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Perceptions of Professionals, Academicians and Current and Graduate Students on designing an ESP Curriculum for Logistics Department

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Abstract

This study aims to explore professionals', instructors' of English, and current and graduate students' perceptions of English needs of Logistics students at University A Vocational School in Istanbul. The findings of the study will propose an ideal curriculum model which may be implemented in the forthcoming academic years. Throughout the study, the importance of designing an ESP curriculum tailor-made for the Logistics department in order to train the learners with the adequate knowledge of their field in addition to the necessary skills in English so as to help them to be successful in their professional life will be emphasized. © 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

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1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an important issue for Foreign Language Education in recent years since the world has become more globalised resulting in the requirement of teaching the jargon and terminology of the profession. Yet, not so many ELT materials have been designed to meet this need: ESP books and syllabi are mostly designed in accordance with the needs of business management students and thus few of the topics implemented meet the needs of the students of other departments. As a result, instructors of English of other departments feel the need to design a curriculum and adapt non-ELT materials for the course which is mostly time consuming since not all the materials are adaptable and curriculum design is not an easy process. According to Oliva (Demirel, 2004), up to 20th century, curriculum was defined as the list of subjects in a course and various comments have been made on the definition, Cater V. Good, for instance, defines curriculum as a list of systematic courses or subjects to be accomplished so as to obtain a certificate or a diploma as the product of the process On the contrary Caswell and Campbell define curriculum as being composed of all of the experiences children have under the guidance of the teacher. (Demirel: 2004:2). Though they have suggested different definitions for curriculum, all of the methodologists and researchers agree on the necessity of conducting "a needs analysis survey" before designing the curriculum since all the components of a course programme should be determined by analyzing and assessing

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the needs of the industry, the academicians and the students. In order to discuss the content and the importance of needs analysis, a clear definition of "needs" should be provided. Many analysts and theorists have argued that "needs" has different types and meanings. Widdowson, for instance, claims that needs has two different types that provides us with two different definitions, the first one being a goal-oriented definition which later is described as objectives by Berwick. The second type being "process-oriented" that relates to the transitional behaviour learners will undergo as a result of the process they have been subject to (Robinson, 1991:7). Needs analysis is the vital part of the learning teaching process since it provides the ultimate information for the design of the model curriculum. The centre of the learning teaching process had long changed and learners as well as their needs have become a crucial factor of the curriculum design. As Jacobson states (1986:72), students play a major role in their learning process as they have become more autonomous over the years and a process-oriented needs analysis will provide the necessary information on the strategies, content, techniques and most importantly the objectives to be covered in the course. To illustrate the importance of conducting needs analysis before designing an ESP curriculum, an example from Malaysia might be given at this point. In the article "*Towards ESP programmes in Technical and Vocational Institutions in Malaysia*" (April,1993) Haji Shukor and his colleagues examine the nature of vocational, technical and polytechnic education; the extent to which English for specific purposes (ESP) programmes are incorporated into such education, and the need for ESP programme reform. According to the article, in 1992 there came a shift in teaching English to Vocational school students in Malaysia. The shift was due to the fact that the concurrent English programmes implemented in Vocational and Technical schools were far from meeting the needs of the learners who started to work in their field of study. The data was obtained by Ministry of Education by questionnaires and interviews conducted among employers. Thus the ministry decided on a renewal of the programme so as to maintain the relevancy of the objectives and content to meet the expectations of the prospective employers.

2. Data Collection:

This study aims to explore the perspectives of different focus groups to design a model curriculum for Logistics department students for their freshman and sophomore year. Needs analysis researches for sub-disciplines of Business faculties have not widely been conducted in Turkey, in this sense, the study is a pioneer. What's more, the findings of this study can provide a useful model for both needs analysis and needs assessment in other departments as well as Logistics department. It can also provide a model for curriculum development for International Logistics students. At local level, students of "University A Vocational School" will benefit from this tailor-made curriculum designed on the basis of their own needs, in their professional life. At a boarder level, the study will constitute a model for other universities as their students have similar needs.

"University A Vocational School" is a 30% English-medium school where students are obliged to study a year of Prep School. At Prep school exit level is B1 (CEF) and students have to take a proficiency test. In freshman year GE (General English) courses that are four hours a week are offered. Then in the sophomore year, students are offered ESP courses of three hours a week and the content of which is designed in accordance with their field of study. The participants of this study are the academicians, professionals and students. Academicians consist of twenty instructors of English who have been teaching at "University A Vocational School" at least for four years. Professionals, who are also part-time instructors at Vocational School, have at least five years of experience in the sector. Students involved in the study are divided into three groups; freshmen, sophomores and graduates. As the data collection instruments, questionnaires and interviews were chosen. The study utilizes a self-developed survey questionnaire to identify the English language skills, the content, the methods and the testing procedures of the course. Survey questionnaire was developed based on the previous studies on needs analysis, feedback from informal interviews with the professionals, feedback from informal interviews with the instructors of English and personal teaching experiences.

2.1 Data Analysis

The data gathered by conducting the questionnaires and interviews held with the professionals and instructors of English were analyzed quantitatively. Data obtained from questionnaires on the Likert scale were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 11). The interview data were analyzed quantitatively by going over the transcripts and looking for the frequency of the answers.

2.2 Findings

Mostly the students, professionals and instructors of English seem to share the same views on the questions, yet there are some discrepancies on some of the questions explored. The differences are illustrated by graphs, with the frequencies of their responses.
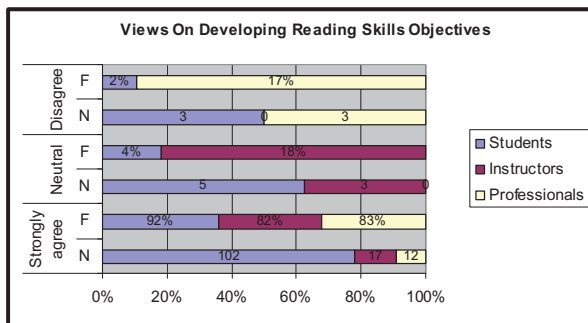

Figure 1. Differences in the views on objectives on Reading skills

As shown in Figure 1, there is not much difference between the respondent groups; most of the instructors, professionals and students share the same views, they all think that reading skills are important and students need to improve reading skills throughout the course.
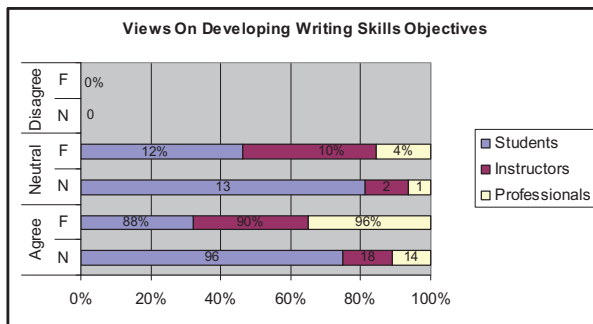

Figure 2.Differences in the views on objectives on Writing skills

As demonstrated in Figure 2, a vast majority of the respondents agreed that improving writing skills should be an essential of the suggested curriculum since logistics sector widely requires international correspondence. This was also revealed in the aforementioned research conducted in 2004 in Hong Kong by J. Jackson, where all respondents in the survey agreed that students' writing skills needed to be improved.
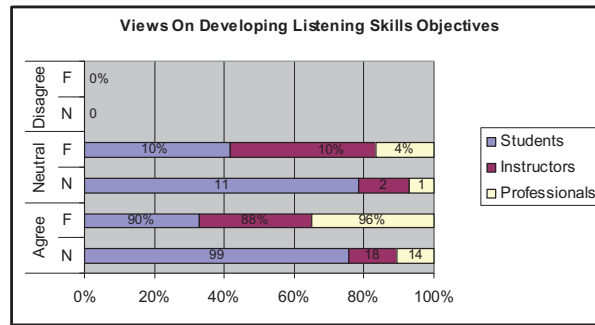
Figure 3. Differences in the views on objectives on Listening skills

Figure 3 demonstrates there is not much difference in the views on developing listening skills; IOE, professionals and students almost equally think that the ideal curriculum should improve listening skills as well as the other skills. In the interviews, the professionals stated that listening was an important skill and ranked after writing and speaking skills,. When they were asked on the sub-skills to be improved, they responded that students' listening for specific information needed to be improved in order to help them carry out flawless communication in their workplace.
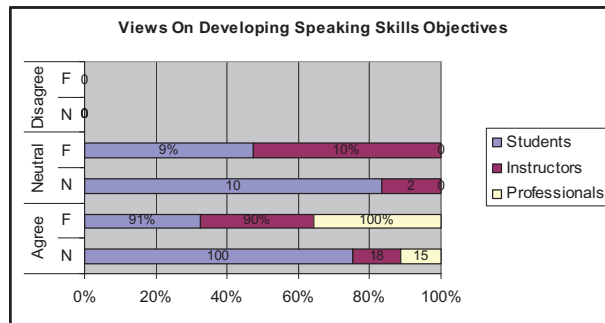

Figure 4. Differences in the views on objectives on Speaking skills

As illustrated in the figure above, all of the professionals thought that the curriculum should be designed in the way that students would have the opportunity to develop speaking skills. For them being able to carry out dialogues with international clients, increasing fluency are quite important and students need to be competent in this skill. Productive skills have found to be the most important ones to be improved in various researches conducted in both the international and domestic scales. In the research conducted in Malaysia in 2006 for instance, the respondents stated that oral communication was the key skill being an asset for employers and also claimed that more importance should be given to the productive skills (Kasim and Ali, 2009). Similarly, the research conducted in 1997 in Aizu University in Japan, revealed that students underscored the importance of developing productive skills since they thought that they would need writing and speaking skills more than reading and listening skills in their field of study and work (Kin'ei Yoshida,1997).In Turkey, the research conducted by Kaygan in 2005, the trainee pilots thought that speaking skills was the most important in the ranking thus the activities and exercises implemented in the classroom should focus on this skill.
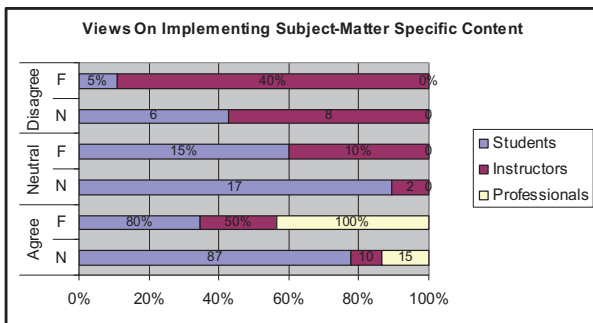
Figure 5. Differences in the views on Implementing Subject-specific Content

Figure 5 demonstrates the significant discrepancy between the instructors of English and professionals and the students. The students and professionals thought that the content of the curriculum should be subject-specific, yet nearly half of the instructors disagreed. However, Labassi in his article *"The Two ESP Projects under the test of time: The case of Brazil and Tunisia"* (2009), stated that the Brazilian ESP project has been successful since the practitioners have developed materials according to the needs of the local students with a subject-specific content. According to Labassi, this was one of the keys to the success of the Brazilian project; Tunisia could not manage to sustain their ESP programme since it lacked materials with subject-specific content. In the research conducted in Japan (2007), likewise, the senior employees stated that the use of textbooks with pedagogical concerns should be avoided and new materials within the framework subject-matter should be developed.
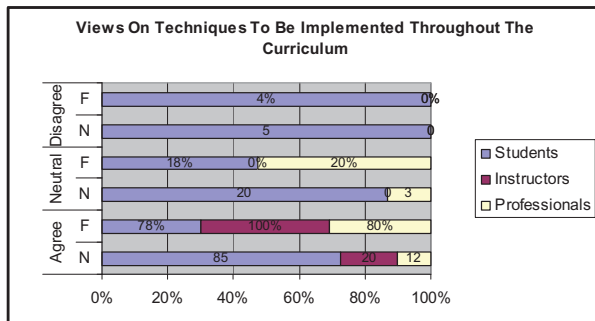

Figure 6. Differences in the views on the techniques to be used

Figure 6 illustrates that the professionals and instructors shared the same views on the communicative teaching techniques, such as simulations, role-plays and information-gap activities to be used. The students on the other hand disagreed, which may be due to their unwillingness to participate in class activities. Uses of communicative teaching techniques were found to be crucial in the research conducted in tourism department at Abant İzzet Baysal University, Turkey. (Coşkun, 2009). The respondents stated that students of the department needed to improve listening and speaking skills the most, thus pair-work activities for their future work environment. The research conducted in Thailand at Chulalongkorn University had similar findings; the academicians, specialists and graduate students thought that communicative teaching techniques should be used while implementing the curriculum since communication skills were important in the workplace (Tumtimtong,1995)

Views On Methods To Be Implemented Throughout The Curriculum

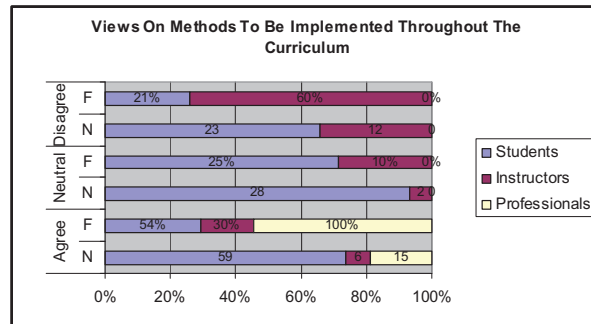|			
Disagree	F	21%	60% 0%
	N	23	12 0
Neutral	F	25%	10% 0%
	N	28	2 0
Agree	F	54%	30% 100%
	N	59	6 15

Students
Instructors
Professionals

Figure 7. Differences in the views on the methods to be adopted

For the methods to be adopted, the professionals thought that PBL (Problem-based learning) should be adopted as an approach. However, the students and the IOE did not think so. In the interviews, the professionals claimed that s only if they were given cases studies and asked to solve the cases using their knowledge, could students convert their theoretical knowledge to practical skills from which they will benefit as hands-on experience. In the study conducted in Pamukkale University Medical School the subject-field experts and the dean suggested that the curriculum should adopt a problem-based approach in order to provide opportunities for students to have experience (Taşçı, 2007). The IOE and the students at A University Vocational School did not agree on the view that problem-based learning should be adopted into the ideal curriculum. The students who are used to traditional teaching methods may not be ready for such a change, from a passive role throughout their educational life, adopting an active role at university may not be most desired by them.

Views On Testing Procedures

Disagree	F	10%	90% 0%
	N	11	18 0
Neutral	F	11.7%	10% 0%
	N	13	2 0
Agree	F	78.3%	0% 100%
	N	86	1 15

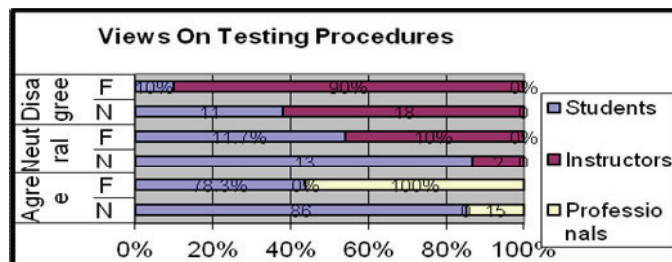Students
Instructors
Professionals

Figure 8. Differences in the views on the testing procedures

As illustrated in Figure 8, the most important discrepancy was found on the question of assessing students by portfolios rather than exams. The IOE disagreed widely that the students should be subject to longitudinal assessment in the form of portfolios, whereas the professionals argued that assessing students' achievement by portfolios was useful since process instead of product is assessed. Performance is more important than the end result according to the professionals.

Views On The Contents And The Tests

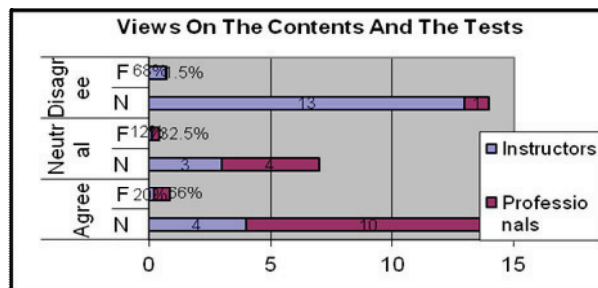|			
Disagree	F	68% 31.5%	
	N	13	1
Neutral	F	12% 82.5%	
	N	3	4
Agree	F	20% 66%	
	N	4	10

Instructors
Professionals

Figure 9. Differences in the views on the contents of testing

Figure 9 illustrates the different views on the content of the tests; the professionals thought that spoken interaction rather than spoken production should be tested and students' oral achievements should constitute a higher rate compared to writing achievements since they thought that speaking skills were of high importance in raking. IOE however, thought that reading skills were more important than other skills thus it should constitute a higher rate while assessing students.

3. Conclusion

The most important finding of the research was that, all parties agreed that "University a Vocational School" needed a new curriculum for the Logistics department. The most notable finding was that the perceptions of the students on the objectives and the content of the syllabus were in line with the professionals who show that students are well-aware of the needs and expectations of their field of work.

This study may constitute a good example for Vocational Schools in Turkey and in other EFL settings. Further studies might be done as follow-up steps, considering material development, adaptation of problem-based learning and its effectiveness in ESP classes.

As cited in Taşçı, (2007:18) perceptions of the students about the contribution of this type of learning into their academic studies can be sought. In addition, since needs analysis is an on-going process (Graves, 2000; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988), future studies should be conducted during or after the implementation of a new curriculum at "University A Vocational School" to better assess the students' possible changing needs and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the changes made.

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