

## ESP Teaching and Needs Analysis. Case Study

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the characteristics of the English language for Specific Purposes (ESP), the difficulties and challenges faced when teaching English as a foreign language, and the importance of Needs Analysis in learning a foreign language. For this purpose, we applied a questionnaire to a group of intermediate level (B1) students, majoring in Tourism. The needs analysis revealed the approaches and activities that should be applied in different types of lessons, thus giving the students the opportunity to improve their English skills and find out what they lack and need when studying English for their future professional careers. The results outlined the need for concrete activities and strategies, with the focus on communicative skills, based on learner-centered approaches and activities, real-life situations by using authentic materials that are efficient for the students' better integration into the Tourism labor market.*

**Key words:** ESP, Needs Analysis, tourism, skills

**J.E.L. classification:** K00

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, English is being spoken all over the world almost on a daily basis, thus, being considered a universal, international language or a *lingua franca*. People need it for various purposes, hence its consolidated dominance as the language of the Internet, with huge amounts of data electronically stored in English. English and globalization have spread hand in hand through the world and this process started with the dominance of two successive English-speaking empires, British and American, and continues today with the new virtual empire of the Internet. Most of our society has become computer addicted for different reasons ranging from data bases to entertainment, job-related subjects, the media, i.e. television channels, radio, movies. English has invaded the workplace along with the global economy. Exchanges and interactions among people and peoples are increasing the need for both general English, and an extensive English vocabulary in various scientific, technological, medical, judicial, political, social fields (some of these issues related to the internationalization of the English language and ESP teaching are debated by many scholars such as Day and Krzanowski, 2012; Ananyeva, 2014; Díaz-Rico 2013; House 2012).

This worldwide demand has led to the emergence of the so-called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In order to understand the features and prerequisites of various professions, and to adapt to these special requirements, some people use distinct learning styles, methods and strategies when they study general English and ESP. Thus, the ESP approach provides opportunities to the learners to acquire English in a more natural, informal way, which means working with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting, motivating and rewarding (Basturkmen, 2006; Basturkmen, 2010).

## 2. ESP – concept and features

A great deal of definitions of ESP has been provided so far. For instance, scholars Mackay and Mountford, in their work *English for Specific Purposes: A case Study Approach* (1978: 2), state that ESP involves the process of English teaching for a “clearly utilitarian purpose”, shaped by the learners’ needs (such as academic, occupational, or scientific). In their turn, the learners’ needs underlie the contents of the ESP curriculum. Furthermore, these above-mentioned authors see ESP as a special language used by certain speakers (usually adults) in particular/ specialized settings and contexts. Therefore, in their study, they dealt with adult learners because the latter are generally highly conscious of the purposes and reasons to acquire English skills and proficiency in a certain field of specialization; moreover, these adult learners often use ESP in the specific contexts provided by their work.

In their turn, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider that ESP is a special approach that is underlain by the reasons wherefore a learner needs to study a foreign language. Similarly, Strevens (1988) defines ESP as including “absolute and variable characteristics”, since English language teaching should be designed so as to fulfill the learner’s specific needs. In addition, these needs should be connected in terms of content to specific subjects, professions and activities and should also be focused on the type of language that is relevant and well-suited to those activities in terms of syntax, vocabulary, discourse, semantics etc. (usually in contrast with those involved by General English). In what concerns Robinson (1991), his definition of ESP is underlain by two key criteria and a number of features generally found to be true of ESP. The two criteria refer to the fact that ESP is normally goal-oriented and ESP courses are designed based on needs analysis. The general features represent the key concepts, as follows: ESP courses are taught to adult learners who are in homogeneous classes organized with respect to professional background or field of specialization. Moreover, although there is a limited time frame, the objectives of these classes should be met.

Scholars Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 4-5) state that ESP is characterized by both absolute and variable features. In their perspective, such absolute features refer to the fact that ESP should meet the learner’s specific needs and that it employs “the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves”. Furthermore, ESP is focused “on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities”. Regarding the variable features, the above-mentioned scholars (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 4-5) profess the following: “ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines; ESP may use in specific teaching situations, a different methodology [...] from that of General English; ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level; ESP is generally, designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners”.

These features are closely interrelated, revealing that ESP involves the teaching of specific English to certain learners who will employ it in a special context in order to achieve certain goals, which meet, in their turn, additional personal purposes. ESP is normally correlated to adult learners because it is tightly connected to their specialization in different areas of concern. Moreover, ESP analyzes the learners’ needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content with the help of relevant language skills. Thus, in ESP teaching, the teacher should choose and introduce those specialized vocabulary items that are relevant and useful in the students’ future professions interactions (Leonte and Istrate-Macarov, 2016: 226). It can be concluded that general English language content, grammatical functions and acquisition skills are important and even dominant in curriculum development and course design.

## 3. Research approaches and methodology

Any pedagogical research involves several stages: asking the question, defining the theme, formulating the hypothesis, collecting and measuring the information, data processing and drawing the conclusions. Among many methods used in the pedagogical research, the experimental-ameliorative research was considered to give the teacher the chance to propose, apply and then to assess the hypothesis suggested as a means in optimizing education. This type of research offers the

possibility of knowing significant phenomena in the teaching practice and finding ameliorative solutions to real problems, their assessment in different contexts. Moreover, we can apply the outcome of fundamental research to real situations.

The functions that are worth being mentioned for this type of research would be: ascertaining, describing, acting, ameliorating, developing. In accordance with the objectives, the experimental-ameliorative research brings about the improvement of the content of the methods and deepens the study of teaching activity enriching the educational methodology. These methods are meant to gather enough information whose further analysis and interpretation leads to scientific answers and solutions to viable conclusions.

Among many research methods in conducting needs analysis (the questionnaire, the psychological observation, the experimental and the case study approach, the investigation, the psychometric method and analyzing the products of the learners' activity), we have used a questionnaire and the observation method for the purpose of our paper in order to achieve the research aims and to provide answers to research questions.

For the purpose of our research, 54 students (aged between 19 and 21) majoring in tourism answered a questionnaire which included 14 closed questions, asking them what they feel they lack, want and need in the process of English learning. The questionnaire included 14 questions (the students had the opportunity to choose more than one answer for each question) aiming at identifying learners' present needs, strengths, weaknesses and wants. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect information from a large number of respondents in relatively short time. When this method is combined with observation, we believe that enough information will be gained to provide clear answers to research questions and to fulfill the tasks of our research.

The questionnaire was anonymous in order to allow students to express their opinions freely without fear of being punished for their answers. The time for completing the questionnaire was 10 minutes, and all students managed to complete it on time. The acquired data were used as a basis for assessing the fulfillment degree of the research aims and questions.

#### **4. Discussion of results**

The questionnaire proved extremely useful in order to determine the students' needs in terms of goals and objectives, serving as the basis for developing tests, materials, teaching strategies and activities, and their willingness for taking part in different types of activities. Therefore, we have applied a needs analysis questionnaire.

Question 1 dealt with the importance of English for the students. 100% of the respondents considered that the English language is very important for their studies and therefore they are highly motivated to study English.

Question 2 focused on the students' perception of learning needs related to the period of time which is allotted to English. Thus, in the question, four options have been proposed in order to obtain a valuable appreciation concerning this main point. Their answers indicate a slightly tight proportion, that is a large number of students (44.4%) think that the number of hours allocated to English learning is fairly reasonable, while a rather high percentage (37.03%) shows that the number of English hours is not sufficient. Only 18.5% considered that the numbers of hours allocated to English learning is reasonable.

Question 3 is seen as a means to assess the students' level in English at present, with regard to the language learning that has been achieved during their studies in a successful or an unsuccessful way. Through this question, the students have been asked to make an evaluation of their own level because their personal opinion is worth considering. The aspect of the level that is questioned here involves the linguistic skills and abilities acquired by the students in agreement with their needs of the language in their specific field. As option "C" has reached the highest score (44.4%), it is clear that almost all students have an average level in English. It is also noteworthy that almost a quarter (22.2%) assessed their skills as "poor" and only 7.4% as "excellent". 14.81% said that their English skills were below average and 11.1% assessed them as "good".

Question 4 summarizes the students' main problems concerning their knowledge of English; the students had the possibility to choose more than one problem. The result revealed that students' main problem is *speaking English*, as more than two thirds (62.9%) said that they had difficulty in speaking fluently and more than half (55.5%) said that they uttered incorrect grammatical sentences. 22.2% complained about their difficulty in pronunciation and lack of confidence. 7.4% said that they had difficulties in understanding English and spelling; 18.5% admitted that reading was their weakness while 11.1% confessed that they had difficulties in writing and in learning new words (vocabulary). Only 3.7% of the students have difficulties in asking and giving opinions.

Question 5, which tries to highlight students' main concerns regarding listening abilities throughout the process of English learning, also provided students the possibility to choose more than one option. Regarding listening skills, most of the students need listening to understand daily conversations and job-related themes (88.8%) almost the same way as for the speech of a native speaker (85.2%). 66.66% also said that they need to effectively and attentively listen to the information sent by the speaker. Students are less interested in recognizing words in the context by means of the speech sounds (7.4%).

Question 6 emphasized the importance that speaking has in students' process of learning English. Speaking the language correctly (92.6%), appropriately (85.2%), fluently (66.66%), being able to ask and answer questions (88%) in different socio-cultural contexts and thus being able to participate in discussions (70.4%) represent students' major objectives. They also need to be confident while interacting in different situations (40.7%). They are less interested in pronouncing words clearly and correctly (26%).

Question 7 refers to students' reading needs and to some issues they want to improve. The results indicate that students are interested mostly in reading a range of general authentic texts on daily social and routine job-related themes (88.8%). They also want to be good skimmers to get quickly the main idea they are looking for (81.5%). The students need also reading for making summaries and guessing the meaning of the new words (51.8%). 33.33% are interested in scanning (reading quickly for a specific piece of information).

Question 8 outlines some of the most relevant needs for writing. Thus, concerning the writing skills, students paid a great importance to the writing skill in order to get a good job (92.6%) but also for using a specialized vocabulary in the writing process (81.5%). They seem to be less concerned with writing articles or reports (26%) or with writing formal and informal correspondence and documents on practical, social and professional topics (7.4%).

Question 9 tries to reveal the students' learning goals throughout the English classes. The results indicate that the students' main learning goals refer mostly to their future professional career (92.6%) and to the need for using English. For achieving this, they need to use correct sentences (77.8%), to discuss in English and speak fluently (85.2%); they also want to enrich their vocabulary with specialized words necessary for their future jobs (70.4%).

Question 10 concerns the usefulness of English for the students. The table shows clearly that most of the students consider English as being important and useful both for their career (92.6%) and for travelling (77.8%). Fewer students are interested in using English for other reasons (22.3%) and nobody wants to study abroad.

Question 11 outlines students' potential of using English so that their possible lack of knowledge could be improved in the future. The results show the students' English level and their possibility of self-assessment, the frequency of their answers indicating relatively sufficient knowledge of English necessary in different socio-cultural contexts, also when referring to entertainment shows (89% can say who they are and where they come from; 74% understand entertainment programmes and films; 18.5% can read magazines and newspapers and only 7.4% can read novels in English.)

Question 12 summarizes students' needs for different skills when using English. Thus, students' answers highlight once again the importance of speaking (92.6%) and reading skills (81.5%) and the need for understanding the language (77.8%) and writing on their own (59.2%).

Question 13 checks students' preference regarding the English classroom activities as a guiding point for the teacher: speaking with a partner (85.2%), listening to people speaking in English (85.2%), reading on their own or with a partner (74%), writing on their own (29.6%).

Question 14 provides useful learning activities to the students so that they can choose which appeal ones to them. Pair-work was chosen as useful by 66.66% of the students, while role-plays and watching videos were chosen by 44.44% of the students. Individual work was considered useful by 29.6% of the students while on-line spoken practice was thought as useful by 37% of the students. Group-work was perceived as useful by 33.33% of the students whereas whole-class work was checked by only 29.6% of the students. Only 7.4% considered that out-of-school projects were useful. The results clearly show that most of the students pay a lot of attention to the speaking, listening and reading skills during the classroom activities and seem to be less interested in writing activities.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper, based on the analysis of a questionnaire that aims at highlighting the students' needs concerning their English knowledge, but also the skills they would like to improve, is focused on the benefits of Needs Analysis. The activities and approaches based on the needs analysis should be designed in order to fit the purposes of an ESP class and adapted by the teacher to the students' needs. The results of this needs analysis questionnaire indicate the need for more real-life activities and strategies, focused on developing the speaking, listening and reading skills. The English classroom activities should include oral presentations, specialized vocabulary, grammar activities and topics relevant to students' field of study, namely Tourism. Moreover, students are aware of the necessity to develop their language skills in order to better integrate on the labor market. The analysis of the questionnaire revealed the students' needs as perceived by themselves. The survey reveals that students feel that they lack knowledge of English grammar and also communicative abilities. They mostly want to learn how to communicate in English for their future jobs rather than use it in everyday life. The students think that having English communicative abilities is more important than the professional knowledge for getting a job and English is the most important language in workplaces.

Real-life interactions in the target language develop the students' ESP skills. Therefore, a very careful strategy should be planned, focusing it on the learners' interaction (student-centered strategies), their engagement in concrete activities, by using authentic materials. Thus, more and more opportunities should be created for students in order to improve their communication skills in the ESP classroom for their better integration into the Tourism labor market.

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