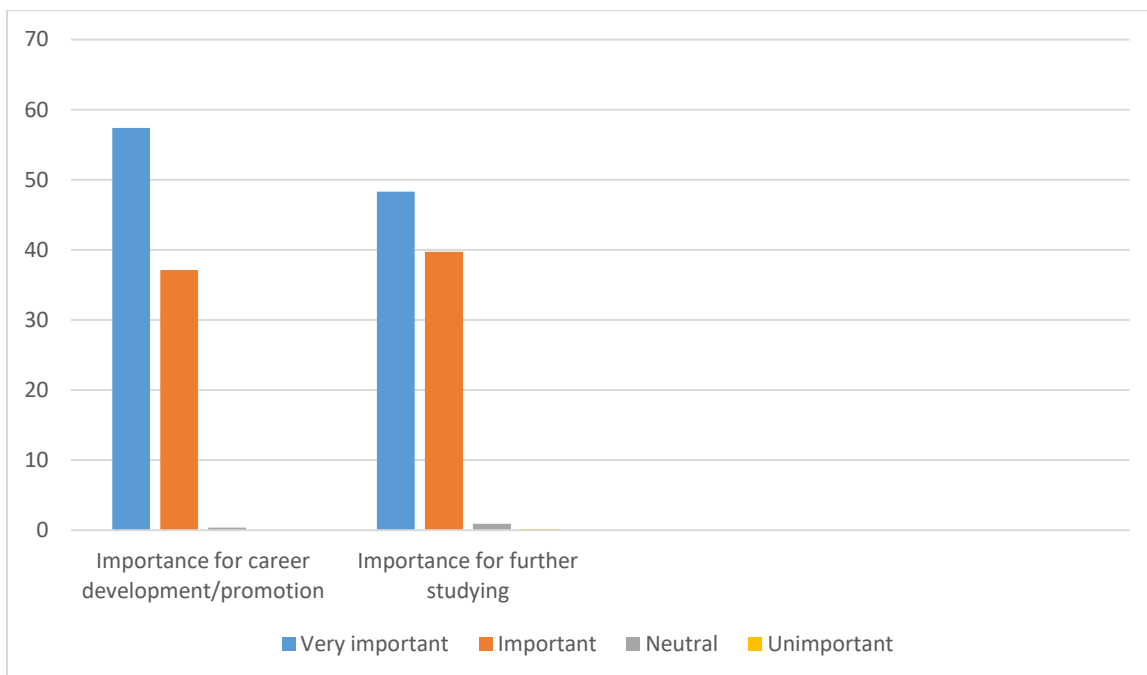


Figure 2 shows students' opinions on the importance of English-speaking skill. 57.4% and 37.1% participants considered English-speaking skill to be "very important" and "important" for their career development, respectively. And 48.3% and 39.7% students stated that English-speaking skill was "very important" and "important" for further studying in the future.

**Figure 2: Students' opinions on the importance of English-speaking skill**



When being asked whether they were confident in speaking in English with their teachers, their friends or foreigners; 82.2% said that they were not confident enough, which can be clearly seen in the figure 3.

**Figure 3: Students' confidence in speaking skill**



And the reasons for their lack of confidence in English speaking are illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1: Reasons for students' in-confidence to speak in English with others**

Variables (n=277)	n (%)
Being afraid of making mistakes	86 (31.0)
Lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures	192 (69.3)
Lack of ideas to start a conversation	120 (43.3)
Wrong pronunciation	95 (34.2)
Inability to catch speakers' words	117 (42.2)
No environment for English speaking (teachers and friends speak most Vietnamese and there are no foreigners for speaking practicing)	86 (31.0)

The table 1 reveals the reasons why students were not confident to speak in English with other. "Lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures" was raised by 69.3% of participants. Standing next was students' lack of ideas to talk about, reported by 43.3% of students. Moreover, 117 students mentioned their weak listening skill as one barrier preventing from communicating in English. Wrong pronunciation, being afraid of making mistakes and no environment for English speaking were stated by 34.2%, 31% and 31%, respectively.

Figure 4 illustrates the sub-skills which students had difficulties during speaking practice sessions. Overall, students were having troubles during their speaking practice lessons. In particular, 78.3% students stated that they did not know how to paraphrase the prompts or ideas. 72.5% and 54.1% students said that they had difficulty in giving explanation and giving examples, respectively, for their main idea. Moreover, 70.7% participants expressed that they could not gain fluency in speaking.

**Figure 4: Students' difficulties during speaking practice sessions**

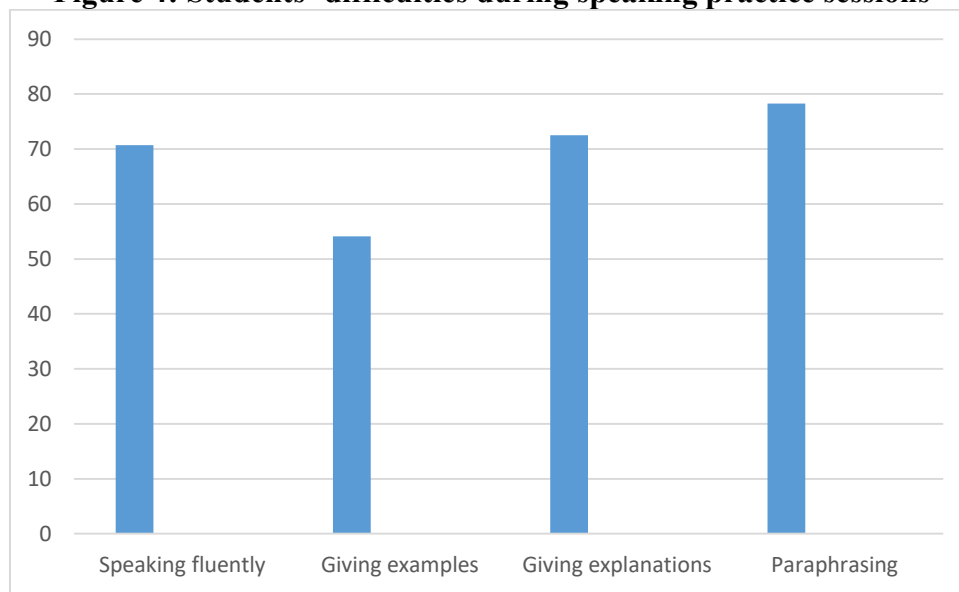
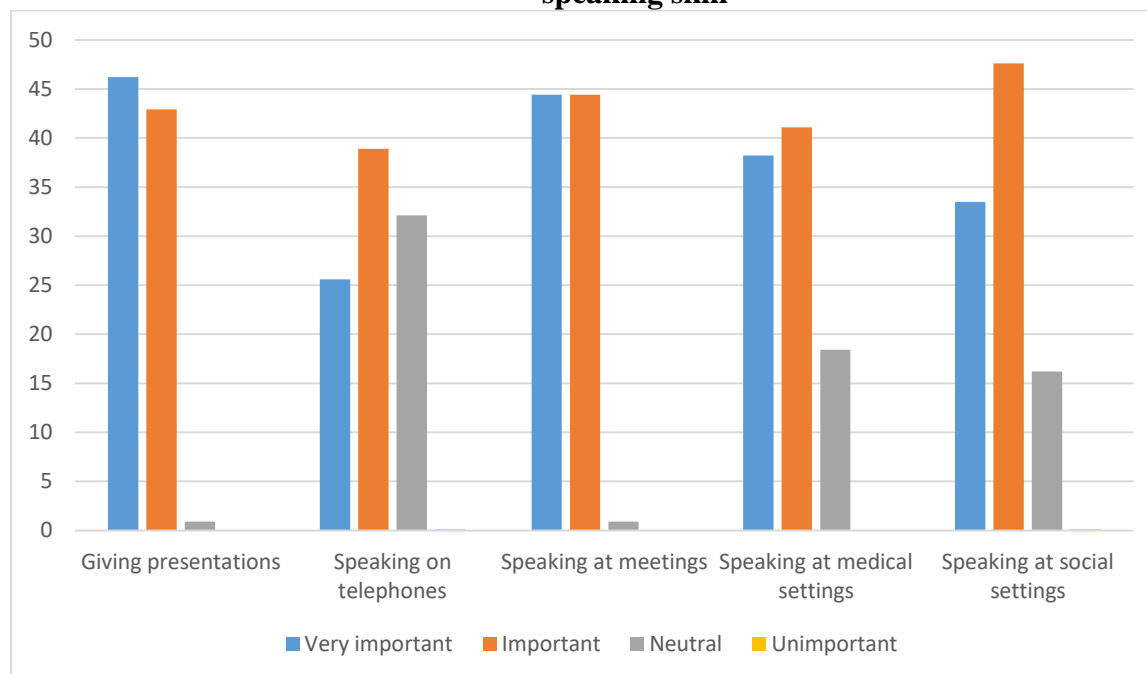


Figure 5 illustrates students' opinions on the importance of some practicing activities in English-speaking skill. It can be clearly seen in figure 5 that the majority of participants considered five surveyed activities to be important for practicing speaking skill.

**Figure 5: Students' opinions on the importance of some practicing activities in English-speaking skill**



**Table 2: Students' wants regarding to speaking skill practice activities in the next term**

Variables (n=277)	n (%)
Oral presentation skill	172 (62)

Variables (n=277)	n (%)
Discussion skill	154 (55.5)
Negotiation skill	99 (35.7)
Practicing pronunciation	201 (72.5)
Conversation skill	153 (55.2)
Talking on telephones	75 (27.0)

The table 2 shows the findings to the question: “What do you want to focus on when practicing speaking skill in the next term?” The majority of students, 72.5%, expected the high frequency of practicing pronunciation. Following were the oral presentation skill (62%), discussion skill (55.5%) and conversation skill (55.2%). Talking on telephones was expected by the smallest number of participants, with only 27%. In addition, students were asked to add any opinions and wants so that their English-speaking skill can be improved in the future. Following are some of the collected answers: 1) I wanted to expand my vocabulary, 2) I wanted to have a separated sessions for speaking skill, not integrating into other sessions, 3) I wanted to be given more chances to practice speaking skill, 4) I needed to increase the time amount for studying English, 5) I wanted to practice pronunciation, 6) I wanted to be given chances to practice English skills instead of learning grammar structures or doing the translation of the reading texts, 7) I wanted teachers to speak more slowly, 8) I wanted to be provided with more vocabularies for each topic, 9) I would like to be given homework.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our study identified that the students’ placement test mark was low, with nearly 70% got marks ranging from 1-5. This figure is attributed to their subject group which they took for the entrance exam to universities. Particularly, Hanoi Medical University only recruits students with the subject group of Math, Chemistry and Biology. Students might pay less attention to English than to their subject group during their high school. Besides, students considered English to have an important role in their studying and working. Their low English capacity when entering Hanoi Medical University may function as a barrier which prevents them from practicing speaking skill. About 82% of student stated that they were not confident enough to communicate in English with others. The reason for their in-confidence in English speaking was “lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures” which was raised by 69.3% of participants. Therefore, a course providing students with grammar and vocabulary should be organized before giving them chances to practice speaking skill.

78.3% of students did not know how to paraphrase the prompts during practicing the speaking skill. 72.5% and 54.1% of students had difficulty in giving explanation and giving examples, respectively, for their main idea. These sub-skills needed to be invested more time in the next term. Moreover, students stated that activities including giving presentations, speaking on telephones, speaking at meeting, speaking at medical setting and speaking at social settings were all important in their speaking practice. Last but not least, the majority of students, 72.5%, expected the high frequency of practicing pronunciation in the next term. Following were the oral presentation skill (62%), discussion skill (55.5%) and conversation skill (55.2%).



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