Foundation English Course Development for Thai Tertiary Education: Learners' Perceived Needs and Factor Analysis

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Article information	Abstract
	A challenge to curriculum designers is what to adapt and include in Foundation English (FE) courses for tertiary education. In Thailand, it is important to explore how Thai EFL university students perceive their own needs in terms of English language learning. The present study aims to explore their perceived needs and to make use of the needs to design appropriate components of FE in a public university in Thailand. An online questionnaire comprising self-rated items on English language skills and written responses was used to capture data from 145 randomly selected university students enrolled in an FE course at the university in the second semester of academic year 2022. The results revealed that speaking was the most wanted-to-learn skill for communication. Moreover, seven other factors were found for the design of FE surrounding English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The components of EAP for FE included Academic English Skills, Advanced Reading Skills, and Paragraph Writing. The elements of ESP for FE included Content-based Language Learning and Career English. These findings have implications for the design of FE curriculum and course component development.

INTRODUCTION

English is regarded as a means of global communication, and it has increasingly been studied in various educational settings, including tertiary education. At the university level, the issue of whether English should be taught as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is still unclear to best serve the needs of university students. Some scholars advocate that Foundation English should enable undergraduates to master language proficiency, academic skills, and professional communication (e.g., Moore, 2020; Murray, 2010), while others perceive English as a tool for further education and careers (e.g., Alfaifi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

In Thailand, as reported in Darasawang (2007), Sanpatchayapong (2017), and Nakkaew (2021), all universities provide Foundation English (FE) in the first and/or second years of study for their undergraduate students. In some colleges, FE is regarded as a remedial course, and students are required to relearn English that they have studied for more than a decade. In

other universities, FE is perceived as a communication course for students to master and participate in a global context. In very few universities in Thailand, however, FE is designed as an ESP course, where students can study specific languages for their own disciplines. This unparallel conception of FE means that each Thai university has its own authority in designing English courses for their university students.

Conducting a needs analysis is fundamental to the process of designing FE courses for university education. Besides the needs of stakeholders, such as faculties and prospective employers, undergraduates who are actual learners of the course should provide views for the course design since they are also regarded as stakeholders of the course (Brown, 1995). Student perceptions based on their needs could be an essential asset to a university when designing an FE course. This present study then explored Thai EFL undergraduates' perceived needs towards their English learning and incorporated these needs into the component design of an FE course at a public university in Thailand.

English learning needs analysis

In designing language curriculum and materials, many scholars (e.g., Brown, 1995; Richards, 2008) advocate the use of needs analysis in gathering information regarding curriculum design. It is an initial requirement for curriculum development, especially in determining purposes, needs, and activities for a language course (Rahman, 2015). According to Brown (1995), needs analysis requires both objective and subjective information to be systematically gathered to determine and validate whether curriculum objectives meet learners' needs in terms of language learning and learning situations. In the same vein, Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) postulated that needs analysis yields relevant information regarding identifying and connecting learners' academic needs in the present situation and for their future career or academic goals. The following sections describe the different types of needs analysis.

Target situation analysis (TSA)

Target situation analysis (TSA) determines specific information regarding language that L2 learners need to learn to meet the target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Munby, 1978). For instance, in a study by Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) on the needs of English major students in a university in Indonesia, it was found that the students perceived *speaking* as the first skill to master in order to conduct presentations and discussions, to participate in casual conversations, and to take part in interviews. In another study by Piamsai (2017) involving three different groups of participants in Thailand, namely students, government officials, and private organization employees, it was found that each group had specifically different needs in English for everyday life. For example, students and government officials revealed that writing was what they most required, but for different purposes. *Writing for higher studies* was required for students and *writing for work* for government officials. Employees in private organizations regarded *reading for work* as the most required learning skill, according to this study.

From the studies of TSA needs analysis, it can be summarized that TSA yields specific communicative needs of L2 learners. This means that specific language skills or components

can be gathered through the lens of TSA to meet the target situation. The results of this type of needs analysis, as exemplified in Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) and Poedjiastutie and Oliver (2017), are seen as valuable input for an organization to make concrete decisions in terms of language development for their employees in a competitive market.

Present situation analysis (PSA)

Present situation analysis aims to explore the differences between learners' present situation and the target situation (Flowerdew, 2013; Watanapokakul, 2022). In other words, PSA treats an individual as a language learner and a potential language user whose needs come from two different perspectives: learners' target situation needs and learning needs. According to Robbinson (1991), learners' self-perception regarding their language learning can be used to determine needs in addition to their proficiency before a course begins. In PSA, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggested two parts of needs analysis: target situation needs and learning needs. Target situation needs consist of necessities, or needs that learners expect to use in a target situation; lacks, or the difference between what is needed in the target situation and learners' proficiency; and wants, or subjective information determined by the learners. Learning needs include language components, skills and strategies, and subject knowledge and contents. The following is a summary of the three constructs of target situation needs and learning needs.

Table 1
Target situation needs and learning needs in PSA
(adapted from Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Watanapokakul, 2022)

Necessities	Language domains required by learners in the target situation
Lacks	Language knowledge that learners do not know
Wants	The perceived needs of learners
Learning	What learners need to know, why they learn them, and how they learn them.

In a study by Zhang et al. (2020), English undergraduates in China reported that they wanted to enroll most in courses related to career development, followed by language skill courses and English-related major courses, respectively. They reported their views towards English in terms of it being a foundation for future education and careers. This is regarded as 'wants', according to Hitchinson and Waters (1987). Similar findings were reported by Alfaifi et al. (2022) in that business students at a university in Saudi Arabia revealed a need (or want) for business English in addition to communicative English courses. The participants reported that as English would be used in their future careers, they felt they lacked adequate vocabulary and fluency.

In a study by Watanapokakul (2022), a combination of TSA and PSA, together with learning needs, were used to capture Thai stakeholders' and undergraduate students' needs in the design of an English for event management course. It was suggested by the stakeholders that technical terminology was the most necessary component to be integrated into English skills (or necessities). This is similar to what undergraduate students regarded in their needs (or

wants) in learning event management terms together with English skills. It could be concluded from the study that information drawn from necessities and wants could be used as ingredients for an ESP course design in the Thai context.

Another study by Changpueng and Pattanapichet (2023) also included the necessities, wants, and lacks of engineering stakeholders and undergraduate students regarding English meetings. It was found from an interview regarding necessities that English was needed in the participants' work contexts, which includes three stages of meeting language. In terms of lack, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used, and it was found that engineering undergraduates lacked meeting participating skills the most. Regarding wants, the researchers found that meeting lessons were practical, and they should be included in designing an English course. It can be argued that with necessities, wants, and lacks, a comprehensive understanding of ESP lessons could be made possible for a course design.

In conclusion, the PSA reveals the subjective or perceived needs of L2 learners through different aspects, i.e., their future-goal needs, present situational deficiencies, and subjective wants in a language course. With reference to Al-Hamlan and Baniabdelrahman (2015), additional information, such as instructional materials, learning activities, and communicative tasks, could be obtained and analyzed for a curriculum design. The lack of English supplies, in terms of teachers' expertise (Bayram & Canaran, 2020), instructional materials (Alfaifi et al., 2022; Moore, 2020), and instructions (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020), could be infused into PSA needs analysis to explain what is lacking in the present situation and to project learning needs and wants for a course or curriculum design.

Regarding both TSA and PSA, it seems that, in developing a course, learners' necessities, lacks, and wants in the present learning situation are as important as their perspectives towards language components and contents. The next section discusses how needs analysis from both TSA and PSA helps ELT teachers and stakeholders design FE curriculum, particularly in the context of tertiary education.

Foundation English for tertiary education

English in Thailand is used as an international language. According to ELT professionals (e.g., Moiinvaziri, 2014; Murray, 2010; Piamsai, 2017), English skills are applied in terms of communication and usage, and L2 learners who learn English should develop their skills in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, together with linguistic knowledge (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017) and culture (Rabiah, 2012).

Among the four core skills of English, it was found that L2 learners at levels of secondary education (Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015), tertiary education (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020; Moiinvaziri, 2014), and employees and civil servants (Piamsai, 2017) perceived *speaking* as their least practiced skill (or lack). Some tertiary students also advocated the need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), such as communication skills for tourism (Supina, 2018), business English communication (Alfaifi et al., 2022), or even career-development courses (Zhang et al., 2020). A question that arises from these findings is what type of English is needed for FE at tertiary education.

When it comes to FE at the university level in Thailand, there has been an initiative to draft FE courses (English Consortium, Commission on Higher Education, 2002; cited in Darasawang, 2007, p. 193). The drafted courses feature two major components: social language and academic language. According to Darasawang (2007), social language covers language skills for communicative competence, whereas academic language includes knowledge construction and application as well as autonomous learning. This means that the goals of language teaching and learning at the Thai tertiary education level focus on communicative skills in English and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Whether or not the draft curriculum and the actual practice are met is still in need of inquiry.

In a study by Moore (2020) on Thai faculty members and students, academic vocabulary and higher-order thinking skills were found to be key components in developing a communicative academic English course. The researcher showed that, in developing academic English courses, unit topics should be made accessible with specific academic vocabulary and skills. In Ethiopia, freshman undergraduates revealed their needs (or wants) for FE courses to include future careers, working or studying abroad, passing a test, as well as language and culture (Chemir & Kitila, 2022). It is interesting that, whereas Thai university students perceived developing academic English skills, Ethiopian students aimed to learn future career and study abroad skills in addition to academic English skills.

The findings of Chemir and Kitila (2022) echoed Murray's (2010) conceptualization of FE for non-native English university students in Australia. In his proposal, strong English proficiency, academic literacy, and competent skills in professional communication are perceived as basic requirements for university studies in Australia. In terms of strong English proficiency, it was conceptualized that, to pragmatically communicate in an English environment, tertiary students need to learn all language skills and language usage for both formal and functional settings. This is in line with Alfaifi et al.'s (2022) findings in terms of the lack of both vocabulary and fluency skills among Saudi Arabian business undergraduates. When it comes to academic literacy, Murray (2010) argues that academic skills are dynamic and are in line with different disciplines. University students might need to possess academic generic domains, such as *editing and proof-reading* and *study habits*, and opt for other academic literacies, for example *designing; implementing and reporting research; seminar skills; writing genres;* or *using data/ statistics*. Tertiary education students also need to possess professional communication skills in terms of interpersonal communication, appropriate pragmatics, non-verbal behaviors, group dynamics, and leadership skills (Murray, 2010).

With reference to different needs towards FE at the university level, it could be summarized that, in addition to advanced English proficiency skills, freshmen from different parts of the world revealed their needs regarding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Several content domains were also found to be included in the course in terms of career communication, specific contents through English, and academic skills. In the present situation, where university studies are dynamic and necessary components of language are various, it is interesting to investigate university students' perceived needs towards the development of FE. Their needs are also substantially reconsidered as key aspects of course contents in designing FE at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Research context

In the present study, curricula at a Thai public university need a major revision in response to the inclusion of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the dynamics of education in the wake of the world pandemic, and the development of digital technology. Undergraduates who enter the university opt for their majors from the three strands of disciplines: Social Sciences and Humanities, Science and Technology, and Health Sciences. However, from 2019 to 2023, students who enrolled in the university needed to study from home due to the pandemic and were required to study FE classes, which had not yet been adapted to meet their needs.

It is thus important to determine the needs of these students, particularly in terms of their English learning needs, based on Murray's (2010) perspective that academic settings and disciplines are dynamic and pluralistic. The findings from these perceived needs could be used as major components for foundation course adaptation and development in response to the following research questions:

1) What are the needs of Thai EFL university students towards listening, speaking, reading, writing, and academic study skills for FE courses?
2) What are the factors contributing to Thai EFL university students' perceived English learning needs?
3) What is the factor structure for the English learning needs of Thai EFL university students?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The aim of this research was to investigate the perceived English skill deficiencies and desired areas of improvement among Thai university students. A total of 145 first-year students from various academic disciplines (62 students from Social Sciences and Humanities, 52 students from Science and Technology, and 29 students from Health Sciences) were recruited randomly from a population of approximately 3,500 students in a public university in Thailand. Given the uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, an online questionnaire was administered to all first-year students enrolled in an FE course during the academic year 2/2022. It is acknowledged that the online data collection method introduced limitations, resulting in a small number of responses and potential implications for generalizability. However, given the small number of responses, relevant in-depth data drawn from open-ended questions made it possible to explore these participants' needs for the design of FE at the university.

Research tool

An online questionnaire based on the work of Murray (2010) was adapted by the researcher, consisting of two major parts. The reason for the adaptation of this model is that it includes

three major components of FE, i.e., English proficiency, academic literacy, and professional communication, reflecting the dynamic context of university education in Thailand. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions concerning students' perceived needs for the four core skills of English. The participants were asked to self-rate their perceived needs in terms of each language skill from 0 to 100 percent and to provide written reasons for their ratings.

The participants were then required to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with 32 items in Part Two, categorized into five components: reading skills, writing skills, listening skills, speaking skills, and academic study skills, on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is the least agreed item and 5 is the most agreed one. This section informs 'wants' from the learners' perspectives. The 32 items include 7 items on reading skills; 8 items on writing skills; 9 items on listening and speaking skills; and 8 items on academic skills (see Appendix). It is noted that the sub-components of Murray's professional communication, such as pragmatics, group dynamics, leadership, and non-verbal behaviors, were not specifically included but partially embedded in some items of the questionnaire, such as communicative speaking, public speaking, internationalization, and skill development for career. This is to reflect language education in Thailand, where language proficiency and academic literacy are in need of attention (Nakkaew, 2021), compared to an international setting of Murray's (2010) Australian context.

Open-ended questions were included in Part One to reduce the risk of bias from rating the pre-prepared items in Part Two. Participant reasons for their perceived ratings in Part One could thus be gathered as realistic and relevant.

Prior to distribution of the questionnaire, questionnaire items were evaluated for validity using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. Three experts who have been teaching FE courses for more than 10 years were recruited to rate the questionnaire items. It was found that, overall, each item scored more than 0.5, which was considered 'a perfect match to an objective' suitable for data collection, according to Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977, pp. 15-16). After the data collection, the questionnaire items were calculated for reliability. It was found that the overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.81, which confirms the reliability of questionnaire items.

Data collection and analysis

After the questionnaire items were checked for validity, an online questionnaire in English was generated. The pre-questionnaire section consists of students' consent to participate in the study. The participants could choose not to participate in the study by closing the form, or they could participate in the study in which their personal data were kept confidential.

The questionnaire in English was distributed to all first-year university students who were enrolled in an FE course from January 2022 to March 2022 through an online registration system. One hundred and forty-five students returned the form. The data from the questionnaire were transformed into a spreadsheet for further statistical analysis.

To explore how the participants perceived their needs in the four core English skills, the average

scores from each discipline were calculated. Then, the participants' reasons for each language skill perception from the open-ended questions were grouped into themes using content analysis. It is noted that the language used in providing written reasons was both English and Thai. The English reasons written by the participants were not corrected, but the Thai reasons were translated by the researcher and then rechecked by a native speaker of English to confirm their correctness and consistency. The themes emerged from the participants' responses in terms of wants towards FE were grouped into *Language as Communication Skills, Language as Content Learning, and Teaching* and *Learning Foundation English at Tertiary Education*. The themes were then rechecked by an expert in qualitative analysis. In cases of disagreement, discussions between the expert and the researcher were conducted to reach an agreement. This practice could increase the reliability of content analysis interpretation.

To examine whether there is evidence for the perceived needs of Thai EFL university students towards English learning, a factor analysis with varimax rotation was carried out on the data. The varimax rotation was chosen because the researcher wished to find evidence for simplified factors by maximizing the loading variance within each factor across variables. In other words, the spread loadings of each factor became maximized after some variables were extracted after rotation, thereby resulting in variables correlating within each factor. The minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 was used to select the number of variables because, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), an eigenvalue of less than 1.0 is not significant as an observed standardized variable for analysis.

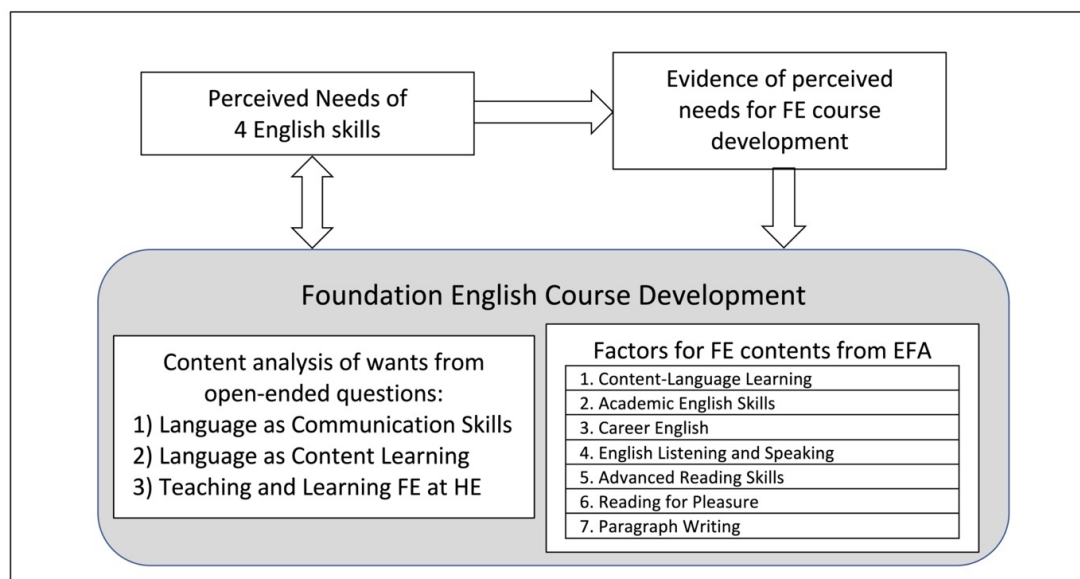The following figure demonstrates the research framework of the present study.

Figure 1 Research framework of foundation English needs analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Perceived needs for foundation English

This section reports the percentage of perceived needs in English listening, speaking, reading, and writing by Thai university first-year students.
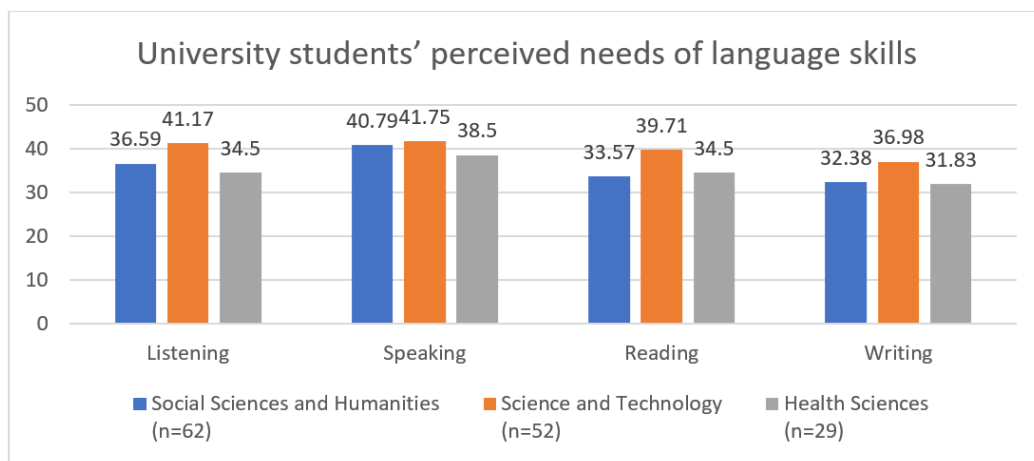

Figure 2 Average percentage of university students' perceived needs of language skills

The survey results reported what the participants wanted to learn, which could be regarded as self-reported 'lack' based on Hutchinson & Waters (1987). However, the aim of the present study is to find the participants' perceived needs towards FE in terms of the four language skills, so the term 'want' is used to reflect what learners perceive to learn in FE.

As can be seen from Figure 2, it was found that, on average, *speaking* is perceived as the most wanted skill to learn by Thai EFL university students, accounting for 41.75% (Science and Technology), 40.79% (Social Sciences and Humanities), and 38.50% (Health Sciences), respectively. The second most wanted skill as perceived by all students from all academic groups is *listening* (41.17% Science and Technology, 36.59% Social Sciences and Humanities, and 34.50% Health Sciences, respectively). However, students from the Health Sciences group also perceived *reading* as equally important as *listening*. The least wanted-to-learn skill as perceived by Thai EFL university students is *writing*, accounting for 36.98% (Science and Technology), 32.38% (Social Sciences and Humanities), and 31.83% (Health Sciences), respectively. Although the results show the ranks of perceived skill needs, it is important to note that the average scores of all skills from the three disciplines are very close. This means that all four skills were perceived as important for the participants, and this needs further investigation in the written response part.

The findings of this present study echo those of Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman (2015), Poedjiastutie et al. (2020), Moiinvaziri (2014), and Piamsai (2017) in that *speaking* and *listening* were the most wanted-to-learn English language skills for communication. Interestingly, Health Sciences participants perceived that both receptive skills, i.e., *listening* and *reading*, were

equally important. The results mean that even though all disciplines perceived *listening* and *speaking* as the top two skills to learn, *reading* and *writing* are also regarded as important skills for FE. However, it remains unclear whether these skills are perceived primarily for social communication or academic study. Also, a question of including EAP or ESP in FE is still in need of inquiry through the lens of qualitative data.

Reasons of learners' perceived needs

In exploring each academic discipline through the written reasons that the participants provided, it was found that there were various degrees of perceptions towards the four core skills with three specific themes as follows:

Language as communication skills

Seventy-two participants from the three strands revealed that all four core skills are equally important, but for communication, they reported a lack of speaking. The reason for this lack is that they had not acquired sufficient knowledge of English. Some of their statements are reported as follows:

> *I want speaking to be taught more so that we can boost our conference on speaking. Also, in speaking, I don't know how to use appropriate words and structures in context. (ST10, Sp)*

> *Many people face the same problem when speaking. I'm one of them. My grammar is okay, but when I speak and find something strange, I lack confidence. I want to learn how to speak to cope with these problems. (ST2, Sp)*

> *Communication in English is important, but some students are not good at speaking and fear speaking. (ST3, Sp)*

Since communication is an important factor for FE, they had fewer opportunities to use English in the Thai context or with an interlocutor.

> *Practicing speaking leads to real-life use. If we don't have many chances to talk to foreigners, speaking should be heavily focused. (SHH17, Sp)*

> *Speaking is necessary, and it is important for everyday communication. Speaking is important and meaningful when we talk to one another. (HS16, Sp)*

Besides speaking, four participants regarded writing as a means for online communication. Social media exchanges with foreigners could provide opportunities for Thai EFL students to practice communicative English.

> *Writing is important. Sometimes, I have to write to foreign friends through social media. I can send a chat to them. (ST12, Wr)*

> *Writing in English can allow me to communicate with other countries. It is also important to convey messages for communication. (SHH1, Wr)*

Evidence revealed that speaking and communication are areas that Thai EFL participants aim to improve in FE. Thus, ample opportunities for practice should also be provided. However, three participants reported that they would like to learn from a native English speaker. Evidence of these findings is as follows:

> *At work or in real life, people don't always use the Thai accent, so I want to listen to native accents. (ST2, Ln)*

> *If I listen to a native speaker, I can't follow and understand the message. I want to practice how to listen to fast speech and connected words used by native speakers. (ST12, Ln)*

The findings concerning a native speaker model are not surprising, as Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) reported a similar finding in their study. For ample opportunities to practice, EFL learners could use model conversations to practice speaking, but they should be aware of the varieties of accents. In addition to the native speaker model, 16 participants revealed that training could be conducted through both receptive skills, i.e., reading and listening, and pronunciation practice.

> *Reading is important for speaking. If I can read, I can learn English for other things too. (SHH15, Rd)*

> *I want to learn how words are used differently in different genres. I want to improve my reading and pronunciation. (ST3, Rd)*

> *Listening helps improve pronunciation, and it is important for everyday use. (ST31, Ln)*

> *I can use listening and speaking in everyday life. (HS12, Ln)*

> *I want to practice how to pronounce words and sentences correctly. (HS15, Rd)*

> *Speaking is the most important part of communication. Correct pronunciation should be focused. (SSH6, Sp)*

It should also be noted that when using the receptive skills, i.e., reading and listening, for speaking, teachers should focus on communication more than correct pronunciation. A participant from the Social Sciences and Humanities strand reported the following:

> *From my experience, when some Thai students read a passage incorrectly, they were laughed at. This makes the students embarrassed. So, in a bilingual study, I don't want people who read incorrectly to be belittled. (SSH15, Rd)*

It can be concluded from the findings that FE for undergraduate study should focus on speaking for communication, as shown by the perceived needs of the present study. Listening and reading skills should also be used to promote more practice in speaking as well as enhance students' pronunciation. The findings of Supina (2018) and Alfaifi et al. (2022) regarding communicative English echo the present study. FE should strongly be catered to communication through face-to-face and online contacts. This follows Murray's (2010) conceptualization and Poedjiastutie et al.'s (2020) findings in terms of language proficiency, language usage, and communicative English.

Language as content learning

Seven participants revealed that they would like to use English as a tool for their academic learning in FE for university learning. The most important skill for their academic domain of learning is reading. Evidence for this is as follows:

> *I can gain new knowledge from reading in English. Reading can expand my search for other English textbooks. (SHH1, Rd)*

> *Reading makes us understand subject contents better. (SHH22, Rd)*

In addition to reading, general academic writing was perceived as a basic, required skill. University undergraduates would like to extend their general writing to a more specific domain, such as technical writing, as follows:

> *I want to learn more techniques for writing. The more I learn the techniques, the better I can write in general. (ST2, Wr)*

> *Writing is important for university education and work. Students should learn how to write and organize ideas correctly. (ST4, Wr)*

> *Writing is necessary when I have to produce English documents or work. If I learn how to write well, I can use it in the future. (SHH24, Wr)*

> *Writing is important for university education. I can use writing in other classes too. So, I want intensive training in writing. (HS3, Wr)*

Domain-specific learning through English can also be viewed in reverse. The participants in this study revealed that they could learn English through content learning, especially vocabulary and grammar. This finding is similar to Alfaifi et al.'s (2022) in that, through content-based learning, university students need to gain more vocabulary and improve their fluency. The following statements provide support.

> *I want to get used to learning grammar and vocabulary in the passage. I also want to practice guessing words in context. (ST7, Rd)*

> *I want to learn how words are used differently in different genres. I want to improve my reading and pronunciation. (ST12, Rd)*

As can be seen from the findings, it can be concluded that FE, besides providing general English skills, could bolster academic and technical skills for content learning, as conceptualized in Murray (2010). In other words, English can be viewed as a tool for academic success in addition to providing communication skills. Similar to Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) regarding English major students in Indonesia, Thai EFL learners also expressed their needs in terms of academic success.

Teaching and learning FE at tertiary level

Three participants in this study reported that, although they are university-level students, they still need teachers' guidance in their English learning. The following statements provide evidence of the findings.

> *Writing needs a teacher's guidance. It is difficult for me to practice individually. (ST30, Wr)*

> *Thai students lack listening skills, which are important communication skills. If the speed is too fast, students might be afraid of talking to a foreigner. The teaching should focus on a slower speed, which might be easier for students to learn. (SHH15, Ln)*

In addition to teachers' guidance, two participants reported a desire for online or blended learning. This could provide them with more opportunities to practice English.

> *Thai students lack writing skills compared to international students. I want a writing class that is not too intense. Also, please consider teaching writing online since not all students can practice. (SHH15, Wr)*

For content learning through English, the participants preferred using domain-general skills in learning English. Evidence of the findings is as follows:

> *Reading for gists should be emphasized in class. (SHH6, Rd)*

> *I want to get used to listening. At least, listening to some easy-to-listening accents and short conversations with easy words. (ST7, Ln)*

> *Learning English starts with listening. We don't need to understand every word; just grasping the main idea and successfully communicating are okay. (SHH25, Ln)*

In language production, two major constructs, i.e., fluency and accuracy, were found when the participants reported a desire to learn English. This indicates that the participants would like to practice English for accuracy in addition to promoting fluency, especially in tertiary education. These findings are in contrast to what Alfaifi et al. (2022) and Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) found in terms of fluency in language practice. The priority of FE in Thailand is both language accuracy and fluency. This is reported below.

> *I want to practice speaking and pronouncing correctly. (ST9, Sp)*

> *When we can listen, we should be able to speak, which makes communication easy. Students should be taught and practice speaking, if not fluently. (SHH23, Sp)*

> *I want to improve my fluency and correctness in communication. (HS14, Sp)*

> *I want to practice how to write correctly. (ST25, Wr)*

> *Writing correctly can help you communicate better. I can use it in future work. (SHH6, Wr)*

> *Writing is important, especially writing correctly. (HS6, Wr)*

Finally, it was found that FE should aim at strengthening Thai EFL learners' English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It was found that, in addition to enhancing EAP, the participants reported a perceived use of English as a tool for their future careers or education. This finding echoes those of Alfaifi et al.'s (2022), Supina's (2018), and Zhang et al.'s (2020) in terms of English for further education and career development. The following statements provide support:

> *Reading is necessary for an additional information search. (HS17, Rd)*

> *Good listening helps me further use it in the future. It helps me understand the messages more. (ST28, Ln)*

> *Speaking is an everyday, necessary skill, and it helps expand our horizons. (HS10, Sp)*

> *Writing essays can be used for international university admission. (ST16, Wr)*

> *Writing can be used in future work, especially in terms of correctness and academics. (SHH18, Wr)*

> *Writing is important for future work. (HS8, Wr)*

To conclude, in teaching and learning FE in tertiary education, content learning and language accuracy are major factors that contribute to learners' language proficiency development. English can be learned through blended learning, yet some guidance by prospective teachers is needed.

Evidence of perceived needs on English learning

To answer research question 2 regarding evidence for the perceived English learning needs of Thai EFL undergraduate students, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out using the principal component method of extraction. The Bartlett's test of the entirety of correlations within the correlate matrix was significant (X^2(406) = 2345.94, p < 0.001), which means that the factor analysis used in the present study was appropriate. A further analysis using the

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy revealed the high strength of the relationship among variables (KMO = 0.88), which means that the sampling in the present study was acceptable for further analysis.

The results of exploratory factor analysis on 32 Likert-scale items revealed an obvious seven-factor solution. The seven factors explain 67.7% of the variance found in the analysis. In Table 2, the eigenvalues and the total variance explained by each factor are presented. Factor 1 items concern content-language learning. Factor 2 items feature academic English skills. Factor 3 items are related to career English. Factor 4 items account for English listening and speaking. Factor 5 items are described as advanced reading skills. Factor 6 items are in relation to reading for pleasure, and Factor 7 items concern paragraph writing.
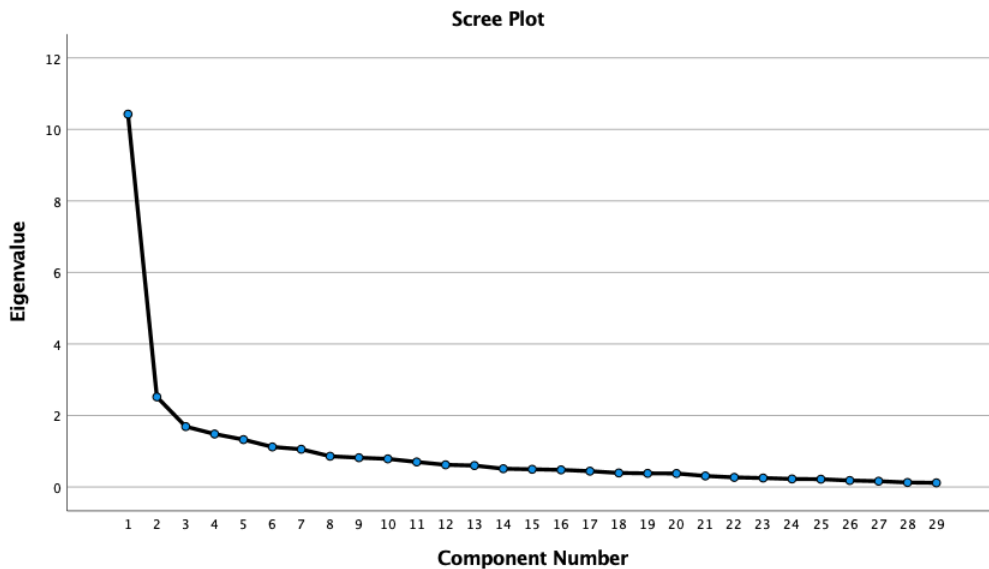

Figure 3 Scree plot of eigenvalues and component number

Table 2
Eigenvalues and total variance explained by factor

Factors	Initial eigenvalues		
	Total	**% variance**	**Cumulative %**
1. Content-Language Learning	10.428	35.96	35.96
2. Academic English Skills	2.52	8.69	44.65
3. Career English	1.69	5.83	50.48
4. English Listening and Speaking	1.48	5.12	55.60
5. Advanced Reading Skills	1.33	4.58	60.18
6. Reading for Pleasure	1.22	3.87	64.05
7. Paragraph Writing	1.06	3.65	67.70

Based on the initial eigenvalues of the seven-factor components, it can be concluded that there is evidence of the perceived needs of Thai EFL university students, resulting in seven components of FE for university language learning. The findings echo the conceptualization of Murray (2010) in terms of language proficiency, academic skills, and professional communication.

However, this present study found reports of both EAP and ESP in the findings. It is also interesting to note here that, among EAP and ESP, FE could include *Reading for Pleasure* – learning could be fun and expand learners' horizons through enjoyable reading, as reported in the qualitative data.

Factor structure of English learning needs for FE

To further explore the factor structure of Thai EFL university students' English learning needs (RQ3), a varimax rotation was performed to simplify factors by maximizing the loading variance within each factor across variables. Based on the rotation of varimax, twenty-eight variables were grouped into seven factors with a loading condition of more than 0.5 for strong correlation within each factor (Woodrow, 2014). There were four variables failing to correlate with the components, namely academic words, listening for the main idea, listening for specific details, and listening and summarizing, so they were excluded for further analysis. Table 3 presents the factor structure of the English learning needs of the participants.

Table 3
Rotation component matrix of Thai EFL university students' English learning needs

	Factor 1 Content-language learning	Factor 2 Academic English skills	Factor 3 Career English	Factor 4 English listening and speaking	Factor 5 Advanced reading skills	Factor 6 Reading for pleasure	Factor 7 Paragraph writing
Learning content through English	0.73						
Academic info access	0.73						
Skill development for career	0.72						
Plagiarism	0.71						
Internationalization	0.71						
Learning English through content	0.70						
Using technology in lang learning	0.69						
Report writing		0.85					
Referencing		0.81					
Abstract writing		0.73					
Presentation		0.71					
Essay writing		0.64					
Reading academic journals		0.64					
Graph description		0.51					
Listening and note-taking			0.69				
Email writing			0.63				
Finding info in online media			0.58				
Reading and note-taking			0.57				
Online creative writing			0.56				
Public speaking				0.78			
Communicative speaking				0.71			

	Factor 1 Content-language learning	Factor 2 Academic English skills	Factor 3 Career English	Factor 4 English listening and speaking	Factor 5 Advanced reading skills	Factor 6 Reading for pleasure	Factor 7 Paragraph writing
Speaking to express opinions				0.62			
Online communication				0.57			
Critical reading					0.83		
Reading for main idea					0.82		
Reading newspapers						0.76	
Reading magazines						0.73	
Paragraph writing							0.70

It was evident from the findings that the fine-grained seven components constitute what Thai EFL university students' English learning needs are. The following discusses each factor found in the present study.

Content-based language learning

From the findings, the first component of English needs, with a Cronbach's alpha rating of a = 0.89, concerns content-based language learning. This consists of learning content through English, academic information access, skill development for careers, plagiarism in language learning, internationalization, learning English through contents, and using technology in language learning. These factor items extend Murray's (2010) FE conceptualization in that intercultural communication counts through *internationalization*. This component combines both EAP and ESP elements through an intercultural lens.

Academic English skills

The second component of English needs concerns academic English skills. Report writing, referencing, abstract writing, academic presentation, reading academic journals, and writing to describe graphs and charts are key variables for this factor (a = 0.89). As found in Moore (2020) and Piamsai (2017), Thai EFL learners seem to want academic skills, especially in reading and writing. However, this factor embraces advanced academic skills, as suggested by Murray (2010), in that academic enhancement could be part of FE for academic discipline study.

Career English

Regarding the third matrix of English needs, *career English* was accounted for in terms of listening and note-taking, email writing, finding information from online media, reading and note-taking, and online creative writing (a = 0.75). The findings in this study echo Alfaifi et al. (2022) in terms of reconsidering business English for business students. The present study, however, found that FE for all academic disciplines in Thailand could include English for future careers, as reported in Poedjiastutie et al. (2020) and Poedjiastutie and Oliver (2017). It is important to note here that, in response to dynamic situations in a disruptive society (Nakkaew,

2021), it is undeniable that undergraduate students regarded career English as what they wanted to learn. In other words, the emergence of digital technology as well as dynamic work contexts reflected the need for Thai universities to include *career English* content in FE courses.

Listening and speaking

The fourth component matrix deals with English listening and speaking. Based on the findings, public speaking, communicative speaking, speaking to express opinions, and online communication were key elements of the factor (a = 0.82). These findings support the present study's perceived needs and qualitative data in terms of speaking and listening for communication. However, this study extended Poedjiastutie et al.'s (2020) findings in terms of online communication. As online communication is unavoidable in the post-pandemic world, it could be included in FE in Thai tertiary education.

Advanced reading skills

In the fifth component, academic reading, consisting of critical reading and reading for the main idea, is the focus (a = 0.88). This factor supports Thai EFL learners' perceived needs in terms of generic English skills, extending to critical reading. This means that, in addition to reading for work found in Piamsai (2017), FE in the present context could include more advanced reading skills for further education. This echoes Chemir and Kitila (2022) in terms of building strong academic skills for further education and career development. It could be argued from the findings that Thai universities shift from aiming to promote students' language proficiency (i.e., reading for the main idea) to including learners' advanced academic skills to study. This is in response to not only the dynamic nature of academic study (Murray, 2010) that Thai undergraduates will encounter, but also self-development as a critical reader for the digital world where various types of information are available.

Reading for pleasure

It was found in the sixth component that reading newspapers and magazines are important variables for reading for pleasure (a = 0.61). This indicates that, in addition to academic skills and professional communication as suggested by Murray (2010), Thai EFL learners could extend the use of content-based language learning to pleasure reading with newspapers and magazines. This might help the participants practice generic English skills, as found in the qualitative data. Also, an extension into a more practical practice of reading reflects what undergraduate students will face in the future of digital communication.

Paragraph writing

The last component concerns paragraph writing. Interestingly, it becomes the only variable in this component. We can conclude that paragraph writing could be a foundational skill for FE for university students. This supports Piamsai's (2017) findings in terms of the need for writing skills in different sectors of Thailand. As FE for undergraduate study, it is important that students learn how to write correctly and fluently in English. Also, in the qualitative data regarding

writing as communication, it was found that undergraduate students wanted their English teachers to help guide them on how to write a paragraph correctly, thereby promoting them to communicate their ideas accurately and fluently in academic contexts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study examined Thai EFL learners' perceived needs towards English language learning and used such needs to design key components for FE at the tertiary education level. The major findings revealed that many university students perceived *speaking* as the most wanted skill to learn, which was similar to findings in Saudi Arabia (Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015), Indonesia (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020), Iran (Moiinvaziri, 2014), and Thailand (Piamsai, 2017). It was also found that, apart from speaking, *online communication through writing* was perceived as a new skill for FE. As Murray (2010) speculated, a first English course for undergraduate students should include English proficiency, academic skills, and professional communication. The findings of the present study revealed seven key components in line with these conceptualizations.

As found in the present study, FE includes English for Academic Purposes (EAP) components regarding *academic English skills, advanced reading skills,* and *paragraph writing*. According to Moore (2020), academic English was perceived by Thai EFL learners and teachers as support for their academic studies. Piamsai (2017) also revealed that Thai nationals from different contexts wanted to learn more *writing* for different purposes. This means that, as an undergraduate, in addition to the communication skills proposed in the drafted Thai English curriculum in 2002 (Darasawang, 2007), academic study skills are necessary components for freshmen's academic achievement. These findings support Murray (2010) in terms of academic skills for international university education.

Through the lens of internationalization, a component of *Content-based Language Learning,* university students perceived that they would like to learn English through content-based learning, and vice versa. This supports Alfaifi et al. (2022) and Supina (2018) in terms of integrating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into FE. As noted in many studies (e.g., Chemir & Kitila, 2022; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017), professional communication and career development are necessary factors in promoting academic discipline studies. This reflects what Murray (2010) suggested in terms of the dynamic and pluralistic features of college disciplines. When FE is designed around students' academic disciplines, i.e., Science and Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities, and Health Sciences, Thai EFL learners might be able to gain more vocabulary and fluency (Alfaifi et al., 2022; Watanapokakul, 2022) in addition to language learning.

It goes without saying that when learning English, freshmen students wanted to learn in an enjoyable way. A factor called *Reading for Pleasure* was found in the present study, which could be regarded as a generic English skill learning. As reported in the qualitative findings, in the presence of EAP and ESP learning, Thai EFL learners reported the factors of understanding the gist and making use of their learning to *expand their horizons*. This means that FE could

also contribute to personal development, especially when students learn English through teachers' guidance and blended learning.

The present study could be regarded as contributing to two aspects. Firstly, in terms of the curriculum development of FE in Thailand, both objective and subjective findings from the actual consumers of curriculum could yield relevant input for curriculum and course design, as suggested by Robbinson (1991). Through the perceived needs of the present study, through both self-rating and written responses, teachers could use these findings to design university FE in Thailand. For example, the participants' wants in teacher guidance and blending learning for writing as well as online communication as speaking practice could be used as relevant input for the design of FE in Thailand. Secondly, findings from the exploratory factor analysis yielded key factors in designing appropriate components in terms of EAP and ESP combinations for FE. This results in additional components to the FE conceptualization of Murray (2010) in terms of internationalization, online communication, and learning for pleasure. Finally, course designers could make use of these findings to cater to university students from various academic disciplines in a more holistic picture regarding FE in Thai tertiary education.

The present study also has some limitations. Firstly, key findings of the study were drawn from Thai learners of English. To engage in a broader view of course and curriculum design, further input from stakeholders, faculties, and universities could be gathered. Secondly, since information was drawn from an online questionnaire during the COVID-19 quarantine, only the personal information of the participants was considered for analysis, and the small number of responses might lack the quality of generalizability. Further research could also use personal interviews, focus group interviews, or other types of qualitative analysis to triangulate with the quantitative data for a more concrete picture of the FE students' needs.

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Appendix

Foundation English needs analysis

This questionnaire aims at gathering your wants and needs in studying Foundation English at the university.

Please answer all questions in this questionnaire. Your answers and personal information will be kept in confidential and only anonymous findings of this study will be used to report the results in publications.

Part 1 Personal information

1. What faculty are you in? (Choose only one answer)

_____ Faculty of Law	_____ Thammasat Business School
_____ Faculty of Political Science	_____ Faculty of Economics
_____ Faculty of Social Administration	_____ Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology
_____ Faculty of Liberal Arts	_____ Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication
_____ Faculty of Science and Technology	_____ Faculty of Engineering
_____ Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts	_____ Faculty of Medicine
_____ Faculty of Allied Health Sciences	_____ Faculty of Dentistry
_____ Faculty of Nursing	_____ Faculty of Public Health
_____ Faculty of Pharmacy	_____ Faculty of Education and Learning Sciences
_____ College of Innovation	_____ Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies
_____ College of Interdisciplinary Studies	_____ School of Global Studies
_____ Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology	
_____ Pridi Banomyong International College	
_____ Chulabhorn International College of Medicine	
_____ Others, please specify _____	

2. What Foundation English course are you currently taking?

_____ TU 050 English Skill Development
_____ TU 105 Communication Skills in English

3. By how much percentage do you want to learn the following English skills? Why?

3.1 Percentage and reason(s) in teaching and learning 'reading'

3.2 Percentage and reason(s) in teaching and learning 'writing'

3.3 Percentage and reason(s) in teaching and learning 'listening'

3.4 Percentage and reason(s) in teaching and learning 'speaking'

Part 2 Foundation English Needs Analysis

1. Please put a tick (/) on the choice of your preferred English study.
(5 = I really want to study this very much.; 1 = I really don't want to study this.)

1.1 Reading Skills	5 😁	4 😄	3 🙂	2 😕	1 😖
Reading newspapers					
Reading magazines					
Reading academic journals					
Finding information on online media					
Reading for main idea					
Critical reading					
Reading and note-taking					
1.2 Writing Skills					
Paragraph writing					
Essay writing					
Academic report writing					
Abstract writing					
Referencing and citation					
Online creative writing					
Email and correspondence writing					
Writing to describe charts or graphs					
1.3 Listening and Speaking Skills					
Listening and note-taking					
Listening for main idea					
Listening for specific detail					
Listening and summarizing					
Communicative speaking					
Academic presentation					
Discussion and speaking to express opinions					
Public speaking					
Online communication					
1.4 Academic Skills					
Vocabulary skills and strategies					
Learning English through content learning					
Learning academic contents in English					
Plagiarism in academic English usage					
Internationalization					
Using technology in language learning					
Skill development for career					
Academic information access					

2. Do you have any other suggestions?