

Need analysis in Business English: Course instructor perspective in identifying students' needs

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Abstract:

As a result of free trade economy and efforts to become a member of European Union, English language need and use in Albania has been growing continuously and has become the main foreign language for communication not only at the international but also national level, through the use of various business documents, agreements, reports, etc., which have been extensively used by economics graduates in their daily work. Higher education institutions in general and English language teaching in the faculties of economics at universities should respond to and reflect changes that are taking place in Albanian society in order to ensure that graduates face workplace needs for language and communication. Revised syllabuses should put more emphasis on the new skills that current students of economics need in order to be integrated into the labour market.

Through semi-structured interviews administered to the course instructors teaching Business English (BE) to students of first year Bachelor at Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT), this study aims at identifying students' needs for language and communication through course instructor's perspective as well as some challenges faced in teaching Business English in Higher Education.

The findings of this study will be the first input to be considered in the design of the Business English Language Program at the Faculty of Economics at AUT. The outcome of the research provides course designers and language instructors with insights into business English teaching related issues and is an essential input in BE syllabus design.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Needs analysis, Business English, Syllabus design.

1. INTRODUCTION

Needs analysis is the starting point of every course and is of utmost importance for ESP course design. CEFR which is a very powerful document for language learning encourages the parties involved in language learning "to base their work on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of the students", and this means that they should answer these three questions:

"What will the learner need to do with language?", "what do students need to learn in order to be able to use the language to achieve these goals?" and "what do they want to learn?".

Many efforts made to increase workforce engagement in English are not coordinated with the education system, are not really in line with job requirements, and not enough in their objectives and the quality offered.

Hutchinson and Waters, two of the most prominent scholars in the field of ESP classify needs as necessities, wants and lacks (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), objective and subjective or process-oriented or product-oriented (Brindley, 1989); and perceived or felt (Berwick, 1989). However, Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John (1998, P. 123), further divided it into three larger categories: a target situation analysis (TSA, including objective, perceived and product-oriented needs); a learning situation analysis (LSA, including subjective, felt and process-oriented needs); and a present situation analysis (PSA, including learners' present levels of knowledge and skills).

Needs analysis conducted at the beginning of a course helps course instructors in setting teaching goals, developing teaching content and materials, and exploring approaches of

teaching and learning. Besides, it is a learner-centred approach, which is believed to stimulate learners' interest of learning to a large extent and show respect to the active role of learners in processes of learning. Furthermore, courses which are based on the findings of pre-course needs analysis will surely meet the needs of both language learners and employers.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the aim of this study which is examining the present and future situation needs for language and communication of students studying Business English at AUT as well as identifying challenges in teaching ESP in Higher Education, a semi-structured interview has been used as the main instrument. The interview was adapted from the Professional Profile of Common European Framework and based on the model of Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) on Need analysis. This model is considered as the most comprehensive model for the study of needs in ESP. The model focuses on:

- a. professional information on students (tasks and activities during which students will use English, language analysis of the target situation (TSA) and the objective needs);
- b. personal information about students (overall student profile, previous experience of learning the language)(in this case the information is about the course instructor);
- c. language information on students about the target situation(what are their current skills and the use of language);
- d. students' "lacks"(the gap between (C) and (A));
- e. students' needs from the course (effective ways to learning skills and language);
- f. the language learning needs (knowledge on how language and skills are used in targeted situations, linguistic analysis, discourse analysis and genre analysis);

- g. information on communication in the target situation (students' needs from the course, what is required from the course), and
- h. the information on learning environment (condition of the learning environment, information about the setting in which the course will run- means analysis).

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Instructors' perception of students' needs for English language skills and sub-skills

a) General information on the participants

Four women course instructors who teach ESP at English department in AUT participated in the interview, of which two belong to 35-45 age group and the other two to 45-55 age group. Regarding the professional qualifications, one course instructor holds the Master degree and the other three hold a PhD mainly in Linguistics. The participants in the study have all been teaching for more than 10 years. Furthermore, they declared to have “very good” knowledge in linguistics and terminology.

b) Trainings received in the framework of teaching for specific purposes

Regarding English-language training for specific purposes, a lecturer said to have had the opportunity to study ESP during masters and doctoral studies and training abroad, while the other three during doctoral studies within the country.

c) Conducting analysis of students' needs for language and communication

When asked whether they conducted a need analysis of language skills students wanted to obtain in business English communication, all the lecturers stated that they did not perform such a study.

d) Opinion on the textbooks used in the department.

Two lecturers stated that the textbooks approved by the department in teaching BE were “good” and two others rated them as “rather good”.

e) Using audio-visual aids in teaching BE.

When asked about the frequency of the use of audio-visual aids in teaching BE, all the four lecturers declared that they were rarely used in classroom practise due to the fact that there is a lack of audio-visual aids in general and the few available were broken and there was no suitable teaching environment.

f) Using authentic teaching material to boost communication.

Lecturers stated that they rarely used authentic teaching material. Detailed reasons have been given in the last section of the interview where they talk about problems faced in teaching BE.

g) Students' engagement in pair and group work.

Students' engagement in pair and group work was rated as “rather good” from two lecturers and very good from the other two.

h) Methodology used in teaching BE.

Asked about the teaching methodology used in class among four options: a) form (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.), b) function (communicative acts), c) discourse / discourse, and d) sociolinguistics, social interaction, respondents answered that they mostly use the first, the form where the focus is on vocabulary, pronunciation, translation and grammar.

3.2. Students' need for English language skills and sub-skills

a) Perceptions of lecturers on the importance of skills

Table 1: Perceptions of lecturers on the importance of skills

Skills	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Listening	100%	0%	0%	0%
Speaking	100%	0%	0%	0%
Reading	100%	0%	0%	0%
Writing	100%	0%	0%	0%
Interacting	100%	0%	0%	0%

As the table clearly shows, all the five skills of English language listed have been considered as “Very important” for the students by the lecturers.

b) Lecturer's perception on the importance of listening sub-skills.

Table 2: Lecturer's perception on the importance of listening sub-skills

Listening	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Listening to presentations and discussions.	50%	50%	0%	0%
Listening to instructions	50%	50%	0%	0%
Listening to descriptions and explanations.	50%	50%	0%	0%
Participating in training	100%	0%	0%	0%

c) Lecturer's perception on the importance of speaking sub-skills

Table 3: Lecturer's perception on the importance of speaking sub-skills

Speaking	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Making a formal presentation	100%	0%	0%	0%
Making an informal presentation	100%	0%	0%	0%
In giving instructions and demonstrating a task.	100%	0%	0%	0%
In describing and explaining	100%	0%	0%	0%

d) Lecturer's perception on the importance of reading sub-skills

Table 4: Lecturer's perception on the importance of reading sub-skills

Reading	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos and short reports for details	100%	0%	0%	0%
Reading fast for general information in magazines and professional texts	100%	0%	0%	0%
Reading for special details in analysis of long reports, agreements and legal documents as well as specific technical manuals.	100%	0%	0%	0%

e) Lecturer's perception on the importance of writing sub-skills

Table 5: Lecturer's perception on the importance of writing sub-skills

Writing	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Writing e-mails	100%	0%	0%	0%
Writing letters and faxes	100%	0%	0%	0%
Writing long reports and articles	50%	50%	0%	0%
Editing letters and reports of others	50%	50%	0%	0%

f) Lecturer's perception on the importance of interacting sub-skills

Table 6: Lecturer's perception on the importance of interacting sub-skills

Interacting	Very necessary	Averagely necessary	A little necessary	Not at all necessary
Receiving visitors	100%	0%	0%	0%
Visiting another company	100%	0%	0%	0%
Participating in discussions and informal meeting	100%	0%	0%	0%
Participating in formal meeting	100%	0%	0%	0%
Chairing meetings	50%	50%	0%	0%
Interviewing	50%	50%	0%	0%
Negotiating	50%	50%	0%	0%
Telephoning	100%	0%	0%	0%

According to lecturers' perceptions, language skills and sub-skills result in most of them as "very necessary" for future use by the students. The exception is in sub-listening skills in

listening presentations, discussions, listening to instructions, and descriptions and explanations where lecturers are divided by 50% between the two options as “ very necessary ” and "averagely necessary". Likewise, in some of the sub-skills of writing and interaction we have a 50% split between the two above mentioned estimates. It is important to point out that the lecturers have not rated any skills or sub-skills as "a little necessary" or "not at all necessary".

3.3. Communication situations during Business English classes

In this part of the interview, the lecturers were expressed about the frequency of using the tasks and activities to help increase student communication skills, skills that might be needed for future use.

Table 7: Frequency of using tasks and activities in class

Communicative situation	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Simulation of introducing the company to clients	0%	25%	75%	0%
Simulation of introducing a product or a service to clients	0%	25%	75%	0%
Simulation of chairing and participating in a meeting as well as negotiating with clients	0%	0%	0%	100%
Conversation with colleagues over various aspects of economics (different fields, services, company activities)	0%	50%	50%	0%
Simulation of telephoning (requesting information, reporting analysis, giving feedback, making appointments, etc.)	0%	0%	50%	50%
Socialising in business talks: small talk in business fairs, before the meeting/interview/negotiations	0%	0%	50%	50%
Writing enquiries/requests/complaints.	0%	50%	50%	0%
Reading and understanding reports, web pages texts on marketing etc., for professional purposes.	0%	50%	50%	0%
Translation of business texts	0%	100%	0%	0%
Writing reports and memos	0%	0%	0%	100%
Writing instructions	0%	0%	100%	0%
Filling in a job application form /cv	0%	50%	50%	0%
Other, specify				

While there is none of the above mentioned communication situations used “very frequently” in class, translating business texts happens “frequently” during Business English classes declared with 100% from lecturers. In the column of activities and tasks performed “sometimes” the highest percentage goes for tasks related to writing instructions and simulation of introducing the company to clients/simulation of introducing a product or a service to clients with 100% and 75 % respectively. On the other hand, simulation of chairing and participating in a meeting, negotiating with clients and writing reports and memos are some of the situations about which no tasks and activities are performed in class in order to develop the skills related to them, rated with 100% in “never” column. It can be noticed that the column of “sometimes” has the highest percentage in choice with 50 %, which means that the majority of tasks and activities aimed at developing skills in the above mentioned communication situations happen “sometimes”.

3.4. Perceptions on theory and practice of Business English teaching.

This part of the interview with lecturers points out their beliefs in relation to general theoretic concepts in teaching BE as branch of ESP.

Table 8: Perceptions on theory and practice of Business English teaching

Issue	Totally agree	Agree	Do not agree	Totally disagree
BE uses a learner centred approach	100%	0%	0%	0%
BE is all about teaching Business terminology	0%	0%	100%	0%
BE does not teach grammar	0%	0%	100%	0%
BE gives little importance to reading and writing	0%	0%	0%	100%
BE should teach Academic English	0%	100%	0%	0%
BE should teach English for employment purposes	0%	100%	0%	0%
BE should teach both English for employment and Academic purposes	100%	0%	0%	0%

As can be seen from the table, there are no differences in the concepts among the lecturers. They are of the opinion that BE uses student-centred approaches. They further argue that they do not agree that the BE focuses only on teaching business terminology and with the statement that it does not teach grammar. Regarding the assertion whether BE should teach English for Academic Purposes or English for Employment Purposes, the lecturers expressed that they strongly agree to have a combination of both.

3.5. Problems encountered in English Business teaching at AUT.

The following table summarizes the problems and difficulties faced by lecturers in BE teaching, which in their view hinder the success of the learning process by not providing the best opportunities for students' skill development in the use of Business English .

Table 9: Problems encountered in Business English teaching at AUT.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. English for Business Purposes requires knowledge about key concepts in the field of economics, in many cases we are both language teachers and students in the field of economics.2. Since AQS requires the use of authentic materials, it takes a lot of time to find, adapt and use them in the classroom.3. Given that BE is a relatively new field in foreign language teaching, a lot of training is needed, which are rare in Albania and training abroad is unaffordable.4. Education institutions do not fund research in this area and needs analysis is one segment in ESP that needs researching.5. Many of the tasks aimed at developing students' communication skills are based on pair or group work, but students are reluctant to participate actively.6. The course takes place during the first 2 semesters of bachelor studies, and the students do not even have the basic knowledge of their core subjects, so the lecturer in many cases should explain the concepts of economics together with the specific terminology. It would be good to run the course in the third year of bachelor or master studies.7. There are shortcomings in audio-visual equipment and special facilities to run the class. The use of audio-visual equipment is important because BE uses podcasts and movie portals taken from real-life workplaces in order to expose the student to authentic language used in the workplace, etc., as well as to practice the skills of listening and speaking.8. Compulsory textbooks do not develop students' communication skills. They are mainly focused on the form in which the dictionary, pronunciation, translation, etc. are disclosed and not in function where the student performs tasks that will be needed in the future.9. According to the subject program, the final assessment of the students is in writing. At the same time intermediate tests are required by the department to be made in writing as a more evident form of student assessment. In written exams, it is almost impossible to evaluate communicative speech and student interaction skills.10. Classes have a high number of students and consequently it is difficult to apply teaching with |
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communication goals.

11. Number of classes available are not sufficient and short, leaving no time for practice.

12. Too many teaching hours for lecturers, sometimes 100% overload, causes fatigue and stress that are reflected in low performance in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

The semi-structured interview provided some important data on the students' needs for language and communication in Business English from the perception of the lecturers who teach Business English. They stated to have very good knowledge of language for specific purposes in terms of language content. This is a very positive indicator as one of the obstacles in teaching ESP relates to the aspect of knowledge of the field, in our case the economic one. Studies show that one of the question marks in teaching English for specific purposes was whether to be provided by a field specialist with good language skills or a language teacher with good knowledge of the field. While language learning is concerned, the second variant is most appropriate by highlighting the good knowledge of the field for language lecturers. Furthermore, in relation to theoretical concepts, the lecturers possess substantial knowledge emphasizing that BE teaching is a student-centred approach and that they disagree that the BE focuses only on teaching business terminology and also with the statement that it does not teach grammar. Regarding the assertion whether BE should teach Academic English or English for Employment Purposes, the lecturers expressed that they strongly agree for a combination of both.

In addition, the analysis of students language needs as a first step in the course design has been never carried out by any of the lecturers. Lecturers mention the fact that some sort of analysis can be called in our case the entry test, where the main and only goal is to determine the level of knowledge of the foreign language that students possess at the beginning of the course to divide them into groups If necessary by level.

The lecturers praised the textbooks as "good" and argued that audio-visual aids are rarely used in classrooms because university does not provide them.

In relation to teaching methodology, the lecturers stated that they focused more on the approach of the form where the focus is on working with vocabulary, pronunciation, translation, and grammar.

Regarding the students' needs for specific language skills in the future, the lecturers say that the fifth skills are very much needed. Likewise, we have the same rating for sub-skills, except for some listening sub- skills in listening to presentations, discussions, listening to instructions, and following descriptions and explanations where the lecturers are divided by 50% between the two options as " very necessary" and "averagely necessary ".

With regard to the most common classroom practices within the ESP teaching, the lecturers stated that translation of business texts is "often" encountered in BE classes with 100% estimated by the lecturers. In the column of activity and task assessments that apply "sometimes" the highest values pertain to tasks related to writing guidelines and simulating the presentation of a client company / simulating the presentation of a product or service to clients. On the other hand, the simulation of participating and chairing meetings as well as negotiating with clients and writing reports and memos are two situations where classroom tasks and activities do not apply to developing these skills, thus reaching 100% In the "never" column and most of the tasks and skills development activities in the above-mentioned communication situations occur "sometimes".

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