

Experience and Teaching at Polytechnic University of Tirana

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Abstract

This paper is based on treating several issues related to observing proficiency of English Language for Specific Purposes at Polytechnic University. It presents the findings and analysis on how English for Engineering and Technology Students can be taught so that to develop not only language proficiency, but also technical skills and competences. The research provides certain answers to some of the relevant questions: How can they acquire their knowledge and skills for their future work? Do students have the required professional competences for the market? Do the programmes and content of the curricula meet the standards and requirements of the development for the new on-going technology? The research aims to differentiate between these potential determinants by asking respondents on their needs in order to link the findings to technological specifics and impact within ESP education. The research concludes, into some recommendations linked with implementation of the principles on ESP competence and skills at the Polytechnic University for further improving teaching methods, materials and techniques in order to develop the professional competences in parallel with linguistic and technical skills.

Keywords: needs, requirements, curricula, competences, linguistic skills

Introduction

During the last 29 years of Albanian democracy, scientific progress and technological innovation have imposed a profound influence on English learning needs and competences. At present, globalization in engineering education and research is currently a tangible reality, in Albania; so the future engineers and university academics should be able to correctly communicate and acquire professional English with the aim to consolidate their abilities and skills to better develop and implement the innovative techniques and technology in the country. This research paper was initiated as part of a Study entitled "Quality Assurance in Higher Education", and was further on conducted by Foreign Language Centre to identify the language needs and requirements of students at Polytechnic University. The English language curricula have been constantly updated and reviewed based on the feedback gained from the students, teachers and consultations with other University Faculties, Departments and relevant stakeholders.

From its establishment, since 1992, the Centre of Foreign Languages has been delivering English Language and Teaching Courses to all students from 25 different academic Departments and Centres at the university. These departments are grouped into seven Faculties within PUT.

Within the University entities, the Centre appears to be unique, as it extends the English teaching and activities through the entire university, (PUT) where the students are considered as the most important factor and source to the development of curriculum and programme design. The approaches as described in the curricula are considered most likely to bring about changes in the significance of English language on one hand, and in the specific knowledge, skills and acquisition of professional resource materials on the other. They are most likely to contribute to strengthening the professional competences with the ultimate objective focusing to a great extent, on English competence and performance gained at the university. The English Language cannot be considered just a simple 'added material or subject' to the regular curriculum guidelines, but it needs to strike and "encompass the learning environment" as a whole, responded 100% of the teachers of English at the university. The English language is considered as one of the important indicators which play a role to the "future developments in the society", responded 85% of the students at Polytechnic University of Tirana.

Problems of Research

The study is based on a concept which requires for a greater concern and change in the teaching trends, methods and strategies, paying special attention to consolidating students' English proficiency for future responsibilities and undertaking. The baseline research involved seven Faculties of Polytechnic University and aimed at surveying through the questionnaires "the problematic areas in ESP teaching and learning".

In terms of the students' needs, the study was intended to determine its goal and objectives, its activities and outputs by putting light onto the attitudes and perceptions of students and teachers within the seven Faculties of Polytechnic University about English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and explore the use of methods and application of strategies for developing it further.

No.	Polytechnic University	Students
1	Faculty of Architecture	19
2	Faculty of Civil Engineering	20
3	Faculty of Information Technology	18
4	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	16
5	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	15
6	Faculty of Mathematics Engineering	14
7	Faculty of Geology and Mines	17
	Total	119

Table 1 Number of students at Polytechnic University per Faculty

Research Focus

In the ESP teaching domain, as an imperative process and activity, the university consolidates and promotes English language competence and linguistic skills through the professional texts and materials. The study-survey was based on two analytical issues:

- 1) perception and needs of ESP;
- 2) teaching text-books and methods which promote professionalism through ESP.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the university is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real expectations or wishes; it is integrated into a subject matter area which helps to the further consolidation of English skills in their specific fields of study.

Technical subjects varying from Architecture to Civil Engineering, from Computer Science to IT Engineering, from Mathematics Engineering to Chemical Engineering etc. make the English language to be mainly focused on language teaching and activities into the contextual subject matter, rather than on teaching grammar and language structures.

Sample of Research

The sample consisted of 119 students of Bachelor Degree (Tab.1) and 20 teachers who teach ESP at the university. All students and teachers were invited to participate in the survey. For the purposes of the research, only 20 students were interviewed who had excellent learning results aiming to collect a more detailed information and feedback on open ended questions.

Instrument and Procedures

All the teachers and students filled in the questionnaires comprising questions related to perceptions of methods and programmes of English language and their attitudes.

The ESP teachers completed a questionnaire composed by two sections: in the first section questions were asked on methods and curricula conception, and in the second one, questions were asked on relationship between English language and students' future profession.

Data Analysis

The initially performed analysis, provided a lot of information on most sensitive issues which need to be improved and upgraded in the prospective research and programmes that can be launched and developed within particular faculties. The content analyses were carefully observed to present perceptions on needs and expectations from ESP, which include several basic elements of teaching and learning, emphasizing on the particular terminology and vocabulary of the field in which the students attempt to be active and participatory respondents.

The research was also focused on the students' opinions, teachers' concerns and the market requirements. It was highlighted that the teaching which combines subject matter with English language in the students field of study may:

- 1) improve the ability to read English materials;
- 2) improve students' speaking;
- 3) encourage faster learning and acquisition of English;
- 4) upgrade efforts to achieve the required skills, knowledge and competences, so necessarily vital for a successful life and career prospects in community business markets.

However, there is no place to wane and give up from the attempts and work to reassess the situation, hence we have already started the adjustments and appropriate steps into our new Study-Programmes for Master Levels of English at PUT according to CEF¹ by extending the term-duration and frequency of the English modules, by further consolidating and introducing Academic Writing and Research with the follow up of achievable teaching and learning outcomes.

Results of Research

The research findings presented the following results which should be taken into consideration during English teaching process at the Polytechnic University:

- 1) teaching practices that encourage students to reflect interactive learning techniques;
- 2) opportunities to positively interact with diverse foreign peers who may develop a good command of English proficiency in specific fields and
- 3) possibilities for perspective undertaking in different scientific sessions and assignments in English language domain.

Discussion

Perceptions, Recent Practices and Experience at PUT

It is explicitly evident that students of a global society need a strong command of English language to help them succeed in their future career and orientation. The number of people who speak it, either as their mother tongue or as a second or foreign language, has increased more than 40%, since the 1950s (Crystal, 1989); and it is the official or semi-official language in more than 60 countries over the six continents (Medgyes, 1994).

The constant and pressing need for the university to work towards students who meet and exceed the requirements of their chosen field of study, has contributed to the design of an English communication programme and modules for the engineering students at university.

¹ CEF (Common European Framework for Languages from the Council of Europe), orientations and guide.

In the light of Albania's strategy towards EU Accession and Integration, the vision of globalization and out-bursting spell and dominance of English as "Lingua Franca", namely the Government, more precisely, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth issued out an "Ordinance", stating that the "Institutions in Higher Education have to determine the International Levels of English Language Acquisition with the follow up of Procedures for the Accomplishment of International Exams according to CEF for the Study Programmes: Professional Master, Master of Sciences and PHD". MES, Ordinance no.14, 28.03.2011 and the other following Ordinances: no.52 dated 3.12.2015, no.5 dated 16.02.2017, no. 11 dated 10.04.2017, no.20 dated 22.09.2019.

In view of this, the centre developed and built some new concepts and orientations not only for the Tertiary Education, but highlights on the necessary adjustments in the Secondary Education as well. Hence, the national and international standards and curricula aim at extending this vision on English, as an intrinsic part of the quality assurance programme reviews, into the designing of the future programmes and materials.

The centre revised and adjusted the programmes in English Teaching and Research, by reconsidering the total workload for English with reference to the number of ECTS¹ awarded to English as a subject, by every particular department of the Polytechnic University. In addition to module contents, regarding contact hours, self-study hours and interactive hours, it has to be considered as an emerging hindrance and reflect upon the course duration and annual uniform extension of English classes into various Branches of Departments within Faculties by highlighting the positive experience and practice; presumably, laying emphasis on certain developments within few Departments in which English is not brought up to the required vision and level; the pinpoint stands for unification and standardization of ECTS among various Departments and Faculties within PUT. Moreover, with the focus to assess more the integrated skills for the students, ESP teachers think to pay more specific attention to students' competences and critical awareness. Most likely, in a multi functional approach, referring to the scope of activities and challenges of profession, ESP teachers resemble more as "ESP practitioners" as Swales defines them, by describing their roles and functions (J. Swales, 1985). Therefore, a long challenging way stands ahead in the future developments and efforts for ESP at Polytechnic University.

Students' opinion

100% of the students pointed out that they are highly motivated due to their ability to learn in their main field of study.

80% of students support the idea that their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with different foreign speakers, peers and professional texts.

95% of the students think that the use of vocabulary and structures in a meaningful context, improves English language skills.

95% of students support the idea that ESP at Polytechnic University should emphasize the reading skills.

90% of them think that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom, right away in their work and future studies.

Teachers' opinion

100% of the ESP teachers think that by providing to the "students assignments on enticing topics" and using the linguistic skills, together with a strong interaction within the class environment and setting, would improve ESP teaching methods and approaches.

"Fluency performance in the English language" is seen as an opportunity in the Engineering Field to move towards' becoming a global engineer' told 95% of the university teachers.

100% of ESP teachers pointed out that more attention and diligence should be paid to intellectual objectives of learning English by encouraging students to "independent research work and critical awareness"; the idea here is to process the information from any professional text into a short summary, concentrating on the main idea and on students' attitude. The idea stands in line with Rivers' remark: "Students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on

¹ ECTS is European Credit Transfer System

conveying and receiving authentic messages, that is, messages that contain information of interest to speaker and listener in a situation of importance for both”(Rivers 1988).

100% of teachers highlighted that “independent materials need to be organized” so as to provide consistency in “developing creative skills” in a way to get rid of traditional thinking and learning. 100% of ESP teachers consider critical thinking as an important instrument for the students to strike success towards employment opportunities and future careers.

Conclusions

Developing and upgrading the English curricula and modules according to the latest requirements and EU standards, contributes to the global, professional integration and enhanced mentality of the students.

The content-based learning in English, consolidates professional knowledge as well.

The best way of improving the students’ general level in English is by teaching students more specialized communication skills.

The feedback of researchers into the teaching process, empowers in improving English teaching approaches and strategies.

Raising students’ awareness towards the importance of the processes and strategies involved in ESP learning helps them to decide which fits better for their learning efficiency.

Team competences and critical thinking, consolidate the research and integrated skills.

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