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Research Article

Investigating Student's Needs for English Language as Foundations for Syllabus Design

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Abstract

Efforts to integrate into the European Union and a rapid economic growth in Albania have led to the growing prevalence of English language, which has become the leading foreign language for communication between experts not only at the international but also national level, as various business documents, contracts, reports, etc., have been widely used by graduates in the field of economics in their daily work. Thus, English language teaching in universities should reflect these changes that are taking place extensively in Albanian society. New syllabuses should put more emphasis on the new skills that current students of economics need to be integrated into the labour market. Through semi-structured questionnaires administered to 420 students of the first year studying Business English at the Faculty of Economics and Agribussines, Agricultural University of Tirana, this study aims at identifying their needs for language and communication for future use either for employment or further education purposes. Program design and course development of Business English needs to respond to future student needs for future employment or study purposes. In general, needs analysis plays a key role and is the first step in the process of drafting each subject in the English Language for Specific Purposes, a course characterized by the student centered approach. The results of this study will serve as input to be taken into account for the design of the Business English course at the Faculty of Economics at AUT. The analysis of the research data has provided teachers insights into business English teaching related issues and an essential input in BE syllabus design.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Needs analysis, Target situation analysis, Learning situation analysis, Present situation analysis

1. Introduction

Needs analysis is the starting point of every course and is of utmost importance for ESP course design. CEFR 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 does 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 (CEFR, 2001).

Needs are classified 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, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), 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 before a course works for teachers in setting teaching goals, selecting teaching content and materials, and exploring approaches of teaching and learning. Besides, it is a learner-centered 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 and Objective of the Study

This study aims at examining the TSA, LSA and PSA of students studiying Business English at Agricultural University of Tirana, Albania. Questionnaire is to be used as a major instrument for collecting the data from 420 student from faculty of Economics and Agri-bussines. The questionnaire was based on the model of Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) on need analysis.

This model can be seen as the most comprehensive model for the study of ESP needs. This 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);
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).

The paper aims at answering the following questions:

Research question no. 1: What is the current level of language skills and communication skills in the English language of students at the Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness at the Agricultural University of Tirana?

Research question No. 2: What are the learning difficulties, teaching aids and language learning facilities for these students?

Research question no. 3: What are the intended perceived needs for future communication for academic reasons or employment of students at the Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness at the Agricultural University of Tirana?

3. Findings

Firstly, the questionnaire collected information on students participating in the study. The data, which are largely quantitative, are related to the gender of the participants, the languages studied and the years for each language, the perceived or certified level for each language studied. Further the practices of communicative situations in the classroom, and the perceptions of the students concerned with their language needs in the future for study or employment purposes have been described in details. Below are the relevant tables.

3.1 Students participating in the study

The study included 420 students, of whom 144 were boys, 275 girls and 1 unspecified person for gender.

Table 1: Gender of the students.

Gender	Boys	Girls	Undetermined	Total
No. of students	144	275	1	420

All students of the first year of the FEA at AUT participated in the study, where there is a nearly double the presence of girls versus boys.

3.2 Foreign language studied

Regarding foreign languages studied during university studies, 420 stated that they studied English. Further, from these 420 students, 180 students studied Italian, 78 French, 42 German, 30 Turkish, 18 Spanish, 6 Macedonian, 6 Greek and 6 Arabic as second and third foreign languages

Table 2: Number of students and foreign language studied

Language	English	Italian	French	German	Turkish	Spanish	Macedonian	Arabic	Greek
No of student	420	168	78	42	30	18	6	6	6

As noted from the table, all students studied English during their pre-university education. This was an expected result since for years the English language is a compulsory subject in the curricula of pre-university education, mainly starting from the third grade as well as compulsory state matura exam.

3.3 Years of studying each foreign language

Table 3: Number of students and years of studying foreign languages.

No of years / Language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
English			30	24	18	6	24	72	48	114	54	18	12	420
Italian	60	30	42	18	6	6				6				168
French	12	18		6	36			6						78
German		24		12	6									42
Turkish	6	6	18											30
Spanish	6	12												18
Macedonian	3	3												6
Arabic	6													6
Greek	6													6

The study found out that the largest groups in the study related to the number of years were 10 years of study with 114 students, 8 years with 72 students and 11 years with 54 students. These data go in line with the fact that in most of the pre-university education schools English language teaching begins in the third grade of the lower cycle as mentioned above.

3.4 Level of proficiency in foreign languages

Data from student' responses revealed that most of them result in a level of knowledge of English B2 according to CEFR, and only 12 students with A1-A2 levels. This means, in other words, that students claim to stay above the average level of knowledge. This is an important factor in language learning for specific purposes as, as mentioned earlier in this study, students should be of advanced age and with good prior knowledge of English for general purposes, preferably at the level of Independent language user (B1-B2).

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Table 4: Level of proficiency in foreign languages, CEFR.

Language level / Language	A1-A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total
English	12	101	240	57	10	420
Italian	66	66	24			156
French	42	18	12			72
German	30	6	6			42
Turkish	6	6	18			30
Spanish		12				12
Macedonian			6			6
Arabic	6					6
Greek	6					6

Not all students determined the level of knowledge regarding the third foreign language. A high level of Macedonian language is noticed compared to the years of study (1-2 years). These students belong to minority group who consider the Macedonian language as their mother tongue.

3.5 Perceived importance of English language.

Student perception about the importance of English language is fundamental to the study as they indirectly point out their motivation for language learning but at the same time their interest in contributing valuable data to the study.

Table 5: Students' perception on the importance of English language in the future.

Very important	Averagely important	A little important	Not at all important	Total
412	8	0	0	420

The data show that almost all students are of the opinion that English is very important for future ambitions.

3.6 The intended use of English language in the future

In this part of the questionnaire, the students declared the purpose of using the language in the future. Identifying the purpose is a step closer to the needs and as such is important in defining the objectives in language teaching as well as the definition of language tasks. Students were asked to circle all possible options and add if there were any other options unlisted questionnaires they might add.

Table 6: The purpose of using the language in the future

Purpose of study	Percentage of students
For employment in the country	100%
For employment opportunities abroad	100%
To study abroad	89%
To study literature	87%
To travel	62%
Other reasons, specify	0%

Responses indicate that there are two purposes with the same answer value (100%), that of employment both at home and / or abroad, followed by study opportunities abroad.

3.7 Need for English language measured in skills

Table 7: Perceived need for skills

Language skill	Necessary	Moderate	Little Necessary	Not Necessary
Listening	6%	92%	2%	0%
Speaking	76%	24%	0%	0%
Reading	35%	64%	1%	0%
Writing	21%	63%	16%	0%
Interacting	44%	51%	5%	0%

The questionnaire data revealed that students consider speaking skill necessary with the highest of 76% and the writing as litle needed with 16%. Further, listening, reading, writing and interacting skills were considered on average with 92 %, 64%, 63% and 51% respectively.

3.8 Difficulties in using sub-skills

3.8.1 Students' difficulties in listening

Table 8: Students' difficulties in listening.

Sub-skills	A lot	Averagely	A little	Not at all
Listening to presentations, discussions	0%	2%	84%	14%
Listening the instructions	0%	4%	86%	10%
Following the descriptions and explanations	0%	0%	84%	16%
Participating in trainings	0%	2%	82%	10%

Difficulty in listening by sub-skills results to be low for students, presenting a value of 0 in the "very difficult" evaluation. The sub-skill rated as "not at all difficult" with the highest value of (16%) is following descriptions and explanations. Meanwhile, the highest value in the "a little difficult" column results in listening to instructions.

3.8.2 Students' difficulties in speaking

Table 9: Students' difficulties in speaking

Sub-skills	A lot	Averagely	A little	Not at all
Speaking in a formal presentation	13%	64%	21%	2%
Speaking in an informal presentation	11%	59%	25%	5%
Providing instructions or demonstrating a task	9%	66%	21%	4%
Describing and giving explanations	7%	62%	24%	7%

Unlike listening sub- skills where students expressed in higher values as "less difficult", the sub-skills of speaking have a shift of values to the "moderately difficult" column. From the listed sub-skills, students say they encounter difficulties in holding a formal presentation with the highest value in the column (13%). While in the column "not at all difficult" describing and giving explanation reaches the highest value by considering it as easy from the listed sub-skills.

3.8.3 Students' difficulties in reading

Table 10: Students' difficulties in reading

Sub-skills	A lot	Averagely	A little	Not at all
Reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos and brief reports in detail	0%	14%	23%	63%
Reading fast for general information in magazines and professional texts.	6%	24%	21%	49%
Analysis for specific points in long reports, contracts and legal documents as well as technical and specific manuals.	5%	32%	46%	17%

Reading sub-skills have been generally regarded as "not at all difficult" for students except for analysis of particular points in long reports, contracts and legal documents, technical and specific manuals which are assessed as "a little difficult" with 46%. E-mails, letters, faxes, memos and short reports are not considered "difficult" by any student.

3.8.4 Students' difficulties in using writing sub-skills

Sub-writing skills are considered "moderately difficult" and " difficult". Editing letters and reports of others and writing long reports and articles are considered the most difficult with 63% and 62%

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respectively . Only 3% and 2% of students have considered writing e-mails and writing letters and faxes as not at all difficult. These sub-skills also have the highest values as "moderately difficult" with 51% and 56%.

Table 11: Students' difficulties in using writing

Sub-skills	A lot	Averagely	A little	Not at all
Writing e-mails	19%	51%	27%	3%
Writing letters and faxes	23%	56%	19%	2%
Writing long reports and articles	62%	25%	13%	0%
Editing letters and reports of others	63%	28%	9%	0%

3.8.5 Students' difficulties in interacting

Table 12: Students' difficulties in interacting

Sub-skills	A lot	Averagely	A little	Not at all
Receiving visitors	0%	39%	46%	15%
Visiting a company	4%	33%	45%	18%
Participating in discussions and informal meetings	2%	29%	58%	11%
Participating in formal meetings	5%	44%	41%	10%
Chairing meetings	22%	43%	33%	2%
Interviewing	12%	54%	20%	14%
Conducting negotiations	44%	39%	17%	0%
Making calls	3%	42%	33%	22%

The evaluation of interacting sub-skills results mainly with "average" and "less difficult" values. Negotiating has a higher percentage (44%) being considered as the most difficult interacting sub-skill and at the same time reaching a minimum of 0% where no student has considered it difficult at all. Also, receiving visitors was assessed at 0% where none of the students said it was too difficult.

3.9 Communicative situations during Business English classes

Table 13: Frequency of use of communicative situations and teaching tools in the classroom

Communicative situation	Very frequent	Frequent	Sometimes	Never
Simulation of company presentation to clients	0%	0%	82%	18%
Simulation of presenting a product or service to clients	0 %	0%	81	19
Simulation of participation and chairing meetings as well as negotiating with clients	0 %	0 %	0 %	100%
Discussion on various topics on aspects of the economics (marketing, accounting, services, policies)	0%	34%	54%	12%
Simulation of telephoning (search for information, analysis report, feedbreak, fixing a date, etc.)	0%	0%	25%	75%
Interview simulation	0%	0%	16%	84%
Conducting written inquiries / requests / complaints	0%	0%	12%	88%
Text translation	84%	16%	0%	0%
Summary of the text	77%	23%	0%	0%
Doing class tasks with matching / filling in / options, etc.	90%	10%	0%	0%
Reading compulsory text	90%	10%	0%	0%
Reading and understanding articles, websites.	0%	0%	74%	26%
Writing reports and memos	0%	0%	0%	100%
Writing instructions	0%	0%	0%	100%
Filling in an application form and / or CV	0%	0%	65%	35%
Using Audio and / or video in the field of economics	0%	0%	71%	29%
Authentic texts taken from real life in the context of work	0%	0%	35%	65%

It is evident from the data that speaking and writing communication situations are almost never or rarely encountered in teaching activities. Meanwhile, most frequent are the reading of the text, its summary, the translation and doing class tasks with matching / filling in / options, etc.which mainly

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check the vocabulary with 90%, 77%, 84% and 90 respectively. It is clear that teaching focuses mainly on form (ie grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and not on functions (ie, communication acts). Also the writing sub-skill of communication situations of writing reports, memos, and instructions is never encountered during the teaching activity.

3.10 Need for future communication (analysis of target situation)

Table 14: Students perception on the needs for future communication.

Communicative situation	Necessary	Average	Little necessary	Not at all necessary
Presenting the company to clients	55%	30%	15%	0%
Introducing a product or service to clients	51%	33%	16%	0%
Taking part and conducting meetings as well as negotiating with clients	42%	44%	14%	0%
Conversation with colleagues on different aspects of the economics field (various areas, services, company actions)	56%	41%	3%	0%
Telephoning (search for information, report analysis, feedback, fixing appointments, etc.)	66%	34%	0%	0%
Socializing in Business Situations: small talk in business fair, before meetings / Interview / negotiations	57%	37%	6%	0%
Conducting written inquiries / requests / complaints	15%	60%	25%	0%
Reading and understanding articles, web pages	20%	47%	33%	0%
Text translation	12%	36%	52%	0%
Writing reports and memos	2%	45%	53%	0%
Writing instructions	3%	45%	52%	0%
Filling in an application form and / or CV	30%	58%	12%	0%

Students considered "neecessary" communication situations involving sub-skills of speaking, as "averagely necessary" situations that include reading sub- skills and as "little necessary" writing sub- skills. None of the communication situations has been considered as " not at all necessary "

3.11 Selecting three situations for immediate improvement.

At this point in the questionnaire, students were asked to determine the three situations they would like to improve as quickly as possible keeping in mind a target situation where they would use the language.

Table 15: Situations selected for immediate improvement

No	Communication situation	Percentage of students
1	Chairing and participating meetings as well as negotiations with clients	50%
2	Presentation of the company to the clients	46%
3	Writing reports and memos	17%
4	Conversation with colleagues on different aspects of the economics (various areas, services, company actions)	16%
5	Introducing a product or service to customers	15%
6.	Socializing in business situations: small talk in business fairs, before the meeting / interview / negotiations	12%
7.	Doing written inquiries / requests / complaints	10%
8	Telephoning (search for information, report analysis, feedback, leaving appointments, etc.)	9%
9	Writing instructions	9%
10.	Filling in an application form and / or CV	6%
11	Reading and understanding articles, web pages, marketing texts etc, for professional purposes	3%

Data on communicative situations that students think they need to improve quickly show almost the same value with the perceived situations as needed in the future. Thus, 50% and 46% of students said they needed to improve their skills in situations where chairing and participation of meetings, customer negotiations and the presentation of the company to clients were required. The largest number of communication situations is related to speaking and interaction skills, while on the other hand the least selected number of situations for improvement is that of reading and writing.

3.12 Expectations from Business English course.

Table 16: Students expectations from BE course

Expectation	% of students
To understand Business English terminology	53%
To gain the best communication skills	32%
To improve the spoken skills	30%
To understand conversation of people working in the field of economics	6%
To read professional articles and give feedback	6%
To face work situations in the future	6%
To improve essay writing	5%
To improve memos writing	4%
To improve communication in everyday life	2%
To have better knowledge in grammar	1%
To get a high mark	1%

It is noticed from the responses that more than half of the students state that the main expectations from the course are the acquisition of Business English terminology. These data contradict the student's thinking about the situations needed for the future where they declare that communication situations are more important and useful for employment or study opportunities. Consequently, these expectations from the course are due to the classroom practice which, as noted above, consists mainly of translation and reading. At the end of the list of expectations are improving the knowledge in grammar and obtaining a higher mark with 1% of the students expressed with this option.

3.13 Duration of the course

Scheduling classes for the course is important. Students have BE 2 classes (60 minutes) a week with a total of 60 classes per academic year. Students were asked if these classes were enough, less than what they needed or more.From the answers provided, 222 students said that 2 classes of 60 minutes per week were sufficient. 198 of them declared that it was not enough and among them 110 think that 4 classes would be needed and 80 would think 3 classes a week would be appropriate.

Table 17: Students' suggestions for the course

I would like to learn new words about economics.
Special English language used for management and banks.
We need to learn more about professional terminology.
It is necessary in some classes to read financial papers, because they are difficult to understand.
To develop our speaking skills by practicing with English speaking people, perhaps by communicating with proffesionals from foreign companies and banks.
It would be good to communicate with proffesionals or students from other universities. But to do this we need to do more interacting.
ESS should not be boring and full of terminology. It is necessary to include some reading assignments, movies and projects. I think these things will develop students' skill more.
The instructor should help students correct their mistakes in grammar and pronunciation.
I know that learning languages without grammar is impossible, but for me, if I can speak fluently, it is more useful in life.
More role play, group work - this is useful to develop our speaking skills.
More group work, conversations, discussions.
There may be short presentations prepared by students to develop communication skills, research and presentation skills. This will help us in our future work and when we write the diploma thesis.
We need more AB, at least 3 hours a week.
If the time is good, can we have classes outside?

4. Conclusion

Based on the research questions set out earlier in this paper, this study came to the following conclusions:

4.1 Students' current and perceived need for communication in English language .

Students at the Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness at the Agricultural University of Tirana consider the BE subject very important in meeting their needs. Since their level of knowledge is average, their needs for language are toward skills which enable them to increase the competence of communication in the language. They stated that the main purpose for studying BE was for further studies and employment abroad. The study highlighted a greater tendency for languages for professional communication aimed at employement purposes rather than English language for academic purposes in student needs.

4.2 Perceived target needs for future communication.

Of the five language skills, students appreciated the need for speaking skills and the ability to write in the future. Meanwhile listening, reading, writing and interacting were considered as needed on average. In relation to communication situations, tasks such as: telephoning (requesting information, report analysis, feedback, etc.), socialization in business situations (small talk at business fairs, before the meeting / interviewing / negotiating) etc., are "necessary", while situations involving sub-skills of reading are considered as "averagely necessary" and the sub-writing skills were determined as "a little necessary" The largest number of communication situations required for improvement is related to speech and interaction skills, while on the other hand, the least selected number of situations for improvement is that of reading and writing.

4.3 Difficulties in learning, teaching aids and learning environments.

Students encounter average difficulty in using writing, speaking and interacting skills, while reading and listening are considered to be a bit difficult. Using writing skills is considered to be very difficult. ESP language teaching practices in class are not conducted by having the student centered and continue in the traditional teaching approach of form and vocabulary and not into functions, the student's tasks, and goals for learning a foreign language. Thus, from the communication skills of the language, the data clearly show that communicative speech and writing situations are rarely encountered or never in the teaching activities. Meanwhile, the highest values with greater frequency are exercises that mostly check vocabulary.

The audio-visual aids are not used in the classroom neither are additional authentic teaching materials while classes focus on basic compulsory texts and accompanying grammar that are prepared for non-native speakers.

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