

Original scientific paper

STUDYING THE ESP NEEDS OF STUDENTS OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIO-POLITICAL STUDIES

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Abstract. *The article presents a study of the ESP needs of students of economics and socio-political studies aimed at course optimization. The research includes two stages with the pilot one having finished in June 2021 and involving the students at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in Bulgaria as well as the subject and ESP lecturers at UNWE. The second stage was conducted with students from universities with the profile of UNWE in Bulgaria and worldwide (April-October 2021). The results from the survey of students from the pilot stage are presented and analysed in detail along with a review of the ESP needs analysis studies.*

Key words: *ESP, needs analysis, ESP for economics, ESP for socio-political studies*

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been the lingua franca for decades owing to socio-political and economic reasons since the Second World War. Apart from using it for everyday communication, it was needed to do business in every sector of the economy worldwide. Specialists in international and international economic relations, the oil industry, manufacturing, tourism, aviation and medicine had to acquire the English language in order to be able to perform their duties and be competitive on the labour market. All these factors put an emphasis on the learning of English for specific purposes (ESP) and made most educational institutions include ESP courses in their curricula. Without the specialized language training involving the knowledge and skills for the language use in specific situations, without being familiar with the discourse and genre specifics or with the specialized vocabulary and texts of a particular professional context, a student or an expert in a given area of the social and economic life will not be able to develop their potential and achieve full realization.

Foreign language education and the study of ESP have long-standing traditions in Bulgaria with ESP courses included in secondary education and university curricula. These courses aim to equip learners with the knowledge and skills forming learners' functional communicative competence in an effective and efficient way. Curricula are regularly updated in line with the modern trends in teaching and learning as well as in education and

Submitted August 1st, 2021, accepted for publication August 15th, 2021

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employment. However, generations change, science and technology advance and new methods of teaching prove more appropriate to serve the needs of high-quality education.

Generations Z and the Millennials grow up with modern technology – computers, game consoles, mobiles, MP3 players, the Internet, social media and networks – which influence their perception, communication and learning compared to the previous generations of their parents and grandparents. They tend to spend more time in the virtual space rather than in physical reality unlike the Baby boomers and Generation X who are accustomed to face-to-face communication. On the other hand, human progress has reflected on the way all generations work and interact. A lot of business activities are performed via the Internet: conversations, company correspondence, negotiations, conferences and meetings. In addition, technical and scientific novelties have resulted in changes in learner needs and teaching. This means that examining these needs will facilitate the designing, improving and optimising of the ESP courses offered by academic institutions. What is more, because of the very few surveys of student needs, such research could provide valuable insights into the needs, wants and lacks of modern students and, ideally, contribute to ESP development in general.

2. ESP NEEDS ANALYSIS: RESEARCH

In order to design an effective ESP course, educational experts have to be aware of learners' needs because, as Basturkmen notes, an ESP learner studies the language because it is the means to achieve certain academic or professional goals (Basturkmen 2010). Depending on the area of their professional and occupational context, ESP learners have different needs – air traffic controllers need to develop their specialised speaking skills, students of economics need to develop the specialised writing skills for business correspondence including the preparation of reports, proposals, presentations, inquiries and offers or the specialised speaking skills of giving presentations, negotiating and participating in meetings, for instance.

In his research “Communicative Syllabus Design” Munby (Munby 1978) suggested considering needs analysis in detail by applying a set of procedures aimed at establishing the target situation needs. The set includes questions related to the key communication variables – topic, participants, means – that could help identify the target language needs of any group of learners. According to Chambers (Chambers 1980), needs analysis deals with the establishing of the learners' needs and their satisfaction based on the analysis of the communication in the target situation. Alwright (Alwright 1982) pointed that needs are related to the learner necessity of certain knowledge and skills required for successful functioning in a professional context. The lack is the gap between the present and the desired functional communicative competence, while wishes are the most important needs within the limited time the learner has to meet their needs.

Hutchinson and Waters (Hutchinson and Waters 1987) distinguish *target needs* – what the learner should do in the target situation and *educational needs* – what the learner should do to learn. Target needs are classified into needs, lacks and wants. Needs are determined by the target situation and are what the learner needs to function successfully in the target situation. Lacks are the gap between what the learner has already acquired and what they still have not acquired but need in order to achieve the target functional communicative competence. Wants are associated with the subjective perceptions of the learner regarding their needs. Therefore, when analysing target needs, a researcher should study both the target situation and the attitudes of the participants in the learning process.

Educational needs present the particular needs, potential and limitations of the learning situation.

West (West 1997) expands the concept of needs analysis by including in it the analysis of the target situation; discourse analysis; present situation analysis; learner factor analysis – motivation, learning style, perceptions of needs; learning environment analysis – the context of the ESP course .

Dudley-Evans and St John (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) see needs analysis as the analysis of information: professional information about the learner – target situation and objective needs; personal information – details that can affect the learning process; English language information about the learner – their current knowledge and skills; information about the professional communication in the learner's area – language, discourse and genre analysis; expectations about the ESP course and information regarding how the course will be run – means analysis.

Sysoyev (Sysoyev 2001) relates ESP needs analysis to cognitive development and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky's concept, there are two stages in an individual's development: the first one including what the learner can do on their own and the second one including the individual's potential and what the individual can achieve assisted by someone more competent. The gap between the two stages is the zone of proximal development. In ESP, the more competent person is the teacher who is the mediator to help the individual (learner) meet their needs by moving from the first to the second stage (Vygotsky 1978).

According to Basturkmen, it is noteworthy that in ESP course syllabus is influenced by learners' needs which is why enhanced learner motivation can be expected if learners see the connection between the material taught and its application in the learners' educational and professional context (Basturkmen 2006)

3. ESP NEEDS ANALYSIS: SURVEYS

A number of surveys conducted worldwide reveal the needs of the learners – students and employees from the fields of engineering, textile, medicine, business, clothing, administration, commerce.

Ferris conducted a survey of over 700 students and 200 lecturers from US universities (Ferris 1998). The survey showed that the necessary skills vary depending on the institution's profile, level of language knowledge, number of students in the group and discipline. Furthermore, it became clear that there was a significant difference between students' and lecturers' answers. Basturkmen (Basturkmen 1998) studied the needs of the students at the faculty of engineering and oil industry of the University of Kuwait by interviewing both students and lecturers. Bacha and Bahous (Bacha and Bahous 2002) used a Likert scale to study the needs of the business students at the Lebanese American University. They examined student attitudes and perceptions regarding different skills by interviewing students and lecturers. Chia, Johnson, Chia and Olive (Chia, Johnson, Chia and Olive 1999) surveyed the ESP needs of the students of medicine in Taiwan and Sakr (Sakr 2001) did research on the needs of the workers in the textile industry and clothing in Cairo.

Li So-mui and Mead (Li So-mui and Mead 2000) analysed the needs of the students of commerce, textile and clothing in Hong Kong to establish what the most common kind of communication in their sphere was. They used questionnaire surveys, telephone

interviews and business correspondence analysis, and found out that most often the communication was written with a lot of abbreviations with phone calls, faxes and emails being the preferred forms to communicate. Bolsher and Smalkoski (Bolsher and Smalkoski 2002) carried out a survey of the needs of the immigrant-students of nursing in the USA based on observations, interviews and questionnaires. Among the participants were not only the students, but their lecturers and the programme director as well. This research revealed the fact that the students had problems understanding their colleagues and patients and using the correct pronunciation and intonation. Therefore, the needs analysis helped find out that these students had difficulties functioning in their occupational context and contributed to the course optimisation and the implementation of appropriate measures to deal with student lacks and meet their needs.

In 2006, Kim examined the needs of the East-Asian students at US universities by using an online questionnaire and with a sample of 280 respondent students (Kim 2006). The questionnaire included questions regarding listening and speaking skills, student attitudes and impressions related to the learning difficulties as well as to the student opinion of the listening and speaking skills that seemed the most important in terms of student academic success. The studies carried out by Ferris and Kim led to the conclusions: that the needs of undergraduates and doctoral students related to speaking and having discussions vary; learners' and lecturers' perceptions differ; the key skills that learners need to acquire in order to achieve academic success and that seemed difficult for them in one way or another were given priority.

In 2016, a survey was conducted by Ching-Ling Lee with students at the National Taiwan University for Science and Technology to find out how the students perceive their ESP needs (Ching-Ling Lee 2016). The respondents included both students who studied ESP and students who did not. The results from both groups showed that the need to study ESP was important and crucial for students' careers. Some 80% of the respondents considered the ESP courses critical for their future professional realisation with writing skills perceived as the most important skills. A fact is noteworthy – the more fluent students found the high level of ESP more valuable.

In the same year, Mian and Sarwar studied the ESP needs of the receptionists in private hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan (Mian and Sarwar 2016). They used a questionnaire based on Likert scale and established the serious need these employees had of ESP training. Based on the survey findings, a syllabus was developed aimed at meeting these needs in an optimised and effective way. A year later, in 2017, Alsamadani (Alsamadani 2017) carried out a study of the ESP needs of the students of engineering in Saudi Arabia. The study involved classwork observation, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview in which lecturers teaching the subject and ESP took part as well. The aim of the research was to find out the key needs and the most serious linguistic lacks of the students majoring in civil and industrial engineering. It was established that the focus of the ESP classes was the receptive skills of listening and reading, while the greatest needs were related to the skills for speaking followed by those for writing and reading. The results from the study made it possible to define the problematic linguistic areas in the field of engineering as well as to make recommendations for the improvement of the ESP courses.

All these studies reveal different approaches to learner needs: they examine the attitudes and perceptions of students and employees in a given trade, investigate the observations and opinions of lecturers, employers, executive academic staff and educational experts, contribute to the improvement and optimisation of ESP courses in terms of content,

approaches, time and other parameters taking into account research results and establishing relations and correlations between: ESP course components and between ESP course components and learner motivation.

The empirical research shows that following human progress ESP syllabi change, different ESP course components are emphasised depending on learners' needs, institutional profile and professional context, and novelties in information and communication technologies are introduced.

4. ENGLISH FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER: A STUDY OF THE NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS MAJORING IN ECONOMICS AND SOCIO- POLITICAL STUDIES

4.1. Studying student ESP needs

The situation in the teaching and learning of ESP in Bulgaria and globally prompted the university research intended to study the ESP needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), the largest economic university in South-Eastern Europe, and worldwide. Regardless of the positive student feedback, the project “English for a successful career: A study of the needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies” was started in order to establish what the current ESP needs of the students of economics and socio-political studies are, and to recommend how to optimise the academic ESP courses offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) specialised in economics and socio-political studies and by UNWE, in particular. Research objectives include:

- the study of the ESP needs of the students of economics and socio-political studies (needs, lacks and wants)
- the study of student attitudes and motivation with regard to the academic courses in ESP for economics and socio-political studies (means)
- the definition of the main criteria to be applied in order to recommend how to update and optimize the academic ESP courses for economics and socio-political studies

To achieve research objectives, empirical data is to be gathered using an online personal structured survey. To this aim, a questionnaire of 28 questions including learner personal and language information – language experience and background, learner needs, lacks, wants, motivation and engagement, was developed. The survey has two stages. It was started in April and is intended to finish by 31st October 2021:

- stage 1: April – June 2021. This stage is the pilot one and focuses on the students at UNWE;
- stage 2 – April – October 2021. The second stage involves the study of the attitudes and perceptions of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies at universities in Bulgaria and worldwide. So far, the stage has involved students from universities with the educational profile of UNWE from Bulgaria (Plovdiv University, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, University of Economics-Varna, Sofia University, South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, New Bulgarian University) and from Albania, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Lithuania, Latvia, Brazil, China, Spain and Portugal.

To complement the data collected empirically, an online personal structured survey was carried out of the lecturers teaching subject and ESP at UNWE during the pilot stage. Lecturers' perceptions are expected to add valuable insights into the teaching and learning of

ESP nowadays that could help make more objective and thorough recommendations regarding ESP course effectiveness and optimisation.

If we refer to Dudley-Evans and St John's description of needs analysis it will be easier to illustrate how the research is being done and why (1988 p. 125):

"A. Professional information about the learners: The tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for – *target situation analysis* and *objective needs*.

B. Personal information about the learners: Factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectations of it, attitude to English – *wants, means* and *subjective needs*.

C. English language information about the learners: What their current skills and language use are – *present situation analysis* – which allows us to assess (D).

D. The learners' lacks: The gap between (C) and (A) – *lacks*.

E. Language learning information: Effective ways of learning the skills and language in (D) – *learning needs*.

F. Professional communication information about (A): Knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation – *linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis*.

G. What is wanted from the course.

H. Information about how the course will be run – *means analysis*".

In the case with UNWE and Bulgarian universities, **A (Professional information about the learners)** and **F (Professional communication information about (A))** are based on the academic criteria determined by using employer feedback – state educational standards taking into account the needs and requirements of employer organizations, public administration and private business as well as the world trends in education. Therefore, the situation analysis and objective needs are related to the students' realization in the sectors of the economy and areas of social life or the scientific work in organizations and institutes locally and globally. The graduates are expected to be competitive on the labour market and function successfully in an international, intercultural and globalized environment. Similarly, **G** and **H** are determined by social development and scientific advance, meaning that the academic ESP course is aimed to ensure the balanced development of student functional communicative competence applying modern teaching methods. The expected level of specialized language fluency is C1 for the first foreign language and B2 for the second foreign language, the study of two foreign languages being compulsory for some of the specialties. **C (English language information about the learners)** is known to a great extent because there are admission tests in English for the majority of the specialties with the option to apply with the matriculation result or by presenting an internationally recognized certificate of English such as the Cambridge ones FCE or CAE with a required level corresponding to B2 (of CEFR) for English studied as a first foreign language.

Thus, **D** is related to the acquisition of the ESP knowledge and skills involving all components of the student functional communicative competence providing for the successful career of the university graduates and **E** should be focused on meeting both student needs, objective and subjective, based on the current situation in the teaching of foreign languages and ESP in particular as well as on taking into consideration the specific features of the new generations of learners. In order to receive in-depth insights into the student viewpoint, perceptions and attitudes and find out how they see their subjective needs and to enhance their motivation, the survey included questions intended to collect data related to **B, C, D, G** and **H** – to learn more about student needs, wants,

lacks, views of course optimization and effectiveness. The detailed questionnaire is aimed to provide information about the skills that students find most difficult to acquire, the skills that are most relevant in terms of students' future career and the possible ways to increase learner involvement and engagement that will result in improved performance and achievements. The research results are expected to facilitate the process of syllabi update and the introduction of novel teaching techniques that could contribute to the greater course effectiveness. In addition, it is expected to show whether there are considerable differences in student perceptions and attitudes country- and worldwide or between student and lecturer perceptions. The data analysis could be further exploited to point to course adjustments or conclusions of use to the improvement of the learning process and academic work.

4.2. Survey results: pilot stage

The sample from the pilot stage includes 567 students majoring in 14 specialties such as Law, Economics, Marketing and Strategic Planning, Political Studies, International Relations, International Economic Relations, Media and Journalism, Business Informatics and Communications, Economics of Infrastructure, Economics of Tourism, etc. at UNWE. The respondents are doing their bachelor's or master's degree with the majority being in their first to third year of study. They are asked about their mark in English at school and at their English matriculation exam. In Bulgaria, the excellent mark is 6 with 2 considered poor (failed). Some 3 students (0,5%) had not studied English at school; 1, (0,2%), had a satisfactory mark (3); 52 or 9,2 % had a good mark (4), 188 (33,2%) had a very good mark (5) and 321 or 56,6% were excellent (6). To the question about their matriculation result in English, the students answered as follows: 5 students or 0,9% - 3 (satisfactory), 50 students or 8,8% - 4 (good); 159 students or 28% - 5 (very good); 168 or 29,6 % - 6 (excellent). Some 179 or 31,6% had chosen another matriculation exam. The question about the matriculation exam and the result from it is asked for two reasons: first, because, as it was mentioned above, in most Bulgarian universities it is used as an admission test (result) and, second, because it provides objective information about student knowledge and skills in general English at the B2 level of CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference for languages of the EU). The average student result in English from school was 5,48 and from the matriculation exam – 5,28, which shows a good command of the language.

When asked if they had been assessed objectively at school, the respondents answered positively with 49% strongly agreeing and 30,2% agreeing. This question aimed at providing personal information related to the study of English. Some 7,4 % of the students felt they had not been assessed objectively. This could mean that these learners would need more intense encouragement in order to feel more motivated for work. It could furthermore be concluded that for most of the cases there was an overlap of teacher and student perception of student achievements. One could, therefore, suggest the same at university level and expect a good teacher-student relationship, which is beneficial for the learning process. One more personal question was asked but the answers to it will be considered later with relation to the analysis of the answers to the questions about motivation.

The focus of ten questions was student needs and wants. The questions were formulated by using the word "expectations" for it was considered to comprise in itself needs and wants and at the same time it did not seem a distractor word. Not surprisingly, most of the answers revealed an interest in acquiring all knowledge and skills that the syllabi include and that form the goals of the ESP courses at the university. Two findings are worth noting.

The first one is that regardless of the fact that generally the students are fluent, an impressive number of them think that they need to improve their grammar and be more accurate in their professional communication. Even though lecturers find the teaching of specialized grammar meaningful, the lecturer team's observations in recent years has shown that due to the intense communication on the Internet and the social media, the majority of the young people nowadays think that their English grammar knowledge is sufficient. Therefore, having students who realize the need to expand their grammar knowledge and skills can facilitate the learning process and make it more effective if taken into consideration when a lecturer plans and organizes course work. However, this need can be considered an unexpected result given the very good command of general English the students have.

The second result is the one related to the student perception of the significance of style and register in business communication. Though high, the percentage of the respondents who have indicated their appreciation of this fact is not as high as supposed, especially compared to the response to the other questions. Modern generations seem to need more efforts to understand the importance of style and register in a world of fierce competition at all levels – individual, company, global, and socio-economic changes and repercussions. This could mean more work with the students to explain and convince and, respectively, an adjustment of course syllabi to obtain better results in this direction.

Table 1 Student expectations: needs and wants

Expectations (needs and wants) for the ESP course to help me:	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree, nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
acquire knowledge and skills for written communication I will need during my professional career	53,3	28,2	12,7	3,4	2,3
acquire knowledge and skills for listening comprehension of specialised texts I will need during my professional career	51,9	28,6	12,0	4,8	2,8
acquire knowledge and skills for speaking I will need during my professional career	60,1	20,3	13,1	3,7	2,8
acquire knowledge and skills for reading I will need during my professional career	54,0	27,2	13,2	3,7	1,9
acquire knowledge and skills for the translation of specialised texts I will need during my professional career	51,0	26,8	15,2	4,9	2,1

Expectations (needs and wants) for the ESP course to help me:	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree, nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
acquire knowledge of specialised vocabulary I will need during my professional career	55,6	26,1	12,5	4,1	1,8
acquire and improve my knowledge and skills in grammar I will need during my professional career	49,6	28,9	12,9	6,2	2,5
acquire knowledge and skills of the style and register typical of my professional field	48,9	28,6	14,6	5,3	2,6
acquire and improve my knowledge and skills in resolving communication-related problems in the foreign language so that I enjoy a successful career development in my professional field	54,3	25,9	12,2	5,6	1,9
acquire and improve my knowledge and skills in intercultural communication so that I enjoy a successful career development in my professional field	52,6	25,2	15,2	4,6	2,3

Four of the questions in the survey are focused on student motivation and hence increased engagement in the ESP course. Student feedback has indicated that unlike their parents and grandparents, new generations require explanations in the way classwork is done or why a certain task is assigned. They prefer to discuss assessment more and to be provided with very detailed information about all assessment components. What is more, they show an interest in suggesting topics, activities and even approaches to doing something in class or for homework. This is the reason to include questions about interactive tasks, the Internet and social media, student involvement by suggesting topics or course adjustments. Over half of the respondents reacted really positively to participating in classwork more actively and by using the ways of perception, communicating and learning that they have been accustomed to. Compared to the first two questions, the responses to the last two ones do not seem that definite with an overall positive result of 71,1% and 70,7% of which 44,1% and 42,3% strongly agree. However, this definitely indicates that if taught their way and treated as partners and collaborators, students can improve their achievements considerably. The choice of the “agree” answer could be attributed to some students’ tentativeness or fear of demonstrating greater autonomy in the learning process.

Table 2 Student expectations: engagement and motivation

My expectations are that the academic course in English will:	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree, nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
include interactive tasks that will raise my interest and motivation for studying	50,1	25,7	16,0	4,9	3,2
include work on the Internet and on the social media platforms that will raise my interest and motivation for studying	47,1	25,7	17,5	5,8	3,9
provide the opportunity to suggest specialised topics that will raise my interest and motivation for studying	44,1	27,0	19,0	5,6	4,2
provide the opportunity to discuss with both the lecturer and my colleagues the opportunity to optimise the academic course that will raise my interest and motivation for studying	42,3	28,4	20,5	5,5	3,4

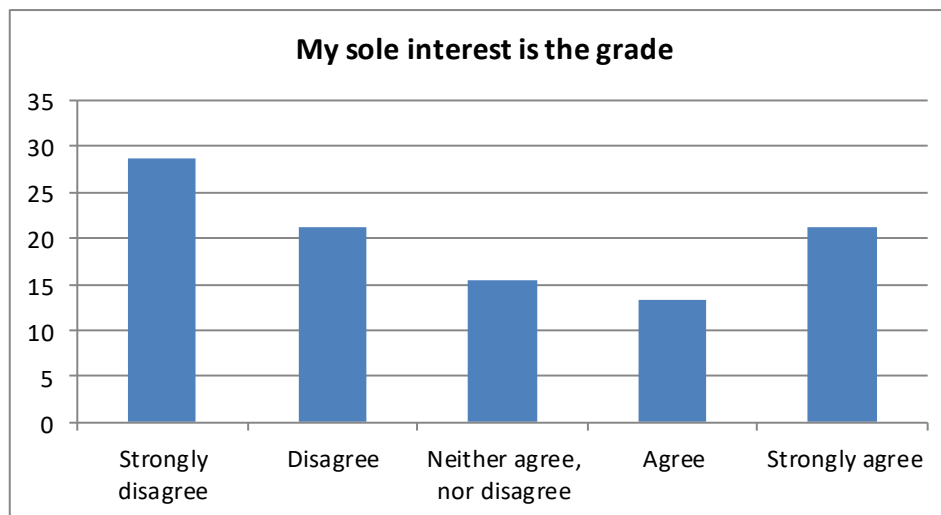


Fig. 1 "My sole interest is the grade"

Figure 1. presents the answers the respondents gave to the straightforward question about their motivation to study. The respondents were asked if their sole interest with regard to the academic course were the grade and whether they thought they could acquire knowledge and skills in ESP **through other means** (a course at a language school, private lessons, etc.). This is a challenging and provoking question related to the students' attitude to the subject taught as well as to their education since over the last decades it has become more popular to graduate for the sake of the higher education diploma. Altogether, 34,5% of the respondents are motivated by the grade only (21,3% - strongly agree and 13,2% - agree). This means that a third of the students who were surveyed study ESP only driven by the final grade regardless of the fact that in their answers to the rest of the questions they demonstrated their understanding of the importance of the ESP course. The students driven by obtaining grades, not knowledge, require another approach.

In terms of the skills that in the students' opinion are the most difficult to master, the respondents indicated speaking as the most difficult one (42% of the respondents), followed by writing (27,1%), listening (24,3%) and reading (8,5%). The ESP skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading were then included in questions by offering the students to choose from the specific skills for each activity. The acquisition of all these skills is part of the ESP course syllabi and the respondents can choose more than one answer which is why the total percentage exceeds 100%.

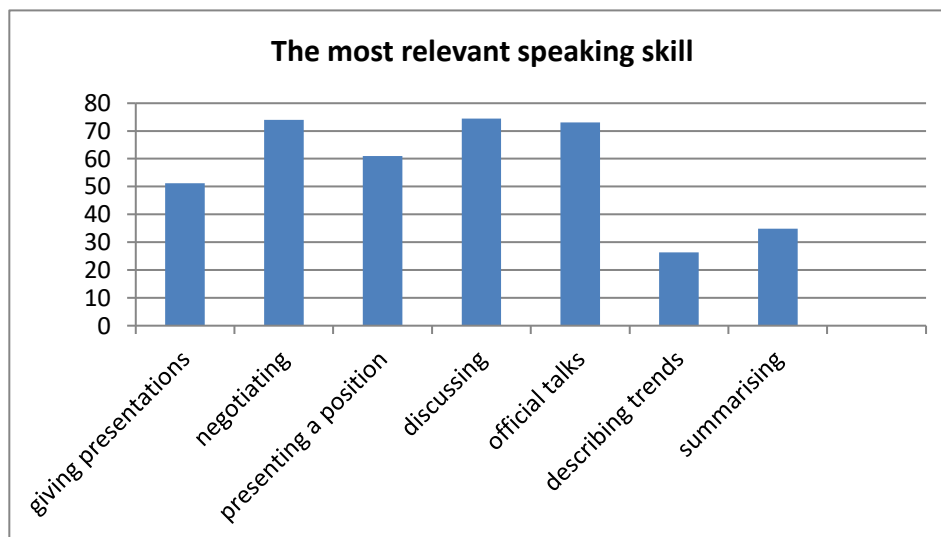


Fig. 2 The most relevant speaking skill

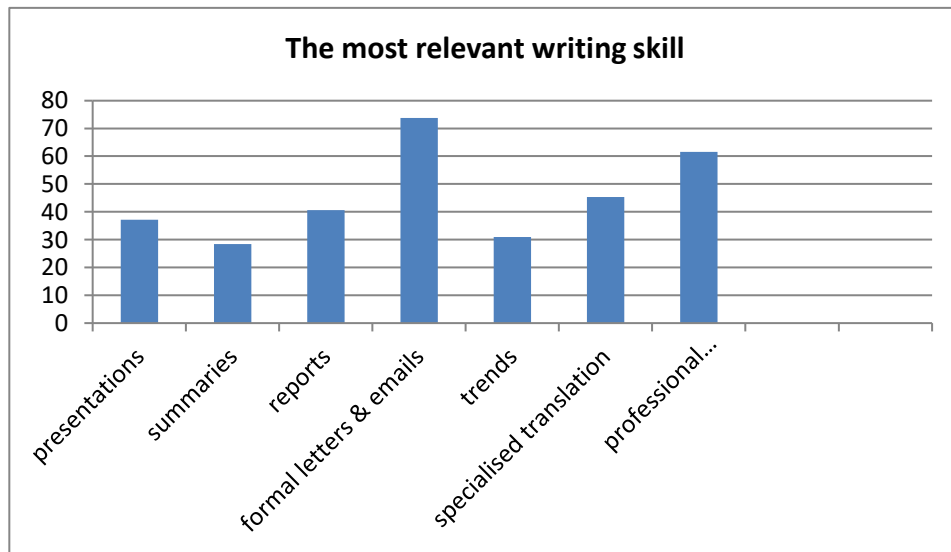


Fig. 3 The most relevant writing skill

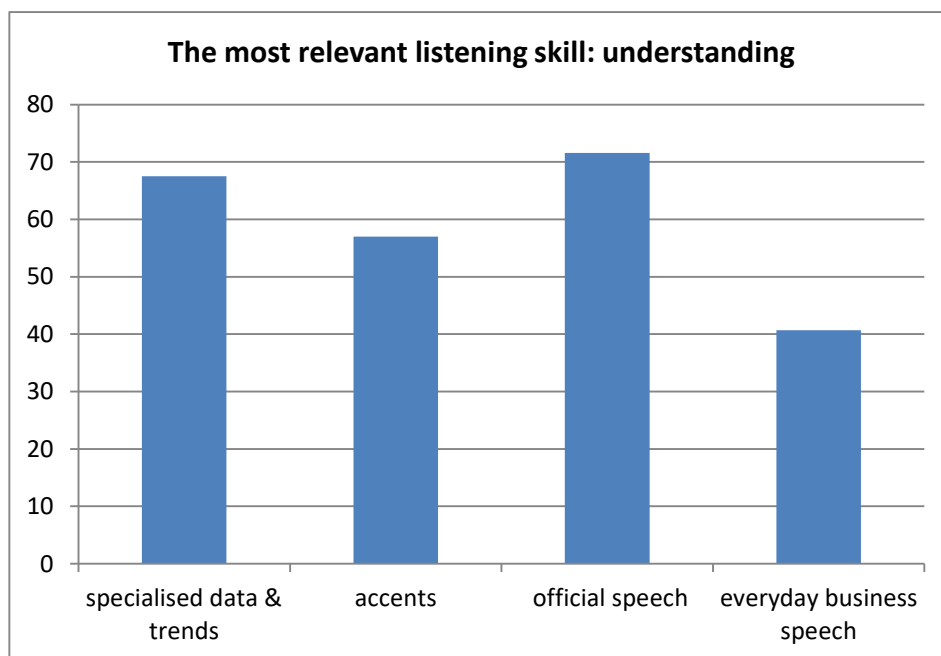


Fig. 4 The most relevant listening skill

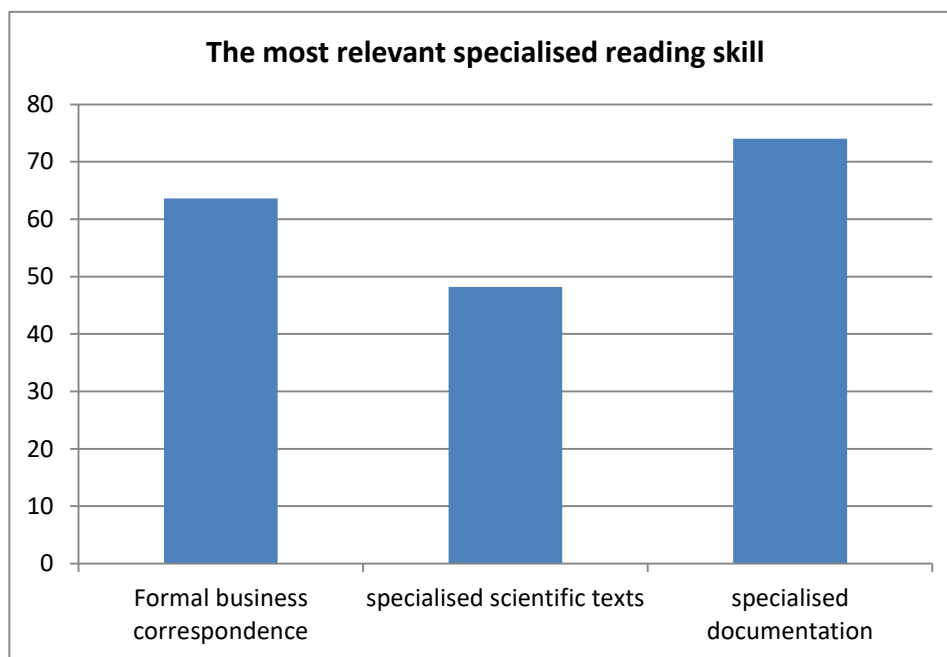


Fig. 5 The most relevant reading skill

Surprisingly, the speaking and writing skills for trend description seem underestimated by the respondents similarly to those for summarizing. At work, describing the development of a process or activity can be crucial, especially in the fields of financing, stock exchanges and international markets just as summarizing in order to give the team the essence of the official talks or negotiations with an important client can be of critical importance for the organization's future. Hence, the lecturer can make some efforts in this direction and draw students' attention to such facts and convince them in the significance of these skills acquisition by making a connection to real-life situations in students' professional context. Another suggestion could be the choice of a different method to teaching these skills.

As far as the results about listening and reading are concerned, it seems reasonable that young people, who are experienced in everyday communication in English with friends, connections and followers on social media and the Internet, find it useful and necessary to be able to deal with formal texts.

Due to Bulgaria's accession to the EU and the educational reforms related to this process, the number of hours for academic courses in foreign languages was radically reduced. For instance, our students who used to have a 480-hour 4-year course in ESP (English as a first foreign language) now have a 240-hour 2-year course. This change entailed a number of adjustments and reflected on the quality of the courses not only because of the reduction, but also because there were similar changes related to other subjects with the previous synergistic effect of studying certain subjects in certain years being minimized. The respondents are not aware of this fact, unlike us – their lecturers, so their answers were expected to provide an insight into their attitude. As Figure 6 shows, 51% of the students consider an increase in the number of hours meaningful.

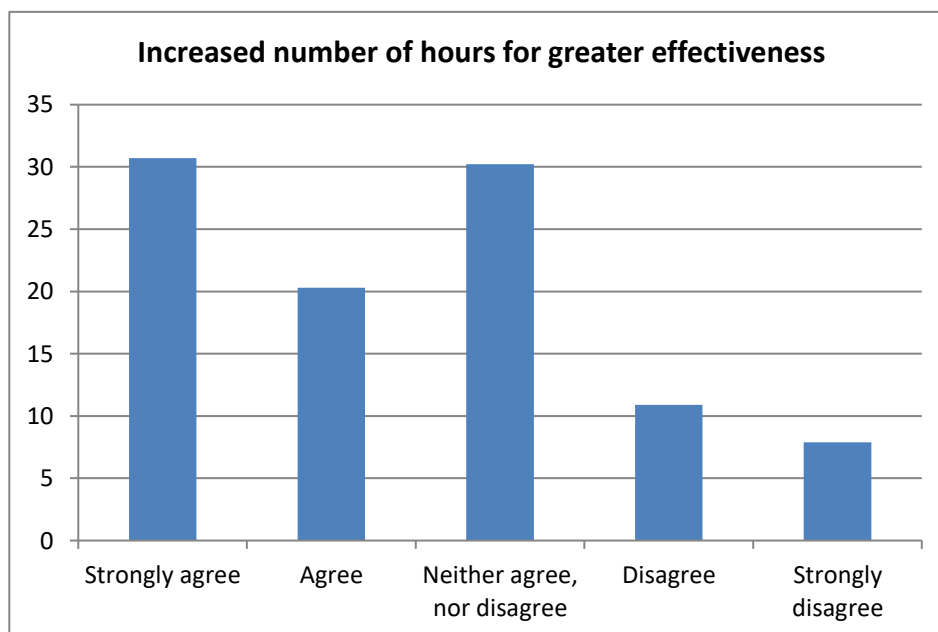


Fig. 6 Increased number of course hours

In addition, during the statistical processing of the data, a correlation was noticed between the increase in the number of course hours and student expectation to hone their ESP knowledge and skills. The need for more hours is presented in five groups (a Likert scale): strongly agree; agree; neither agree, nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree. Similarly, students' expectations for knowledge and skills improvement are also presented in five groups (the same scale) and include the following: writing, speaking, listening, reading, specialized translation, specialized vocabulary, grammar, style and register, coping with communication problems, intercultural communication, interactive tasks, using the Internet and the social media, suggesting specialized topics, opportunity to participate in the course optimization. It is of research interest to see if there is a statistically significant difference in the respondents' expectations expressed by the five groups of willingness. Expectations are an ordinal scale, which allows to find a provisional mean for each expectation. Then, the null hypothesis will state that there is no difference in the average levels of expectation for the different groups, whereas the alternative hypothesis will state that there is a difference in the average levels of expectation for the different groups. Applying the Kruskal-Wallis test a check of the statistical hypothesis is done and the analysis confirms the alternative hypothesis for each expectation with a probability of 95%. Therefore, an increase in the number of course hours results in an increase in the expectation to improve a particular skill.

5. CONCLUSION

Having finished the analysis of the student data collected from the pilot stage of the research of the ESP needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies, it is possible to make several conclusions. The results prompt the wider and more active introduction of interactive tasks and the use of the Internet and social media in the learning process in order to facilitate ESP acquisition as well as taking into account the specific features of the new generations who spend more time in the virtual reality rather than in real life. Involving students in the improvement of course parameters results in enhanced engagement and motivation. They, in turn, lead to greater course effectiveness and better student achievements.

Survey results provide valuable information about student perceptions of the different skills within each activity and point to the measures that could be taken to improve student awareness of the importance of the skills underestimated by them, but considered by employers as critical for a successful functioning in a professional environment. Satisfying the grammar needs of the learners needs the attention of the other stakeholders – university management and lecturers. What is more, the increase in the number of the ESP course hours is worth considering.

The empirical data from the survey of lecturers' perceptions and attitudes are being processed and the second stage has not finished yet, but it is expected that the information gathered will add to the findings from the pilot stage and will allow to make wide-ranging recommendations for course optimisation and greater effectiveness. The study is one of the very few Bulgarian studies focused on students' needs analysis and gives the ESP practitioner in the country as well as abroad the opportunity to use the research results to improve their courses, adjust their approach to the academic teaching of ESP or reflect on the respondents' responses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This work was supported by the UNWE Research Programme (Research grant № 6/2021).

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