



A COMPARISON OF EXPECTATIONS OF TOURISM STUDENTS AND SECTOR EXECUTIVES ON THE VOCATIONAL ENGLISH COURSE

Cemre TAŞKIN ESKİCİ*, Perihan KORKUT**

* Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Datça Kazım Yılmaz Vocational School

** Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Faculty of Education

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ABSTRACT

Today, a quarter of the world's population uses English for different reasons, and the tourism sector is one of the major areas where English is widely used. English language education takes place as a compulsory course in tourism programs in junior colleges and faculties. Vocational English courses are also part of language training. Although English is a common subject, the vocational English courses taught at universities do not have a common curriculum. The purpose of this study is to find out what the students expect from the vocational English course and what those who hold managerial positions expect from an employee to be recruited in the sector in terms of English, to compare whether their expectations overlap and to discuss the role of the school if there is a conflict between expectations. In this context, a questionnaire was applied to a group of high school students and the managers of a leading hotel in resort tourism were interviewed. According to the results the expectations of the students and managers are mostly overlapping, the managers also give importance to the general English skills; they seem to be insistent on the fluency in speaking. Therefore, it is probable to reach the conclusion that general English subjects should be included in the preparation of the vocational English curriculum. Recommendations include increasing the hours of compulsory English hours in colleges.

Key Words: Vocational English, tourism students, needs analysis, sector expectations

TURİZM ÖĞRENCİLERİ İLE SEKTÖRÜN YÖNETİCİLERİNİN MESLEKİ İNGİLİZCE DERSİ ÜZERİNE BEKLENTİLERİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

ÖZET

Günümüzde dünyanın dörtte bir nüfusu farklı sebeplerle İngilizce kullanmaktadır ve turizm sektörü de İngilizcenin yaygın olarak kullanıldığı başta gelen alanlardan biridir. Dil eğitimi yüksek okul ve fakültelerde bulunan turizm programlarda zorunlu dil eğitimi olarak yer almaktadır. Mesleki İngilizce dersleri de dil eğitiminin bir parçasıdır. İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olması ortak nokta olmasına rağmen üniversitelerde okutulan mesleki İngilizce derslerinin ortak bir müfredatı bulunmamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin mesleki İngilizce dersinden beklentileri ve sektörde yönetici pozisyonunda bulunanların yeni işe alacakları bir çalışandan bekledikleri İngilizce bilgisinin ne olduğunu bulmak, beklentilerinin örtüşüp örtüşmediğini karşılaştırmak ve beklentiler arasında uyumsuzluk doğarsa okulun bu uyumsuzluk karşısındaki rolünü tartışmaktır. Bu kapsamda bir grup yüksek okul öğrencisine anket uygulanmış ve resort turizminin önde gelen otellerinin yöneticileri ile görüşülmüştür. Bulgular öğrencilerin ve yöneticilerin İngilizce konusunda beklentilerinin çoğunlukla örtüştüğünü, yöneticilerin mesleki İngilizce dışında genel İngilizce bilgisine de önem verdikleri, özellikle akıcı konuşma konusunda ısrarcı oldukları yönündedir. Bu sebeple mesleki İngilizce müfredatı hazırlanırken genel İngilizce konularına da yer verilmesi gerektiği sonucu ağır basmaktadır. Yüksekokullardaki zorunlu İngilizce ders saatinin artırılması öneriler arasındadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mesleki İngilizce, turizm öğrencileri, ihtiyaç analizi, sektör beklentileri



INTRODUCTION

Thanks to its beautiful nature and rich history, Turkey is one of the most attractive touristic destinations around the world. It welcomes a lot of international and national tourists every year. This situation inevitably creates a need for more and more staff to work in tourism industry. There are a lot of associate degree programs in universities across the country to school these staff. Thanks to the global language status of English, it is often seen as one the basic skills that a staff member must have. Therefore, these programs include vocational English courses into their programs. These courses aim to enable students function well in many situations from reception to send-out. To be able to prepare the students for their future job properly, it is important to identify what they need first. This entails both consideration of student's own perception of what they need, and giving credit to the professional point of view to this matter. As the associate degree programs prepare students for the work life, it is important for them to meet both the students' and the sectors' expectations.

Literature Review

According to English Effect Report by British Council, English is spoken by a quarter of the world's population. While the borders are becoming less visible, English is becoming more important. In the report it is estimated that by 2020, two billion people will be using English – or learning to use it. People use English in numerous areas such as technology, economy, health, entertainment etc. As a result, English has become a world language which is used in the majority of intercultural communications. As the number of tourists who use English to communicate in our country increases, the tourism sector gives utmost importance to their staff being capable of speaking English. There are plenty of tourism schools around the world and English is one of their compulsory courses in most cases. When English is taught for employment in tourism, it falls under the category of “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argues that:

ESP must be seen as an *approach* not as a *product*. (italics original) ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consists of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? ... ESP, then, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning. (p.19)

When it comes to language teaching, whether it is general English course or an ESP course there are several factors to be taken into consideration. Designing syllabuses and creating materials are two of them.

Graves (2014) explains that “syllabus describes what will be taught in a course” (p.50). She also points out that “What is in a syllabus depends on who the learners are, their purposes for learning, and the context in which the course takes place.” (p.47) Nunan (1988) approaches syllabus from a slightly different angle and says that “Syllabus design, then, is the selection, sequencing, and the justification of the content of the curriculum” He describes the process and continues “In language teaching, content selection will include selecting linguistic features such as items of grammar pronunciation and vocabulary as well as experiential content such as topics and themes. This selection process is guided by the needs analysis of various kinds”



The body of literature emphasizes the importance of conducting a needs analysis before creating a syllabus for an ESP course. Nation and Macalister (2010) states that “needs analysis examines what the learners know already and what they need to know. Needs analysis makes sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn.” (p.24) Hutchinson and Waters (1987) states that the main difference between general English and ESP is not the existence of the need but the awareness of the need. They divide needs into “*target needs* (i.e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and *learning needs* (i.e. what the learner needs to do in order to learn).” (p.54) The target needs are grouped into three categories. Necessities, wants and lacks. According to their classification, necessities are related to the demands of the target situation, lacks concerned with the gap between learner’s existing language proficiency and the needed target situation language needs and wants refer to learners’ view on what their needs are. To be able to gather the needs, these three sources are used: the students themselves, the target language-teaching establishment and the user intuitions.

In conducting needs analysis, researches have focused on different aspects. For instance Masoumpanah and Tahririan (2013) in Iran or Choi (2010) in South Korea asked the students about the importance of English and in both studies students stated that English is very important for work life. Some studies focused on the four skills related to teaching tourism English. For example Pongjumpa (2011) found in her thesis studies in Taiwan that listening and speaking skills were often used by staff and representatives in the five star hotels.

Research Questions

As well as around the world, tourism education is an important issue in Turkey. There are secondary and higher education schools for tourism. Higher education is provided in public and non-profit private universities and includes 2-year Associate's degrees, 4-year Bachelor's degrees and post-graduate programs at the Master's and Doctorate levels. Students who graduate from 2-year Associate's degree programs, are potentially capable of working in all departments. English is widely used and seen as a skill that a staff member must have in the hotels. Therefore, these programs include vocational English courses into their curriculums. This study is conducted to determine

1. What do vocational school 1st year students expect from a Vocational English course?
2. What do department principals and HR department expect the Vocational School graduates know in English?
3. Is there an overlap or mismatch between the expectations of the students and professionals?

The answers of the research questions can pave the way for improvements in the curriculums of vocational English courses in Tourism Associate’s degree programs. Answering the research questions can open up more questions such as “If there is any mismatch between the students’ and professionals’ expectations, what should be the role of the school? How should be the syllabus for tourism English designed?”

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive study in order to uncover the students’ perceived needs and the sector’s expectations. The results are compared to determine for possible areas of conflicts or overlaps between the two surveys.



- Participants

The participants are chosen according to purposive sampling technique. Both School of Tourism and Management students and hotel administrators participated in this study.

- Students

To be able to conduct a needs analysis, a group of 23 first year Associate degree tourism management students from Datça region were asked to fill a close-ended questionnaire. It is appropriate to choose first year students because to be able to create a syllabus that will meet their needs, it is important to learn what they expect from the course.

- Hotel Administrators

Five different hotel administrators who are responsible for different departments were interviewed. Different department administrators were chosen purposefully as they play a crucial role whether a person is employed as a staff or not. They were interviewed in the light of the same questionnaire that was presented to the student participants. The administrators' opinions about which items would be necessary for a typical employee in their department were asked. They were also asked whether they would like to add anything to the survey.

- Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire was taken from a similar study which was conducted in 2005 by Fazelah Noor in Malaysia. The questionnaire was translated and adopted by the researchers and was shown to an expert in the field of teaching English. In addition, a focus group of students was created, and they were asked their expectations from the course. It was seen that their ideas mostly overlap with the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 27 statements related to tourism English in four different skills. There are 9 statements for speaking, 4 statements for listening, 8 statements for writing, and 6 statements for reading skill. Students were asked to mark what they think for each statement from very important to less important.

FINDINGS

- The Survey

The frequencies of each statement for the speaking, listening, writing and reading were investigated. Table 1 below shows the responses from students on speaking skill statements in tourism English.

Table 1: Responses from students on speaking skill statements in tourism English

	Frequencies		
	Very important	Important	Less important
S1. To be able to attend to the guests orally (restaurant and front office)	17	5	1
S2. To be able to answer questions about the restaurant menus and the hotel	13	10	
S3. To be able to give information about the dishes	9	10	4
S4. To be able to respond the complaints about the hotel and restaurant	9	11	3



S5. To be able to deal with enquiries on the local area	8	13	2
S6. To be able to answer questions about the hotel services and facilities	13	8	2
S7. To be able to answer reservation telephones.	17	5	1
S8. To be able to answer telephone calls properly.	16	7	
S9. To be able to complete check in and check out processes.	9	12	2

In terms of speaking, most of the students considered statements for speaking skills as either very important or important. *S1: To be able to attend guests orally at the restaurant and front office* and *S7: To be able to answer reservation telephones* were considered the most important skills by the students. *S3: To be able to give information about the dishes* was seen the least important skill in their profession by the students, which is followed by *S4: to be able to respond to the complaints about the hotel and restaurant*.

Table 2: Responses from students on listening skill statements in tourism English

	Frequencies		
	Very important	Important	Less important
S1. To be able to listen and understand the questions and the problems of the guests	16	7	
S2: To be able to take orders at a restaurant	15	7	1
S3. To be able to listen to complaints of the guests	12	8	3
S4. To be able to listen to and understand the instructors from the administrators.	9	13	1

As shown in Table 2, when the statements on listening skills were examined, it was clearly seen that students thought that listening to guest's questions and problems were very important. They also considered it very important to be able to take orders at a restaurant. Listening to complaints and listening to instructions were not considered as important as the other skills.

When writing skills were investigated, students suppose them mostly important. The responses from students on writing skill statements were presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Responses from students on writing skill statements in tourism English

	Frequencies		
	Very important	Important	Less important
S1. To be able to reply the complaint letters	7	12	4
S2. To be able to take notes during the meetings	6	15	2
S3. To be able to reply e-mails where guests request information on room pricing	8	10	5
S4. To be able to reply e-mails where guests request information on hotel services and facilities.	6	11	6



S5. To be able to answer guests' questions on food and beverage via e-mail.	9	10	4
S6. To be able to fill the reservation forms.	8	10	5
S7. To be able to fill the check in/check out forms.	10	10	3
S8. To be able to write reports.	11	12	

As seen in Table 3, the most important skills according to students were *S8. To be able to write reports* and *S.7 To be able to fill the check in/check out forms*. They regarded *S6. To be able to reply e-mails where guests request information on hotel services and facilities* as the least important writing skill. On reading skills, students considered most of the items very important (See Table 4 below)

Table 4: Responses from students on reading skill statements in tourism English

	Frequencies		
	Very important	Important	Less important
S1. To be able to read and answer the complaint letters written by the guests	16	5	2
S2. To be able understand the job descriptions in English	14	9	
S3. To be able to understand the instructions written in English	15	8	
S.4. To be able to understand the written sources on tourism for a professional development.	12	9	2
S5. To be able to read the safety card.	12	11	
S6. To be able to understand the reservation e-mails.	11	10	2

As presented in Table 4, the students acknowledged the *S1. To be able to read and answer the complaint letters written by the guests* as very important. The second very important skill was considered to be *S3.To be able to understand the instructions written in English*.

When all the responses are examined, students mostly decided that statements were either very important or important in all four skills, which can be shown as a proof that students see English as an important aspect of their future jobs. Statements related to reservations and check in/check out procedures were attributed a lot of importance by the students in all skills. This gives a clue that students see themselves as receptionists in the future. Students considered the writing skills less important than the other skills and the speaking skills were given the most importance. This illustrates that students give importance to oral communication.

- The Interviews

The administrators from a luxury resort were asked for their opinion about the skills on the questionnaire. They all considered speaking and listening statements as the most important skills. Interviewee 1, who is responsible for a restaurant said:



“The back page (where the writing and reading statements are) means nothing to me. My staff should definitely be able to communicate in English” and he added that *“The writing and reading skill requirements depend on the department they will work for.”*

Interviewee 2, who is responsible for room service department emphasized the importance of listening comprehension skills. He stated that:

“Our employers should clearly understand what the guests want. If they don’t understand correctly, this may reflect badly on the hotel”

Interviewee 3, who is responsible for housekeeping department remarked that

“We are considered as a department which doesn’t require any English. However, this is not true. Our staff should at least know greetings, directions or should be able to reply basic inquiries that come from our guests.”

Interviewee 4 who is a concierge told that all the skills on the questionnaire is very important.

She also said that

“English is the key for this job. They should have C1 level English in all areas.”

Interviewee 5, who is an administrator in reservation department emphasized the importance of writing and speaking skills. He pointed out the importance of formal language in email writing and telephone conversation. He also said that:

“Our agents should know proper English. Grammar and pronunciation are also very important. In our department we don’t have a chance to communicate with our guests face to face. That’s way correct grammar and pronunciation is very important”

As the sentences uttered by administrators illustrate, all the administrators give importance to speaking skills. Furthermore, it was found that they all approach the English language ability from different angles as their department require. They also stressed that if a new graduate has a good level of general English, they can quickly learn the department requirements.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is highly accepted around the world that knowing a foreign language is one of the most important factors in tourism industry. (Simion, 2002; Leslie&Russel, 2005; Wai Leong & Xi Li, 2012) This present study is no exception. Participants, both tourism students and administrators, attributed great importance to English. When the importance ranking of the skills are considered, while speaking skill is considered the most important skill of all, followed by listening, reading and writing. These findings are in line with a study done by Prachanant (2012) in Thailand. The tourism employees ranked the skills in the exact same order in the study. It is conclusive that English is very important in tourism industry and speaking is seen the most important skill.

The findings of this study showed considerable overlap between student and sector expectations. Both participant groups stressed the importance of oral skills over spoken skills and highlighted the need for developing a basic level of English in all four skills. While preparing a curriculum for vocational English, it is suggested to include general English topics in the curriculum. Besides, for having students develop their speaking skills, the number of English lesson hours might be increased. Students may also benefit from extracurricular activities like a conversation club.



This small scale study investigated student and sector expectations using survey questions and interviews with only limited number of participants. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to other contexts. Despite this limitation, the results of this study shed light on sector expectations in the researchers' particular contexts. Further studies in which a larger sample is used can be conducted. In addition, the results of this study can inform developments in the vocational English syllabus and the effects of such changes can be investigated with experimental studies.

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