



UZBEKISTAN ON THE PATH OF REFORMS IN ESP TEACHING

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Abstract. This article describes the steps of data collection and analysis of these data in different strands: English level of students and teachers, textbooks analysis and exit tests review regarding CEFR level and National Standards requirements upon graduating. Along with the problem descriptions, the ways to improve ESP teaching in non-linguistic universities are suggested.

Key words: ESP, data collection, textbooks, curriculum, CEFR level, Testing and Assessment, reforms.

In the years since independence, Uzbekistan has increasingly been integrated into the global economic and educational systems, and engages in political and cultural activities with countries around the world. English plays a vital role in all these activities, but, while pre-service training of English teachers has been reformed in recent years through the PRESETT project, the teaching of English to non-linguistic majors has not yet been reformed. In order for reforms to be implemented effectively, the areas of strength and weakness in the current system need to be identified. For this purpose the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, British Council and Uzbekistan Scientific Practical Innovation Center decided to design a Baseline Study in non-philological higher educational establishments.

Initially 17 universities were chosen to collect data and analyze them. But considering the fact that those universities were mostly from the capital city and couldn't fully reflect the state of English teaching and learning in entire Uzbekistan 14 more universities has been added to the list.

The aim of the baseline study is to research the current situation of the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in non-linguistic institutions of higher

education in Uzbekistan. By making the baseline study we want to identify areas of good practice and areas where reforms or changes may be needed; to make evidence-based recommendations about how these reforms might be implemented; to provide a base against which change can later be compared after the reforms have been produced in order to judge their effectiveness. What has been done within the project so far? We selected 17 universities and studied them in January –May 2016. Later all data were analyzed and completed into one baseline study report. Considering some nuances as modifying some instruments for analysis and trying to cover more higher educational establishments we decided to involve 24 more institutions to the project and while working within the team we developed a new instrument – Employers’ questionnaire. So the fuller study involving 31 universities has been done in October 2016 – January 2017. In phase 1 we carried out a survey which covered nearly 1000 respondents in 17 institutions across Uzbekistan in phase 2 we collected the data from approximately 3 000 respondents in 31 institutions. The data were collected in different ways:

- Interview with senior university management, head of department and ESP teachers.
- Questionnaires distributed to students in all universities.
- Observation of ESP lessons in all universities.
- Collecting samples of materials and exit tests from all universities.
- Needs analysis questionnaire from content teachers and from ESP teachers.
- Employers’ questionnaire.

In addition to these data we asked to provide with institutional profile and resources of every institution library.

We believe that the data collected represents the most comprehensive overview of ESP in higher education in Uzbekistan.

Regarding institutional profile we may say that higher educational establishments vary in structure and specialty, but all teach “narrow” ESP to reflect students’ disciplines. In accordance with Bologna agreement, programs are provided at three levels: undergraduate, masters and doctorate. At present, very few programs are taught in English, although many HEIs have aspirations and plans to increase the amount of English medium of instruction at all levels. Most institutions consider English to be “important” but not “essential” for their study and future employment. According to the new State Educational Standards that had been modified in 2013 our non-philological entrants have to have B1 level while applying to the HEIs and be at level B2 by the time they graduate from universities, but actually most of the students have level A1 and A2 when they start their study. So we may say that one of the factors which makes teaching English difficult is students’ low level of proficiency on arrival at university. Analyzing the institutional profiles we came to conclusion

that main student constituency is young people between 18–25. In non-philological institutions male students make the majority whereas with global trends the low number of mature students and the gender imbalance are out of step. Students' need analysis indicates that that main motive to study English is studying abroad, using Internet and travelling to other countries. Students state that they would like to more English hours than they have now, smaller groups and relevant to their specialty sources and materials. Basing on students' need analysis we can make a conclusion that out of four skills they need listening and speaking more.

Analysis of materials used in class shows that our teachers use various materials which include internationally produced books, nationally published one and in-house (textbooks or course books). There are advantages and disadvantages of using all of them. For example, teachers do not see our national and cultural features in international textbooks. These books are sometimes difficult for our students' level of English even though it is possible to find international book on every specialty. As to the nationally developed textbooks they do not reflect the specialty of students and in some extend are also difficult for the level of proficiency of our students. In-house resources are mostly translations of old Soviet textbooks and are out of date. Therefore, the design of in-house books needs to be revised and improved in line with the research findings, State standards requirements and modern principles of ESP material design.

Next analysis is made on testing and assessing students of non-philological universities. As we can see from it tests mostly assess general English rather than ESP, suggesting that they do not assess the ESP syllabus that is taught in universities and therefore they provide little motivation for learning and little indication for consumers that students can perform the language tasks that they need in their professional and academic careers. Most exit test do not cover listening skill and cover very limited speaking skill focusing mostly on grammar, translation and retelling the given text. Again, such tests provide little motivation for the learning of communicative language or the kind of English needed in students' future careers. Moreover, these tests are not linked to National Standards (1, p.1) or CEFR scales or criteria in any way; therefore they cannot claim to assess a student's language proficiency at B2 or any other CEFR level. It is obvious that teachers who are responsible for creating tests needs preparation and trainings in language assessment.

Another field of study in this project is to determine the level of language proficiency of ESP teachers. In phase 1 only lesson observation form had a question about teacher's CEFR level of English, but considering this data was subjective and depended on the observer in phase two passing APTIS test by teachers was provided. In January – February 2017 approximately 300 ESP will be tested and according to the results, we can make the conclusion whether our ESP teachers need English

language training or not in addition to their every three-year professional development courses. These training should include not only general English training and methodology one. It should involve ESP too as the results of the interview with ESP teachers show that only few of them have undertaken some in-service trainings containing ESP.

Basing on listed above data we may say that teaching of ESP in non-linguistic institutions of higher education in Uzbekistan is in need of complete and urgent reforms if it is to meet the country's needs for professionals and academics with international standards of English as set out in Presidential Decree # 1875 of 2012 (2, p.1). The reforms need to address all levels of the current system: Standards, National Curriculum, institutional syllabi, teaching materials and methods, assessment and teacher training and development.

As a conclusion we may say that this study is the first step to global reforms in our Republic which in the final stage will improve the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in non-linguistic institutions of higher education in Uzbekistan.

REFERENCES

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