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Task-Based Needs Analysis: A Triangulated Methodology

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***Abstract*—This study presents a task-based needs analysis of female English major seniors at a Saudi university to identify the academic tasks needed for their academic progress. The study utilized triangulated sources and methods, including the department's written materials; semi-structured interviews with instructors and students; and questionnaires. Academic tasks were found to be essential for academic progress, providing insights that could be overlooked without such analysis. The interviews revealed that students' proficiency levels ranged from low to average and that course content was not adapted to support below-average students. According to the questionnaire, the most essential skills for students' academic progression were effectively using the university's Learning Management System, time management, and delivering presentations. Listening to teachers as well as writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs were also important, whereas critical thinking and writing research papers were the most difficult tasks. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of adapting course content and pedagogical strategies to accommodate diverse student proficiency levels, thereby enhancing academic success.**

***Index Terms*—English as Foreign Language (EFL), task-based needs analysis (TBNA), Applied Linguistics, Saudi Higher Education**

I. Introduction

Task-based needs analysis (TBNA) is a systemic approach that identifies tasks students must perform in real-world contexts and designs courses accordingly (Long, 2005, 2015). This approach can be beneficial for both English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) learners (Brown, 2009; Long, 2005, 2015), as well as English majors specializing in linguistics, literature, and translation (Lambert, 2010). TBNA provides valid and accurate data on the tasks learners must perform, facilitating the development of a content-based or task-based syllabus. In such syllabi, task success hinges on effectively using a second language (L2) to communicate meaning. According to Lambert (2010), most English major graduates in EFL contexts struggle with the theoretical nature of what they have learned and the practical applications of their acquired abilities in the job market.

Therefore, this paper conducts a TBNA to identify and formalize the essential academic English tasks that English major students must master when advancing academically in EFL courses at a Saudi university. This aims to resolve ambiguities related to the practical application of the students' acquired skills. The study was conducted during the academic year 2017–2018 and included implementing two curricula plans for the bachelor's program: one new and one old. The study focused on the new curriculum plan of obligatory courses, as this will eventually be the adopted plan. Long (2005, 2016) emphasizes using multiple methods and sources to articulate learners' needs precisely. Thus, the current analysis adopts a triangulation of sources—written materials, instructors, and students—alongside multiple methods such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The following section (II) presents a literature review outlining theoretical concepts of tasks and recent research on TBNA. Subsequently, an outline of the study's methodology is provided in section III. Next, the results of qualitative and quantitative analysis are presented in section IV. Finally, a discussion about the results and implications will be provided (sections V and VI, respectively).

II. Literature Review

A. Tasks in TBNA

Pedagogically, tasks provide a framework encompassing all units of analysis (e.g., structures and vocabulary) which can then be evaluated and measured according to how learners complete the task (Long, 2005). This focus may also encourage learners to expand their interlanguage according to their internal syllabuses, their learning styles, and their personalities by prioritizing task achievement over correctly using structures and vocabulary (White & Robinson, 2005). Consequently, other units of analysis involved in task performance become part of the task outcomes (Long, 2000). Conceptually, individuals can judge their performance on tasks more accurately than their vocabulary and grammar competency (Lambert, 2010). Finally, TBNA identifies realistic tasks for workplace environments by referring to real experts (Avermaet & Gysen, 2009; Lambert, 2010; Long, 2005, 2015) alongside non-experts, such as teachers or linguists, who provide more precise conceptualizations of the language needed for task performance (Long, 2005, 2015).

Such tasks can be categorized into three types: target tasks, task types, and pedagogic tasks (Long, 2000). Target tasks represent daily life activities and are the outcomes of the analysis. Task types are abstract notions that can be classified to include different acts involved in performing a target task. Pedagogic tasks relate to educational activities in the classroom. For example, a target task "might be making/changing a hotel, plane, restaurant, or theatre reservation," while the task type of such target tasks would be "making/ changing reservations" (Lambert, 2010, p. 100). A pedagogical task of the target task might include classroom activities such as "filling out/changing a reservation form while listening to a sample telephone call or role-playing customers and clerks who are making/changing reservations" (Lambert, 2010, p. 100).

B. Previous Research on TBNA in Ongoing English Courses

A substantial body of research adopting the TBNA approach has been conducted to identify L2 learners' needs. Some studies, such as those by Gilabert (2005) and Serafini and Torres (2015) in Spain, as well as Huh (2006) in Hawaii, implemented TBNA to ascertain the tasks that students needed for their future careers. The results revealed which tasks were marginalized in their current curricula. Moreover, other studies have conducted needs analyses for varied purposes. For example, Chaudron et al. (2005) conducted an analysis to discover relevant task types for teaching Korean through a task-based learning approach; Lambert (2010) conducted TBNA to determine the tasks needed by English major students in the educational or business sectors. Similarly, Oliver et al. (2013) conducted a TBNA to identify the tasks students who speak English as an additional language would likely need in vocational education and training programs in various Australian workplaces or future educational settings.

Further studies have focused on conducting TBNA to identify tasks essential for academic progression. For instance, Kim et al. (2003) conducted a study to pinpoint the academic tasks essential for EFL learners' success at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa. The study involved 89 students selected through stratified sampling for interviews, which revealed that the most common and challenging tasks included public language production, listening to lectures, taking notes, reading for lecture preparation or review, and utilizing technology for research. Subsequently, a questionnaire based on the interview findings was administered to all participants. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: background information, task frequency, task importance, task difficulty, and desired changes in English as an L2 course. The results revealed that task frequency varied by academic discipline and competency level, while task importance varied by the type and status of the ESL learner (whether immigrant or international). Contrastingly, task difficulty remained unaffected by factors influencing the preceding variables. However, the study acknowledged that it lacked expert opinions from content course instructors.

Similarly, Ono (2007) conducted a TBNA focusing on academic reading tasks to provide insights into developing academic reading curricula. Due to time constraints, the researcher opted for a single investigative method, employing a questionnaire to assess the frequency and difficulty of academic reading tasks. The questionnaire was based on Kim et al.'s (2003) study. They specifically emphasized the necessity of integrating task types that accurately reflected the required academic reading tasks, aligning the tasks with learners' proficiency levels and content areas. Additionally, the study highlighted the significance of incorporating authentic reading materials from learners' content courses into those academic reading courses. Recommendations were made to enhance future academic reading TBNA efforts, including the involvement of domain experts, conducting follow-up interviews, and observing the target group.

In a longitude study, Lambert (2010) employed a triangulation of sources and methods to investigate the tasks required of English major graduates in Japan, examining job employment records, expert interviews, and surveys. The findings revealed that, while education and business were the most frequent domains, education held more significant importance. Five key tasks emerged as essential in both domains: locating information, translating documents, summarizing information, editing documents, and interpreting between speakers. Nonetheless, other tasks (e.g., being able to communicate) were deemed the most critical, followed by using appropriate vocabulary; cultural awareness; politeness; listening and pronunciation skills; and speaking fluently and accurately. The study concluded with a recommendation to integrate these tasks into a unified language program for both domains.

In summary, the reviewed studies illustrate the diversity of tasks identified through TBNA across various educational contexts. These findings highlight the importance of using needs analysis to address L2 learners' needs. The present study builds upon these insights by adopting a TBNA triangulated methodology to articulate Saudi learners' needs.

III. Methodology

A. Sources

In this study, data triangulation was employed to conduct a TBNA, ensuring more robust qualitative findings by drawing from three sources: teachers, students, and written materials. This approach is supported by Long (2005, 2015) and has been implemented in prior research studies (e.g., Gilabert, 2005; Huh, 2006; Lambert, 2010; Oliver et al., 2013; Serafini & Torres, 2015). The current study involved 25 senior students majoring in English at a Saudi university and 13 instructors (see Table 1), each teaching a mandatory course(s) in the program. The study was conducted in the academic year 2017–2018, during which two curricula plans were taught. Data was collected from the newer plan's sources, including course descriptions, syllabi, and input from instructors/students.

TABLE 1
INSTRUCTOR PROFILES

	Major	Education	Number of Courses
1	Literature	PhD in Literature	3 required courses
2	Linguistics	MA in Applied Linguistics	2 required courses
3	Literature	PhD in Literature	1 elective course
4	Linguistics	MA in Applied Linguistics	2 required courses
5	Literature	PhD in Literature	3 required courses and 1 elective
6	Literature	MA in Literature	1 required course and 1 elective
7	Literature	MA in Literature	2 required courses
8	Linguistics	PhD in Applied linguistics	1 required course
9	Literature	MA in Literature	2 required courses
10	Literature	PhD in Literature	1 required course
11	Linguistics	PhD in Linguistics	1 required course
12	Linguistics	MA in Linguistics	2 required courses
13	Literature	MA in Literature	1 required course and 1 elective

Chaudron et al. (2005) and Serafini and Torres (2015) identified teachers as *domain experts*, referring to students as *domain outsiders*. Accordingly, in this study, the instructors were the domain experts, and the students were domain outsiders. Additionally, written materials and unpublished works were utilized as a third information source to provide the researcher with the necessary contextual background, following Long's (2005) recommendation. This included referencing the department's official website, akin to practices observed in Oliver et al.'s (2013) and Lambert's (2010) studies.

B. Methods

Aligning with Long's (2005, 2015) recommendations, two methods of investigation—semi-structured interviews and questionnaires—were utilized to ensure data triangulation. Interview protocols were informed by the questionnaire used to investigate ESL/EFL academic tasks in the work of Ono (2007) and Kim et al. (2003), as an examination of written resources detailing the mission, vision, and goals of the university, the college, and the department in which the study was conducted. Semi-structured interviews offer distinct discussion points that can provide a coherent framework for subsequent data analysis (Long, 2005). Scholars such as Kim et al. (2003), Gilabert (2005), Huh (2006), Lambert (2010), and Chaudron et al. (2005) have underscored the informative nature of interviews conducted in the initial phase, enriching their respective investigations. The interviews were structured into three parts: (1) exploring students' English language proficiency and the program's impact; (2) assessing the content and academic tasks within linguistics and literature courses; and (3) examining the alignment of the department's missions, visions, and goals with instructors' practices. Fifteen instructors were interviewed, nine specializing in literature and six in linguistics. Before each interview, the instructors' syllabi were reviewed to familiarize the researcher with the assigned academic tasks and streamline the interview process (Long, 2005, 2015).

The second phase involved designing a closed-ended questionnaire to confirm or reject the results of the first phase. Questionnaires are a favored method in needs analysis due to their accessibility, simplicity, and objectivity (Long, 2005). Echoing the approach of Kim et al. (2003), Gilabert (2005), Huh (2006), Lambert (2010), Serafini and Torres (2015), and Chaudron et al. (2005), questionnaires were used as a follow-up procedure to inform the analysis. The questionnaire was developed through various questionnaire samples from the literature, written resources such as the instructors' syllabi, and the results of the semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the suggested academic tasks identified in the semi-structured interviews were categorized into task types and further classified into target tasks, akin to the approach followed by Kim et al. (2003) and Ono (2007). Secondly, the target tasks were categorized based on the language and cognitive skills they fostered, mirroring the methodology of Serafini and Torres (2015). Subsequently, each task was assessed in terms of its frequency, importance, and difficulty, aligning with the methodology of Kim et al. (2003). However, adjustments were made to the scales, eliminating the *not-applicable* option to accommodate the inclusion of all items due to their applicability. Thus, frequency was measured on a scale of 1–4, with 1 indicating *never* and 4 indicating *very frequent*; importance was rated on a scale of 1–3, with 1 indicating *not important* and 3 indicating *very important*; similarly, difficulty was assessed on a scale of 1–3, with 1 indicating *easy* and 3 indicating *very difficult*.

C. Procedure and Sequencing

The study unfolded in three phases. In the first phase, the researchers analyzed written sources to provide basic information about the program. This informed the questions asked by experts in the semi-structured interviews, a strategy aimed at maximizing the time efficiency of the interviews (Long, 2005). The second phase comprised semi-structured interviews with instructors and language experts. The third phase aimed to capture the senior (levels seven and eight) students' perspectives regarding the proposed academic tasks' frequency, significance, and difficulty. To accomplish this, the researcher designed a questionnaire based on the interview results and the analyses from phases one and two. Accurate sequencing, where each phase informs the next, is as vital as the triangulation of sources and methods for ensuring the attainment of reflective results (Long, 2005, 2015).

IV. RESULTS

A. Written Sources

Following Oliver et al.'s (2013) investigations of online sources, the academic department's website (specifically its mission, vision, and goals) was explored to determine the desired skills required, the type of graduates they wanted to produce for society, and the target jobs envisioned for graduates. Additionally, the current curriculum plan for the program was examined, looking for obligatory courses, their descriptions, and objectives. Moreover, the instructors' syllabi for each obligatory course were analyzed to identify the assigned academic tasks and their objectives within each course. This analysis revealed four main themes: (1) teaching and training students in English; (2) exploring topics within English language, literature, linguistics, and translation; (3) preparing students for the job market; and (4) engaging students in multicultural and international communication.

B. Semi-Structured Interviews With the Instructors

The interviews revealed information about the students' English proficiencies, linguistics, and literature courses, as well as the department's vision, mission, and goals.

First, most of the instructors cautiously reported that students typically join the department with low to average English proficiency, though there are exceptions with higher levels of English proficiency. Almost all of them emphasized the importance of a placement test to filter the applicants and accept only those with at least an average level of proficiency, or as one of the instructors commented, "those with room for development." When asked about the department's role in training and developing the students' language, less than half of the instructors reported that the department provides sufficient extracurricular training in English via department clubs, the writing center, and workshops. They reported that the department did not provide teaching and training in the four language skills (writing, reading, listening, and speaking), explaining that the department is not a language institute. Instead, the department focuses on linguistics and literature, with English skills developing as a "by-product" to varying degrees depending on the individual students.

Eight instructors noted the failure of the preparatory year to develop students' language and communication skills. However, one experienced instructor did comment positively on the year's ability to develop the students' communication skills. Notably, four instructors were not satisfied with the limited advanced training in English skills; they preferred the program's older curriculum plan that explicitly taught the four language skills from basic levels. Finally, almost all the instructors tentatively reported that the students' language development depended on their differences, willingness, and motivation to learn English, with one instructor remarking, "language can't be spoon-fed!".

The second section of the interview investigated the influence of students' language levels on the depth and breadth of exploring topics in the fields of English language, literature, linguistics, and translation. It also explored the different types of tasks assigned to the students in their literature and linguistics courses. Most instructors reported that they did not limit the investigated topics due to the students' language proficiencies. However, they admitted that weak language skills could hinder students' understanding. Therefore, instructors reported using different teaching techniques, such as mind mapping, paraphrasing, translation, visual aids, and others to aid comprehension. Nonetheless, they noted that sometimes they adjust the level of topic exploration due to the limited course duration or the students' levels in the program. For example, one instructor reported introducing part of a long poem to allow time to present other prominent ones within the same study period. Another instructor avoided two extensions of a theory she introduced to her students because this material required an understanding of other interrelated theories that students were unfamiliar with at their level. However, one experienced instructor admitted that she altered the content of her beginner writing course by teaching from the sentence and paragraph level rather than the essay level, diverging from the course description. She justified this alteration by referencing the skill-training courses from the old curriculum plan, which provided better training in English. It should be noted that this instructor only implemented this alteration in skill-level courses and did not do so in major-specific ones. Moreover, some instructors noted that the content would be comprehensible if the students attended their classes: "basically, they need to attend." Regarding the assigned academic tasks, the instructors unanimously mentioned tasks that required the practice of the four language skills alongside cognitive skills.

The final part of the interview addressed the main goals of the department and the university; the research environment; intercultural dialogue engagement; and instructors' suggestions for program development. Most instructors agreed that all or some of their courses provided a research environment or at least introduced the students to research techniques such as seeking knowledge from different sources, critical thinking, extensive reading, creating arguments, and providing evidence. Nonetheless, one instructor reported that students must be taught how to conduct experimental research by training them on different research methodologies, data collection, and presentation of results, as well as how to structure their papers. However, she reported failing to give an experimental research assignment for one of her courses. Additionally, it should be noted that two instructors mentioned challenges in creating research environments in their language or linguistics courses due to the nature of the syntax course, which required a pure focus on language structure.

Regarding the reliability of the program in preparing students for the job market, the question produced different responses. Four instructors thought the program provided students with sufficient training, especially through the practicum course. Two of them noted that the program also prepares students to pursue higher education. One highlighted that, if they acquire research skills, they should succeed anywhere. However, most instructors hesitantly commented on the program's direct job market preparation, noting that such preparation comes from literature theories and linguistic pragmatics, which may equip students with the necessary insights to feed their communication skills (e.g., understanding

different personalities and "reading between the lines"). Additionally, instructors noted that the content of different novels and author backgrounds would not be beneficial unless higher education was pursued. Finally, only two instructors believed that the program did not prepare students for the job market. Notably, one instructor believed that direct preparation for the job market "should not be our concern." She argued that the major is scientific and should thus be pursued through investigation and research—noting that the college should be a philosophy provider that specializes in linguistics and literature, not job training. Conversely, the other instructor stated that such preparation should be a priority, highlighting that the college should revisit its program to prepare its students for specific jobs, as it used to when it taught translation courses.

Finally, most of the instructors believed that the English language and literature program prepared the students to engage in intercultural communication by providing sufficient understanding of different cultures worldwide and adequate language for communication. However, one instructor believed that the students' weak language proficiency would hinder such communication. Similarly, instructors almost unanimously recommended that the program must be developed, particularly in content and program sequencing. Content development suggestions included introducing new courses, reviving courses from the old curriculum plan, and eliminating some from the current one. The instructors unanimously suggested improvements in content, with the majority wanting more content on literature. Two instructors specified certain courses they wanted to see, such as "film studies," "pop culture," and skill courses like "scholarly editing" and "creative writing." Some suggested job preparation courses such as "teaching English as a foreign language" and "translation" as elective courses.

Additionally, concerning the revival of the old program plan, this interest was mainly related to English language and literature content. Three instructors wanted to reintroduce the English language skills courses since "the old plan was much better in preparing students" for later courses. Moreover, the instructors wanted the old curriculum plan back because it provided better coverage of time periods in literature, noting that the current courses were "just surveys." Thus, suggestions for eliminating the current courses mostly involved dropping survey courses such as "American Survey" and "Survey of British Literature" from the program. Notably, this elimination was suggested by all literature instructors. In addition, most instructors suggested removing the minor and elective courses, such as those taken from the departments of mass communication and Arabic language and literature. This is because these courses "limit the students' practice of the language" and "waste hours" that should be invested in major-related courses. The general courses boost students' GPAs, which results in a GPA that "does not reflect their language proficiency" or competency in the major. However, it should be noted that one instructor favored the minor courses as a means "to prepare the students for the job market." Regarding the sequencing of the program, three instructors suggested introducing the "Composing Research" course earlier in the program to support students' academic writing during the program. Moreover, seven instructors suggested early specialization in literature or linguistics since this focus would give students a "deeper understanding" of the field. One instructor suggested dividing the program into three sub-majors, literature, linguistics, and translation, to provide more focused educational pathways.

C. Close-Ended Questionnaire to Investigate Students' Point of View

The 25 questionnaire responses were collected from the students, excluding one incomplete questionnaire from the frequency and difficulty analysis. Means and standard deviations were calculated for task frequency, importance, and difficulty. Figure 1 illustrates that some tasks were rated as more frequent than others. It reveals that "using the LMS [learning management system] and Microsoft Office software" was the most frequent task students were asked to do (M = 3.8), followed by "time management" (e.g., regular attendance, meeting deadlines; M = 3.5) and "giving oral presentations" (M = 3.41). Conversely, the "role play" tasks were the least frequent (M = 1.6), preceded by "conducting administrative work in English" (e.g., writing reports for companies or banks; M = 1.87) and "writing a research paper with a group" (M = 2.08). The most frequent writing task was the sixth task: "writing an outline for a paragraph, essay, or proposal for a research paper" (M = 3.16). This task was closely preceded by the most frequent reading task, which was the fifth task in the table: "reading for specific information (content) or for a specific purpose" (e.g., understanding a concept or answering a reading quiz; M = 3.17).

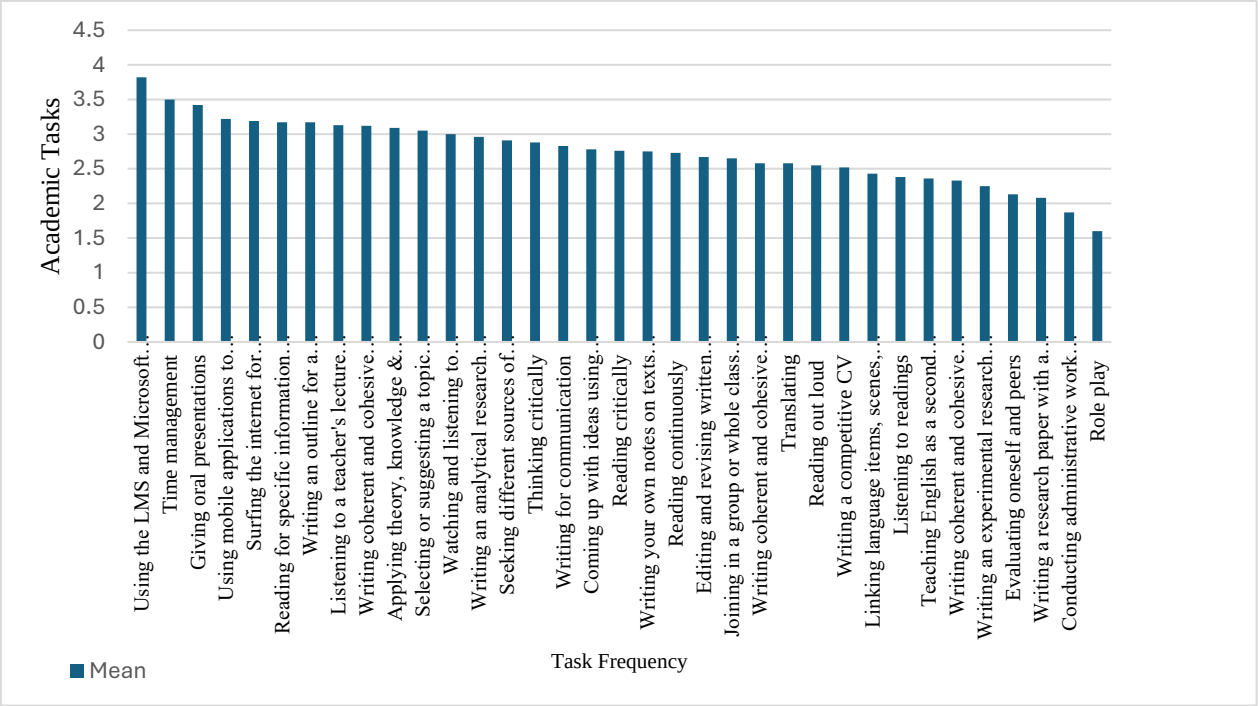

Figure 1. Mean Rates of Task Frequency

Additionally, as Figure 2 indicates, some tasks were rated as more important than others, and the most important task was "time management" (e.g., regular attendance and meeting deadlines; $M = 2.55$). This task was followed by "listening to a teacher's lecture or class announcements and taking accurate notes at the same time" ($M = 2.54$) and "writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs" (with correct grammar and meaning; $M = 2.52$). Notably, the students reported that the "role play" task was the least important one ($M = 1.50$), which was preceded by "writing a research paper with a group" ($M = 1.63$) and "linking language items, scenes, theories, concepts and so forth during analysis to real-life, textual evidence, or previous studies" ($M = 1.83$). However, it should be noted that only 18 responses were found for this item. Moreover, the most important writing, listening, and speaking tasks were reported among the top three most important tasks, while the most important reading task was "reading critically" ($M = 2.40$), which was rated as the eighth most important task in Figure 2.

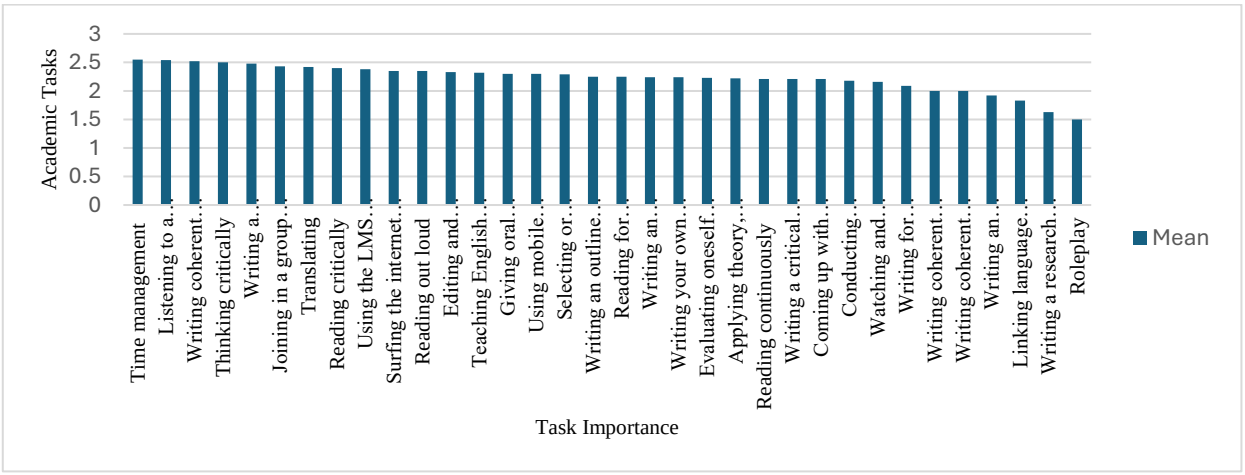

Figure 2. Mean Rates of Task Importance

Finally, as Figure 3 indicates, some tasks were rated easier than others. The students indicated that the most difficult task was "thinking critically" ($M = 2.18$), which was followed by "writing an experimental research paper" (involving data collection, a methodology, and presenting then discussing results); "using APA style" ($M = 2.00$); and then "role play" tasks ($M = 2.00$). Notably, the task "writing an analytical research paper (analyzing a concept, theory, idea, theme or language item supported by other sources and/or real data) using MLA style" was rated as the fourth most difficult task ($M = 1.92$). It should be noted that only 17 out of the 24 responses were provided for the "role play" task. Conversely, it was reported that the easiest assigned task was "using mobile applications to take quizzes, find lectures, or participate in social networks like Twitter (now known as X)" ($M = 1.05$). This was preceded by "surfing the internet for information

via any device" (M = 1.05) and then "watching and listening to English segments on YouTube (any media player/visuals) for analysis" (M = 1.18). The fourth easiest task was "writing for communication" (e.g., email, text/WhatsApp messages, Tweets, or Instagram/Snapchat posts; M = 1.18). However, it should be noted that only 19 out of the 24 responses rated "surfing the internet for information via any device".

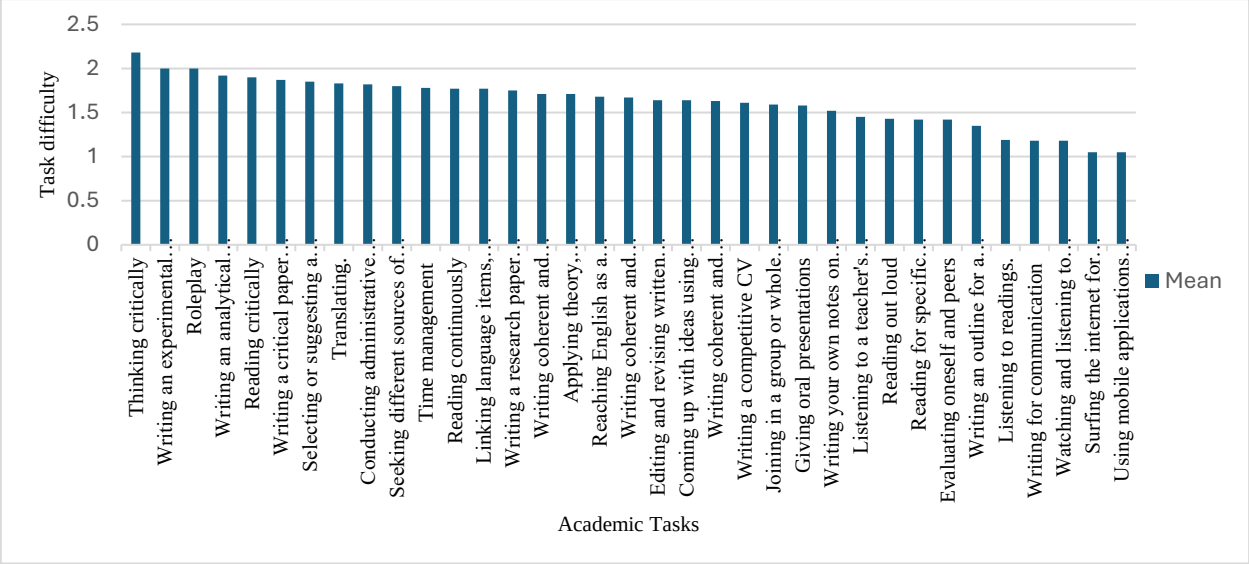

Figure 3. Mean Rates of Perceived Task Difficulty

V. Discussion

The analysis revealed that the most frequent tasks were using LMS, time management, and giving presentations. Time management (e.g., regular attendance and meeting deadlines) was rated amongst the top three most frequent and most important tasks, an item that was also stressed in the instructors' interviews. Notably, time management was not reported as a factor in previous academic TBNA research (e.g., Chaudron et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2003; Ono, 2007), which could be due to it being a feature or characteristic of accomplishing tasks rather than a target task itself. Moreover, this finding represents the necessity of a *tailored* needs analysis that Long (2005, 2015) stressed. This is because such task characteristics might otherwise go unnoticed if relying solely on pre-prepared academic tasks.

Another task among the top three most frequent was giving oral presentations, which was also noticed during the syllabus analysis. Nearly all courses required students to give presentations at least once per semester. The instructors highlighted the importance of teaching students how to give presentations, with one commenting that "they need to be trained" in this skill. However, most participants reported that presentations were not only relatively important but also relatively difficult. Giving presentations was also found to be among the most difficult academic tasks listed in Ono (2007), and the most important, although not as frequent as those from Kim et al. (2003).

From the students' perspectives, time management, listening to the instructor, and writing paragraphs were deemed important to learning new content. Listening to a teacher's lecture or class announcements and taking accurate notes at the same time was considered among the top three most important tasks for the students and the top ten most frequent tasks; however, this was also purportedly one of the easier tasks. Kim et al. (2003) also reported that tasks of a similar nature were among the most frequent and important, but not the most difficult. Similarly, writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs with correct grammar and meaning was among the most important and frequent tasks but not the most difficult. Although writing paragraphs and analytical papers was perceived as important, writing experimental/critical papers and essays was among the least important tasks. Finally, it was reported that the least important tasks were writing a research paper with a group and role-playing tasks, which were also among the least frequent. It should be reiterated that the results concerning the role play tasks should be considered with the caveat that a smaller number of participants answered questions on this item.

Moreover, the students reported that the most difficult tasks were thinking critically, writing an experimental paper, role-playing, and writing an analytical research paper. Thinking critically was noted as being both the most difficult and among the most frequent tasks, as well as being of relative importance. Teachers also reported that students must display critical thinking in their discussions and writings. Thus, although students did not believe that it was very important to develop this skill, they should be trained for it. According to Long (2005, 2015), students may not always be aware of their needs. Moreover, writing papers was among the most difficult tasks. However, writing an experimental research paper using APA style was reported to be among the least frequent and least important tasks. Conversely, writing an analytical research paper using MLA style was reported among the most frequent and relatively important tasks. However, most instructors did not differentiate between the two paper types. Nonetheless, upon further discussion of the paper

requirements, it was found that most instructors assigned the analytical type as experimental ones were usually given at higher levels. Moreover, Kim et al. (2003) reported that similar tasks were the most difficult and least frequent in their study.

Additionally, the students reported that translation, critical thinking, and critical reading were among the most important and difficult tasks (within the top 10). They also noted that engaging in group discussions was one of the most important tasks, but not the most difficult. Nonetheless, such tasks were among those that were somewhat frequent. Reading critically was considered among the top ten most important and difficult tasks. Notably, a discrepancy emerged with this task, as students indicated that they were not asked to do such reading frequently. This contradicts the instructors' claims of asking students to read critically as homework assignments. This discrepancy suggests a gap in compliance or perception between educators and students regarding this task.

VI. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

The findings from this current study suggest that a "general university skills" course should be given, as per one of the instructor's recommendations. This course should provide critical thinking and time management training, which are skills that the students found important yet challenging to master. Moreover, academic English speaking and listening courses are needed to train students to give presentations, listen, take notes during lectures, and engage in discussions. Additionally, students should be provided with academic and general writing courses; while the latter was not considered an important task, it was frequently assigned and difficult to perform. However, the general writing course should include practice on how to write CVs, as this was found to be one of the students' most important needs. Furthermore, students should be provided with academic reading courses that focus on critical reading and translation. These were described as important and difficult requirements by students, but also the least frequent, hence, they need guidance in these areas. Moreover, based on the interview results, placement tests should be administered to ensure suitable input and training for each group. Finally, all the recommended courses should be provided at the early program level, which some instructors also suggested.

In conclusion, conducting a TBNA may identify students' needs more accurately when such assessment is based on the triangulation of methods and sources. For example, this study's semi-structured interviews revealed that students' proficiency levels range from low to average, course content was not altered for below-average students, and a research environment was almost always created. The questionnaire revealed that using LMS, time management, and giving presentations were the most frequent tasks. It also showed that time management, listening to teachers, and writing coherent/cohesive paragraphs were the most important. Furthermore, critical thinking and writing analytical or research papers were regarded as the most difficult tasks. Given these insights, this study recommends introducing university skills, reading, writing, listening, speaking, and translation courses; as well as conducting a placement test as a prior entry requirement to categorize students according to their level. It should be noted that this study was conducted during the pre-COVID period and thus the results may differ from teaching since the explosion of online communication.

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