



ANALYSING INDUSTRY NEEDS IN ORIENTATION WITH DEVELOPING VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' WORKPLACE ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE FOR GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract. This study aims at examining how English has been used at work and what industries have actually needed in terms of their staff's English communicative competence for the current globalization. For these purposes, the research methodology was constructed with the main use of questionnaire survey and interviews with 126 employees and managers from 11 corporates in central Vietnam. The triangulation of data collection instruments, sources of information and various investigated locations helped to sort out important factors in order to enhance the vocational undergraduates' English communicative competence at work. The findings reveal actual workplace communication needs of English in the field of business administration (BusiAdmin). Particularly, the research results yield valid contents significant to developing the BusiAdmin students' English communicative competence in orientation with the widespread globalization: (i) industries identified English as one of the prioritized recruitment standards; (ii) language skills for job purposes namely telephoning, reading and writing emails, business letters, contracts, memos and minutes, speaking and listening in social situations with business partners and job interviewing were recommended; and (iii) the suggestions put forth by all the participants were catered for.

Keywords: workplace English communicative competence, industry needs, needs analysis and vocational students, Business Administration.

1. Introduction

To successfully pursue the competitive commercial world in the era of fast globalization, employees in almost all areas of specialisation need to possess a decent level of English proficiency to communicate well at work. The demands for learning and teaching English for workplace purposes have been increasing rapidly in the widespread integration.

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In Vietnam, tertiary education has been directed to train students for the globalisation and integration but at present there is little sign of success (MOET annual report, 2013). It is annually reported that despite the introduction and emphasis of English in the educational curriculum for decades, a majority of Vietnamese students cannot communicate well in English (MOET annual report, 2013).

This is a common problem for most Vietnamese graduates who cannot use English effectively for job interviews or for communication in the workplace (Le, 2016). Consequently, a large number of graduates face employment difficulties. This limitation has urged colleges and universities to highlight English for workplace use as a dramatically urgent need in the development of language programs. Attention has been paid to the teaching and learning of English for vocational purposes much more than ever.

While it is really essential to enhance the students' proficiency in general English, their vocational English communication needs should be satisfied in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs so that they can keep up with the trends of globalisation and the market. Moreover, in recognition of an increasing demand for developing the English teaching and learning situation to prepare students for global integration, this study aimed to explore the BusiAdmin graduates' actual use of English in the workplace and the industries' real demands in terms of their staff's English competence in the current era of globalisation. The industries' recommendations towards the development of the undergraduates' English language competence majored in BusiAdmin field are also specified in this paper.

This research hopefully acts as a response to the widespread globalization. The understanding of the graduates' language needs emerging from the globalized situation can be applied as a basis to define efficiently and appropriately the objectives, goals, syllabus, methodologies and teaching materials of a student-centered and industry-oriented language curricula at tertiary levels. By doing this, the research seeks possible solutions to come up with the urgent needs in enhancing English language competence of employees in alignment to the demands of the world-wide globalization.

2. Previous studies

The field of applied linguistics has witnessed several studies on curriculum development, especially on designing ESP programs which were based on analyzing the target needs.

Take Jones's study in 1991 for instance. The author conducted an ESP syllabus design for France Telecom engineering practitioners by an integrated model. Four hundred engineering practitioners of France Telecom were involved in a needs analysis of the global communication needs. The results revealed four main speech 55 events connected to the Telecom engineers'

language communication, which were later subcategorized into four related macro-topics. Tasks and activities were constructed around each sub-topic in the actual teaching.

With a different purpose to meet the needs of both oral and written language of low literacy and unskilled US laborers in Chicago, Garcia (2002, cited in Hart-Rawung, 2008) administered a needs analysis and task analysis in order to design an ESP learner-centred program for the workers. The needs analysis determined what approach could be applicable and appropriate for designing a syllabus for this particular group of learners. Specifically, the workers were encouraged to participate actively in the classroom activities such as role plays, dialogues with several real materials from the workplace. This design was aimed to meet the workplace communication demands and to motivate active learners in classroom participation.

Focusing on English for Medical Purposes, Alfehaid (2011) created a proposal for the development of the present ESP course at Health Sciences Colleges (HSCs) in Saudi Arabia on the basis of a needs analysis and a course evaluation. The study came to conclusion that the collection of multiple types of data from various sources and places was necessary to overcome many of the problems commonly associated with needs analysis and evaluation studies.

Within Vietnamese context, due to the changing demand for developing the workforce's English proficiency in the time of globalization and the imperative of the Project *Teaching and learning foreign language in the state-run educational system for the 2008-2020 period* (the 2020 Project), an increasing number of studies have been conducted to improve the quality of EFL and ESP education in Vietnam. These studies involve issues such as Vietnamese learners' autonomy in EFL learning (Dang, 2010; Le, 2013); difficulties in teaching ESP (Nguyen & Pham, 2016); or ESP teaching approaches (Le & Nguyen, 2014; Nguyen, 2015; Tran, L. V. C. 2015).

In general, although the studies have covered various aspects of ESP curriculum development, little focus has been put on the development of English programs for Vietnamese vocational students and none of the research related to BusiAdmin has been done in the Vietnam's globalized workplaces. Therefore, the current research hopes to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

Research design

Since no single method is free of problems (Le, 2011, p. 92) and any one source of information is likely to be incomplete or partial, a triangular approach (i.e., collecting information from two or more sources) is advisable (Richards, 2012). For the current study, the researcher adopted a mixed-methods strategy of both quantitative and qualitative method. Since needs analysis is often conducted with questionnaire survey (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2010; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Hossain, 2013; Iwai et al, 1999; Schöpfer-Grabe & Weiss, 1998; Thivviah,

2013) and interviews (Huhta et al, 2013, p. 17), this study also employed them for needs assessment. The research instruments were designed with reference to a professional profile of business administration, the basic purpose of which was to describe the language and communication needs for workplace context at a level of detail sufficient to create an effective ESP training program or vocationally oriented language course. The researcher prepared structured questions in which a respondent chose from a limited number of responses to both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaires involved 22 questions which were divided into three sections: (i) participants' personal information, (ii) their perception of English communication needs and (iii) participants' suggestions towards the ESP curriculum design for BusiAdmin students at college. The questionnaire survey was conducted with 126 BusiAdmin employees from 11 corporates in Central Vietnam.

Based on the questionnaire information, interview schedules were developed for further survey purposes. Eight out of 126 BusiAdmin employees participated in the interviews voluntarily. The first part of the interview concerned the interviewees' background information. The participants were then asked about the role of English in their job, self-evaluation of English proficiency, difficulties in using English at work, advantages of the frequent use of English for job context, the tasks they performed at work using English, language skills most used at work, suggestions towards business administration students of preparing for future job in terms of English learning and suggestions towards the English curriculum design for business administration students. The items in this set of interviews were related to language-specific description, enabling the researcher to have an overview about the BusiAdmin employees' real-world English communication situations and their suggestions for an effective design of a new curriculum for BusiAdmin students.

The interviews with three employers of three companies in Hue City were also conducted to have more insights into English language needed in the BusiAdmin profession. They first gave some introduction about their background information. The questions were related to the companies' expectations of English standard for their recruitment, the challenges and benefits from the frequent and fluent use of English at work, employers' support for their employees' English learning for workplace use, suggestions towards BusiAdmin students and colleges in terms of English learning and teaching for future job context.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted since most of the respondents lived nearby. However, some telephone interviews were administered due to time and space limitations. These tools were chosen at the interviewees' most convenience. Each respondent was interviewed individually. An interview took about half an hour on average. The participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research in advance. The questions were written in Vietnamese but interviewees could answer either in English or in Vietnamese. All

interviews were audio recorded. The Vietnamese interviews were fully transcribed into English for analysis. The recall recordings would be sent to the interviewees for respondent validation.

In general, the questionnaires and interviews were devised to explore the employees' actual English communication needs at work and their suggestions towards the ESP curriculum design for BuAdmin students at college.

Participants

For the current study, data collection was implemented with 126 BusiAdmin employees and employers from 11 corporates in central Vietnam. These participants were chosen based on the current number of staff whose responsibility was related to BusiAdmin in these corporations. Their businesses with foreign colleagues, partners, clients, experts or international deals were taken into account on purpose. This participant population was invited to participate in the research to yield the relevant target needs of English learning for BusiAdmin profession since they faced great needs to communicate in English on this field. It was anticipated that their real language use for workplace purposes would be very informative to the research. At the same time, employees' responses revealed the current social needs in terms of professional English language use.

The demographic data reveals that the participants worked in different company sections. Those working in Sales-marketing department occupied the highest portion (34.9%), followed by those in customer service (19.8%) and finance-accounting sections (15.9%) respectively. The respondents held various working positions in the 11 companies studied, namely directors (2.4%), vice-director (0.8%), heads of departments (3.2%), deputy heads of department (5.6%) and employees (88.1%). The majority of the employees worked around 10 years. The responses to the questions about working areas demonstrated that the employees were involved mostly in marketing, finance, production and human resources, which are the four main areas in the BusiAdmin profession. Noticeably, three out of 126 participants were employers who also participated in the interview schedule to reveal the general recruiters' expectations of the BusiAdmin employees' English expertise and skills.

Data analysis

The data collected including questionnaire and interview transcripts were both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire responses were grouped into categories and calculated into percentages, means and standard deviation by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Statistics 20) while the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews were classified, grouped, coded and interpreted through content analysis related to the themes of the research. The audio-recorded

data that were mainly collected in Vietnamese were then translated into English before being analyzed.

4. Findings and discussion

English standards required in recruitment

According to the recruitment information from the employers investigated, the employers identified English as one of the prioritized standards in recruitment.

Table 1. English standards required in the employers' recruitment policies

Recruiters	Positions	English competence required
Company 1	Various positions	Level C (National certificates) or equivalent, good communicative skills and good competence
Company 2	Corporate service manager	Good communicative skills
Company 3	Planning assistant Business assistant Salary accountant	Good communicative skills (no requirements of specific certificates)
Company 4	Engineer Workers	Not mentioned
Company 5	Technical manager Lean Engineer Quality controller	Good English skills (No specific requirements of English certificates mentioned) Fluent English Good English skills
Company 6	Business assistant Marketing assistant Business controller Accountant	C-level national certificate or equivalent C-level national certificate or equivalent B-level national certificate A-level national certificate
Company 7		Not available
Company 8	SPA manager (Sales & Purchase Agreement) SPA assistant	Good communicative skills
Company 9	Head of accounting department	Foreign language skills (No specific requirements of English certificates mentioned)
Company 10	Accountant Planning assistant Production assistant	No requirements of English mentioned
Company 11	Sales secretary	No requirements of English mentioned

Though English criteria in these companies differed, the employers generally expected their employees to be prepared with English competence at certain levels that can help them in

their job contexts. A common requirement was that the employees should be able to communicate well in English. This was understandable since most corporations in Vietnam realized the challenges on entering the new era of integration (Trung, 2016; Viet, 2015; Vietnam News, 2016). Especially, they had to possess skillful labor forces in response to the higher demands of international cooperation. Among them, English played a key role for mutual understanding and collaboration among business partners. The fact that English was a prioritized standard in the job recruitment policies laid out prominent demands for the EFL educators in equipping learners with necessary English competence. For this reason, English language programs have been improved or developed to meet the social needs. Especially, while it is really essential to enhance the students' proficiency in general English, their professional communication needs should be satisfied in the ESP program so that they can keep up with the trends of globalisation and the market.

Workplace communicative activities conducted in English

With regards to the actual use of English in BusiAdmin workplace settings, a question in the questionnaire was raised using the five-point scale with 1 as *never* to 5 for *daily* to elicit the answers. The data in Table 2, which illustrates the communicative activities conducted at work, shows the mean score centering around 2.5 points ($M=2.47$). This means that the BusiAdmin employees tended to use English for BusiAdmin workplace activities. The figures reveal that the two most frequent activities were *reading and using information from professional sources* ($M=3.23$) and *writing English emails and business* ($M=2.88$).

In relation to the study by Grosse (2004) reporting wide use of English among Mexican executives in reading job-related materials such as research reports, English magazines, Internet news sources and training materials, it appeared important for BusiAdmin employees in Vietnam to have frequent access to English materials related to jobs to keep up with the current widespread globalization.

Table 2. Communicative activities conducted in English at work (N=126)

Communicative activities	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading and using information from professional sources	1	5	3.23	0.93
Writing e-mails and business letters	1	5	2.88	1.34
Reading/writing invoices and certificates	1	5	2.40	1.26
Telephoning	1	5	2.49	1.14
Negotiating	1	5	2.15	1.05
Making oral presentations, demonstrations and product descriptions	1	5	2.10	1.07

Reading and writing reports and summaries	1	5	2.64	1.12
Reading/writing contracts	1	5	2.66	1.25
Writing memos and minutes	1	5	2.68	1.18
Writing CVs, job applications	1	5	2.27	1.05
Social talks, meeting clients and business associates	1	5	2.53	1.03
Other activities/situations	1	5	1.70	0.88
Mean of cluster	1	5	2.47	0.84

Table 2 indicates that emails and business letters were the most frequently writing tasks in the BusiAdmin profession. The BusiAdmin interviewees responded that they often dealt with their work through emails and tended to read and write English emails every day. A survey study on written business communications conducted by Louhiala-Salminen (1996) revealed that mails and telefaxes were the most common mediums of communication. In 2004, Grosse investigating Mexican business executives' English use reported email and phone calls as the most frequently used communication channels. In comparison with these studies, the use of emails in the current research was still popular while the use of fax tended to reduce.

As shown from Table 2, the low mean scores of 2.10 and 2.15 respectively implied that the participants rarely used English for presentations, demonstrations and product descriptions and for negotiating. Using English for business meetings (e.g. presentation, negotiation, briefing, conference, seminar and social meetings) was not considered as a frequent task in BusiAdmin jobs at the companies surveyed. Some employees also mentioned other situations at work ($M=1.70$) in which they were involved in English such as participating in the English club (at Company 3), using English-medium software in banks and travelling. However, those listing these items accounted for a low percentage (6.3%). Meanwhile, CVs and job applications were considered the least popular documents that the respondents had access to ($M=2.27$). It was true since almost all the companies involved in this study did not require the candidates' minimal English proficiency certificates with their CVs and application forms written in English. This questionnaire result was relatively contrary to the interview data while the respondents suggested that BusiAdmin graduates should know how to write English CVs and application forms. In their opinion, this would help them to be outstanding in the interview results.

Generally speaking, the above-mentioned English business tasks involved all four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The skills tended to be used equally through reading and using information from different English sources related to BusiAdmin job, writing English e-mails and business letters, oral presentations and telephoning with foreign clients, business partners and employers. However, a common problem in the EFL

education in Vietnam is that most ESP courses often concentrate on vocabulary, grammar and macro language skills (Duong, Bui & Bui, 2005; Nguyen, 2015; Vu, 2015) while neglecting training students on professional skills. This reality implies a dramatical change in teaching ESP to vocational students.

Industry voice towards the development of vocational students' English communicative competence

According to the employees' real-world working experience, BusiAdmin undergraduates needed to be well-trained and well-prepared with English for workplace contexts in the new era of fast globalization.

Specifically, seven out of eight employee respondents suggested that students should get familiar with speaking and listening tasks. Speaking on the phone was a daily communicative activity that BusiAdmin employees were involved in. In addition, professional communication situations were also common in this kind of job such as product or service descriptions to clients, customers, and partners; dealing with requests and complaints. Moreover, graduates majoring in BusiAdmin would engage in social situations, namely small talks with foreign colleagues and managers; meeting clients and business associates, etc. As an interviewee suggested, what BusiAdmin students should prepare for future jobs involved speaking English correctly, efficient professional English knowledge and being overt in learning English. He continued that the ESP curriculum for BusiAdmin students should concentrate on listening comprehension and prepare learners with professional vocabulary. Another respondent advised the students to enhance their communicative skills and pronounce correctly from the beginning. From all of this, priority should be given to speaking and listening skills in English learning and teaching so that students can conduct effective English communication for workplace purposes.

In addition, nearly half of the interviewees recommended that students should practice writing emails a lot since this was the most frequent writing task in business correspondence. Daily use of emails required employees to make electronic letters not only proper but effective. In this sense, electronic correspondence should be an indispensable component in English courses for BusiAdmin students.

For appropriate and effective EFL or ESP courses, the participants suggested that students should be given more opportunities to have access to daily workplace. Thanks to this, students could live in real environment of using English for job context such as meeting professionals and experts, working with foreign colleagues and managers and dealing with English-related incidents at work. On this matter, a respondent mentioned:

The English curriculum for BusiAdmin students should encourage students to join real environment of using English (at work); create chance for students to use English, e.g. internship at foreign-related industries; provoke students' interest in learning English (if students have a good command of English, they can have a lot of opportunities in employment success). Teachers direct activities towards students' interests and hobbies. Learning and teaching like entertaining can bring out effectiveness (*An employee from company 3*).

Especially, a number of participants (20%) stated that students needed to learn culture norms for cross-cultural communication since we entered a new era of world-wide integration. This would help them interpret and comprehend business partners from non-English or English-speaking countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, India, Israel, France, Italy, England, America, etc. Understanding cultural conventions would enable the graduates to get on well with foreign managers, colleagues, clients, business partners and experts from different countries in the world and conduct business deals successfully. On this basis, teaching English should include the cultural instruction so that graduates can avoid misunderstanding in English communication and get advantages of using English for workplace contexts.

5. Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the questionnaire survey and the interview responses of the participants revealed the importance and the reality of the English language use in the BusiAdmin profession. The findings implied several important considerations in the preparation and enhancement of English communicative competence for BusiAdmin students. Specifically, all four macro English language skills were necessary in BusiAdmin jobs and English was generally needed for finding and using information from English professional sources, writing business letters and emails and speaking and listening in social situations. With the statistical evidence, the study also signified practical recommendations for students majoring in BusiAdmin to be well-prepared with English competence for their future job context.

The above workplace-oriented needs analysis was considered as a valuable channel and essential starting point to develop syllabus and choose teaching approaches. The employers' expectations and employees' needs regarding English for workplace communication could help ESP course designers and teachers anticipate what specialized content knowledge and language functions are most necessary to meet the graduates' English communication requirement at work. Then, the actual language practices can be conducted appropriately.

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