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Analyzing Needs in Designing English-for-Business Courses Syllabi: a Case Study of University of Phan Thiet

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Abstract: *This research focuses on the role of needs analysis in designing the Syllabi of English for Business (EB) courses for English major students at the University of Phan Thiet (UPT), specifically the identification of needs of students, recruiters and alumni to improve the syllabi. The survey carries out at UPT, Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFL) reveal students' needs and students' perspectives towards the EB courses. The quantitative method using SPSS and an additional qualitative method in the year 2020. The results of the research are hoped to give suggestions for improving EB syllabi, including suggestions for improving language skills and professional skills. Results emphasize competence needs have been identified in two main areas: language skills and professional skills to consider syllabi adjustments for EB courses. This research paper is one part of the thesis.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Designing a syllabus is very important in language teaching and there have been many researchers who have researched this. Widdowson (1984, p.26) stated that to facilitate learning, designing a syllabus is considered a teaching device. However, designing a syllabus to address learners' needs is challenging. Especially designing syllabus for English language students are very difficult because of the changing of learner's needs and social needs. The motivation to do this research on the needs for improving the EB syllabi also arises that before the syllabi were put into use, from the beginning until now, no student at FFL-UPT needs analysis has ever been carried out formally or informally to recognize their needs. Moreover, no much attention has been paid to examining the needs of the recruiters and EB alumni who understanding most clearly what language skills and professional knowledge that need in the office working. On a theoretical level, the study is contributed to the literature on the role of needs analysis on syllabuses design. On a practical level, firstly, the study recommends and provides the framework for identifying needs in designing syllabuses for students; secondly, the study provides pedagogical implications for designing learning activities in class.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Role of syllabus and syllabus design in ELT

Nunan (1998) mentions that "language curriculum specialists have tended to focus on only part of the total picture - some specializing in syllabus design, others in methodology, assessment, and evaluation (…)". Giving more comprehensive definition to compare with the syllabus design, Richards (2001, p. 41) focused more on learners:

"Curriculum development refers to the range of planning and implementation processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum. These processes focus on needs analysis, situational analysis, planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching materials, providing for effective teaching, and evaluation".

"Syllabus is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and list what will be taught and tested" (Richards 2001, p.2). Sharing the same point of view, one study by Slatterry & Carlson (2005) examined the syllabus as a "contract between faculty members and their students, designed to answer students' questions about a course, as well as inform them about what will happen should they fail to meet course expectations". It is also a "vehicle for expressing accountability and commitment" (Habanek, 2005, p. 63). Over time, the notion of a syllabus as a contract has grown more literal but is not in fact an enforceable contract (Wasley, 2008).

It is believed that the syllabus ensures a fair and impartial understanding between the instructor and students such that there is minimal confusion on policies relating to the course, setting clear expectations of material to be learned, behavior in the classroom, and effort on student's behalf to be put into the course, providing a roadmap of course organization/direction relaying the instructor's teaching philosophy to the students, and providing a marketing angle of the course such that students may choose early in the course whether the subject material is attractive. Moreover, it provides the planners' view of the most essential elements of language learning.

According to Ramos Holguín, B. and Aguirre Morales, J. (2014)*,* "Syllabus design explores the benefits as well as the challenges that drive teachers as materials developers". Additionally, Richards (2001, p.2) believes that syllabus design is a process of developing a syllabus. Syllabus design focuses on content, which deals not only with what we should teach but also the order in which the content is taught and the reasons for teaching this content to our learners (Richards and Rogers 2001, p.25). Similarly, the following quotes have been taken from Yalden (1984, p. 14) which provides an excellent overview of the range and diversity of opinion on syllabus design: "The syllabus replaces the concept of 'method', and the syllabus is now seen as an instrument by which the teacher, with the help of the syllabus designer, can achieve a degree of 'fit' between the needs and aims of the learner (as a social being and as an individual) and the activities which will take place in the classroom". In this study, the researcher only focuses on the following components of syllabus design: professional skills of EB major.

2.2. Needs Analysis in Syllabus Design
Why needs?
The term needs, according to Brindley (1984) is "sometimes used to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectation, motivations, lacks, constraints and requirements" (Brindley 1984, p28 cited in Richards 2011). More specifically, Richards (2011) states that, in terms of linguistic, needs is described as the differences between what learners can do and what they should be able to do. In the term of language needs, needs is "the language skills needed to survive in an English-dominant civilization". Brown (1995) believes that needs is the system of collecting and analyzing all subjective and objective information. In conclusion, needs are what the students have in order to be able to communicate in the target situation effectively and what students have to learn to acquire the language.

Types of needs
Researchers provide many types of needs such as objective and subjective needs, target and learning needs, content and process needs. Objective needs is also defined as the use of language in real life, language difficulties, current and intended occupation as well as the length of time spent in the target culture and previous (Nunan, 1988; Brindley, 1989; Robinson, 1991). , Richards (2001) points out that the curriculum and objective should be consistent. Besides that, according to Nunan (1988a), objectives are a particular way of formulating or stating content. In short, the objective depends on the content of the course. Target needs is

likely to the term objective, including necessities, lacks and wants (Hutchinson & Waters 1987). The learning needs, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), focus on language use and investigate how learners learn to do what they do with language: what learners take the course, how they learn, etc… Nunan (1998) describes content needs consist of the selection and sequencing of the domain of syllabus design such as topics, grammar, function, notions and vocabulary.

Why needs analysis?

Needs analysis in this case of the study is aimed at clarifying target needs and learning needs of students in English for business course. This course provides students' language knowledge, developing students' four skills, gaining students' technical and professional skills for the business field. All kinds of needs seem to share an equal role in making the learning process successful.

The procedures used to collect information about learner's needs and communication tasks are known as needs analysis Nunan (1988). Needs analysis as a distinct and necessary phase in planning educational programs emerged in the 1960s as a part of the system approach to curriculum development and was part of the prevalent philosophy of educational accountability (Stuffiebeam, and Nelson 1985).

Various researchers including Richards (ibid) identified the purposes for needs analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes: a) to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student; b) to help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students; c) to determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills; d) to identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is important; e) to identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do; f) to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing" (p.52). Brown (1995) added "needs analysis can be used as the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to satisfy the language learning requirements of the students within the context of the particular institutions involved in the learning situation".

Present needs, the study of perceived, potential, and unrecognized needs could be considered needs analysis. Designing a needs analysis is likely to provide a comprehensive view of learners' needs and that represent the interests of the different stakeholders involved. Employers need to recognize the validity of this form of education and work with other stakeholders to ensure that graduates meet the needs of the job market.

III.   METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research's methodological in terms of sample and Sampling procedures, Research instruments, Data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Sample and Sampling Procedures

-Firstly, 111 students aged from 19 to 21 years old were asked to complete the questionnaire. The respondents are third and fourth-year students who study English for Business at Faculty of Foreign Languages at UPT, the 3rd-semester academic year 2019-2020;

-Then, 10 alumni who graduated EB major at FFL and 05 the recruiters who recruited the graduated EB major students at FFL asked to complete the questionnaire.

3.2 Research Instruments

Questionnaires were created by reviewing the statement and check reliability from Alpha Cronbach, SPSS, and grouped in the 3 areas of a) Students' needs of skills and language knowledge; b) Students' needs of professional skills; c) Skills students would like to improve. The additional semi-structured interview was designed for alumni and recruiters with the closed questions to assemble the views and ideas of respondents in further detail. This research is aimed at investigating the needs of students, alumni, and recruiters for

improving the syllabi for EB major students at UPT. Specifically, it is meant to answer the following questions: (1) In what way are needs of technical skills important to designing syllabi for English for Business courses? (1) In what way are needs of professional skills important to designing syllabi for English for Business courses?

3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

In order to get sufficient necessary data for the study, the following steps were carried out: Firstly, a set of the questionnaire was delivered to 111 students in the academic year 2019- 2020 with 111 copies; Secondly, a questionnaire and syllabi attached were delivered to the possible contacting alumni via email with 10 copies; Thirdly, a questionnaire was delivered to the possible contacting recruiters via email to the Personnel managers and Personnel staffs of companies with 05 copies; finally, an additional interview was administered base on the total responses with the highest score selected;

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The questionnaire with four sub-questions was divided into two parts to identify students' needs of professional skills and the skills that students would like to improve. In other words, this part presents professional skills: participant's needs and area of needs to fulfill.

4.1 Results of questionnaire to students

The result of collecting questionnaires about the student's needs was presented in this part with 111 questionnaires was delivered to students to collect their needs. After 7 days of surveying, 111 questionnaires were collected. The researcher used SPSS to generate descriptive statistics for each question. The reliability of the scale was evaluated by the internal consistency method using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Variables all higher than 0.7 is a good and usable measurement scale as table 4.2 below

Factors	Variable observation			Cronbach's Alpha
	Before verifying	After verifying	Variables removed	
Item 1	10	8	Item310, Item39	0,859
Item 2	10	9	Item45	0,868
Item 3	10	10	0	0,717
Item 4	10	10	0	0,883
Total	40	37	3	

Table 4.1: Cronbach's Alpha reliability

It was indicated from the survey result that almost all students, accounting to 75.4%, believed that professional skills are important while others 24.6% believed that it is less important to the effectiveness of the existing syllabi and to their field after graduation. Moreover, if positive answers were considered the combination of both High and Very high scale, the highest frequency of surveying stated as Phone call practice, Job interview practice, Oral presentation, Note-taking accounted to more than 80%. Additionally, students believed that all of the other professional skills are important to the effectiveness of the existing syllabi such as Writing (business letters, business contracts, newsletters, advertisements) which accounted for over 60%. Overall, by comparing the answers in the survey about professional skills, it is clear that professional skills are very important to students not only in the existing syllabus or in student's study but also in students' fields after graduation.

According to the survey results of the questionnaire for students the need to fulfill their professional skills, it was clear that almost all participants thought that they need to improve the skills with 58% to 90% of positive answers. Especially, they need to fulfill the most the speaking skills namely pronunciation, speaking,

job interview, phone call practice, oral presentation, negotiation, out-of-class activities, and extra-curricular activities.

4.2 Result of questionnaire to alumni

The alumni responded to the survey with nearly 100% choosing positive answers for the skills that are important to study. Job interview practice and Oral presentation Note-taking, Out-of-class activities, and Extra-curricular activities/Field trips accounted for the highest and were the most important activities or skills to the effectiveness of the existing syllabus and to the importance of students' study.

The same result with the question about the importance of the professional skills students need to fulfill, the positive answer were 100% with nearly equal responses for both high and very high scale. From alumni suggestions, writing advertisements, oral presentations, and note-taking were the most important activities that students must improve. In short, from an alumni perspective, students need to improve their professional skills above to meet job requirements.

In summary of the surveying results from alumni, as mention above, the positive answers took nearly 100% of the responses. These results were really different from the students' perspectives presented above. The results also indicated that alumni all seriously thought that professional skills are very important to students. And alumni point out their needs as students must improve their knowledge of business or professional skills. As mention later, communication skills could bring success for each individual and organization. Therefore, the results of surveying alumni could be predictable. The difference results between the high percentage of communication skills versus the low percentage of writing skills were explainable.

4.3 Result of questionnaire to the recruiter

The survey of the student's needs for professional skills presented clear results. Recruiters thought that all of the activities and experiences listed were important to the effectiveness of FFL's existing syllabus. However, each activity or experience played a different role to make the syllabus effective. Especially, the highest response was oral communication namely out-of-class activities, extra-curricular activities, and Field trips with 80% of responses. All of the recruiters highly appreciated the importance of professional skills, in the syllabus and in working fields. The results of this part could also be proved that although there were effective EB syllabi, what students showed in interviews or working seemed not to meet working requirements. Students still needed to improve more about these skills to meet the needs of work. This result was reasonable because it was the fact that effective communication also indicates high performance for individuals and organizations as mentioned later. These results were different from the students' perspective presented above but shared the same results with the alumni's perspective. Recruiters' ambitions were the higher quality of training for students. And the skills that should be the first priority improvement is communication skills.

In summary, in the literature, this result accorded with ELT theory that speaking is an important skill among other skills (Richards 2008). He also indicated that one of the main aspects of communication is speaking skills, and it is the main point for many foreign-language learners. Moreover, in Vietnam, Job interview skill is considered including speaking and listening skills. That was a practical oral of the skills they have learned.

Moreover, in the practice, this result of the survey also agreed with the real situation of teaching and learning in Vietnam in general, and in FFL, UPT for specifically. It is a fact that teachers seemed to focus on writing and reading skills only and they seemed to ignore speaking and listening for many reasons.

It is a fact that in Vietnam in general, students seem to be miserable with listening and speaking skills. Sharing the same infelicitous issue, FFL's students at UPT are having the same urgent situation. Language covers every individual and social life. Language also impacts economic development. Every organization or individual needs listening and speaking skills because oral communication could bring success to themselves. Effective communication also indicates high performance for individuals and organizations. That is the reason why many people tend to study listening and speaking skills. Therefore, the high percentage of listening and

speaking skills in this case of the study were predictable. And the different results between listening, speaking skills versus reading and writing skills were predictable as well.

4.4 *Additional Interview*

The first question was to confirm items number one and three in the questionnaire with some of the comments for their justification below. From here, it was inferred that one hundred percent of respondents agree that in the recruitment, the recruiters based on their performance in English, not their transcripts. They explain that transcripts were just a means for being in an interview meeting. How much skills and knowledge they could show in interviewing decided if they could get the job or not. Although alumni and recruiters agreed with almost all the professional skills listed in the questionnaire, with their experiences in the workplace they also commented on some more skills that were not listed. Base on the quotes, the researcher indicated the properties and then categories them then put them into themes with details presented in table 4.2. With experience in working, they might think that these skills can contribute to the success of a candidate. The interview result has implications for collaboration skills that they expect the candidate to have for working.

Code	Quotes	Properties	Categories	Themes
Case A01	When recruiting students, almost company assess students' language and professional skills based on their performance in English	performance in English	Listening, speaking, How well students respond to the interviewer; How well students address their knowledge in the field of working etc.	Professional skills
Case A02, Case A03, Case A04, Case A05, Case R03, Case R04, Case R05	their performance in English	performance in English	Listening, speaking	Professional skills
Case R01	And the importance .. is the face ... the face expressing his body language ... Then I think it would be better, to sympathize more in English.	the face expressing his body language	Public speaking; communication	Communication skills

Table 4.2 Valued response to question one

The second question was to confirm items number two and four in the questionnaire. Although alumni and recruiters agreed with almost all professional skills listed in the questionnaire, providing more valued comments, they commented on some more skills that were not listed in the questionnaire. The researcher base on the quotes indicated the properties and then categories them then put them into themes with value comments were as the following table in detail.

They expected candidates' attitude in working more than his/her professional skills. They explained that all the samples for documents were created and the staff could use that samples easily. In other words, all skills could be trained, but it was hard to train attitude. Base on the interview results, professional skills or

communication skills were emphasized as the most important skills of all skills. This result agreed with the ELT theory mentioned above that speaking is an important skill among other skills.

Code	Quotes	Properties	Categories	Themes
Case A02	When we work on a team or work with many people, we need to have a way to do it well	work on a team or work with many people	Group work; Collaboration skills	Communication skills
Case A06	Candidates need all these skills, but they also need to have computer skills, many of them do not know how to type the text properly thus it is hard for them to work	computer skills; how to type the text properly	Technology	Technology skills
Case R01	And the importance .. is the face ... the face expressing his body language	the face expressing his body language	Public speaking	Communication skills
Case R01	the attitude and the attitude in studying of the students. In the companies, the training business might be easy	the attitude and the attitude in studying	Attitude	Professional skills
Case R01	It is a responsibility that you have for your work, and attitude might more important than knowledge.	attitude ... might be more important than the knowledge.	Attitude	Professional skills
Case R02	My company needs staff who can deal with customers every day. Thus I think that candidates need to speak to customers nicely	deal with customers; speak to customers nicely	Speaking	Communication skills
Case R05	I don't hire a candidate then I have to teach them everything. Candidates have to know how to solve the problems that happen in the workplace	solve the problems that happen in the workplace	Solve the problems	Problem-solving skills

Table 4.3 Valued response to question two

In sum, the results and findings drawn from the light of research literature and data analysis were presented in this part. This chapter also presents the strengths and weaknesses of the current EB syllabi at FFL UPT. The match and mismatch between the student's needs, alumni' needs recruiter's needs, and the syllabus aims and objectives are also presented above. An effective English for business syllabi should address all these above factors.

It is worth mentioning to refer to Ratclipff (1997, p.26) who believes that in curriculum development, the developer should reach the balance between students and society. He emphasized, "the curriculum is strongly mediated by the students and society". Later doing research, Richards (2001) also proposes that curriculum must address the important goals of education to develop the individual.

V.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The participants as well as students in FFL UPT had poor knowledge of professional skills in the field of researching. After surveying, the researcher found that the most urgent needs set by students was professional skills. By contrast, alumni and recruiters could identify professional skills including technical and

attitude as well. In summary, it was realized that from students' perspective, the existing syllabi could meet students' needs which the following findings:

- Firstly, the students seemed to be satisfied with the existing English for Business syllabi about professional skills;
- Secondly, they had strong needs of improving their communication skills namely Job interview, Phone call practice, Oral presentation/ Negotiation, Out-of-class activities, and Extra-curricular activities.

    Meanwhile, from alumni' and recruiters' perspectives, they seemed not to satisfy with the existing syllabi completely because they pointed out that professional skills include both attitude and technical skills. In a real working environment, attitude seemed to be more important than technical skills in almost every situation. However, the existing syllabi, professional skills just covered the technical skills without attitude.

In conclusion, designing syllabi are based on all the two skills above to prepare for students to have the competence to work. It is fact that the existing syllabus and the competence need are now not really the same.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for improving the syllabi at FFL.

The limitation of designing syllabi at FFL UPT is that the voices of students, recruiters, alumni, teachers in charge have not been considered. All the voices of stakeholders should be heard in order to build more effective and complete syllabi.

Suggestions for improving English for Business syllabi for English majors students at UPT base on the findings of the research. Thus, developing syllabi should include the purpose of not only providing skills and knowledge but also developing student's comprehension, preparing for future work, and meeting social needs.

The needs of recruiter's and alumni's feedback are essential for syllabi's development. The contribution of this feedback could help syllabi developers update the syllabus to meet students' need and employers' expectations or the labor market. Moreover, the relationship between UPT and enterprises could be enhanced. Furthermore, with alumni' experiences at workplaces, their feedback can help improve English for business syllabi to be more practical and realistic. Last but not least, before designing new syllabi base on students' needs, the following aspects must be best prepared; Activities means tasks in teaching and learning; Materials state what text must be read; And idea which points out what students need besides their abilities. Motivation should be noted and considered one of the main aspects in designing new syllabi

Recommendations for improving communication and professional skills

Communication skills in this case of study not only consist of listening and speaking but also other professional skills including Phone call practice, Job interview practice, Oral presentation, Negotiation, Out-of-class activities, and Extra-curricular activities/ Field trips. All of these skills play an important role in effective communication.

In the case of research, students are not self-confident in communication, with friends and teachers. Helping students to overcome these issues then improving their weaknesses needs the combination of teachers, administrators and students. Improving communication skills should handle these issues. The suggestions below base on the needs of students alumni and recruiters.

Firstly, students should be in class with foreigners every week. At the present, in each semester, students just meet foreigners six times. It's not enough time for practicing and developing communication skills.

Secondly, the number of students in the class should be reduced. The crowded classes with over 50 students were not suitable for speaking activities.

Thirdly, the researcher suggests that these activities and field trips should be organized every two weeks in order to build good communication skills for all students to practice what they have learned at school and provide students useful experiences for their future job.

Recommendations for further study

Although several findings and recommendations have been carried out in this research, further research should be done as following recommendations:

Firstly, it is the fact that this research did not embrace perceptions of the other stakeholders such as the administrator (Dean of FFL) and the teachers in charge. For further research, it is recommended that researchers could include these two stakeholders as well.

Secondly, an in-deep interview should be conducted to have a deep understanding of all stakeholders' needs. For further research, the number of the participant as alumni, recruiter, and teachers in charge should be expanded the number and variety of research site.

Thirdly, base on the allowed time of research, the present study was conducted on the thirds and fourth-year students with a limited number of them. In the further study, if time allowed, the researcher could conduct the scope of work for the first and second-year students to identify the needs and expectations of the students from very early in the program for improving English for Business syllabi.

VI.   REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

1. When recruiting students, does your company assess their language and professional skills based on their transcripts or their performance in English?
2. What professional skills do you expect the candidates to have for their work?