

Evaluation of Business English Courses According to The English Teachers' Views Teaching at Girls' Technical and Vocational High Schools

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Abstract In our world, being innovated together with developing technologies, the increase in global mobility brought along some differentiations in professional field. Today, together with becoming independent of individuals from their countries and participating in the global mobility, it is seen that the number of lingua franca speakers has been increasing. The necessity of lingua franca requires these foreign languages to be taught through learning objectives of individuals. Accordingly, vocational English courses, which were developed according to the modular education system, were included in the curricula of some vocational high schools in Turkey. This study aims to evaluate vocational English courses according to the views of English teachers working at Girls' Technical and Vocational High Schools (GTVH), which train intermediate level subjects for tourism sector. The study was conducted through interviews with 20 teachers, working at 6 different GTVHs, located in 5 central districts of Ankara. Each teacher was interviewed twice and obtained data were analyzed with content analysis. According to obtained findings, found out that English teachers' academic profiles weren't built in accordance with teaching skills and necessary in-service trainings weren't provided. Modules used during the courses are insufficient and thus teachers don't adopt the modular curricula developed through individual learning principles.

Keywords: Vocational English, English Teachers, Modular Education System

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1. Introduction

While English becomes one of the most needed languages in the globalizing world, teaching it in an effort to use as a new discipline for specific purposes started to become a current issue in the countries which undergo a temporary or permanent change demographically, especially after 1960s [13]. This discipline aims at meeting professional needs of individuals and teaching the terms of specific disciplines and professions and the usage of phrases necessary for business communication [12]. It may also be taught to vocational high school students, who can start working immediately after graduation, in spite of targeting adults or employees in principle [4]. This has started becoming an obligation in many countries because vocational high schools continue to graduate students who will work in different sectors, requiring communicating with foreigners. Thereby, states have had to reshape their vocational foreign language curricula so as to be used at high schools and higher education institutions.

In Turkey, vocational foreign language lessons, which Ministry of National Education (MoNe) developed in

compliance with the modular education system, were included in the course schedules of some vocational high schools. At the departments of food and beverage services, information technologies, shoes and leather craft technologies, entertainment services, handcraft technologies, travel and accommodation services, clothing production technologies, beauty and hair care services, elderly and patient care services and textile technologies in girls' technical and vocational high schools (GTVH), English is taught as a vocational foreign language [10].

Tourism has been one of the sectors which comes a long way over the past four years. In 2013, the number of foreign tourists reached 34.910.098 by increasing 9,84% compared to 2012 [15]. In 2013, the three countries, which sent the highest number of tourists to Turkey, were respectively Germany, Russian Federation and England [14]. The abundance of foreign visitors requires tourism industry workers to be more equipped in terms of foreign language skills, because this personnel has to interact with customers or some of their co-workers in a foreign language. Overall success of GTVHs in vocational foreign language is important in terms of the reflection of credit on the service area.

Various studies were attained related to vocational foreign language teaching. These studies in good part

were done in order to form the foundation of conceptual framework of English for specific purposes (ESP) and indicate the similarities and differences between ESP and content and language integrated learning (CLIL). In his descriptive research, Teodorescu [13] compared ESP with English language teaching (ELT). In a needs analysis study, conducted with nursing and medicine graduate students, Lee [9] stated that a student-centered curriculum, in which communicative approach was embedded, should have been prepared. In a research conducted by Evans [6], an answer to the question where the employees in business sector in Hong Kong use English for their specific purposes was sought. In a similar study, Ainsworth states that trainees believe the importance of speaking a foreign language for a healthy communication and he sets forth that English teaching should be planned so as to meet the needs of individuals. Ghany and Latif [7] conducted research with students attending a Vocational School of Tourism where English is taught for specific purposes and their instructors. According to the data obtained, indicated that lessons given didn't meet the educational needs due to the problems stemming from the curriculum.

When analyzed, research studies related to English curriculum for specific purposes were mostly conducted with students over the age of 18, adults (or their teachers - lecturers) respectively within the scope of undergraduate study or lifelong learning, but any research carried out at high school level wasn't encountered most likely because the subject matter is considered as addressing adults' needs.

Studies carried out in Turkey are generally needs analyses. Diken [5] studied on a needs assessment, targeting English teaching for specific purposes at vocational schools of higher education. In the study, it was stated that besides speaking and listening skills, reading and writing skills should have been fostered to a certain extent. Another study, supporting the findings of this research was carried out by Kazar [8]. Results revealed the necessity of updating the English curriculum so as to improve four language skills and related sub-skills in line with students' educational needs found out throughout the study. Akın [1] analyzed the effectiveness of problem-based vocational English classes, which were designed based upon the principles of adult education in police academies. In his study, Solak [11] stated that teaching materials should have been modernized and course curricula should have been updated so as to improve the productive skills of the students.

In literature, no study, carried out in Turkey, was encountered related to vocational English lessons taught at high school level. It is considered that this study may contribute to the literature in terms of introducing teachers' views related to vocational English lessons at high school level.

2. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the problems encountered during the vocational English classes and make some solution-oriented recommendations for these problems by receiving the opinions of English teachers, working at GTVHs.

2.1. Problem Statement

What are the views of English teachers, working at Girls' Technical and Vocational High Schools on teaching vocational English?

2.2. Sub-problems

1. What are the English teachers' views on the academic profiles of the teachers who teach vocational English at GTVHs?
2. What are the English teachers' views on the books (designed in compliance with the modular education system) used at vocational English classes?
3. What are the English teachers' views on teaching environments and teaching materials used during the classes?
4. What are the English teachers' views on teaching methods and techniques used during the vocational English classes?
5. What are the English teachers' views on modular education in terms of teaching vocational English?

3. Methodology

In this section of the study, research design, working group, data collection tools and data analysis are discussed.

3.1. Research Design

This study is designed within the frame of qualitative research. Qualitative research tries to explain the meaning or reality of any information or phenomenon through experiences; analyzes and evaluates the matters in hand from individuals' points of view, considering the fact that, situations and facts take shape in social environments [2]. The aim of this study, in which teachers evaluated vocational English curricula that they employed by reflecting their own experiences, is to analyze the problems encountered during vocational English courses in detail.

Table 1. Distribution of participant teachers by gender, teaching experience, and school

Features of Participant Teachers	Number	
Gender	Female	20
	Male	-
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	2
	6-10 years	6
	11-15 years	8
	16-20 years	4
	Altındağ GTVH 1	3
School	Altındağ GTVH 2	2
	Mamak GTVH	5
	Keçiören GTVH	3
	Çankaya GTVH	4
	Etimesgut GTVH	3

3.2. Working Group

In 2013-2014 academic year, 20 English teachers (teaching vocational English), working at 6 different

GTVHs in Altındağ, Mamak, Etimesgut, Çankaya and Keçiören districts of Ankara, participated in the study voluntarily. In this study, members of the working group were selected by using homogeneous sampling method which is one of the purposive sampling methods and provides a sub-group to be selected so as to be suitable for the purpose of the study [2]. The reason for the selection of these schools that vocational English is taught as an elective subject at these schools. Participant teachers were indicated with numbers and letters (T1, T2, T3, T4, etc.) in order to facilitate their views to be differentiated from each other. Distribution of participant teachers by gender, teaching experience, and school is given in Table 1.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

In the study, with the purpose of collecting qualitative data, a semi-structured interview form, consisting of 7 open-ended questions and 2 sub-questions for each question with the purpose of clarifying the answers received, was prepared for the participant teachers. The purpose of utilizing open-ended questions is to enable the participant teachers to answer the questions more flexibly and comfortably. Interview questions were developed in order to determine the views of English teachers, teaching vocational English on the curricula of these subjects, modules, other teaching materials, teaching methods and techniques, teaching environments, and teachers' academic profiles. All the interviews were realized as phone conversations. The researchers recorded all the conversations by taking notes. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour on average. Interview questions were addressed to participant teachers in the same order. Observed that during the interviews, participant teachers generally shared their experiences and impressions eagerly.

3.4. Data Analysis

Researchers read the recorded data three times primarily. A form, including 7 open-ended questions and their sub-questions was prepared and remarkable and prominent answers were written next to each question by enumerating. Most repeated and mentioned expressions related to points that become clear and prominent were coded, their frequencies were noted and they were placed under each related question. Based on the coded expressions, subjects which teachers focus their attentions on were organized as themes.

To collect the data, two interviews (at two-week intervals) were made with participant teachers and thereby, with the help of the second interviews, the answers of the questions were clarified and opinions, which participant teachers wanted to add, were included in the data analysis form. Data analysis and interviews were conducted synchronously. After the first interviews, data was analyzed and matters, which are necessary to be cleared up and dwelled upon more, were determined. In the second interviews, the subjects, which participant teachers provided weak opinions, were brought into question again. Three teachers who referred to key aspects related to teaching vocational English were also asked to write their detailed opinions and send them via e-mail. In this way, given answers were provided to reveal the participant teachers' views on the issue extensively.

4. Findings

In this section, findings obtained as a result of analysis and evaluation of the data provided by participant teachers are provided.

English teachers' views on the academic profiles of the teachers who teach vocational English at GTVHs

Participant teachers were asked to express their opinions about the necessary education, which English teachers, who would teach vocational English, must have received. Presented opinions were analyzed and seen that opinions focus on the re-organization of vocational English curricula at university level and teachers' needs for in-service trainings. Most of the participant teachers meet on the view that teachers must have a necessary education before teaching vocational English.

Some examples of given answers are as follows.

"Yes, you will encounter professional terminology during the teaching processes. We are obliged to study and learn necessary terminology all the time. We can't find the meanings of some words in even technical dictionaries. I consulted vocational teachers a lot... I asked the meanings of the words or terms many times. Maybe, if we had been taught properly at the university, everything would have been easier." (T1)

"It is impossible to consider this course as a usual English course. It is really different. This course requires both professional knowledge and expertise on teaching English language. Maybe, we can be better at teaching vocational English through in-service trainings. But, who will give us trainings? I think that is important, too." (T15)

"I found a book and gave weight on it, though just barely. I use dialogues mostly. Students try to make dialogues according to given situations and act them out. I have not needed an extra in-service training since I discovered to teach vocational English in this way. I think teachers should find their own solutions instead of complaining." (T6)

English teachers' views on the books designed in compliance with modular education system

Participant teachers' views were received on the modular books used as teaching materials of vocational English lessons; given answers were analyzed and views on this subject are given according to the frequency of assertion as follows.

- Designation of modular books doesn't attract students' attentions and these books are derived from visual richness.
- Modular books weren't prepared so as to enable students to communicate in business area and fit the purpose of teaching students how to communicate with their guests or co-workers. Self-assessment and evaluation sections were ignored in most modular books. Although these books aim at the acquisition of four language skills, listening records weren't included in the modules and they have lots of detailed and unnecessary information.
- Modular books were prepared more than adequate for some departments while inadequate for some others. Even for some departments no modular books are available.

- Some modular books were prepared in line with CLIL method that is they aren't communication-based, but intended for giving professional information.
- Modular books weren't prepared in compliance with modern approaches for English teaching.
- Modular books were designed so as to support individual learning, yet cognitive levels of students are below the level which is necessary to understand and follow the instructions in the books.

According to the participant teachers' views, modular books aren't designed to fit the purpose of vocational English courses. Modular learning is a learning approach used in vocational education and individual learning and research are brought forward. Found out that modular books designed according to this approach are not adopted by the participant teachers and there are quests to find alternative solutions.

Some examples of given answers are as follows.

"I teach vocational English in food and beverage department in 10th grades. The modular book we use is no different from a chemistry book written in English. As if you took any course books and translated them into English. I really sweated over it to be able to muddle through. My students are about to become translators. These books are supposed to provide students with acquiring language skills in business communication, but not make them translators."(T1)

"I have written a modular book before. I think writers should be allowed to write flexibly to some extent. Book writers have to follow certain procedures strictly. Besides, writers should know about the demands of the sectors. Our aim is to facilitate students to acquire necessary qualities which sectors demand." (T18)

"Modular books are terrible. For example, one of them explained how to clean fish at length. I would accept it if it were how to serve fish. Vocabulary acquisition is okay, but students will learn it by translation, but not through speaking activities. This means they can forget the vocabulary they learnt any minute. With these modules, you will lose your way. Can I make myself clear?"(T2)

"I was shocked once I saw the modular books. Colorless, uninteresting, and boring...Then, I started seeking for different books. It is difficult to find books designed for vocational English lessons here. Finally, I found a book, but it was full of mistakes." (T17)

"We teach lessons in a traditional way while we are supposed to follow the modular system. Our schedules, teaching equipment, materials, and environment aren't designed to meet the needs of the modular education system. There is no point in teaching these lessons according to the modular education system. It is unnecessary for English classes." (T9)

English teachers' views on teaching environments and teaching materials used during the classes

Participant teachers' views were received on teaching environments and materials used during the classes; given answers were analyzed and views on this subject are given according to the frequency of assertion as follows.

- Teaching environments are generally derived from technical equipment.
- Since modules don't include listening materials, program goals cannot be achieved thoroughly.

- Video shots, voice recordings, and handouts developed by the teachers or books that are not aligned with the curricula are other teaching materials used during the classes.

While teachers were answering the question, they raised some concerns over teaching environments and materials. Problems such as being obliged to use inadequate modules in terms of meeting students' educational needs, ending in disappointment while seeking for better course books, not being able to afford expensive course books, and being derived from necessary business literature, come out as demotivational factors.

Some examples of given answers are as follows.

"Even if there are listening materials developed for the modules, I have never seen them. I think education ministry doesn't care about fostering listening skills. We have a few slide projectors in our school, but there aren't a sufficient number of them. I can't use them whenever I like." (T15)

"I occasionally deliver handouts and sometimes copy some pages of cookery magazines. We don't have a slide projector in our school, but I read listening texts myself and try to do listening activities in the classroom. Even if modules include listening CDs, we haven't been provided with or there are no websites to download them." (T6)

"I used a course book other than the modular book for a while, but then, that didn't make any sense and still it doesn't. I think utilizing modules is the best. Anyway, we have a real difficulty in finding suitable source books. I don't need slide projectors or something else like those during the classes. I don't think I should give them the first priority to make students comprehend the subjects." (T20)

English teachers' views on teaching methods and techniques used during the vocational English classes

Participant teachers' views were received on teaching methods and techniques used during the vocational English classes; given answers were analyzed and views on this subject are given according to the frequency of assertion as follows.

- In vocational English classes, teachers claimed that they generally focused on student-centered teaching activities, but their explanations related to teaching processes indicate that they lead the classes rather than being a facilitator during teaching processes.
- The most used foreign language teaching methods according to frequency of assertion are grammar and translation method and communicative approach.
- The most used teaching techniques according to frequency of assertion are simulation, role-play, question-answer, drama, pair works and group works.

Participant teachers stated that the content in the curricula didn't fit the purpose of the courses and because of that they sometimes felt obliged to follow traditional teaching methods and techniques in order to go aligned with modular books. They told that situation-oriented simple and effective dialogues couldn't be acted out in classroom environments properly.

Some examples of given answers are as follows.

"Teacher's role is also very important. Teachers should organize dialogues in the modules as role-plays. They should create situations and make their students feel as if they are in those situations. Since they need to

communicate while working as interns in businesses, in the classrooms, they adopt these situations immediately anyway. Students are to speak, be exposed to language and feel comfortable while expressing themselves. Translation is nonsense in this respect.”(T3)

“Students work as interns at big hotels. They meet foreign cooks or other foreign staff there. They know that starting working at these hotels is subject to the condition that they will communicate in English fluently. Especially 11th and 12th graders are interested in vocational English more than the lower graders. It is really enjoyable to teach vocational English through situation-oriented dialogues in these classes.” (T14)

“As students grow older, their interests in vocational English increase. My students are 11th graders and they can easily give a recipe in English. I asked them to do research on how to give a recipe, how to explain it, and how to pronounce the words. I think we should make them aware of how to express themselves in a foreign language instead of wasting time with ineffective activities.” (T12)

English teachers’ views on modular education in terms of teaching vocational English Participant teachers’ views were received on the modular education system in terms of teaching vocational English; given answers were analyzed and views on this subject are given according to the frequency of assertion as follows.

- English teachers didn’t receive in-service trainings related to the modular education.
- All the participant teachers teach vocational English with traditional methods rather than following the principles of the modular education system.
- Participant teachers think that since vocational English lessons are based on communication and interaction, these lessons are not suitable for individual learning which modular system impose them to; thereby modular system is unnecessary for these courses. In addition, they all stated that weekly schedules of their schools weren’t designed according to the requirements of the modular system.

Participant teachers’ views on teaching vocational English by using modular education system show that they don’t comprehend the requirements of the system necessarily because they didn’t receive any in-service trainings related to the system and they maintain their old habits which they dropped into while teaching general English classes before.

Some examples of given answers are as follows.

“How can I implement the modular education system? I don’t even know what it is exactly. I don’t suppose that other English teachers give importance to individual learning, either. (T16)

“I had wondered once when these in-service trainings were given in our school. I had even asked to participate in those trainings, but I was told that since those trainings were organized for vocational teachers, I wouldn’t be able to participate in. Yet we teach vocational English, too. They don’t realize that.” (T3)

“Nobody can implement the modular education system in such a school system. That is totally a different thing. We made ourselves believe in our own lies again. That’s it... Besides, I don’t understand how a subject, which is based on communication, can be linked to individual learning.” (T8)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, analyzing the views of English teachers related to vocational English courses, obtained findings indicate that participant teachers adopted the learning acquisitions targeted by the curricula and had a consensus on the subject that vocational English lessons should have been taught effectively so as to provide students with necessary language skills to communicate with foreign guests or co-workers.

Participant teachers recognize through their own experiences that vocational English is handled within the scope of foreign language teaching for special purposes and specify that these courses attract students’ attentions more compared to regular English classes. Participant teachers emphasized that teachers who taught vocational English should have both known about vocational terminologies and technical terms in English and been aware of foreign language teaching methods and techniques. Obtained findings of this study and the results of the research conducted by Ghany and Latif [7] show similarity in terms of the consequences of teachers’ academic inefficacies. They found out that efficiency of classes decreases in parallel with inefficacy of lecturers.

Participant teachers generally addressed to rather negative sides of the modules. Modules are prepared by MEGEP to enable students both to learn vocational literature in detail and comprehend how to communicate with foreign people whom they will work together or serve during their careers. Yet, modules, including technical terms and expressions are considered as unnecessary by the participant teachers because they cause students to translate lots of detailed and unnecessary information into Turkish and teachers think that necessary vocabulary can be taught through content-based teaching approaches such as fostering four language skills by using dialogues and short texts. Cons of modules also cover the problems related to designs, colors, visuals, contents, and measurement and evaluation issues. Participant teachers also emphasized that modules should have been prepared by the commissions with experienced members who know about the needs and demands of the related sectors. Results of the research carried out by Diken [5] and Kazar [8] support the findings of this study. According to the findings of both studies vocational English courses should be designed in a way to strengthen students’ communication skills.

Participant teachers asserted that teaching environments were derived from technical equipment; they couldn’t reach this equipment whenever they needed; and they were in search of better books or other teaching materials. According to the research carried out by Ghany and Latif [7] lack of teaching materials decreases the effectiveness of vocational English courses. Thus, obtained findings are compatible with the findings of this study.

Despite participant teachers have a difficulty in associating aims indicated in the curricula with the content provided in the modules, they try to use suitable teaching methods and techniques to meet the educational needs of the students during the classes. Participant teachers specified that they often had to apply to grammar and translation method because modules included too much vocabulary. They also told that they used communicative approach as well.

Based on the findings obtained in this study, recommended that teachers' in-service training needs should be met, currently utilized modules should be reviewed, and necessary precautions such as reorganization of weekly schedules or changes in the functioning of school hours should be taken in order to facilitate teachers to adopt the modular education system at schools comfortably.

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