

PROMOTING THE VOCATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCES OF STUDENTS IN AN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES CONTEXT: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT¹

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the vocational English language needs of students in an ESP context in the Accommodation and Travel Service department at a vocational and technical Anatolian high school. The study is a partially mixed sequential equal status design. While convenient sampling method was employed to select students, criterion sampling method was utilized to select teachers and supervisors as participants. As a result, 25 ATS students, two vocational course teachers, two English teachers and three supervisors contributed to this research. A survey, semi-structured interview forms and open ended questions in the open interview were employed respectively to collect data from students, teachers and supervisors. In the analysis of the survey data both qualitative and quantitative methods were put into effect. On the other hand, the interview data were analysed through systematic content analysis, inductive coding and thematizing. The result of the analysis of the data revealed that students in this specific context were in need of improving particularly their speaking and listening skills. Low self-confidence of students, negative attitude toward speaking the language, lack of use of appropriate materials; strategies and methods during instruction emerged as issues of consideration in order to reach a resolution. Finally, lack of an appropriate curriculum, lack of strong school-enterprise relationships and inadequate professional qualifications of teachers emerged as issues to be considered by decision makers.

Keywords: Needs assessment, vocational English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

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INTRODUCTION

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN TURKEY

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has a crucial purpose in equipping young people and adults with the skills for work and to respond to the needs of the labor market (OECD, 2010, 9). It has to help individuals develop the skills, abilities and competences obligatory for the occupations in accordance with the demands of the business life and targets of the economy of the country (MoNE, 2012, 11). In Turkish education system, VET programs are provided for students in secondary education and higher education levels (Özer, 2018; Özer 2019a, Özer, 2019b). VET in secondary education level is structured as a four-year education and training program which is divided into two categories as Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools (VTAHSs) and Vocational Training Centers (VTCs). VTAHs provide both academic and vocational courses. Graduates of this type of schools can both select to join the workforce or proceed to higher education (Özer and Suna, 2019, 170).

Contrary to the general education, as is cited by Eichorst et al. (2012), VETs are classified into three categories which are (i) school-based; (ii) a dual apprenticeship system combining school training with a firm-based approach and (iii) informal based. In Turkey the existing vocational education, as is defined by law, is a “dual” system. In the dual system both the educational and the labor sides cooperate to train the labor force through apprenticeship. The school-enterprise relationship is expected to set a sound basis for the development of VET in the context of the business world. However, still vocational education in Turkey suffers from lack of a strong cooperation between school-based vocational education and the sectors (Gelişli, Beisenbayeva, and Sultanbek, 2016). Therefore, it has not reached its desired potential in terms of quality and quantity (Kavi and Koçak, 2018; Erçetin et al., 2019). Despite the efforts to increase the quality and quantity in vocational education, the number of students studying at vocational and technical Anatolian schools does not exceed 35% compared to the total number of students attending high schools which can be said to be a quite low rate (Erçetin et al., 2019). Among the most common issues experienced in vocational and technical education, insufficient cooperation with the service sector, inadequate institutions, schools and buildings, financial problems, rigid and centralized structure of vocational and technical Anatolian schools despite different needs, failure to train individuals with the qualifications required by the sector and insufficiency of curricula are mentioned (Ekşioğlu and Taşpınar, 2019).

In order to eradicate those issues in vocational and technical education, a series of initiatives were planned to be put into practice in 2023 Vision Document released by MoNE (MoNE, 2018, 112-118). Some of the objectives identified in the document were as follow:

- Increasing awareness attributed to vocational and technical education,
- Increasing access to guidance,
- Developing new generation curricula,
- Developing human resources and educational environments,
- Raising qualified human capital needed by the domestic and national defense industry.

Following the release of the 2023 Vision Document, new objectives such as supporting foreign language education, updating curricula and balancing on-the-job training with internship training were identified in order to increase cooperation with the tourism sector. In Accommodation and Travel Service (ATS) which is one of the main branches in tourism and hotel management institutions, the first initiative planned to be put into effect was determined as supporting foreign language education alongside setting priorities for employment to the graduates and providing on-the-job and internship training in real working environments. Foreign language education as a considerably important and emphasized aspect in 21st century education still preserves its significance as an issue in vocational education in Turkey. Therefore in this study it is aimed to examine the students’ needs in vocational English as a

foreign language at a vocational and technical Anatolian high school which provides vocational training in tourism.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN TURKEY

English as the lingua franca on an international level poses great significance on international communication at macroeconomics. As a means of international communication, equipping the learners with essential English language skills undergirds success and quality in vocational and technical education particularly in the tourism sector as the market is extremely competitive. Developing effective English language skills at vocational and technical education institutions raising staff for the tourism sector is a critical issue as speaking the language both enables effective communication at international level and leaves a positive impact on customer service at micro level which may increase the likelihood of return visits to the country (Özen et al., 2013). An important indicator of hospitality is the ability to be able to communicate effectively with tourists. Similarly to the case of many countries, English turns out to be the default language in Turkey, as well. Speaking the English language at a proficient level is a crucial factor in assuring high quality standards of high income visitors (Özen et al., 2013, 35). With respect to this fact, Yeşiltaş, Öztürk and Hemmington (2010) underline the significance of learning and speaking foreign languages effectively for the sake of the sector and indirectly the economy of the country. According to the authors mentioned, remarkable significance should be given to foreign language teaching and all the graduates in the sector should be able to use the English language efficiently. They even imply that, alongside English, a second language such as Russian, German or French should be taught to the students studying in tourism and hotel management vocational and technical Anatolian high schools.

Unfortunately, Turkey National Needs Assessment of State School English Language Teaching report released in 2013 revealed that English language competences of the students were found quite low particularly in secondary education public high schools (Özen et al., 2013). Despite the potential of the teachers, the report proves that the English language competences of most students (90+%) across Turkey were defined as “rudimentary” and “unsatisfactory”. The underlying reasons of this situation were found to be related with the overall teaching strategy which was based on teaching the language as a subject to be learnt instead of a communication tool. Thereby, the results showed that students fail to learn using the language in a functional way. Moreover, it was found that the classroom practices were more teacher-centric heavily relying on grammar and textbooks whereas the students' expectations were to practice the language (Özen et al., 2013). Another important finding related to the low level of English language competences of the students was a reference to the failure of the curricula in that the curricula were not responding to the varying needs of the students (Özen et al., 2013). Likewise, Dinçer, Takkaç and Akalın (2010) examining the readiness levels and experiences of students found out that the profile of the students was low and that the underlying reasons were observed to be the poorly implemented curricula, insufficient course hours, materials and failure in using the language as a communication tool. On the other hand, according to the study conducted by Aysu (2019) to uncover the role of English in students' lives studying at vocational high schools, it was revealed that students indeed wanted to learn English as it was stated to be important for their professions to be able to communicate yet was found difficult to be achieved. In other words, alongside macroeconomics, speaking the language fluently at individual level was perceived as prestigious both as a factor increasing the possibility of being employed and as an opportunity to be promoted to superior positions in the sector.

Besides, as was reported by Taşkın and Aksoy (2018), students are accounted to be homogeneous groups of learners depending on the fact that the placement system of students into high schools largely is bound to a high stakes exam at the end of the middle school. On the contrary, the case is different in classrooms particularly in terms of foreign language skills. While success in the English language courses in reality heavily depends on production skills

like speaking, writing, the high stakes exams are conducted as multiple choice questions which have little to do with the case of producing a language. In line, even in one class students' motivation to learn the language may present differences. Likewise, this case is thought to be represented similarly at school level depending on the type of schools. Also, accounting for the fact that vocational and technical education is classified into different types of schools having different departments responding to the needs of different sectors, each must have different vocational English language needs which is defined as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). That is, as is stated beforehand, at vocational and technical Anatolian high schools students are exposed to both general and vocational English. While, as is clarified by Tabatabaei and Hoseini (2015) students learn English as a Foreign language (EFL) in general English courses, at vocational English it is learnt as ESP. Thereby, as is noted by Hayati (2015), ESP students must meet specific needs that are different from general English. Yet the problem is that the feedback given from the field reveals dissatisfaction regarding the language profile of the students.

In sum, the studies in the literature refer to the fact that vocational and technical Anatolian high school students have low competences in EFL and they experience difficulties in learning ESP. In the light of this fact, the purpose of this study is to uncover the needs of ESP of a group of ATS department students at a vocational and technical Anatolian high school and to explore the areas needed to be improved at vocational English courses. In order to achieve the purpose of the study the research questions probed for are as

1. What are the needs of the students in the ATS department in vocational English courses?
2. How can students' vocational English competences be promoted?

The results of this needs assessment would be used to pave the way for setting priority needs, identifying possible solutions, selecting solution strategies and as a further step propose an action plan for a curriculum design.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted at a vocational and technical Anatolian high school which provides education in tourism and hotel management serving with two major departments namely ATS and Food and Beverage Services (FBS). These two departments of the school are composed of sub-departments. While ATS is divided into Housekeeping and Front Office Services; FBS department is divided into two different classes as Culinary and Service.

Whereas in this specific context the academic year for 9th and 10th grades starts in September similarly to other state schools, 11th and 12th grade students complete their internship up to the end of October and start the new term. Likewise, while the 9th and 10th grade students finish the academic year in June at the same time with other public high schools, 11th and 12th grade students complete the requirements of the curriculum up to the end of April and leave for practicing their internships in hotels, cafes or restaurants which last almost for five months.

The courses are given in standard classes with the seating arrangement in rows. The classes are equipped with smart boards and white boards. As students in 11th grade are divided into sub-branches, the number of students in classrooms ranges between 10 to 20. The school hosts 425 students and 28 teachers. In this context, students are being exposed to two types of language courses as general and vocational English. Unlike the general English course which is a must, the status of vocational English is elective and presents a case for ESP. General English course is taught at all secondary education institutions countrywide. This course is based on teaching all four language skills including the use of basic language structures, lexis and patterns. The course highly aims to equip learners with speaking skills with an emphasis on daily patterns. Vocational English, on the other hand, is based the basic skills adopted in general English courses. In this course it is aimed to equip learners with the required terminology and the language use within the workplace. The main focus in this course is on teaching language of correspondence, the terminology used in customer relations and the terminology required for

hierarchical communication at the workplace. More importantly, an official curriculum specifically related with the needs of tourism students for vocational English courses does not exist in Turkey. Therefore, implementation of the course heavily relies on the teacher groups' decisions. However, it should also be mentioned that the examination of the teacher' group minutes revealed that in this specific vocational and technical Anatolian high school, needs assessment studies did not exist in taking the decisions for the implementation.

There were five English teachers responsible for teaching both general and vocational English courses. The English teachers were graduates of English language teaching and applied linguistics programs at faculties of education from varied universities. They did not have any additional training in ESP and were not familiar with the context when first they were assigned as teachers to work in this specific vocational and technical Anatolian high school.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study is a partially mixed sequential equal status design (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The study is partially mixed in that qualitative and quantitative phases were not analysed until after all types of data were gathered; sequential in that the qualitative and quantitative components did not occur at approximately the same time and; equal status in that both qualitative and quantitative phases had equal weight in achieving the purpose of the study. First of all, it was a highly fulfilling design in order to find answers to the research questions. Secondly, considering the time constraints of the academic calendar in this specific context and teachers' concerns for finishing the curriculum, data collection was planned in convenience to teachers' schedules and students' presence at school. That is, firstly the data were collected from students as there were only two hours of vocational English weekly. In the following, teachers and supervisors were interviewed according to their convenience. The data were not analysed until after all the data were collected. Therefore, it can be claimed that considering the research questions, the conditions in the research site, convenience of the participants and the data collection procedures, this design was the best fit as it was highly overlapping with the nature of the study.

SAMPLE

PARTICIPANTS

The target population is composed of 11th grade ATS students studying at front office and housekeeping sub-departments at a Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (VTAHS). The learners are at the age of 16-17 studying in the 2018-2019 academic year spring semester at the ATS department. The students started the academic year on 21st October and finished their academic semester on 21st April. Depending on the English competences, students with better English skills are located at more prestigious departments during the internship practices of the students. Compared to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for language, the students were identified and accepted as A1-A2 (basic users) level at 9th grade by MoNE. This identification was expressed in the updated and revised Secondary Education English Language Curriculum (2018). Depending on the placement system after middle school in Turkey, the students are accounted to be homogeneous groups and are registered to high schools. Therefore the school does not apply any extra institutional standard tests to identify students' language levels. At 9th grade the students took four hours² of general English and two hours of elective English weekly. At 10th grade the students who participated into the study were taught only two hours of general English. Although vocational English

² Recently (2021), general English course hours were revised as five hours a week at 9th grade, two hours at 10th, 11th and 12th grades.

courses started at 10th grade before 2017, as a result of the weekly schedule change (MoNE Journal of Announcements, 2017), vocational English courses were shifted to 11th and 12th grades³³. As a result, the student participants in this study were given two hours of general English and two hours of vocational English weekly at the time of data collection. The general English courses were carried out according to the common curriculum in secondary education institutions. Instruction was based on 10 themes as school life, plans, legendary figure, traditions, travel, helpful tips, food and festivals, digital era, modern heroes and heroines and shopping. The content of the vocational English course, on the other hand was comprised of topics such as brochures, hotel facilities and services, food and beverages. Although compared to the curriculum 11th grade students are defined as B1 (independent users), teacher participants were defining student participants' language levels still as A1-A2 (basic users).

Convenient sampling method was employed for selecting student participants into the study. As a result, 25 students ($n=25$) including 16 male and 9 female students studying at 11th grade in ATS department participated in the study. On the other hand, in the selection of teacher participants, criterion sampling method was utilized. The criteria assigned for the sampling of the English teachers were “teaching vocational English for at least two terms” and “working as a full time teacher in this context”. In this respect two English teachers met the criteria and contributed into the study. The criteria for the sampling of the vocational teachers and supervisors were identified as “working as a full time vocational teacher in this context” and “having worked in the ATS department for at least two terms”, “being in charge of keeping in touch with the supervisors”; “working as a supervisor for at least two years” and “being responsible for observing the students during internship”. In line with the criteria two ATS vocational course teachers ($n=2$) and three supervisors ($n=3$) participated into this needs assessment study. It should also be noted that the abbreviations assigned for the participants in the results were Vt, Et and Sp referring to vocational teachers, English teachers and supervisors respectively.

THE INSTRUMENT

The instruments used to collect data in this needs assessment study are comprised of a survey and semi-structured interview forms. Via the survey, comprehensive information was gathered from students in relation to the *learner characteristics, instructional objectives, clues for content sequencing, designing the message, instructional strategies and the delivery of the instruction*. The survey originated from utilizing the needs assessment studies of Özyel et al. (2012) and Boroujeni and Fard (2013) conducted in ESP contexts. The items belonging to the surveys were reviewed by the researchers and a schedule was prepared comprised of corresponding items to the context of the research site this study was carried out. Apart from the adopted items, there were two additional parts in the survey. The researchers prepared the additional parts in cooperation with the teachers in line with the purpose of the study. Those parts were added to probe for revealing irrelevant content (if existed); and suggestions for alternative units (themes or topics) to be included in the curriculum. Under the guidance of the expert views, before giving the final form, the last version of the survey was reviewed with the teachers working in the research site for clarity and accuracy. Additionally, the instruments employed in collecting data from vocational and English teachers were semi-structured interview forms prepared by the researcher while open interviews were conducted with the supervisors. In giving the final version of the interview forms, expert views were consulted and both forms were piloted.

³³ After the finalization of the study, the weekly schedule changed again. Today (in 2021), vocational English course is taught only at 10th grade.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Initially, the documents which were available related to the course such as the teachers' group minutes, the syllabus employed for the course, class notebooks and teachers' materials used for instruction were examined. Secondly, the survey was conducted to the students and the interviews were conducted with the teachers and the supervisors following one after the other. In other words, the data were collected in a sequence. The interviews were arranged according to teachers' convenience and conducted with the teachers in the teachers' room. Supervisor interviews, on the other hand, were arranged according to the availability of convenient time that can be spared by supervisors and conducted in the hotel lounge. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the survey both quantitative and qualitative procedures were put into action. For the quantitative analysis, the frequencies were taken into account as students had the chance to tick more than one option in each part. The analysis of the quantitative data was conducted via SPSS Statistics 24. Following the transcriptions of the interviews with the English teachers, vocational teachers and supervisors, the analyses were conducted via systematic content analysis, inductive coding and thematizing. As is recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) validity is termed as "legitimation" in order to reach a bilingual nomenclature in this study. In order to combine the complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods and to increase the inference quality, weakness minimization and sequential legitimation were employed based on the typology of mixed method legitimation types proposed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006).

FINDINGS/RESULTS

This part consists of results and findings of student surveys, vocational teacher interviews, English teacher interviews and supervisor interviews.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF STUDENT SURVEYS

According to the analysis of the survey with regard to the *reasons for learning English*, "success in future profession" ($n=16$) was followed by "speak to foreigners" ($n=15$). As for the *experienced difficulty level in internship*, "some" ($n=14$) and "a lot" ($n=11$) were the most frequent answers. In sum, the evident indicators of the findings revealed that students learnt the language as a means to promote their future career while problems in using the language effectively in the field were encountered relatively to a large extent.

Secondly, it was revealed that in *dominating skills in the current course* the least frequent answers were "speaking" ($n=10$) and "reading" ($n=8$) while the most frequent was "grammar" ($n=16$) which means grammar still was dominating those courses. On the other hand, the analysis of the part with regard to the *areas of language needed to be improved* from the most to the least frequent options indicated that students were in need of improving their *speaking* particularly in the areas of "starting and ending a conversation" ($n=13$), "engage in a dialogue" ($n=12$) and "dealing with communication problems" ($n=11$); *listening* particularly in "understanding different accents" ($n=16$) and "listening to natural speech" ($n=13$); *writing* in "taking notes on talks" ($n=16$) and *reading* in "read and translate" ($n=16$). As a result, it was found out that the students were in need of a more practice based speaking course which would be more in line with the probable cases they would encounter during practicing their jobs in the tourism sector rather than a course heavily focusing on the structure of the language.

Thirdly, about the *functions of the language* part in the survey, the analysis revealed the fact that all functions allocated were found crucial. The most frequent options presumed to be in line with the students' needs were "giving information" ($n=19$) followed by "introducing yourself" ($n=18$) and "asking for information" ($n=17$).

Finally, as for *materials and equipment needed during instruction*, “computer and tablets” ($n=14$) was followed by “smart boards” ($n=13$) and “mobile phones” ($n=12$) which actually might be referring to the need of technologically enriched courses. Additionally, alternative topics such as “room procedures”, “tours and excursions” and “airport” emerged as the most emphasized themes by students suggested that can be included and exploited more functionally in the curriculum of vocational English courses.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER INTERVIEWS

Depending on the fact that the vocational teachers have the chance to observe students on the job and are in constant touch with the supervisors in the field (hotels managers, chefs, supervisors etc.) two vocational teachers were consulted for their opinions. The analysis of teacher responses revealed that the *English language competences* of the students were found extremely significant for their professions. Yet, the analysis of the data indicated that the students had *low competences* particularly in speaking.

Although three different types of English courses (general, vocational and elective) are taught in our school, students still cannot speak English. [Vt1]

The analysis yielded that at school level there were two major underlying reasons behind the low competences of students. The first one was related to *lack of use of appropriate strategies and methods* to teach the language to this student profile in this school.

Of course I trust the expertise of the English teachers working at this school, yet what does it have to do by teaching how verbs, adjectives or adverbs function and writing the structure on the board! [Vt2]

The second reason was found to be the *low self-confidence* of the learners in speaking the language which was thought to be related with the students’ *negative attitudes towards pronunciation*.

Besides, the analysis of the data gave insights that at macro level with regard to the stakeholders involved in planning the curriculum the students were exposed to, there was a *lack of strong school-enterprise cooperation* (among vocational teachers, English teachers and the sector). It was also revealed that indeed the teachers themselves were aware of the need of cooperation for expecting effective results professionally, at school and at macro level.

..We need to come together and communicate throughout the year with English teachers. But that does not happen in any way! Further to say, if the supervisors and the sector expect good students with high language competences, they also must shoulder the responsibility together with us..! [Vt2]

In sum, the vocational English courses were found drawing a low profile in meeting the students’ needs though it was believed to be quite important for students’ jobs and careers. Also, lack of a strong cooperation between the schools and enterprise emerged as another emphasized aspect to be considered. The recommendations of vocational teachers to overcome this situation revolved around more learner-centered teaching strategies and methods and co-teaching (with vocational teachers) with an emphasis on functions and expressions of the language.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF ENGLISH TEACHER INTERVIEWS

To access the clues of the phenomenon of ESP through the lens of the vocational English course teachers, two English teachers were interviewed. The analyses of the interviews gave insights that the curriculum they implemented had a *top-down approach*; that is, there were no needs assessment analyses conducted specifically to identify the needs of the student profile in this

context. The yearly syllabus was prepared by the course teachers with depending on their own views of what is to be taught.

Another important insight relevant with macro-level results was the reference to the *highly centralized structure of the vocational and technical Anatolian high schools*. This situation was found to be among the major reasons for failure of ESP due to *different needs* of each type of vocational high school. For instance, this specific VTAHS has a considerably shorter academic calendar and yet has to cover the same common curricula with the other Anatolian high schools. According to the analysis, it was revealed that teaching vocational English in an ESP context was found to be a much more difficult job compared to teaching general English. ESP was found to be seen as *a professional expertise area* and teachers also felt *limited and inadequate* in responding to the students' needs.

Teaching at a tourism school or in a health school is totally different. It is not regular English we teach. A world you are truly unfamiliar with! If it were for vocational teachers it is easy, they have the professional knowledge but for us we feel helpless.
[Et2]

Similarly with the results of the vocational teachers, at school level according to the vocational English course teachers also, the students had a *low profile in speaking*. The analysis revealed that the inability to speak was related with students' *negative attitudes toward pronunciation* emerging due to fear, peer pressure and lack of enhanced teaching methods.

This week at the course I experienced it, the student asked 'Teacher what if I mispronounce! What if everyone laughs at me! I said that's why I'm here to help you!'
[Et2]

The analysis of the data yielded overlapping insights with the vocational teachers in terms of teaching methods, as well: the artificial learning environment called for more *applied teaching strategies*, learner-centered teaching methods and *co-teaching* practices at school.

If we teach how to take an order at a restaurant, we use the desk as tables in the class and try to simulate the case. Can the vocational teachers not open the ateliers for us and thereby we would teach in a real workplace. [Et1]

In conclusion, the analysis of the data gathered from English teachers indicated that the students were exposed to the course in a top-down manner. The results also showed that the centralized approach to vocational and technical Anatolian high schools caused difficulties in the implementation as neither the needs of all vocational and technical Anatolian high schools are the same nor are the teachers equipped with the qualifications required to teach this course. Additionally, in order to ease students' negative attitudes towards learning the language and support students for speaking the language, strong cooperation with the vocational teachers and enhancing the variety of strategies and methods during instruction were emphasized.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF SUPERVISOR INTERVIEWS

Depending on their experiences to monitor students' performances during internship, three supervisors were interviewed. The emerging codes and themes to a great extent overlapped with that of vocational and vocational English teachers. The analysis of the data showed that speaking the language was found quite important for students in the sector both for *fulfilling the requirements of the job* and *getting promoted*.

In fact, we select students who are good at English for front-office desks. More importantly, students competent in English get promoted more easily to superior positions. [Sp3]

Besides, the analysis yielded that the supervisors also thought that the *low profile of the students in speaking* was related to *grammar-based teaching methods at schools* and students' *negative attitudes toward speaking the language* due to their *fears of mispronunciation*.

I think, still, grammar is taught at school. When they come to the hotel they practice the language, improve within time despite their fears because they have to. Please teachers, never speak to them in Turkish in the class! [Sp2]

Comparing the three interview groups (vocational, vocational English teachers and supervisors) there was consensus that the program at school did so little to encourage the students “to speak” the language. Therefore, more applied strategies and methods were to be put central in teaching how to speak rather than teaching the structure of the language.

As a result of the triangulated findings emerging from all three groups, it appeared that students had a negative attitude towards speaking the language yet this fear could be conquered with appropriate strategies and methods. One supervisor’s saying as “there are also students coming from your school who have good English skills, so why not to use their potential in the class” also stood as an indicator related to the teaching and learning methods that can be adopted in the classroom. Also, the top-down approach in the curriculum instead of designing the curriculum according to students’ needs emerged as a serious hindrance. Similarly to this problem, the triangulated results showed that the centralized structure of the vocational and technical Anatolian high schools presented difficulties as each type of vocational school has different departments and responds to different sectors. Additionally, teacher qualifications in ESP emerged as another concern. As teaching English as EFL and as ESP may quite require different expertise areas, the insights of the study revealed dissatisfaction in terms of professional efficiency in teaching the language in an ESP context.

As a result, it can be said that the students at this specific school actively need to produce the language for the sake of their current condition in language use and their future career in their departments in the tourism sector. Therefore, in sum as an answer to the first research question, the triangulated findings in this needs assessment indicated that the current curriculum needed to be revised with an emphasis on more speaking and listening skills. Also, as an answer to the second research question, it is revealed that there need to be improvements with regard to the strategies and methods during instruction as well as the materials and equipment in the curriculum.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding and find answers to the research questions, the data of student surveys, interviews with English teachers, vocational teachers and supervisors were triangulated. In response to the first research question probing for “What are the needs of students in the ATS department in vocational English courses?” salient results were obtained. The triangulated results revealed that the students wanted to learn the language for being successful in their future professions and speak to foreigners, which can directly be related to the qualifications expected from ATS students. As a result, it can be claimed that the students were aware of the significance of the competence in English language for their job-career promotions. As was reported by Özen et al. (2013) students perceived language competence as an important factor for being employed. This fact also was underlined in the study conducted by Aysu (2019) in which it was inferred that students desired to learn English for they thought it was important for their professions. As was emphasized, being able to communicate effectively with the tourists is an important indicator of hospitality and is related with the quality of being hosted (Özen et al. 2013). Even, like it was suggested by Yeşiltaş, Öztürk and Hemmington (2010), a second language like German, Russian and French can be

taught to students studying at tourism and vocational schools to ensure the quality expected in the tourism sector.

The triangulated results also yielded that the students were experiencing difficulty in practicing the language in their internship experiences. Dinçer, Takkaç and Akalın (2010) also defined the English language competences of students as “low profile” particularly in producing the language. In relation to the difficulty experienced in speaking, when the dominating skills in the vocational English course were examined, it was found out that basically grammar was put central in the classroom practices. That is, while the skills the students needed to improve were revealed as speaking and listening, the teaching practices in the classroom were more grammar-based. Yet, being well-equipped in particularly speaking and listening skills is highly required in the sector of tourism. As a result, it can be claimed that ATS students at this specific school needed a highly speaking and listening-centric instruction in vocational English courses. In relation to this result, it can be suggested that the vocational English course curriculum in this tourism and vocational Anatolian high school needed a sound perspective with an emphasis on speaking and listening skills rather than exposing the learners heavily to the structure of the language.

According to the results with respect to areas of language needed to be improved in *speaking skills* at vocational English courses, “starting and ending a conversation”, “setting dialogue effectively” and “dealing with communication problems” were found to be among the most important aspects. With respect to *listening skills*, the focus was on “understanding different accents”, “listening to natural speech and TV, radio and internet broadcasts”. The role attributed to writing and reading skills appeared to be more limited compared to speaking and listening skills. While for *writing skills*, “taking notes on talks” and “communicating written information” was seen of utmost importance; for *reading skills*, “translation” and “writing and answering emails” were more emphasized. As was noted in the report by Özen et al. (2013), the students fail to learn using the language functionally. In this respect, the results gained regarding the skills, indeed can be referred to the students’ need of practicing the language more functionally in their professions. Therefore, in the design of the curriculum for vocational English courses the emphasis should be more on speaking and listening skills. Additionally, the endeavour to uncover the needs with respect to the alternative topics to be included in the curriculum revealed that room procedures and airport themes could be added with a more functional emphasis.

After revealing the needs of ATS students in vocational English courses, answers were found for the second research question: “How can students’ vocational English competences be promoted?” The results related to the materials and equipments to be utilized at vocational English courses revealed that first of all, the students expected incorporation of computer and tablets, smart boards and mobile phones into classroom practices rather than using only textbooks, and conducting pen and paper examinations. As was stated by Dinçer, Takkaç and Akalın (2010) among the underlying reasons of the low language competences of the students were poorly implemented curricula, materials and failure to use language as a communication tool. As was suggested by Lee (2017) Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) via e-learning systems and the Internet encourages students to develop language ability in a more effective way. Therefore, it can be noted that there is a need for more updated utilization of materials alongside the need of updating the content covered to improve students’ vocational English competences. Hence, for TELL to incorporate more updated technological equipment and materials, the use of the mobile phones and smart boards could be matched with the purposes of the course both to motivate the learners and enhance learning both in and out of classroom practices. Further, TELL can be matched with the instructional methods of multimedia (Mayer, 2009) and computer simulations (Jong, 2011). As was suggested by Mayer (2009) the instruction based on only words does not prove to be as much developed as

multimedia instruction. On the other hand, evidence out of 13 experimental studies proved that low-knowledge learners performed better ($d=1.35$, a large effect) via multimedia instruction. According to the results, the students under interest have a low profile in English language competences in ESP. Therefore, multimedia instruction together with TELL could be offered as a remedy in this case (Mayer, 2009).

According to the triangulated results of the interviews conducted with teachers, the supervisors and the surveys applied to students, mainly at school level, the reasons underlying in the low language competences of the learners were found to be rooted in learners' low self-confidence in speaking the language due to the fears of mispronunciation and peer-pressure; lack of use of appropriate strategies and methods during instruction and lack of cooperation among vocational teachers and the teachers in charge of teaching vocational English courses. At macro level, the reasons emerged to be related to the highly centralized structure of vocational and technical Anatolian high schools despite different needs, lack of professional qualifications of teachers and lack of strong school-enterprise relationships.

Therefore, based on the results gained out of the needs assessment study, at school level, first of all, it can be suggested to consider the negative attitude of the students to speak the language. Therefore, Cooperative Learning (CL) instructional methods could be utilized as both the social cohesion perspective and developmental perspective support learning of individuals through the power of learning in groups (Slavin, 2008; Slavin 2021). As was indicated by Slavin (2011) in social cohesion, the individuals identify themselves with the group and support the learning processes of each other. Also, Slavin (2021) concludes that CL methods when used with group goals/rewards and individual accountability consistently increase achievement of secondary education students. As is cited by Slavin (2011), according to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory, collaborative activities among students can foster one another's proximal zones of development. Besides, Piaget's (1926) Social Arbitrary Knowledge theory suggests that the only way to learn language, values, morality and symbol systems is to learn via interaction with others (Slavin, 2011). Hence, both formal and informal cooperative learning methods can be utilized for diminishing students' fears, increasing their confidence in speaking the language. In this respect, from formal methods, Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), Team Assisted Individualization (TAI) can be utilized while from informal methods Learning Together can be helpful accounting for the needs and the applicability to the topic covered. Moreover, peer tutoring in classroom practices can be recommended as another method to overcome the fears, prejudices against mispronunciation and low self-confidence problems of students. As Graesser, Mello and Cade is cited in Mayer (2011) peer tutoring is a low-cost solution and this method proved to improve communication skills and be effective even when the tutors are unskilled like same-age or cross-age peers.

At macro level, on the other hand, different needs of each type of vocational school should be taken into account by MoNE and it should be acknowledged that language needs of each type of vocational and technical Anatolian high school student profile most probably would present differences in terms of ESP vocational courses. Finally, it can be suggested that steps should be taken for solutions to increase the professional qualifications of English teachers who may teach vocational courses. Moreover, the solutions formulated in doing so should also take into account the type of the vocational schools as each has its own specific content and corresponding sectors. Last but not the least, school-enterprise relationships should be strengthened and their support should be incorporated both in the development of relevant curricula, design of the courses and implementation of the programs.

In conclusion, initially, as a result of this needs assessment study, providing that the vocational English course in this ESP context would be redesigned, speaking and listening skills should be given a broader emphasis and can be enhanced with writing and to some degree with reading skills. Besides, the functions of the language should base the skills with respect to mainly

“giving information”, “introducing oneself”, “asking for information”, “explaining where something is” and “explain the process or procedure while staying at a hotel”. More specifically, providing that the course would be designed based on the findings of this needs assessment, *speaking skills* which was seen as paramount by students, teachers as well as supervisors should provide a broader perspective in the areas of “starting and ending a conversation”, “setting dialogue”, “dealing with communication problems” as these areas were reported to be more probable to be experienced in on-the-job practices. In planning the practices for *listening skills*, “understanding different accents”, “listening to natural speech and listening to TV, radio and internet broadcast” should be ensured to be included as those abilities were the most emphasized ones required during on-the-job practices in the field. Also, based on the results it can be inferred that as students working on the desk need to communicate written information, in terms of *writing skills*, “taking notes on talks” can be highly suggested to be included into the design. Secondly, depending on the results of the study, it can be concluded that materials used to teach should be enhanced and outdated materials replaced with new technological equipment and materials like mobile phones and tablets. In this respect TELL can be matched with multimedia and computer simulations (if possible) instructional methods to motivate the learners and promote their speaking skills. Also the results yielded that alternative topics of “room procedures”, “tours and excursions” and “airports” should be included and exploited more functionally in the curriculum rather than inserting the topics on a superficial level.

Thirdly, it is concluded that students have a low-self-confidence and have a negative attitude towards speaking the language. In this respect, instructional strategies which proved to be successful in overcoming similar problems such as social cohesion and developmental perspectives in CL can be selected. Therefore it is highly suggested to design the course around strategies and methods overlapping with the needs of the learners.

The study can be mentioned to have implications for the design of vocational English courses in ESP contexts at MoNE in Turkey at macro-level as there was not a formal curriculum accessed despite the existence of this course. Besides, the study presents insights for decision makers at macro level in terms of incorporating the power of the sector into planning of education at vocational and technical Anatolian high schools and taking initiatives to strengthen school-enterprise relationships. Also, the study can be claimed to have implications at school level for teachers to design their courses even if an accessible central formal curriculum does not exist yet in ESP.

The study is limited in that it was conducted at a specific context with stakeholders having different needs. Though all named under the umbrella term of vocational and technical, those schools have different areas responding to different sectors. Hence, as this school is responding to the needs of the tourism sector, the results cannot be generalized across other vocational and technical Anatolian schools. Yet, as the design, sampling and data collection procedures are clearly reported, the way the study was conducted can be replicated by other studies.

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