

Towards Bridging the Gap between the ESP Classroom and the Workplace: Content and Language Needs Analysis in English for an Administrative Studies Course

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Abstract : Croatia has made large steps forward in the development of higher education over the past 10 years. Purposes and objectives of the tertiary education system are focused on the personal development of young people so that they obtain competences for employment on a flexible labour market. The most frequent tensions between the tertiary institutions and employers are complaints that the current tertiary education system still supplies students with an abundance of theoretical knowledge and not enough practical skills. Polytechnics and schools of professional higher education should deliver professional education and training that will satisfy the needs of their local communities. The 21st century sets demand on undergraduates as well as their lecturers to strive for the highest standards. The skills students acquire during their studies should serve the needs of their future professional careers. In this context, teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) presents an enormous challenge for teachers. They have to cope with teaching the language in classes with a large number of students, limitations of time, inadequate equipment and teaching material; most frequently, this leads to focusing on specialist vocabulary neglecting the development of skills and competences required for future employment. Globalization has transformed the labour market and set new standards a prospective employee should meet. When knowledge of languages is considered, new generic skills and competences are required. Not only skillful written and oral communication is needed, but also information, media, and technology literacy, learning skills which include critical and creative thinking, collaborating and communicating, as well as social skills. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the needs of two groups of ESP first year Undergraduate Professional Administrative Study students taking ESP as a mandatory course: 47 first-year Undergraduate Professional Administrative Study students, 21 first-year employed part-time Undergraduate Professional Administrative Study students and 30 graduates with a degree in Undergraduate Professional Administrative Study with various amounts of work experience. The survey adopted a quantitative approach with the aim to determine the differences between the groups in their perception of the four language skills and different areas of law, as well as getting the insight into students' satisfaction with the current course and their motivation for studying ESP. Their perceptions will be compared to the results of the questionnaire conducted among sector professionals in order to examine how they perceive the same elements of the ESP course content and to what extent it fits into their working environment. The results of the survey indicated that there is a strong correlation between acquiring work experience and the level of importance given to particular areas of law studied in an ESP course which is in line with our initial hypothesis. In conclusion, the results of the survey should help lecturers in re-evaluating and updating their ESP course syllabi.

Keywords : English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language skills, motivation, needs analysis

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