

## **Some Aspects of the ESP Curriculum Design for Tertiary Education Institutions**

### **Abstract**

The topicality of the issue is explained by a discrepancy between the current English for Special Purposes (ESP) *curriculum* and students' wishes and demands of the labour market. In order to create an up-to-date ESP *curriculum* that would suit students, employers and customers' wishes, the following research methods were used: analysis of theoretical literature and sources, empirical study (students' interviews, students' questioning, lecturers' interviews, employers' questioning) and qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The conducted needs analysis allows creating a modern *curriculum* based on theory and practice – setting its goal and tasks, choosing the most appropriate *syllabi* types, selecting teaching methods that correspond to students' learning styles and satisfying students' wishes and the requirements of the industry.

**Key words:** *needs analysis, curriculum, syllabus and ESP competence.*

### **Introduction**

The political, socio-economic and cultural changes that have taken place in the world during the last ten years have influenced all the spheres, including education. Most radically they have affected people's relations, aims of life and striving to improve their lives. Jeremy Rifkin (Rifkin, 2001) ascertains that we are entering a new age – “the age of access”, and the most useful value in this age will be access to knowledge. By this he means the knowledge that can be gained with the help of ITS. An important role in the process of gaining information is played by the English language competence as English has become *lingua franca* and the latest

information in the Internet and other sources of the mass media is in English. More and more people will pay for experience (culture, entertainment, adventure, experience gained while travelling). This causes the growth of tourism and requires highly competent staff able to provide customers with this new experience, satisfy their wishes and solve tourists' problems.

Tourism students must develop a high level of the English language competence because it is used both for studies while reading specialised literature, listening to guest lecturers and for work in tourism and hospitality industry enterprises in Latvia and abroad (Greece, Ireland, France, the UK, the USA, Switzerland, Lithuania) where students have their training.

Traditionally, the ESP *curriculum* at the School of Business Administration Turība (BAT), Latvia, was created taking into account an interdisciplinary link, i.e., before composing the language *curriculum* the language teacher studied *curricula* of other subjects and created an ESP *curriculum* whose *syllabus* was utterly topical. On the one hand, such an ESP *curriculum* was integrated in the whole study programme but, on the other hand, it was difficult to react to the rapidly changing situation because all the departments composed their new *curricula* at the same time and the foreign language teacher could base his/her language *curriculum* on the previous year's *curricula* of other subjects, thus, in a way lagging behind other departments and the topical requirements of the industry. Besides, this system did not provide the ESP teacher with the requirements of the labour market as the language *curriculum* creators did not have a direct contact with tourism experts and students used to complain that the *curriculum* included topics which they did not need for work, at the same time some necessary topics were not included in the *curriculum* at all. This is why the researcher decided to make a versatile needs analysis both at a theoretical and empirical level to understand the situation, students' wishes and the market needs in order to create a new type of ESP *curriculum*.

## **Methods of Study**

This research is an inseparable part of the whole research conducted at the Faculty of International Tourism (FIT) of the School of Business Administration Turība (BAT), Latvia, consisting of 5 stages:

- January 2003 – September 2004 – the analysis of theoretical literature and needs analysis;
- September 2004 – August 2005 – the analysis of theoretical literature and the first stage of the empirical study (data analysis and creation of the model);
- September 2005 – April 2006 – the analysis of theoretical literature and the

second stage of the empirical research (data analysis and improvement of the model);

- May 2006 – November 2006 – the third stage of the empirical research, generalization of the research results,
- December 2006 – February 2007 – a focus group interview involving tourism experts, teachers and students in order to evaluate the created end product.

The **object** of the research is to develop students' ESP competence. The **aim** of this research is to create an ESP *curriculum* and organize studies taking into account students' wishes and the needs of the industry, thus developing students' ESP competence. The following **tasks** were introduced:

- to study theoretical literature about needs analysis, *curriculum* theories and *syllabus* theories;
- to conduct empirical research (needs analysis) in order to create an ESP *curriculum* for tourism students;
- to analyze the results of the data obtained at theoretical and empirical stages of the needs analysis and create a new ESP *curriculum*.

This paper deals with the research conducted at **the first stage**, which was further subdivided into **5 stages**: January 2003 – September 2003 – the analysis of theoretical literature; October 2003 – January 2004 – students' interviews and questioning; February 2004 – April 2004 – lecturers'/professors' interviews; June 2004 – September 2004 – tourism experts' questioning; September 2004 – the analysis of theoretical literature, data analysis, the design of the *curriculum* and designing of a further plan of the research.

## **Research Process and Results**

### **Theoretical Research**

The theoretical research started with the analysis of the literature about a needs analysis.

Any course design starts with a needs analysis (Elliott, 1998; Gillet, 1989; More, 2001; Nunan, 1991), which is conducted at several levels: at the level of a student group, at institutional, educational, administrative, political and cultural level. (Kennedy, 1988)

A needs analysis as a necessary part of *curriculum* planning started in the sixties of the previous century and it was a component of a system approach. It can be defined as procedures that are carried out in order to get information about students' wishes. In language teaching needs analysis was introduced by the ESP practitioners' movement in the same period. By the eighties of the 20th century in

many countries in language teaching there appeared a philosophy based on students' wishes. It was especially observed in the development of ESP and vocational language *curricula*. (Richards, 2001)

However, there is an opinion that a students' needs analysis is much older than that because already in 1921 H.E. Palmer recognized that it is not possible to create a foreign language *curriculum* not having the very basic information about students, as the *curriculum* has to take into account students' learning aims (needs). (Widdowson, 1983)

The research is based on a socio-constructivist theory that recognizes cooperation of the teacher and the students in the studies, including a selection of tasks and a needs analysis. (Lūka, 2005)

The researcher agrees with P.Brooks (Brooks, 1998) that **students' English language competence is developing more qualitatively if the goal of the *curriculum* and the learning strategies are created based on a needs analysis, the used teaching aids correspond to the goal of the *curriculum* and reveals the English language that is used in one's industry, and well-structured, continuous feedback is received during the whole period of the studies.**

The term *students' needs* may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it may be associated with students' further aims, i.e., what students will be ready to do when they have learnt the language. This is the goal-oriented definition. Secondly, it may be associated with the tasks that students have to perform while studying the language. It is connected with teaching aids and it is process-oriented. The teacher's aim is mostly product-oriented but the students' learning is expressed in the selection and use of certain learning strategies, thus it is process-oriented. (Widdowson, 1986) The paradigm shift in education means a change of the studies from a teacher-oriented to student-oriented process. A student is actively involved in the process, selects his/her own learning styles and strategies and learning pace and the teacher is a guide or an advisor who gives advice on choosing the best teaching aids. The teacher helps a student not to digress from the aim. A student and a teacher cooperate and help each other.

R.T.Bell has developed the first language teaching-learning model of *syllabus* design that can be applied to this research (dissertation) as well. The model consists of three branches: needs analysis and definition of skills; analysis of mistakes and determination of the level as a result of which *syllabus* is designed. The third branch includes the choice of teaching methods, creation of teaching aids and evaluation, which originate from the composed *syllabus*, and finally it includes feedback. (Bell, 1981)

Next, *curriculum* and *syllabus* theories were analyzed. The analysis of these theories is reflected in another researcher's article: *ESP Syllabus Design for Tourism*

*Students*, which is published in the Collection of the selected papers presented at the ATEE 7<sup>th</sup> Spring University *European added value in teacher education* (Lūka, 2004) In this research *curriculum* is understood as general educational guidelines, educational philosophy and aims, and *syllabus* includes course contents, methods and selected teaching aids. Another conclusion from the previously-mentioned article is that while creating an ESP course the most useful type of *syllabus* is the integrated one which includes content, process and results, stressing the process aspect of an activity, which means learning by doing, and observing the socio-cultural aspect as students will use ESP competence in different situations and in versatile, various cultural contexts.

Next, the analysis of documents and statistics about language teaching in different higher educational institutions was made. The researcher analyzed foreign language *curricula* of 9 study programmes from 6 higher educational institutions of Latvia: the School of Business Administration Turība, the University of Latvia, the Vidzeme University College, Latvia University of Agriculture, Liepāja Academy of Pedagogy, and Latvia College of Culture. All the study programmes offered tourism education: 3 of them were the first level study programmes of professional higher education and 6 were the second level study programmes. The following conclusions were made:

- the goal of most English language *curricula* was to learn professional lexis necessary for students' further career,
- besides professional lexis, the first level study programmes of professional higher education included themes of General English,
- the second level study programmes of professional higher education develop all language skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening,
- the study programme *Tourism Organization and Management* of the Vidzeme University College offers a possibility to study specialized courses *Business Correspondence in English* and *Public Speech in English* which develop students' skills of a formal language style,
- in most cases the available study programmes do not reveal the situation on the whole because the content of the *syllabus* is not given, only the course annotation, which does not allow drawing a conclusion about the content of the *syllabus* and about the integration of ESP course in the study programme.

### Empirical Research

In autumn of 2003, a group of nine third-year FIT students of BAT, who had worked in different sectors of tourism industry, was interviewed. The aim of the interview was to study the basic situations in which the students used the language

skills. The data were analyzed applying the qualitative data analysis method AQUAD 6. The interviewed students had mentioned 13 different situations for which they had used listening skills, 20 - for reading skills, 16 - for writing skills and 19 - for speaking skills. Based on the obtained results a standard questionnaire including the mentioned language themes was designed.

**In January 2004**, the survey of 90 second year FIT students applying the designed questionnaire was conducted. In fact, the researcher distributed 247 questionnaires, but, unfortunately, received back only 90 filled-in forms. 18 respondents had done two jobs in the tourism industry, thus the total number of the questionnaires constituted 108. The obtained results were analyzed applying quantitative data analysis methods. The research showed that while working in tourism industry most often the students had used listening skills (40.60%), then speaking skills (37.33%), reading skills (36.48%), least of all – writing skills (24.65%).

This stage of the research lasted from September 2003 till January 2004 and its results are analyzed in the researcher's article *English for Specific Purposes – Past, Present, Future* published in the Proceedings of the 5th International conference *Uzņēmējdarbības iespējas, problēmas un to risinājumi globalizācijas apstākļos* [Business Options, Problems and Solutions concerning Globalisation]. (Lūka, 2004)

**From February till April 2004** twelve tourism professors/lecturers of FIT were interviewed. The interviewed professors/lecturers taught 26 different tourism courses. The total number of the courses that tourism students study is 33. The interviews were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method AQUAD 6. Three groups of metacodes were chosen: the choice of teaching methods in the study process; the analysis of students' language skills and language level; the professional lexis necessary for work in tourism business. Then the sequence of codes was determined. This stage of the research and the obtained results are analyzed in the researcher's article *ESP Syllabus Design for Tourism Students* published in the Collection of the selected papers *European added value in teacher education*. (Lūka, 2004) The published article deals with the analysis of 9 interviews which were conducted in February and March 2004. The conclusion was drawn to continue interviews. Thus, in April 2004 three more interviews were conducted. The conclusions from all the twelve interviews are as follows:

- the content of the ESP *syllabus* should include as many tourism related topics as possible, because tourism labour market is versatile,
- when creating the ESP *curriculum* an interdisciplinary link should be observed,
- the ESP *curriculum* has to ensure the unity of the studies and practice which promotes students' motivation,

- while creating the ESP *syllabus* primary attention should be paid to the study of professional lexis and development of students' listening and speaking skills,
- it is necessary to develop students' intercultural communicative competence and the ability to work in different cultural contexts,
- when choosing the teaching methods the teacher should take into account students' learning experience, wishes and individual learning styles.

**From June till September 2004** the questioning of tourism experts (employers) was carried out. It has to be remarked that this was the most difficult part of the research because the respondents were unwilling to reveal information. Another problem was the chosen period of the survey – from June till August. As this is a high season in tourism in Latvia it was often impossible to meet tourism employers at their office. As a result the survey period had to be prolonged for a month. 26 tourism employers representing different tourism branches and different levels of management were questioned: five of them were restaurant managers, eleven were hotel managers, four – managers of travel agencies, one – manager of a tour operating company, two – managers of tourism information centres, two souvenir shop owners and one owner of a campsite. The aim of the survey was to find out the necessity of using English while being a lower level, medium level and higher-level employee of a tourism establishment. The survey questions were selected based on the requirements of the international exam for tourism employees – *English for Tourism Industry (EFTI)* (English, 2004; Lingo, 1999; London, 2004), the results were obtained at the previous stages of the needs analysis and consulting two leading Latvian tourism education specialists – the dean of FIT BAT assistant professor Zinaida Melbarde and the Master Programme's director and the Head of the Tourism Department associate professor Dr.geogr. Maija Rozite.

The age of the respondents was from 21 to 54, 17 of them were older than 30. The respondents had different work experience in tourism business: seven had only one-year experience, eight had experience from 2–5 years, 6 had experience from 6–9 years and five respondents had more than ten years' experience in tourism. The respondents represented small, medium and large tourism enterprises. The survey included questions concerning the respondent's identity and 17 questions concerning the English language competence necessary for work in the tourism industry. According to the requirements of quantitative data analysis (Lasmanis, 2002, 2003) the data were coded and then analyzed determining their frequency (cf. Table 1).

In order to find a correlation between the studied phenomena the average statistical values were determined (coefficient, per cent and absolute numbers) (cf. Table 2). The statistical analysis shows that on average tourism employees at



Table 1. The frequency of codes in tourism employees' surveys

Using the English language for work a tourism employee must know how to:	Code	Working at a lower post		Working at a medium post		Working at a higher post	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Read and understand notices	_pazi	23	88.46	17	65.38	19	73.08
Read and understand bills and accounts	_reki	9	34.62	23	88.46	17	65.38
Read and understand specific texts	_teks	5	19.23	15	57.69	19	73.08
Read and understand formal letters	_vest	5	19.23	15	57.69	21	80.77
Read and understand contracts	_ligu	5	19.23	15	57.69	22	84.62
Inform customers about the information read	_info	10	38.46	19	73.08	19	73.08
Read and fill in forms	_anke	14	53.85	20	76.92	17	65.38
Write the information heard	_dzir	16	61.54	18	69.23	17	65.38
Do business correspondence	_kore	4	15.38	18	69.23	19	73.08
Design a tourism brochure	_bukl	4	15.38	10	38.46	19	73.08
Understand customers' questions and requests	_jaut	21	80.77	19	73.08	19	73.08
Answer customers' questions and requests	_atbi	19	73.08	19	73.08	18	69.23
Make telephone calls	_tele	14	53.85	20	76.92	19	73.08
Ask questions	_ujau	18	69.23	17	65.38	17	65.38
Accept/refuse bookings	_pasu	14	53.85	17	65.38	17	65.38
Conduct a meeting in English	_sapu	2	7.69	8	30.77	20	76.92
Participate in business meetings	_tiks	1	3.85	11	42.31	22	84.62

Table 2. Statistical average values in tourism employees' surveys

Code	Lower post (l)			Medium post (m)			Higher post (h)			Differences		
	Positive answer	coef.	%	Positive answer	Coef.	%	Positive answer	Coef.	%	m-h	m-l	h-l
_pazi	23	0.88	88.46	17	0.65	65.38	19	0.73	73.08	2	6	4
_reki	9	0.35	34.62	23	0.88	88.46	17	0.65	65.38	6	14	8
_teks	5	0.19	19.23	15	0.58	57.69	19	0.73	73.08	4	10	14
_vest	5	0.19	19.23	15	0.58	57.69	21	0.81	80.77	6	10	16
_ligu	5	0.19	19.23	15	0.58	57.69	22	0.85	84.62	7	10	17
_info	10	0.38	38.46	19	0.73	73.08	19	0.73	73.08	0	9	9
_anke	14	0.54	53.85	20	0.77	76.92	17	0.65	65.38	3	6	3
_dzir	16	0.62	61.54	18	0.69	69.23	17	0.65	65.38	1	2	1
_kore	4	0.15	15.38	18	0.69	69.23	19	0.73	73.08	1	14	15
_bukl	4	0.15	15.38	10	0.38	38.46	19	0.73	73.08	9	6	15
_jaut	21	0.81	80.77	19	0.73	73.08	19	0.73	73.08	0	2	2
_atbi	19	0.73	73.08	19	0.73	73.08	18	0.69	69.23	1	0	1



Code	Lower post (l)			Medium post (m)			Higher post (h)			Differences		
	Positive answer	coef.	%	Positive answer	Coef.	%	Positive answer	Coef.	%	m-h	m-l	h-l
_tele	14	0.54	53.85	20	0.77	76.92	19	0.73	73.08	1	6	5
_ujau	18	0.69	69.23	17	0.65	65.38	17	0.65	65.38	0	1	1
_pasu	14	0.54	53.85	17	0.65	65.38	17	0.65	65.38	0	3	3
_sapu	2	0.08	7.69	8	0.31	30.77	20	0.77	76.92	12	6	18
_tiks	1	0.04	3.85	11	0.42	42.31	22	0.85	84.62	11	10	21

lower posts have received 10.82, at medium posts 16.53 and at higher posts 18.83 positive answers. The average difference between the employees of a higher and medium post is 2.35, medium and lower post 5.71 and higher and lower post 8.06 answers. The employees of medium and higher posts have more common traits than other groups. It can be explained by their professional duties.

The data were also analyzed according to the tourism branch: restaurants, hotels and travel agencies. As other tourism spheres were represented only by one or two respondents they were not analyzed. All the employees, except those holding lower posts at hotels, have to use English to perform their professional duties. In restaurants employees of higher-level posts should develop all the language skills, employees who perform medium and lower level duties mostly need to develop communication skills. In travel agencies employees occupying lower level posts need more English than other groups, which can be explained by the fact that most travel agencies of Latvia specialize in outbound tourism rather than inbound.

Analyzing the data according to the size of the enterprise a conclusion can be drawn that in small enterprises everybody must know English, in a medium sized company the situation differs: the more responsible job the employee performs, the higher level of the English language competence is required. In a large company there is a strict job division and employees need to know English to perform their direct professional duties. Employees occupying lower posts need mostly speaking and listening skills, whereas employees of higher posts need specific reading and writing skills and communication skills.

The survey of tourism employees led to the conclusions that:

- in a small tourism enterprise all its employees should have a high level of ESP competence,
- in large tourism enterprises the higher the employee's post is, the more he/she has to use English at work,
- employees of medium level posts, who are in daily contact with clients, most often use English for communication and interaction, therefore, it is necessary to develop their intercultural communicative competence,

- to perform professional duties managers of all tourism enterprises need to have knowledge of specific professional lexis to do business correspondence, conclude contracts and work with other documents,
- as students at FIT study tourism to run all kinds of tourism establishments in the ESP course students' language skills should be developed in a complex way using a communicative approach to promote students' communication and interaction,
- creating the ESP *curriculum* customers' interests should be observed, which are expressed in the employees' survey,
- it is necessary in the studies to develop students' intercultural communication skills and the ability to work in different cultural contexts.

In September 2004 all the obtained data were systematized and on the basis of the research results a curriculum for teaching ESP for tourism students was designed. Then the further plan of the research was made and the research was continued. A group of nine students was chosen who learnt ESP according to the new *curriculum* and approved of it.

## Conclusions

- The needs analysis stresses the necessity to create an ESP *curriculum* that promotes students' English language competence, at the same time developing their intercultural communicative competence that would allow tourism specialists successfully work and compete in tourism market. It allows assessing the language topics and skills necessary for such a type of *curriculum*, choosing the most appropriate teaching aids and teaching methods that would correspond to students' individual learning styles and wishes and to the requirements of the industry.
- When creating an ESP *curriculum* the most suitable is the integrative model as it incorporates contents, process and results. Thematic *syllabus* can be chosen as the leading one and situational, task-based and procedural *syllabi* may be used as supplementary ones.
- Students' ESP competence successfully develops at the tertiary level studies on the basis of continuous students' and customers' (tourism employers and industry customers) needs analysis.
- Students' ESP competence develops more successfully if studies are realized in cooperation between students and the teacher.

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