

Students' Perception of the ESP Courses at the University of Prishtina

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that three main factors that have contributed to the growth of English for specific purposes (ESP) are the increased demand for English to suit particular needs of learners on the one hand, and on the other the developments in linguistics and educational psychology, factors that brought about the need for increased specialization in language learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Considering the diversity of study fields offered at the University of Prishtina, the paper in general investigates the English courses offered in different academic units, including the status, the content, as well as the outcomes of these courses. In particular, in their research the authors focus on ESP courses offered in two University of Prishtina academic units: Faculty of Philology and Faculty of Economy.

The paper presents the analysis of the course content, its delivery, as well as outcomes, highlighting similarities and differences, as well as various interrelated factors that influence the students' success rate.

As the consequence of the authors' learning - centered approach, the paper also presents students' perception of the courses as a crucial factor in course evaluation aiming at empowering students as stakeholders in the learning process.

Key words: English, ESP, Motivation, Perception, Stakeholder.

1. Introduction

Having originated in the 1970s as a result of an increased demand for focusing on learners' individual and social needs alongside with the developments in linguistics and educational psychology (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), English for specific purposes (ESP) has accomplished to have its multi-disciplinary recognized. Due to its multi-disciplinary nature ESP, is further classified (and taught) as English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP). While English for academic purposes further focuses on either general academic purposes or on specific academic purposes, English for occupational purposes (EOP), as umbrella term, comprises a number of specific courses that focus on particular occupational fields such as English for legal purposes (ELP), English for medical purposes (EMP), English for business purposes (EBP), English for science and technology (EST), to mention just a few (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

1.1. Background of the research

University of Prishtina, as a public higher education and research institution, comprises the total of sixteen academic units and eighty-five departments and programs dedicated to diverse fields of study. Common to all is that in their curricula all of the faculties and departments offer English language courses. What differs is the status and the type of courses offered. The status of the English language courses in academic units and departments within them is not unified. In some faculties and departments English is a compulsory course, whereas in others it is an elective course. Moreover, there are cases of the differing status of English courses within particular faculties.

Considering the diversity of study fields offered at the University of Prishtina (Social sciences, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Agriculture, to mention just a few), one would expect to find English courses related to specific fields that would meet particular needs of students of respective faculties.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that students' motives and their needs may be diverse and specific, most frequently offered courses by the departments within academic units are general English courses. The Department of English language and Literature of the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Economy are among the few exceptions. In the

Department of English Language and Literature, apart from general English courses, special courses, namely English for academic purposes and English for specific purposes are offered.

2. ESP courses at the Faculty of Economy

The ESP courses at the Faculty of Economy are offered in the first and second year, more precisely in the first and the fourth semester of Bachelor studies. In the first semester it is a compulsory course, whereas in the fourth semester it is compulsory for the Department of Marketing, and elective for other departments of the Faculty of Economy, which proves the disharmony in course status within this academic unit. This also provides evidence for existence of discontinuity in course offer which results in lower numbers of students who decide to attend the second year course.

The courses aim to equip students with knowledge and skills that will enable them to comprehend and interact with written texts in their professional field as well as to communicate fluently in speaking and writing for their professional needs.

Upon successful completion of the course students are expected to be able to initiate, maintain, and conclude business conversations, participate in discussions and debates, write business letters, and compile other types of business correspondence.

The syllabus of the course taught in the first and second year is topic based. The first course covers diverse areas of economy: *The Three Sectors of Economy, Management, Company Structure, Work and Motivation, Management and Cultural Diversity, Recruitment, Banking*, are just some of the topics that are elaborated. These are wider topics that aim at introducing students to key concepts of their study field in order to enable them to build their vocabulary and, at the same time, improve their language skills.

The second course covers more specifically topics like Bonds, Market structure and competition, Business ethics, The role of government, The business cycle, International trade, Information technology and electronic commerce, Entrepreneurs and venture capital, Economics and Ecology, and similar.

The course content, as well as the mode of delivery, which includes autonomous learning as well as interaction in pairs and groups, is fully in compliance with the needs of the students and the general principles of ESP courses. It provides opportunity for serious and goal-oriented study, for

building and expanding specialized vocabulary, as well as for acquiring knowledge and skills in conducting business correspondence. Grammar and functions, general vocabulary, and anxiety about capabilities, everyday English, small talk, travel vocabulary, survival English, and current events are also included being common to ESP courses and general courses (Rosenberg in Netiksiene: 2006).

3. ESP courses at the Faculty of Philology

Considering the fact that students of the Department of English Language and Literature need to be equipped with specialized areas of knowledge, more precisely with a range of specific and specialized terminology that they might encounter in the future as graduate translators and interpreters, an exciting mix of special topics from different fields of science, like law, medicine, mechanical engineering, economy, and some other social and natural sciences are chosen. For this course additional units are also selected in order to give an overview of some particular topics like: *Filing, Swine flu, Advertising, What is meant by law, Branches of Engineering, Work, Force, Industrial Revolution, The United Kingdom*, and similar.

The aim of these units is of an informative and educational nature and they are usually followed by special comprehension and vocabulary check exercises.

ESP is difficult to define and limit in linguistic terms. It has to be highlighted that there is more than one face to ESP communication with some of it being much closer to the everyday language spoken by ordinary people than many other segments of ESP.

The focus is on presentation through reading and explanations, providing synonymous words, antonyms as well as homophones that are frequently encountered in English. Finally, there are activities dedicated to skills development in different settings including marketing, medicine, lawmaking, engineering, geography and other fields of human sciences.

Students' attendance and their active participation in classes suggests that they find ESP courses valuable. This assumption gains in strength considering the fact that ESP courses at the Department of English Language and Literature of the Faculty of Philology are offered as choice courses in the second and third year of studies (one semester for each). Among the other subjects that they have, ESP seems to be a kind of attractive course that encourages the student to gain additional knowledge different from the teaching program offered to them.

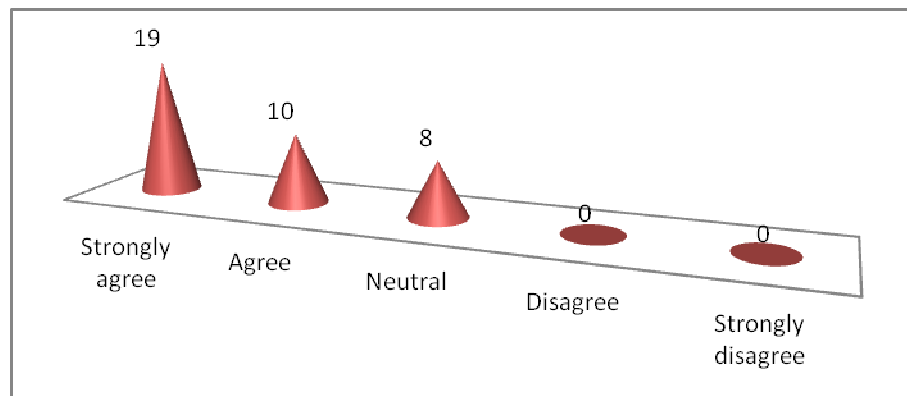
4. Method

In order to investigate the students' motivation and their perception of the ESP courses delivered in the selected academic units of the University of Prishtina, a survey method was used. The research population comprised 32 students of the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Economy. A questionnaire which was distributed to students comprised twenty-two statements and three open ended questions. The statements clustered around the evaluation of the course content and its structure, course materials, as well as its outcomes. Likert scale was used to measure students' satisfaction and their attitude towards ESP courses they have been attending. In this paper only a selection of students' responses are presented.

5. Results

The analysis of the data collected in the survey shows generally positive attitude of the students. Their responses to particular questions also reflect positive evaluation of the course. Figure 1 shows that 19 students out of 32 find the course content strongly agreeable to their needs, 10 agree with the statement, 10 neither agree nor disagree, whereas none of the students have shown disagreement with the statement.

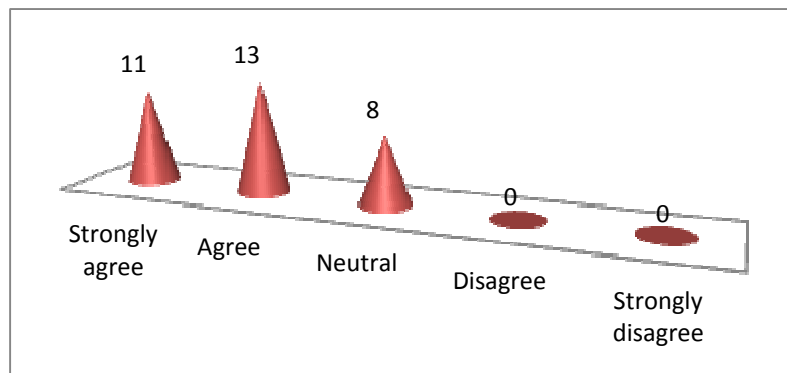
Figure 1: Suitability of the course content



Source: N. b. Data derives from the authors' own research; therefore no sources are provided.

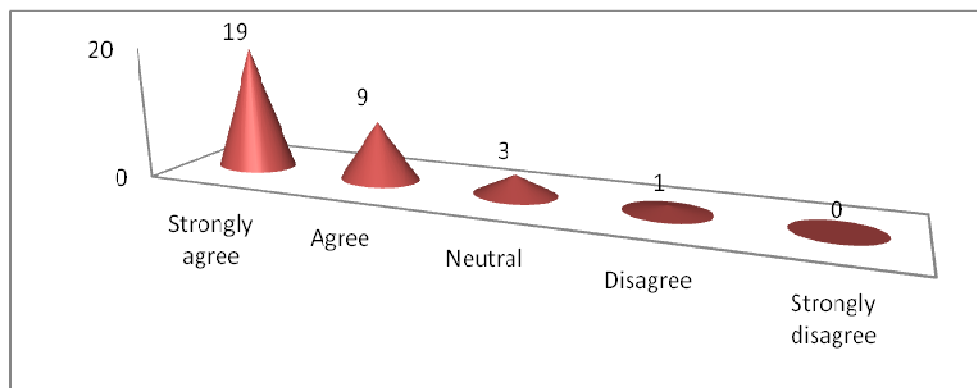
On the other hand, 11 students strongly agree, and 13 students agree, while 8 students neither agree nor disagree that the structure and the sequencing of the course was suitable. Again, none of the students show any kind of disagreement, which is shown on figure 2.

Figure 2: Suitability of course structure and sequencing



Asked about the course materials, 9 students agree, 19 other strongly agree, 3 have neutral attitude, and only one disagrees that they were informative and educational, which is presented on figure 3:

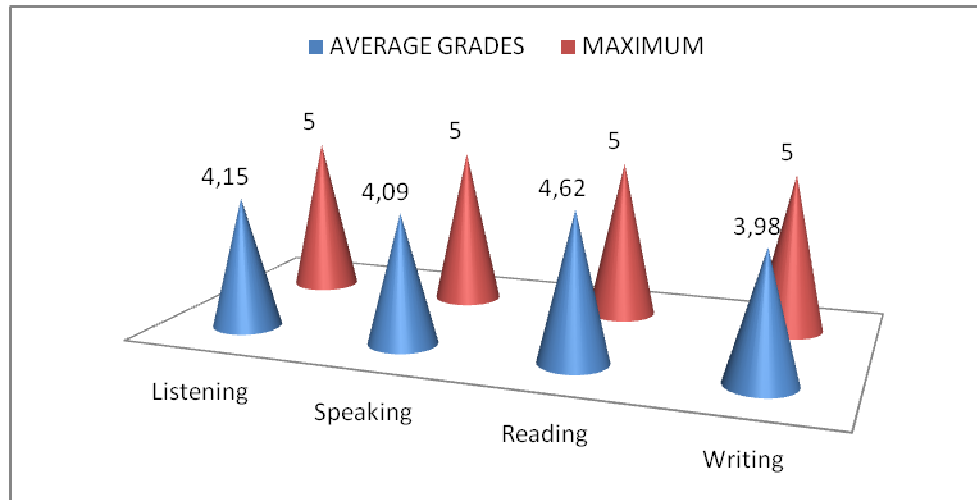
Figure 3: Informative and educational value of course materials



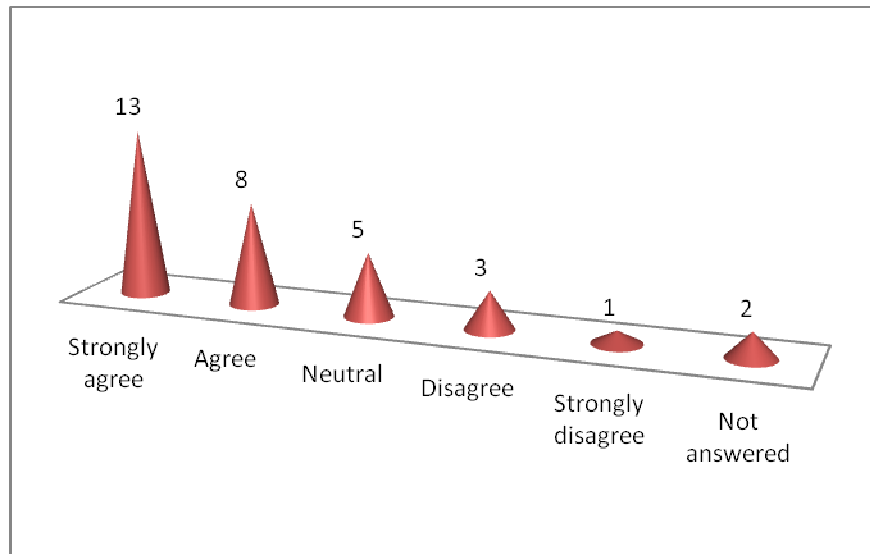
Students were also asked to grade the opportunity that the course provided for improvement of their language skills in the ESP course. The

average grade for the opportunities provided for the improvement of listening skills was 4.15, speaking 4.09, reading 4.62, and writing was given the average grade 3.92, the data shown on figure 4.

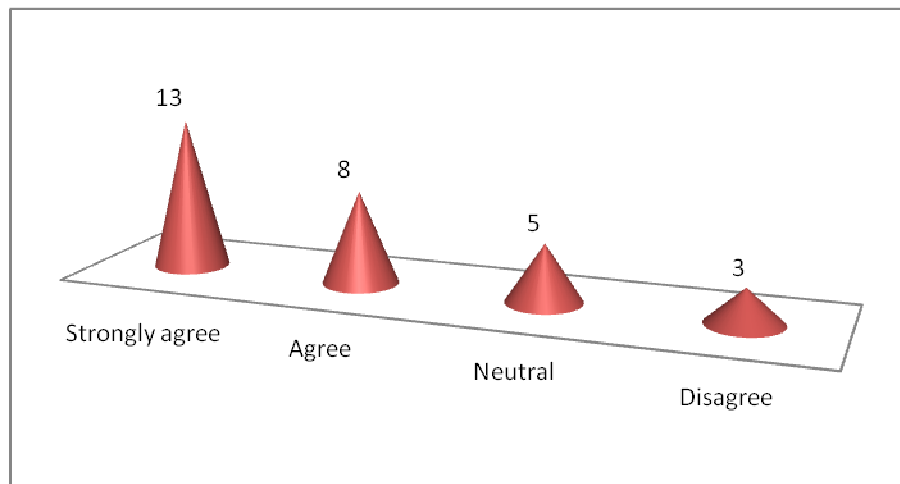
Figure 4: Average grades for language skills improvement opportunity



Students' responses show that the course also provided opportunities for improvement of vocabulary learning skills since 13 students have chosen the alternative strongly agree, 8 of them have agreed, 5 kept a neutral attitude, whereas 3 students have disagreed, and one of them has strongly disagreed with the statement. The data is presented on figure 5.

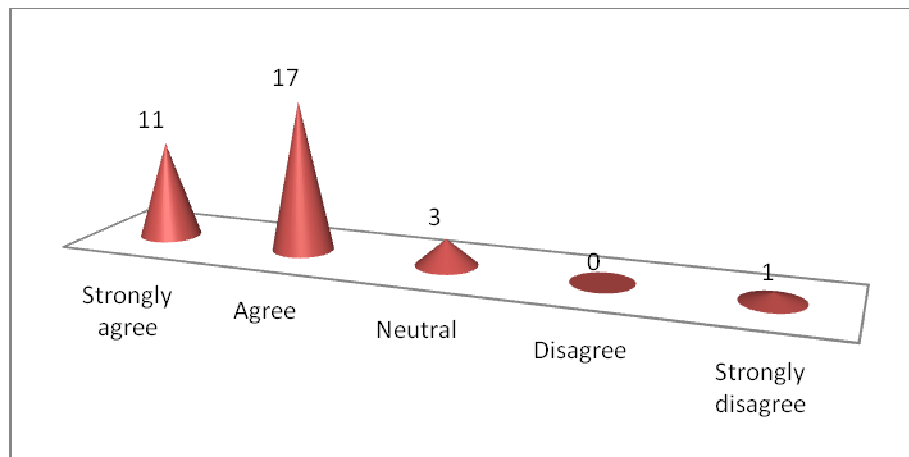
Figure 5: Vocabulary and skills improvement opportunities

Students consider that the course has enabled them to identify their strength and weaknesses since 13 strongly agree, 8 agree, 5 neither agree nor disagree, and only 3 of them consider that it did not enable them to do this.

Figure 6: Ability for identifying strengths and weaknesses

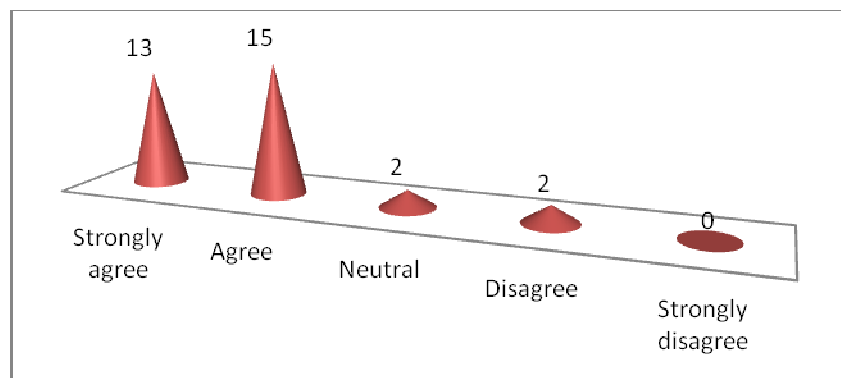
On the other hand, students think that the ESP course was a good opportunity for self-directed, autonomous work, since 11 students have declared that they strongly agree, 17, agree, 3 have taken a neutral position, and only one has strongly disagreed, the data presented on the chart given below:

Figure 7: Self-directed learning opportunity



In general it may be concluded that the course has met students' expectation since 13 students strongly agree with the statements, 15 agree, 2 neither agree nor disagree, and only 2 out of the total of 32 students disagree with the statement, as shown on figure 8.

Figure 8: Meeting students' expectations



6. Conclusion

Based on the literature consulted, our long experience in teaching at university level, as well as on the research conducted with the students of the Faculty of Philology and Faculty of Economy, university students need English for specific courses since they provide:

- Authentic texts and authentic situations for facilitating learning;
- Specialized vocabulary for particular fields of study;
- Process-oriented approach provides greater opportunity for student engagement in classroom activities;
- Goal-oriented approach increases student motivation for self-directed and autonomous study;
- Grammar and functions that are incorporated in the activities 'invisibly' yield better effect than general English courses.

Considering all these, our recommendation is that general courses should be replaced by ESP courses at university level since they are more focused and provide grounds for the increased success rate of students.

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