

STAKEHOLDERS' ASSESSMENT OF ANIMAL SCIENCE STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AT VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE

CÁC BÊN LIÊN QUAN ĐÁNH GIÁ VỀ NĂNG LỰC TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN NGÀNH CHĂN NUÔI HỌC VIỆN NÔNG NGHIỆP VIỆT NAM

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Abstract

English proficiency of students enrolled in Animal Science plays a very important role in the context of today's digital revolution. The author designed the study combining qualitative and quantitative research, investigating the stakeholders' assessment of English proficiency of Animal Science graduates at Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) through questionnaires and interviewing students, alumni, teachers and employers in Hanoi, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hoa Binh, Ha Nam, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Quang Ninh, Thai Binh, and Vinh Phuc. Based on the results, some suggestions are made for improving the quality of students in the institution to meet the requirements of the society in general and Animal Science in particular during the period of international and regional integration.

Key words: Animal Science, assessment, English, proficiency, stakeholders

1. Introduction

English proficiency of students in general and of students majoring in Animals Science at Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) in particular has a very important position, especially in the context of technology 4.0 and the current period of international and regional integration. According to Vietnam Ministry of Education's policy, one of the learning outcome standards of university students is that before graduating, students must get B1 level of Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), which means students 'can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.' In accordance with the university curriculum, students are required to learn 6 credits for General English (GE), namely English 1 (3 credits) & English 2 (3 credits) and two credits for English for Special Purposes (ESP). Then, after graduation, students have to join the labor market where they have to apply not only the major knowledge they learn at the university but also English in their job practice. It is the fact that those who can communicate well in English can get much more opportunities to get a better job and are much better-paid than those with poor English ability.

The actual purpose of this paper is to find out the current status of English proficiency of graduates majoring in Animal Science at VNUA and propose some suggestions to improve the quality of training Animal Science students to meet the increasing demands of society in

general and the Animal Science in particular in the period of international and regional integration.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aim, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i). How do the stakeholders assess Animal Science students' English proficiency at VNUA?
- (ii). What suggestions should be made to improve the quality of English teaching to Animal Science students at VNUA?

2. Literature review

VNUA' educational philosophy states that 'VNUA believes that TRAINING the mind for the creativity, PRACTICING skills for proficiency, NURTURING the thought for the nobility, and INSPIRING the will for excellence together will help students after graduation to become TALENT AGRICUTURISTS, who contribute to sustainable development and international integration of Vietnam's agriculture' (<https://eng.vnua.edu.vn/about-vnua/vision-missions-strategy>). According to VNUA regulations, the Animal Science program in general and English courses including GE courses and ESP course in particular must be designed and developed from an Outcome-based Education (OBE) perspectives. The Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs) reflect the requirements of the stakeholders (the government, the university, the faculty, the department, professional and social organizations, employers, lectures, students and alumni). The program is designed and developed with the participation of lecturers and students. All lecturers of the program and student representatives from different cohorts directly involved the program design and development process through the program improvement seminars held every four years and annual program feedback meetings. Employers, alumni, students, lecturers, department and faculty regularly make suggestions throughout the process of program design and development. The stakeholders' feedback on the program is periodically surveyed and analyzed, which is used to improve the program curriculum (annual minor improvement at course level and major improvement at the program level).

Therefore, it is really necessary to get the stakeholders' assessment of Animal Science students' English proficiency so that some suggestions could be made to improve the graduates' English capacity so as to better meet the labor market's requirements.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted with a combination of both qualitative research and quantitative research to investigate the current status of English capacity of Animal Science graduates at VNUA through a survey questionnaire and interviews with stakeholders including employers, scientists, lecturers, alumni and students who work and/or study at universities and enterprises in provinces such as Ha Noi, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hoa Binh, Ha Nam, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Quang Ninh, Thai Binh, and Vinh Phuc.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 15 employers of 15 companies working in the fields of Animal Science, 15 scientists working at 5 universities in the North of Vietnam, 20

lecturers working in 5 universities in the North of Vietnam, 25 alumni working in the field of Animal Science and 110 third-year students of the Faculty of Animals Science of VNUA. The questionnaire consists of two parts and one open-ended question which asks the stakeholders about their suggestions (if any) for changing the English program, coordination and others related to English language improvements. Part 1 of the survey contains 8 statements denoting graduates' English abilities with 5 levels of satisfaction such as 1. *Dissatisfied*, 2. *Temporarily satisfied*, 3. *Confused*, 4. *Satisfied*, and 5. *Very satisfied*; and Part 2 has 7 statements presenting requirements on graduates' English proficiency with the 5 levels of necessity: 1. *Unnecessary*, 2. *Low*, 3. *Medium*, 4. *High*, and 5. *Very high*. The contents of these 15 statements are in line with B1 level of CEFR and level 5/6 of Foreign Language Capacity Framework for Vietnam.

The interview consists of 3 open-ended questions to ask 20 stakeholders (3 employers, 3 scientists, 3 lecturers, 3 alumni and 8 students) about what they think about the duration, the content of the English program and whether they would like to add any elements. The interview questions are as follows: (i). Regarding the time duration (currently 6 credits for GE and 2 credits for ESP), how should you increase/ decrease? Why? (ii). Regarding the content of the English courses, which skill (listening/speaking/reading/writing) in GE and ESP should be increased/decreased? Why? And (iii). What does the program need to add?

4. Findings and Discussion

This part presents the findings from the questionnaires and the interview as well.

4.1. From Lecturers

The results of the open-ended question and the interview with 3 lecturers show that (i) It is necessary to increase the amount of General English learning as at present GE consists of 6 credits (90 credit hours), increase the amount of time teaching English for communication, listening and speaking skills, and ESP - English for Animal Science, add more lessons focusing on communicative activities with more interactions between the learners and the language users and need to coordinate companies and businesses to give students the opportunity to gain real-world experiences. (ii) The university should open short-term training courses for students to learn listening and speaking skills. (iii) It is necessary to diversify training programs by coordinating and linking with agencies, companies and universities at home and abroad.

Lecturers' assessments of the English proficiency of graduates majoring in Animals Science is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Lecturers' assessments of the English proficiency of Animal Science Graduates

No	Statements	Levels of satisfaction (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
I.	Status of English ability of students after graduation					

1	Can communicate (listen, speak) and exchange ideas in daily activities.	6.7	40	26.7	26.6	
2	Can read and understand daily news.	6.7	26.7	20	46.7	
3	Can write emails, text messages to customers, colleagues and leaders about the contents of work and life.	6.7	40	26.7	26.7	
4	Can read some ESP materials.	20.0	13.3	13.3	53.3	
5	Can give presentations in English at conferences and seminars.	20.0	13.3	40.0	20.0	6.7
6	Can listen and understand the main contents of reports and presentations at ESP conferences and seminars.	20.0	13.3	40.0	26.7	
7	Have skills in looking ESP vocabulary up in dictionary.		33.3	6.7	46.7	13.3
8	Can write emails, messages and replies to customers, and partners about the contents related to animals' industry.		26.7	20.0	53.3	
II.	Requirements on graduates' English proficiency	Levels of necessity (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Can listen and understand instructions, announcements in English and get main ideas of English programs.			33.3	53.3	13.3
2	Can express simple opinions on cultural issues, repeat the interlocutor's speech, or give specific instructions in English.			26.7	53.3	20.0
3	Can understand news, messages, emails, and letters in English from colleagues and friends.			20.0	60.0	20.0
4	Can write emails, letters, and messages in English on familiar topics.			20.0	66.7	13.3
5	Can use vocabulary and ESP terms, can read, look up and translate some ESP documents.		6.7	13.3	53.3	26.7
6	Can make presentations in English in conferences, seminars; can listen and understand main contents of the reports, presentations in ESP conferences.		6.7	20.0	60.0	13.3
7	Can write English letters to respond to customers, employers working in animal industry.		6.7	6.7	46.7	40.0

4.2. From Scientists

The results of the scientists' interview and their answer to the open-ended question indicate that the university should increase the amount of time for students to learn General English and ESP, improve English communication practice activities, and add more communication practice lessons for students. The university needs to diversify training programs by coordinating and linking with domestic and foreign agencies, companies, universities and institutions. Table 2 below demonstrates the scientists' assessments of the English proficiency of graduates majoring in Animals Science.

Table 2. Scientists' assessments of the English proficiency of Animal Science Graduates

No	Statements	Levels of satisfaction (%)
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		1	2	3	4	5
I.	Status of English ability of students after graduation					
1	Can communicate (listen, speak) and exchange ideas in daily activities.	6.7	33.3	26.7	33.3	
2	Can read and understand daily news.		40.0	26.7	33.3	
3	Can write emails, text messages to customers, colleagues and leaders about the contents of work and life.		53.3	20.0	26.7	
4	Can read some ESP materials.		33.3	40.0	26.7	
5	Can give presentations in English at conferences and seminars.	20.0	13.3	53.3	6.7	6.7
6	Can listen and understand the main contents of reports and presentations at ESP conferences and seminars.	20.0	33.3	33.3	13.3	
7	Have skills in looking ESP vocabulary up in dictionary.		40.0	20.0	33.3	6.7
8	Can write emails, messages and replies to customers, and partners about the contents related to animals' industry.		40.0	40.0	20.0	
II.	Requirements on graduates' English proficiency	Levels of necessity				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Can listen and understand instructions, announcements in English and get main ideas of English programs.		6.7	60.0	13.3	20.0
2	Can express simple opinions on cultural issues, repeat the interlocutor's speech, or give specific instructions in English.		13.3	33.3	33.3	20.0
3	Can understand news, messages, emails, and letters in English from colleagues and friends.		6.7	60.0	13.3	20.0
4	Can write emails, letters, and messages in English on familiar topics.			53.3	33.3	13.3
5	Can use vocabulary and ESP terms, can read, look up and translate some ESP documents.		13.3	40.0	33.3	6.7
6	Can make presentations in English in conferences, seminars; can listen and understand main contents of the reports, presentations in ESP conferences.		40.0	6.7	40.0	13.3
7	Can write English letters to respond to customers, employers working in animal industry.		13.3	46.7	26.7	13.3

4.3. From Employers

The results from the open-ended question and the interview with 3 employers show that the university should increase the amount of time studying General English and ESP, increase English communication practice activities, and add more communication practice lessons for students to interact with one another. The university needs to increase the number of practical English lessons and extra-curricular activities to help improve students' communication skills so that they can enhance their English skills, especially listening, speaking, communication skills, presentation skills in English. Table 3 below shows the employers' perceptions of the

current state of English proficiency of Animals Science graduates and their requirements for the graduates' English ability and suggestions for English training programs to improve students' English capacity.

Table 3. Employers' assessments of the English proficiency of Animal Science Graduates

No	Statements	Levels of satisfaction (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
I.	Status of English ability of students after graduation					
1	Can communicate (listen, speak) and exchange ideas in daily activities.	20.0	33.3	46.7		
2	Can read and understand daily news.	20.0	26.7	53.3		
3	Can write emails, text messages to customers, colleagues and leaders about the contents of work and life.	33.3	33.3	13.3	20.0	
4	Can read some ESP materials.	20.0	33.3	33.3	13.3	
5	Can give presentations in English at conferences and seminars.	53.3	13.3	26.7	6.7	
6	Can listen and understand the main contents of reports and presentations at ESP conferences and seminars.	26.7	33.3	40		
7	Have skills in looking ESP vocabulary up in dictionary.	20	40	26.7	13.3	
8	Can write emails, messages and replies to customers, and partners about the contents related to animals' industry.	26.7	40	20	13.3	
II.	Requirements on graduates' English proficiency	Levels of necessity (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Can listen and understand instructions, announcements in English and get main ideas of English programs.			26.7	73.3	
2	Can express simple opinions on cultural issues, repeat the interlocutor's speech, or give specific instructions in English.		6.7	33.3	60.0	
3	Can understand news, messages, emails, and letters in English from colleagues and friends.			26.7	53.3	20.0
4	Can write emails, letters, and messages in English on familiar topics.			26.7	60.0	13.3
5	Can use vocabulary and ESP terms, can read, look up and translate some ESP documents.			33.3	53.3	13.3
6	Can make presentations in English in conferences, seminars; can listen and understand main contents of the reports, presentations in ESP conferences.		20	46.7	13.3	20.0
7	Can write English letters to respond to customers, employers working in animal industry.			33.3	46.7	20

4.4. From alumni

Alumni are very important people who are both learning participants and those who experienced the outputs of a teaching and learning process in the university. Therefore, their voices are an important objective factor as they are insiders who have special knowledge and influence. Through their daily practice of using English in their job practice, these alumni know really well what their strengths and weaknesses are so that they can overcome them in the future.

The current situation of English proficiency of students majoring in Animal Science, requirements for English proficiency and proposals for English training programs to improve English proficiency of graduates on a scale of 1 to 5 are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Alumni's assessments of the English proficiency of Animal Science Graduates

No	Statements	Levels of satisfaction (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
I.	Status of English ability of students after graduation					
1	Can communicate (listen, speak) and exchange ideas in daily activities.	33.3	33.3	33.3		
2	Can read and understand daily news.	16.7	66.6	16.7		
3	Can write emails, text messages to customers, colleagues and leaders about the contents of work and life.	16.7	66.6	16.7		
4	Can read some ESP materials.	66.6	16.7	16.7		
5	Can give presentations in English at conferences and seminars.	33.3	50.0	16.7		
6	Can listen and understand the main contents of reports and presentations at ESP conferences and seminars.	50.0	50.0			
7	Have skills in looking ESP vocabulary up in dictionary.	33.3	16.7	33.3		16.7
8	Can write emails, messages and replies to customers, and partners about the contents related to animals' industry.	50.0		33.3		16.7
II.	Requirements on graduates' English proficiency	Levels of necessity (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Can listen and understand instructions, announcements in English and get main ideas of English programs.		66.7	16.6		16.7
2	Can express simple opinions on cultural issues, repeat the interlocutor's speech, or give specific instructions in English.		66.7	16.6		16.7
3	Can understand news, messages, emails, and letters in English from colleagues and friends.		33.3	33.3	16.7	16.7
4	Can write emails, letters, and messages in English on familiar topics.		33.3	50.0		16.7
5	Can use vocabulary and ESP terms, can read, look up and translate some ESP documents.		16.7	50.0	16.7	16.7

6	Can make presentations in English in conferences, seminars; can listen and understand main contents of the reports, presentations in ESP conferences.	33.3	33.3	16.7	16.7	
7	Can write English letters to respond to customers, employers working in animal industry.	33.3		33.3	16.7	16.7

4.5. From Students

Students' survey results have some differences. Table 5 below shows how the students majoring Animals Science at VNUA assess their English ability themselves and how they think of the requirements of English ability needed for their future job practice.

Table 4. Alumni's assessments of the English proficiency of Animal Science Graduates

No	Statements	Levels of satisfaction (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
I.	Status of English ability of students after graduation					
1	Can communicate (listen, speak) and exchange ideas in daily activities.		30.0	33.3	30.0	6.7
2	Can read and understand daily news.		23.3	30.0	33.3	10.3
3	Can write emails, text messages to customers, colleagues and leaders about the contents of work and life.		30.0	33.3	20.0	10.0
4	Can read some ESP materials.		30.0	16.7	26.7	26.7
5	Can give presentations in English at conferences and seminars.		30.0	36.7	26.7	6.7
6	Can listen and understand the main contents of reports and presentations at ESP conferences and seminars.		23.3	16.7	40.0	20.0
7	Have skills in looking ESP vocabulary up in dictionary.		10.0	23.3	50.0	16.7
8	Can write emails, messages and replies to customers, and partners about the contents related to animals' industry.		6.7	20.0	53.3	20.0
II.	Requirements on graduates' English proficiency	Levels of necessity				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Can listen and understand instructions, announcements in English and get main ideas of English programs.		6.7	33.3	30.0	30.0
2	Can express simple opinions on cultural issues, repeat the interlocutor's speech, or give specific instructions in English.			26.7	3.3	20.0
3	Can understand news, messages, emails, and letters in English from colleagues and friends.		3.3	13.3	63.3	20.0
4	Can write emails, letters, and messages in English on familiar topics.		3.3	10	56.7	30.0
5	Can use vocabulary and ESP terms, can read, look up and translate some ESP documents.		3.3	26.7	50.0	20.0

6	Can make presentations in English in conferences, seminars; can listen and understand main contents of the reports, presentations in ESP conferences.		10.0	20.0	36.7	33.3
7	Can write English letters to respond to customers, employers working in animal industry.		3.3	23.3	36.7	36.7

5. Conclusion and implication

After investigating the current state of the English proficiency of students majoring in Animal Science at VNUA through two research instruments such as a survey questionnaire and interviews, we found that Animals Science students are very interested in learning both GE and ESP, and most of the stakeholders such as the employers, scientists, teachers, and alumni have a similar view. By analyzing the similarities and differences between the answer options of the five above-mentioned groups, we believe that some points should be noted as follows.

Firstly, employers and alumni have a consensus on the foreign language proficiency of Animals Science students, more specifically, both of these two types of participants do not feel "very satisfied" about graduates' language proficiency. More exactly, no employer is "very satisfied" with the English ability of their staff, while 16.7% of alumni are 'very satisfied' with their ability to "have the skills to look up ESP documents in English" and "can write emails, messages and replies to customers and partners about knowledge concerning animal industry".

Meanwhile, up to 26.7% of undergraduates are 'very satisfied' with their ability "can read some ESP documents"; 20% are 'very satisfied' with their ability to "understand the main contents of reports and presentations in ESP seminars"; and 16.7% are 'very satisfied' that they have "skills to look up ESP documents in English". The difference in opinion is predictable, but the big difference in assessment of these two types of participants is one of the points to keep in mind. Students need more support in learning English, because their current capacity is not enough for employers to be satisfied, and this view is agreed by most of the animal industry's alumni. There is always a certain gap between learning in class and applying English in real life, and improving the quality of English teaching must be done quickly and fully in the coming time.

Secondly, in terms of awareness of the importance of skills required, employers and students have more similarities than alumni. More specifically, 73.3% of employers "highly require" students to understand the main ideas of English programs and announcements in English; 60% require students to express simple things in English; 60% require students to write emails, letters, messages in English; 53.3% of employers require students to use English for Special Purposes and understand English messages and emails. The corresponding figure for alumni is about 16.7% in most categories, and for students there is a difference. Only 30% said that listening to and understanding instructions and announcements in English was "very necessary", and 3.3% said that being able to express basic things in English was "very necessary". Maybe the undergraduates seem to disregard these seemingly simple requirements while the employers focus on more practical things, or things related to practicality.

Multi-dimensional analysis, meta-analysis will also reveal many differences in the views of students, alumni and employers about using English at work, and the important point is that from these results, the university, lecturers, and students need to make timely changes so that they can keep up with the requirements of their future jobs. That employers are satisfied with the qualifications of students admitted to work is what professionals always aim for.

Based on the above analysis, we make the following recommendations:

- **For the Department of Basic English, Faculty of Education & Foreign Languages and Faculty of Animal Science:**

It is necessary for the faculty to increase time duration for students to study General English and ESP.

The program needs to add a lot of communication activities, increase output requirements for graduates and organize more extra-curriculum activities, especially English-speaking clubs and/or English-speaking contest.

It is also very important for the faculty to diversify training programs by coordinating and linking with domestic and foreign agencies and universities.

- **For lecturers**

Lecturers should increase communication activities and interaction during class time.

Lecturers should increase the number of practical English lessons, extra-curricular activities, help improve students' communication ability.

Lecturers should focus on practicing English communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, and also presentation ability in English language.

- **For students**

Students need to increase self-study, and participate in general supplementary courses and English for Animal Science course.

Students should actively participate in extracurricular sessions, especially English-speaking clubs and English-speaking contests.

Students should practice lifelong learning.

Improving English ability for students majoring in Animal Science is one of the important tasks of teachers and students of the Vietnam National University of Agriculture. In order to be able to meet the output standards, students need to be more exposed to the actual English-using environment, reaching the B1 level or higher means having more opportunities for future development.

Among the required skills, ESP knowledge and skills should be strengthened and prioritized, because this is a specific area the graduates will have to use for the job practice in the competitive labor market. Knowledge of English for Animal Science will be an important key to help the students to be more successful in their career path after graduation.

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Tóm tắt

Năng lực tiếng Anh đối với sinh viên ngành Chăn nuôi có một vị trí rất quan trọng, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh cách mạng số hiện nay. Tác giả thiết kế nghiên cứu kết hợp giữa định tính và định lượng, để tìm hiểu thực trạng năng lực sử dụng tiếng Anh của sinh viên tốt nghiệp ngành Chăn nuôi tại Học viện nông nghiệp Việt Nam thông qua khảo sát (bảng hỏi) và phỏng vấn các bên liên quan bao gồm nhà tuyển dụng, nhà khoa học giảng viên, cựu sinh viên và sinh viên làm việc và học tập tại các Trường Đại học và doanh nghiệp thuộc các tỉnh thành: Hà Nội, Bắc Ninh, Bắc Giang, Hòa Bình, Hà Nam, Hải Dương, Hưng Yên, Quảng Ninh, Thái Bình, and Vĩnh Phúc. Từ đó tác giả đưa ra một số đề xuất nhằm nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo sinh viên ngành Chăn nuôi tại Học viện Nông nghiệp Việt Nam đáp ứng nhu cầu ngày càng cao của xã hội nói chung và của ngành Chăn nuôi nói riêng trong thời kỳ hội nhập quốc tế và khu vực.

Từ khóa: Chăn nuôi, đánh giá, tiếng Anh, năng lực, các bên liên quan