

Rethinking the Languages for Specific Purposes Syllabus in the 21st Century: Topic-Centered or Skills-Centered

Authors : A. Knezović

Abstract : 21st century has transformed the labor market landscape in a way of posing new and different demands on university graduates as well as university lecturers, which means that the knowledge and academic skills students acquire in the course of their studies should be applicable and transferable from the higher education context to their future professional careers. Given the context of the Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) classroom, the teachers' objective is not only to teach the language itself, but also to prepare students to use that language as a medium to develop generic skills and competences. These include media and information literacy, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills, effective written and oral communication, as well as collaborative work and social skills, all of which are necessary to make university graduates more competitive in everyday professional environments. On the other hand, due to limitations of time and large numbers of students in classes, the frequently topic-centered syllabus of LSP courses places considerable focus on acquiring the subject matter and specialist vocabulary instead of sufficient development of skills and competences required by students' prospective employers. This paper intends to explore some of those issues as viewed both by LSP lecturers and by business professionals in their respective surveys. The surveys were conducted among more than 50 LSP lecturers at higher education institutions in Croatia, more than 40 HR professionals and more than 60 university graduates with degrees in economics and/or business working in management positions in mainly large and medium-sized companies in Croatia. Various elements of LSP course content have been taken into consideration in this research, including reading and listening comprehension of specialist texts, acquisition of specialist vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as presentation and negotiation skills. The ability to hold meetings, conduct business correspondence, write reports, academic texts, case studies and take part in debates were also taken into consideration, as well as informal business communication, business etiquette and core courses delivered in a foreign language. The results of the surveys conducted among LSP lecturers will be analyzed with reference to what extent those elements are included in their courses and how consistently and thoroughly they are evaluated according to their course requirements. Their opinions will be compared to the results of the surveys conducted among professionals from a range of industries in Croatia so as to examine how useful and important they perceive the same elements of the LSP course content in their working environments. Such comparative analysis will thus show to what extent the syllabi of LSP courses meet the demands of the employment market when it comes to the students' language skills and competences, as well as transferable skills. Finally, the findings will also be compared to the observations based on practical teaching experience and the relevant sources that have been used in this research. In conclusion, the ideas and observations in this paper are merely open-ended questions that do not have conclusive answers, but might prompt LSP lecturers to re-evaluate the content and objectives of their course syllabi.

Keywords : languages for specific purposes (LSP), language skills, topic-centred syllabus, transferable skills

Conference Title : ICFLTAL 2016 : International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 18-19, 2016