

Needs Analysis as a Measure for the Accuracy of ESP Syllabus Courses in Kurdistan Technical Institutes, Department of Administration as a Case Study

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Abstract— ESP courses are used in all Higher Education institutions in Kurdistan/Iraq. These courses are supposed to provide students with both awareness and skills to handle communication in English in the target subjects. This paper addresses the effect and shortcomings of ‘Administrative Reading in English’, an ESP course taught in Kurdistan Technical Institutes. The paper examines the extent to which these courses fit the needs of Kurdish students; and whether the curricula of the course reflect the characteristics of a systematic standard ESP course. Data was collected through a questionnaire distributed to three different student groups and interviews were conducted with instructors. The data is used to identify the drawbacks of the course material; and investigate the relevance of the teaching methods, assessment and the language used, to the level, motivation and needs of the students. The research concludes that a solid curriculum that takes into consideration students’ motivation for learning as well as their receptive and productive learning skills has not been correctly constructed for the courses in general.

Index Terms— Administrative reading, ESP, needs analysis, course design, English language proficiency.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern language learning programs are based on the idea that language is an instrument for communication rather than sets of linguistic structures to memorize. Therefore, an engineer preparing for graduate study in the United States should take a different course from a potential tourist to England. (Basturkmen, 2010, pp. 1-2) cited in Nunan (2004, p. 7). English for Specific Purposes ESP is describes as referring “to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose.” (Mackay and Mountford, 1978 p. 2). This definition denotes that ESP is needs based and should be taught in ways that enable learners to use it in specific contexts in the future.

The emergence of ESP courses is attributed to three major reasons (Hutchinson, Tom; Waters, Alan , 1987, p. 6). The first is the major advances in science and technology worldwide after the Second World War and the economic dominance of the United States which brought English to status of an ‘international language’. Following this, Western money and knowledge was moved to the oil-rich countries because of the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s. As a necessity, English became the language of scientific and economic movement. Second, the growing demand on English courses led to the idea of focusing on using language in real communication. Soon, linguists started to figure out that the language used for speaking and writing is noticeably different from one context to another. This meant that, after analyzing the linguistic characteristics of a field of work or studying a group of learners, the English they needed was identified. Third, educational psychology also had its effects on the appearance of ESP by means of giving attention to learner’s perception. To illustrate, because learners’ motivation has impact on the effectiveness of their learning, their interests and needs has to be considered too. Thus, designing courses started to reflect the requirements of learners giving rise to “learning centered” or “learner centered” approaches. (Thomas, 2013, p. 161). Thus, needs analysis and student centered learning are at the heart of ESP courses.

This paper relies on needs analysis as a measure to examine the adequacy of the ESP courses used in Kurdistan Technical Institutes. The study assumes that these courses do not reflect what students need or their English proficiency level. To ensure a comprehensive analysis and roll out student bias and misunderstanding, the researchers took to consideration the texts used, students- instructor interaction, and some aspects of the teaching- learning environment from the perspective of the students and the instructors as well. Below are some of the key concepts involved in the analysis..

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF ESP

Dudley-Evans (1997) attempts to identify the properties of ESP under two terms: 'absolute' characteristics, and 'variable' characteristics. According to the absolute characteristics ESP:

1. is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
2. makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
3. is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to those activities.

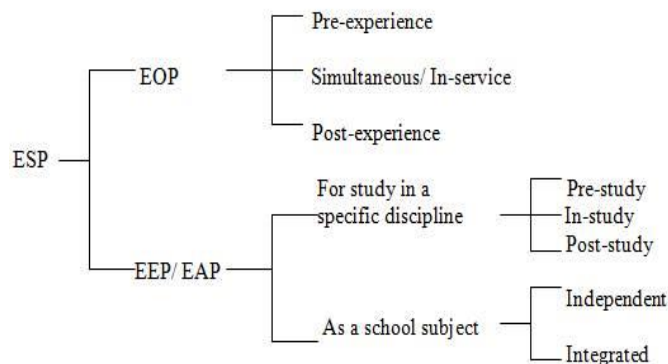
Variable characteristics, on the other hand, states that ESP:

1. may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
2. may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of 'General English';
3. is likely to be designed for adult learners; either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation.
4. is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.

Thus, central to the ESP courses is the learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Both absolute and variable properties stress the fact that student need is the corner stone of designing the course besides the purpose of the course. Furthermore, it should be noted that, as Dudley-Evans points out, ESP courses target students of intermediate to advanced levels.

III. TYPES OF ESP

There are two types of ESP: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).



The classification of this diagram explains the division of courses into EAP and EOP according to when they take place. The importance of these classifications is that they will have impact on the degree of specificity that is applicable to the course. "A pre-experience or pre-study course will probably rule out any specific work related to the actual discipline or work as students will not yet have the required familiarity with the content, while courses that run parallel to or follow the course of study in the educational institution or workplace will provide the opportunity for specific or integrated work." (Evans et al., 2008, p.6)

IV. NEEDS ANALYSIS

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1992), needs analysis is the source of 'necessities' and 'wants'. The former is what the students have to know so as to role successfully in the target situation; the second is what the learners feel they have to know or what they would like to know. Further, Johns (1991) states that needs analysis is the initial stage of course design and it gives rationality and importance to the following activities in the course design. It is crucial to identify the needs of the students as ESP courses is determined by the particular necessity of students not administrators' or teachers' opinions and concerns. (p. 55)

Mackay and Mountford (1978) also state that language teaching needs to be planned in accord with the 'specific learning and language use purposes of identified groups of students', therefore, it is vital to realize definite "learning needs and communication needs" of students in advance, then considering the prerequisite of the content for the students.

There are, however, some disagreements about the materials that are used in the courses. Some authors assert that the language that is used in ESP courses ought to be authentic (Rogers, 2000). Nonetheless, Widdowson (1990, cited in Ptrova 2008) has an opposite view about authenticity:

Authenticity of language in the classroom is bound to be, to some extent, an illusion. This is because it does not depend on the source from which the language as an object is drawn but on the learners' engagement with it. In actual language use, meanings are achieved by human agency and are negotiable: they are not contained in text. To the extent that language learners, by definition, are deficient in competence they cannot authenticate the language they deal with in the manner of the native speaker. (p.10)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that it is vital to pay attention to the instructive values rather than authenticity of the test. However, a virtuous coursebook should enable students to use the language in real life circumstances. In addition, it is advantageous to use materials that approach the students' field of study. (p. 11) Accordingly, ESP courses should exploit some examples of authentic language, reassure real world like communication, and a content that is related to the students' determination.

V. SYLLABUS DESIGN

There are some significant choices that need to be made before designing a syllabus. Going with guidelines of syllabus writing provided by Dick (2005), the following steps could be recognized:

- A. the reason behind selecting the items to be covered in the course and how these items will be structured;
- B. the kind of the syllabus that needs to be founded;
- C. Under which condition the syllabus is put into operation; that is, determining accessible resources, possible difficulties and external factors that might force the instructor to depart from the syllabus.
- D. inspecting the learners' abilities, learning perceptions and wants.

- E. Before utilizing the designed syllabus, it is most likely necessary to have means for assessment of the method.
- F. it is vital to have flexibility in the design of the course to give way to potential changes during and at the end of the course.

As the above points illustrate, student participation and motivation for learning is crucial for ESP course design. ESP courses are conceived as a tailor-made program for prospective students; hence, the students should be consulted in the process of syllabus design as a strategy to know the tasks they performed in their job environment and to make them more involved with the class and the material. Further, through the different sessions, instructors must take to consideration the students' learning preferences and styles as well as their language level and revise and improve on the syllabi.

VI. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A number of studies have been carried out to explore efficacy of ESP courses in the literature. A case study incorporating ESP instruction into the university English course was carried out by (Chien & Hsu, 2010). It was discovered that the English proficiency of the majority of the students who participated in the ESP program improved more than the students who joined the general English program. Chostelidou (2010) measured the efficacy of utilizing a needs-based approach to ESP course design. A pre-test and post-test was carried out before and after the courses for both students who were exposed to the needs-based syllabus and students who were presented with the usual teaching approach for an academic semester. The experiment revealed the effectiveness of ESP course design. The need for ESP course for students in the Department of Accountancy was shown in another study. The preliminary stage was to determine the need of the students and it was found that these courses are both the students' immediate need as learners, and long-term need as professionals in their future businesses. (Ibid). ESP course was also evaluated as a requirement for Mechanical Engineering students and it was concluded that the course is effective in improving the technical translation proficiency of the students, as well as their speaking skills (Hatam & Shafiei, 2012).

Needs Analysis as a prerequisite for ESP was also investigated for courses given to nursing students. It was recommended that Nursing English textbooks should be based on Needs Analysis by ESP designers. (Saragih, (2014)). In another research, the significance of investigation of the needs of learners, teaching organization, and the society is pointed out for establishing curriculum design for business English which is a branch of ESP. (Li, 2014). A thorough description of the needs analysis to improve an ESP course is given by (H & Hyun, 2013). A survey questionnaire was carried out on three different groups: students group, engineering professors group, and industry workers group. The data from these three sources was used to investigate what is expected to function best for ESP course development. Further, another study showed that needs analysis has a vital part in the development and designing a language course, however, the learners, who are the main basis of needs analysis, may not be cognizant of their necessities. So, a practical needs analysis which looks for the needs from many views like, "text analysis, interacting with

students, teachers, employers and assessors, surveying the target environment, observing the pieces of works, using personal experience etc" provides assurance to both students and teachers (Veena, 2016).

ESP course books have also been evaluated to determine its efficiency. In an exploration instructors' and learners' attitudes towards the content, exercises or activities, and topics of their ESP coursebook were studied. The findings showed that considering the opinion of students' and teachers' about the used material of the course has an essential role in the achievements of any language course (Salehi, et al., 2015). ESP materials selection and design have also been investigated. Lesiak-Bielawska argues that though ESP materials writing is a crucial component of ESP practice, ESP teachers need to be assisted by "ready-made commercial materials produced by knowledgeable ESP specialists, Internet resource," and then results of needs analysis and the learners themselves (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015).

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Context of the study

This study is conducted at three different institutes, namely Darbadixan, Halabja and Kalar Technical Institute, Sulaimani Polytechnic University. The research focuses on the ESP course that is given in all three institutes, Department of Administration, under the title "Administrative Reading" (AR).

B. Research questions and hypothesis:

This study tries to answer the questions whether the course meet the needs of the students; are compatible with the standards of an ESP course; and are contributing to raising the level of English of the targeted students.

The research hypothesizes that the needs and level of the students are not taken into consideration in designing the courses, that is why the Administrative Reading Course fails to meet the requirements of a standard ESP course and does not result in any reasonable learning outcomes.

C. The aims of the study

1. Identify the gap, if any, between students' abilities, courses, and needs.
2. Identify teachers' role in the class.
3. Identify the course design, methodology, the materials that are used throughout the course and the students' perceptions about them.
4. Identify the extent to which ARs course matches the characteristics of a systematic standard ESP.

D. The participants

The participants involved in this study are 75 students of the Department of Administration in the above mentioned Institutes. This number is the total number of students enrolled in the course in all three institutes. They are male and female, their age's ranged from 18 to 23 years. The participants are divided on three groups; each group included 25 students from the same institute.

Beside the students, all three teachers who are responsible for delivering the course are also interviewed. The instructors are

only three as only one instructor was in charge of delivering the class in all three institutes.

E. Research methods and instrument

As mentioned earlier, the research uses a quantitative and qualitative method. For this purpose, data is collected through a questionnaire, which includes closed- and open-ended questions and is directed to the students. In addition, interviews are conducted with three teachers and the researchers' observations on the coursebook, course materials, and exams are recorded.

The questionnaire includes eight items by means of which quantitative data is collected and two open ended questions through which qualitative data is collected. The questionnaire is adapted by the researchers from Al Humaidi (2007) and Dick, Lesley (2005). The eight items are designed on a six-point Likert scale which consists of values ranging from 1 to 6. The points on the scales represent the following responses: I strongly disagree = 1, I disagree = 2, I do not think I agree = 3, I may agree = 4, I agree = 5, I strongly agree = 6.

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Student questionnaire:

The quantitative data from the questionnaire is analyzed using excel sheet and the averages of each point in the three student groups who answered the questionnaire is indicated in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
AVERAGE FOR EACH QUESTION RESPONSES OF THE THREE STUDENT GROUPS

Statements for the student questionnaire for acquiring quantitative data.	G 1	G2	G3
I can understand the teacher if he/she explains everything about the course in English.	1.92	2.6	2.56
Even the teacher does not explain the content of the reading texts, I can understand it myself.	1.56	1.8	1.96
When I talk about something in the course, I can express it in my own words.	2.48	3.1	1.88
When I write something from the content of the course materials, I compose it in my own words.	2.12	2.4	2.08
I feel great about this course because I learned many things that I need in the next course I take or in future job.	4.16	4.3	4.88
I know the linguistic knowledge of academia and particular disciplines that is needed for successful English usage.	2.48	2.5	1.76
I think this course increases my self-confidence because I can handle the home works, activities and exams very well.	3.8	3.7	3.44
I depend on memorizing the texts that I am supposed to write or speak about them.	3.84	4.8	4.12

As the table illustrate, the students' average response for the questions are almost the same for all the three groups. The overall answers for the first four questions and the sixth one, which are all about the students' language skills, are all on the negative scale. This means that the language they are

encountered with in this course is higher than their level of English. This clearly violates the basic requirement of a standard ESP course in which the importance of taking to consideration the student's communicative need is stressed (cf. Dudley-Evans, 1997). Question five, however, which is about the students' learning and future need, recorded a scale of 4.4 which means students agree that they learn and they need this in their future. This agrees with Chostelidou (2010) who states that the primary need of the students should be taken to consideration before exposing students to an ESP course (cf. Mackay and Mountfor 1978, Johns, 1991). Data from these questions echoes Hutchinson and Waters (1992) description of needs analysis as the source of 'necessities' and 'wants'; though the ESP course is a necessity for the students, however, the course material fails to meet the student's wants.

Further, the results for question seven which is about the students' self-confidence and control of the home works, activities and exams of the course, is 3.6 that is approximated to being 'may agree'. This shows that, despite the students' deficiencies in their language proficiency, they still have self-confidence and learn through this course. Conversely, regarding the students' memorizing the texts rather than understanding the texts and expressing what they have about the course using their own words, the students' responds are on the scale of 4.59. This illustrates that the language and material used in the course are not authentic that is why students can not relate to it and use it in real communication (cf. Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

To confirm the results elicited from the aforementioned questions, qualitative data was also collected from a ninth question which is an open-ended question. The question concerned how students' deal with the course material and their assignments and the answers were as follows:

In the first group, only six students stated that they do not have any problems and like the course. Conversely, 12 students stated that they cannot understand the English texts of this course therefore they have to memorize them. There are also two other students who think that the texts are too difficult to comprehend because they are much higher than their level of proficiency.

In the second group, there are only two students who approved the course in general. Fifteen students, however, have comprehension problems and hence they have to memorize. The rest of the students, seven students, consider the texts higher than their English language level.

In the third group, seven students thought that the course is appropriate for them, while seven students cannot comprehend the texts and memorize it instead. Whereas fifteen students think that the texts are higher than their level of proficiency and too demanding. Below are some excerpts of the students' reflections about their experiences in the course of administrative reading.

Student 1: The terms are too difficult and I can't say or compose what I have myself therefore I have to study hard and memorize it and I also confuse them because they are too much.

Student 2: It would be better for us to be equipped when we were in preparatory school. We even know about the content of this course now, still we can't memorize and control it.

The answers to this question rarely contained other opinions or information besides those mentioned above. However, a few students mentioned other problems; to mention a few, about five students in all the groups stated that they are too shy to express themselves among the students. They also stated that they usually confuse between the definitions as they have to memorize too many terms about their subject matter.

The sample answers illustrate the students' difficulty with and criticism of the course material. These results are not in agreement with results obtained by Chien and Hsu (2010) who found that being enrolled in an ESP program must contribute to improving the language standards of the students. It also agrees with the results obtained by Salehi, et al. (2015) who argues that only when student's opinion is taken to consideration in designing ESP courses, the courses become successful.

Item ten on the questionnaire is also concerned with the course material and the students' suggestions about what to be included or excluded from the course; the students gave diverse answers. In the first group two students thought that they need to improve their English in general rather than taking this course because this kind of texts are too challenging. Six other students thought that they do not need English in their future careers and they just lose time and effort and it would be better to skip it. Some other students had different ideas such as, shortening the texts, adding real- world- like activities, and activities that improve their speaking skills.

In the second group likewise, seven students thought that it is necessary for them to take language courses and thirteen students believe that the language of the texts of this course is too difficult and therefore modifications have to be made in the language. Five other students think that shortening the texts is necessary and four others think that they do not want any language courses.

In the third group, eight students stated that they need a general English language course. Three other students demanded that the texts should be easier and three others believed that they need more explanations. Three students stated that shortening the texts can be more helpful for them. Below are some examples of answers to the question.

Student 1: Please skip all these texts that we have to memorize and make the language comprehensible for us.

Student 2: it would be helpful to change the texts in a way that if we studied at home by ourselves, we could understand it. There are so many new difficult words that I can't memorize.....

Student 3: I think modifications have to be made in this course so the students get benefit from it and have more motivation for learning the language.

Among all the groups, there were only two students who believed that there is no need for any change in the course and some others left the last two questions not answered.

Data collected from this item stress the necessity for revising and changing the course design and material and as mentioned earlier, one of the features of a successful syllabus is flexibility and giving way to potential changes during or at the end of the course (cf. Dick, 2005). However, these changes are not implemented by the instructors as will be shown in next section.

B. Teacher interviews

A direct interview was conducted with each of the teachers who are in charge of teaching the Administrative reading courses. The first question that was directed to each was about whether the students are active or passive learners. The interviewee provided very similar answers for the question. They stated that the students' English proficiency is too low to be active learners. They illustrated that students wait for their teachers to bring the resources into the class and explain it and then the students memorize it for the next lecture. Teacher (2) commented that even when they try a student centered approach to help the students to be active learners, only about % 10 -% 15 of the students will participate. The following excerpts are examples from the teachers' responses to the question:

Teacher 1: actually the students want to learn but their English is poor. Their main problem is their English. Therefore, they always wait their teachers and then the students memorize. The teachers are active in the class, not the students.

Teacher 2: regarding the situation, teachers speak and explain the subject and then the students participate because the students' English isn't enough for this course..... the students also openly say that their English is not that good to understand these texts.....

Teacher 3: language is an essential problem, the students are not prepared. When we give an introduction in English or when they see the slides are all in English, they tell us that they don't get any benefits from the lecture... Sometimes I give stimuli such as giving marks, reading their names to enable them participate. They are very weak in class participation.....

The second question for the teachers concerned their role as facilitators or as the source of knowledge. All three teachers of the three groups stated that the source of knowledge is the teacher in the class and the teachers even translate the texts for the students.

The third question directed to the teachers was about whether they ask about their learners' perceptions and wants. All teachers mentioned the fact that there is not any systemized method for eliciting the students' opinions and wants before starting the Administrative Readings course. However, they mentioned that they use different methods during the course. The second and the third teacher stated that they take note of many of the students' perceptions just through students' reactions to the methods that they are putting them into practice. The first teacher said that he asks the students about their opinion about the methods he uses in the class after he implements them. They all said that they have about 15- 20% option to make changes in the course materials and subjects. That is why they cannot take student's needs into serious consideration.

The fourth question in the interview centered on the means of assessment of their teaching methods. The teachers similarly said that they do not use any specific means for examining the teaching techniques they utilize. Nonetheless, the second teacher stated that he can recognize the utility of the method he uses through the result of the students' exams or through students' daily participations and quizzes. However, they

mentioned that they can get student feedback at the end of the year as part of the process of quality assurance.

The fifth item on the interview list was about the use of authentic language texts and instructions that reassures real world like communication. The teachers asserted that they all use texts of authentic language. However, as far as activities that reassure real world like context, all the teachers said that they use traditional methods because it is not possible to use such a method with students who have low levels of proficiency. The second teacher stated that he uses both elaborated and condensed texts. He assessed the students at the level of remembering. To explain this, in the exams, the students are asked to list, match, name, and recognize what they have been given. %78 of the students could pass the exam. The course materials that are used for the third group by their teacher are shortened texts of the subjects on slides. The students are only assessed at the level of remembering according to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. For example, in the exams, the students are asked to list, match, name, and recognize what they have been given. The third teacher also stated that large numbers of students and big classes are other reasons of being subject to traditional methods.

The answer to the above question indicate that the students are assessed at the primary level of knowledge as their level of language proficiency is too low compared to the texts used in the course. To explain this, a student's understanding of a subject, which is the second level of knowledge according to Blooms' Taxonomy, cannot be inspected if he/she cannot express what she/he has in her/his own words. This is because for example, explaining, extending, interpreting, paraphrasing, and giving example, etc. cannot be done through rote learning.

As the teachers tried to explain, their use of such a method of teaching and assessing is unavoidable because they are obliged to use academic texts for students with a very low level of language proficiency. Considering the context, the teachers' decision of assessing the students only at the level of remembering can be considered as fair and reasonable. This can be justified by the students' remark that they felt that this course increased their self-confidence and they can learn from it and the fact that a good average could pass the exams shows the teachers' intervention.

CONCLUSION

ESP programs recently receive a lot of attention due the dominance of English in economy and technology beside other fields. The program has specific requirements for course design, course material and teaching methodology that have to be taken to consideration to make the course successful. Data collection and analysis in this research led to the following conclusion:

1. In general, students have a positive view about the ESP course and they see it as a necessity for their future development in their jobs.
2. The level of English used in these courses surpasses the students' abilities. As a result, a huge gap is created between the students and the material provided.
3. The Design of Administrative Reading courses fails to observe students' needs. These courses are pre-designed and are reused several times for different student groups.

Thus, these courses do not meet the standard requirement for a successful ESP program.

4. The course material is not authentic and does not relate to students' real-life situation and experience which drives students to memorizing instead of learning.
5. Instructors are restricted in reviewing and adjusting the course material to fit the needs of their students.
6. There is no consensus on standards that may help the instructors to assess students' levels and abilities, needs, the course material as well as the instructor's own performance.

Due to these points, these classes are largely teacher-centered and are not productive classes for learning English. It is recommended that instructors get enough freedom, training and tools for assessing the needs of their students and designing their course material.

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