Research Article

NEEDS ANALYSIS: SURVEY BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE TO DESIGN A SYLLABUS FOR SALES & MARKETING DEPARTMENT, VIET TRAVEL LIMITED COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of ESP courses is to equip the learners with a certain English proficiency level for a situation where the language is going to be used, i.e., target needs. In the last few years, needs analysis researches have tended to an increased interest in investigating the most effective ways of improving the ability of workers in using ESP in the work place. Training needs analysis is the initial step in a cyclical process which contributes to the overall training and educational strategy of staff in an organization or a professional group. Skills required in the field of travel and tourism are all listening, speaking, reading and writing. This paper focuses on the issue of the importance of needs analysis in ESP course and analyzing questionnaire to collect the information of Sales & Marketing Department at Viet Travel Limited Company to design a suitable syllabus.

Keywords: ESP, travel and tourism, syllabus.

INTRODUCTION

Sales and Marketing Department at Viet Travel Limited Company

Viet Travel Limited Company was founded in 2000 with one clear goal in mind: provide quality educational travel opportunities for teachers and their students. They believe that travel has the power to change lives. They understand that travel allows them all, regardless of age, to become students of the world. Over the past five years, Sales and Marketing Department have helped to take more than 10,000 adults on tour with Viet Travel. There are 30 people in this department. All of them graduated from The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Hanoi University of Culture. To make Sales & Marketing Department successful in signing lots of traveling contracts, so many courses have been held, especially ESP ones. The English syllabus used in teaching was written in-house by teachers working in HR Department in the company. They will take the ESP class at weekends in 3 months.

Aims

The advancement of business and communication technology in the course of past twenty years has revolutionized the field of English language teaching and has radically swerved the attention of course designers from teaching English for Academic purposes to teaching for more specialized purposes (Al-Khatib, 2005). The aim of ESP courses is to equip the learners with a certain English proficiency level for a situation where the language is going to be used, i.e., target needs (Sujana, 2005). It is agreed that any decision made in designing language teaching programs in ESP contexts should hinge on the learners' needs for learning English (Robinson, 1991; Strevens, 1998; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Sujana, 2005). However, pinpointing the students needs is a challenging task since needs have been defined from various perspectives. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1993) have classified needs into necessities, wants and lacks. According to them necessities or target needs are concerned with the demand of the target situations (i.e. what the

learner needs to know in order to function effectively in the target situation). Lacks refer to the learner's existing language proficiency in order to help determination of the starting point of the teaching and learning process. And, wants relate to what the learner would like to gain from the language course. Therefore, course designers must be well informed of the workplace culture, the vocational needs of the workers and the constant changes that are taking place in order to help improve communication in the work place (Leung, 1994). In the last few years, L1 and L2 acquisition researches have tended to an increased interest in investigating the most effective ways of improving the ability of workers in using English for specific purposes in the work place (Li So-mui and Mead, 2000; Al-khatib, 2005). Nowadays English is necessary to obtain a job, get promoted and perform effectively in the world of work. This demand has generated the incursion of a new linguistic branch within the field of ESP, namely, English for occupational purposes. (EOP) (Dominguez & Rokowski 2005)

THE LITERATURE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ESP

What is ESP?

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is one important branch of the EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) system that functions as the main branch of English language teaching ELT. Therefore, ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, but rather an approach to language learning whereby the content and method are based on the learners' particular needs to learn the language (Hutchinson, and Waters, 1987). To distinguish ESP from EGP (English for General Purposes), we could say that ESP is more focused. ESP can be divided into two main areas: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

What is Needs Analysis?

Broadly defined, needs analysis (NA) is a procedure to collect information about learners' needs (Richards, 2001). The importance of NA is emphasized in English for Specific Purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and English for Academic Purposes (Jordan, 1997),

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and also in general language courses espousing learner-centered curricula (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996), task-based curricula (Long & Crookes, 1992), as well as performance-assessment (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1988). The teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) falls within the framework of what is generally called English for Specific Purposes (ESP), taking place in essence, and as its name suggests, in an educational environment. The reasons for its increasing relevance is due to the fact that English has changed from simply being another foreign language into having become a universal form of communication in all walks of life. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:95) state that the teaching process of any kind of language for occupational purposes should take as a starting pint the analysis of the four traditional skills within an appropriate context, that being, as far as possible, the conditions given in the workplace. Moreover, they subscribe to the idea that an effective syllabus must attempt to overcome the deficiencies of the educational system under which they are operating. EOP therefore encircles a reaction against the conventional humanistic approach wherein both teachers and students abide by the academic objective of knowing everything about the language being studied instead of concentrating attention on those skills most relevant within the workplace in the time allotted in the educational environment. (Dominguez & Rokowski 2005) EOP can be defined as "the portion of the curriculum which prepares students for gainful employment in occupations ranging from low-skilled to sophisticated jobs in technical fields. (Anthony, 1997, p.56).EOP programs focus on developing communicative competence in a specific field, such as aviation, business, or tourism. EOP is more general compared to ESP because it does not focus on the specific job disciplines but it is more on general basic skills required by students in order to prepare students for the workforce. Examples of basic skills in EOP are reading, writing, listening and speaking. In the context of this study, writing skills required to perform in job functions are for example report writing, letter writing and memo (Anthony 1997).Some courses prepare students for various academic programs such as offering a seminar for graduate teaching assistants to train them in public speaking skills, while others prepare students for work in fields like law, medicine, tourism and graphic design.(Hortas 1995).Among the many vocational areas that make the world of English for specific purposes, that of English for tourism is one of the most attractive because all of us are tourists on countless occasions, bringing our own real experiences to the classrooms. In the field of English for tourism students most of the studies have focused on the analysis of the required skills and needs in work place, adequacy and appropriateness of instructional materials and strategies, and involvement of students in the procedure of syllabus design. The skills required in the related job were addressed by Martinez (2001),Murphy and Brown(1998), and Sujana (2005).The study conducted by Martinez (2001), indicated that EOP programme mostly incorporate basic job readiness skills such as job search, interviewing, preparing resumes, letters, and filling out work-related forms. Murphy and Brown involved three different groups of adult learners who were doing English courses revealed that it is important to provide tangible evidence to these learners that the courses would help them to obtain employment and would facilitate a variety of job readiness and employability skills. (1998). Competency based approach in designing English curriculum for tourism students was proposed by Sujana (2005). In establishing needed competencies in a particular workplace, he holds, a course designer can start from target needs, identify the duties of professional workers, translate the needs into competencies, translate the competencies into linguistic and other specifications and develop teaching/ learning activities to develop competencies. Stapa (1998) investigated the needs and expectations of Tourism and Management students with regard to the writing courses offered in three collages in Malaysia, and sought to see if the current writing

programs for hotel management and tourism students reflect the specific writing needs required at the workplace. The need to write formal letters and reports were the two highest skills required performing the jobs. Most respondents also indicated that they are not satisfied with the present syllabus offered at the collages and believed that the syllabus does not equip them well in order to enter workforce. Al-Khatib (2005) examined the communicative needs of tourism and banking personnel by shedding lights on their perceptions of needs, wants, lacks, and attitudes toward English in order to include what is needed and exclude what deemed less important to them. It has been observed that the type of work plays a significant role in evaluating and using of English. The most common reasons for communicating as a travel agency worker were found to be offering destination guides, writing and sending email and faxes, making on-line ticketing, browsing the internet, making on-line hotel booking, etc. Travel agency users were found to be heavier users of English than their banking counterparts. The results of the study indicated that the most important skill for tourism personnel is writing. When instructing an EOP course an issue to take into consideration is that using adequate language learning and professional strategies are required in tourism field. (Laborda 2002). Inclusion of the strategies development in the academic process was found to provide both group and individual improvement. In designing a course for people in culture and tourism industry, Barancic (1998) used an integrated approach to get the students involved in the syllabus he wanted to teach. The approach he invented consisted of 8components: knowing the class and their knowledge, determining the goals to achieve, the way we measure the success, making decisions with students involved, creating syllabus, deciding on the real teaching techniques and method and getting feedback during the course. The application of the approach indicated that the teachers are faced with needs which are of a less academic and more realistic nature. In a study on the contribution made by students with work experience to the development of courses for Hotel management and tourism, Leung (1994) found that:

- Student's involvement in syllabus negotiation based on the experience in the industry (Hotel management) help the design of a need-based course.
- Students provide valuable information on changes in workplace culture, for instance subservient politeness on the part of hotel staff is giving way to a more outspoken, decision-making politeness
- Students' suggestions as to what has to be learnt to cope with the vocational needs for tourism management can inform both the immediate learning environment and subsequent course planning activities.

RATIONALE

In the tourism field, English is used widely for inbound and outbound travel as well as in client contact (Leung, 1994). Moreover, tourism is rather a nascent course at the tertiary level; therefore, it is quite a demanding task to write the English syllabus and develop the course (Walker, As Carson (2000) holds carefully identified needs and appropriate teaching materials for tourism students will produce satisfied customers as well as plenty of professional fulfillments for those committed to doing a good job. Keeping this in view, it is felt that writing courses offered at Viet Travel Limited Company should target on skills related to job needs and job functions to ensure that the learners are well equipped with the required writing skills in order for them to perform at the workplaces. Since EOP (English for occupational purposes) is more concerned with the content and format, initially a complete list of sample business letters containing 591 letter topics was downloaded from 4hb.com letters and forms

website. Due to the length of the list, it was speculated that checking such an exhaustive list might not be manageable, hence time-consuming. Consequently, a pilot study was arranged to firstly, truncate the original long list into a more relevant one and secondly, to become familiar with likely hurdles that one may face in dealing with travel agents and hoteliers.

The target needs

Before designing a course, students should know why they are taking the course and how they will apply that learning. Also English language teachers should know what kind of tasks and activities learners will be using English for (Kandil, 2003). Hutchinson, and Waters, 1987 suggested the following questions as a start-point to uncover relevant information.

- Why is the language needed?
- How will the language be used?
- What will the content areas be?
- Who will the learners use the language with?
- When/Where will the language be used?

(Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A 1987, pp 59).

The learning needs

The learning needs refer to the learners' language difficulties, their learning objectives, their styles of learning etc (Jolly. and Bolitho.1998). It is the starting point or the route and answers the question. To understand the learning needs we should find answers for the following questions.

- Why are the learners taking the course?
- How do the learners learn?
- What resources are available?
- Who are the learners?
- When/Where will the course take place?

The new educational pedagogy emphasizes the importance of the learners and their attitudes to learning (Hutchinson, and Waters, 1987, pp 59). Satisfying learners; needs and interests has an important influence on the learners' motivation and therefore achievements. Moreover, this approach gives learners the opportunity to participate in the syllabus design. In a context where the nature of the work changes, and the linguistic needs change too, the importance of this approach increases. As Mackay and Mount ford (1978) stated, adults who need English for academic or professional purposes are more aware of what they want to use English for. In fact, the results of a needs analysis are not absolute but relative. There are a number of factors that could affect the outcomes: for instance: who to ask; what the questions are; and how the responses are interpreted (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998).

Questionnaires:

Given the necessity of assessing the English needs of ESP students, the English instructors made an attempt to:

- Investigate the language needs of Sales and Marketing Department at Viet Travel Limited Company.
- To examine the students' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the current ESP textbooks used in their classes
- To find out the mostly preferred teaching methodology by ESP students in order to make teachers sensitive to the kinds of techniques and methods they apply in teaching English.

SAMPLE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS: QUESTIONNAIRE

- What important skill areas are needed by Sales and Marketing Department?
- What are the most important sub-skills and language-based tasks for these students?
- How do the subjects evaluate their language problem areas?
- What is the subjects' mostly preferred approach to learning English?
- What are the teachers and students' attitudes towards the currently used ESP textbook?

Questions one to six in the questionnaire were designed to obtain a profile of the sample. According to the responses to this section, all the sample (100%) were the male senior students majoring in Business Administration; Only 2% of the sample were employed, but their jobs had nothing to do with their fields of study. Regarding their previous experiences of learning English, 82% of the sample had studied English just as a part of their school requirements, while the remaining 18% had participated in the private institutes besides attending schools, and no one had the chance to live in an English-speaking country. Thus, the sample seemed to be almost homogeneous in terms of their major, sex, and their previous experiences and backgrounds in learning English.

Example of analyzing question 1:

In order to answer the first research question (What important skill areas are needed by Sales and Marketing Department?), the subjects' responses to items seven and eight of the questionnaire were analyzed. Item seven required the subjects to rank the four major language skills in order of their importance for success in business studies. Table 1 shows the percentage of rankings by the sample.

Table 1. Skill rankings in order of importance for success in business

Skill	1st ranking	2nd ranking	3rd ranking	4th ranking
Speaking	53	28	13	6
Reading	49	23	23	5
Writing	31	28	23	18
Listening	9	21	28	42

* All scores are to be read as percentages

Speaking was ranked as the most important skill for success in their career, reading was ranked the second necessary skill for achieving success in their jobs-related achievements, and writing and listening were ranked the third and the fourth respectively.

CONCLUSION

The methodology which the English instructors used to design a syllabus was both quantitative (through the implementation of the students' questionnaire) and qualitative (the teachers' interviews). The students' questionnaire included four sections and thirty eight items. The first section, addressing some demographic information, was designed in order to ensure the homogeneity of the subjects as far as their previous experiences and backgrounds in learning English were concerned. The second part of the tool addressed the students' perceptions of the necessity of knowing the four major language skills for their success both in the university studies and in their future jobs in the order of importance, their need of the most important sub-skills and language-based tasks, and their language problem areas. The third part of the questionnaire, dealing with the methodological issues, was designed in order to find out the subjects' mostly preferred approach to learning English; and finally the fourth section which

included an open-ended question was developed to elicit the participants' opinions about the ESP textbook they were working with in order to examine the degree to which the material meets their English needs.

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