

Assessing needs analysis in English for specific purposes (ESP): The case of the Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT)

Enkeleda Jata¹, Elsa Zela², Arjan Shumeli³, and Irena Shehu⁴

To cite this article:

Jata, E., Zela, E., Shumeli, A., & Shehu, I. (2025). Assessing needs analysis in English for specific purposes (ESP): The case of the Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT). *Romanian Journal of Economics*, 60(1), pp. 75-83.

Abstract. This study aims to identify and analyze the needs of students within the domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The effectiveness of ESP instruction lies in a thorough understanding of students' needs. Foreign language teachers design their ESP curricula by paying attention to these needs. In this way, educators can apply new methods of teaching in class, by taking into consideration their future business environment. The implications of this study extend to both business learners and educators, encouraging and developing long-lasting competence. The participants in this research comprise first-year students enrolled at Agricultural University of Tirana. Therefore, a questionnaire was conducted among first-year students. The findings will help tailor educational strategies to prepare students for their prospective career. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on ESP curricula by providing insight into the language needs of ESP learners. **Objective:** The research aims to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment for the ESP course. The primary goal is to identify the specific language needs of first-year students, and prepare them for their future careers by improving their language skills. **Method:** The research was conducted at the Agricultural University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness. A questionnaire was distributed to first-year students enrolled at AUT, addressing various aspects such as their language needs, knowledge gaps, and preferred teaching methodologies. **Results:** The findings highlight the critical need for curriculum developers to revise and update ESP syllabi. The research offers practical recommendations for educators to enhance course content and refine their teaching strategies, ensuring it aligns with the specific needs of the students. **Originality:** This research highlights the important role of needs analysis in ESP courses, providing valuable insights into students' language proficiency levels, preferred learning methods, and the relevance of ESP in their professional field.

Keywords: Need analysis- English for Specific Purposes, Business English, Learners

JEL classification: Z13 Economic Sociology, Economic Anthropology, Language, Social and Economic Stratification

1. Introduction

It is broadly acknowledged that English is the predominant language in the global market. At the Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a mandatory course, aimed at providing students with essential language skills for their respective fields. This ESP course significantly

¹ Agricultural University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania; ejata@ubt.edu.al

² Agricultural University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania; ezela@ubt.edu.al

³ Agricultural University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania; ashumeli@ubt.edu.al

⁴ Beder University College, Tirana, Albania; ishehu@beder.edu.al

enhances students' employment prospects and their success in the global market. Proficiency in Business English is crucial for students to succeed in their future careers.

As Anthony (1997) explains, the difference between ESP and general English is that ESP courses address the specific linguistic needs of students in various disciplines. Therefore, conducting a thorough needs analysis is essential for the effective development of ESP courses. This analysis allows educators to gain a deeper understanding of students' language deficiencies and learning preferences, guiding them in selecting the best teaching approach. The outcomes of this research will guide ESP educators at AUT to tailor their curriculum and teaching approach to better align with students' needs.

This study uniquely contributes to the field by focusing on identifying language gaps among first-year students enrolled at AUT, with a specific emphasis on the technical language. By identifying these gaps, educators can enhance their teaching methodologies and materials, thereby preparing students for their future careers. The research's findings aid in the development of ESP programs by identifying and addressing students' specific language needs. By understanding needs analysis, educators can help enhance students' motivation and foster a deeper interest in learning Business English.

The Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness at AUT offers Business English courses that aim to prepare students with the essential language skills for success in the global market. The research findings will assist educators by carefully examining the specific technical language needs of AUT students and demonstrating how these needs can be addressed through a revised ESP curriculum.

2. Literature background

Needs analysis is a fundamental aspect of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that must be carefully considered and implemented. Performing a detailed needs analysis is important in the field of teaching, particularly before the start of a course. Understanding needs analysis is essential for designing effective syllabi, curricula, classroom activities, materials, and textbooks. Specifically, ESP curricula must align with the students' needs and the demands of the global market, equipping them with the necessary language skills required for their future careers.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) mentioned that needs analysis should be a fundamental tool in curriculum development. They argue that ESP courses may fail to prepare students for the global market, if linguistic needs aren't understood. Richards (2001) mentioned that needs analysis in language teaching is used to understand the skills that a learner needs, often described as a "linguistic deficiency". Richards (2001) states that needs analysis encompasses the study of perceived and current needs as well as potential and unrecognized needs. This understanding is vital for curriculum development, material design, and teaching strategies.

Similarly, Flowerdew (2013) emphasizes that needs analysis determines the "what" and "how" of teaching, and educators are advised to continually adjust their ESP curricula to reflect learners' needs. Flowerdew (2013) highlights that needs analysis is an ongoing process that must be adapted to learners' needs and job market. As noted by Lasekan (2023), it is evident that insufficient meeting of these needs can lead to student disengagement, which in turn may result in decreased persistence and overall retention in a course or program. This highlights the importance of performing a thorough needs analysis when designing ESP syllabi and curricula. This research will be of great benefit to ESP educators by enhancing their awareness of the significance of needs analysis and helping educators draft courses that effectively address their students' needs. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), ESP is designed to address specific needs of learners and should be connected to or created for particular disciplines. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) asserted that ESP focuses on learners' needs, which differentiates it from general English. As they stated, ESP is a learner-centered approach to language learning. Rose and Sookraj (2015) highlighted the importance of conducting a needs analysis from the learners' perspective to ensure that their English courses meet their expectations. Based on their study, they emphasized the significance of identifying the language skills important to students.

By identifying students' specific language needs and preferences, educators can design ESP curricula that empower students to acquire the linguistic competence necessary for professional success, enabling them to tailor their educational strategies based on students' needs. The integration of needs analysis at AUT is important for developing a curriculum that meets students' linguistic needs. By incorporating insights from different researchers, educators can design an effective curriculum that meets these needs and prepares students for success in the global market. Guo and Modehiraan (2023) highlight that needs analysis is important in "formulating the teaching syllabus, determining the teaching content and deciding the teaching method". Also, Trujeque-Moreno et al. (2021) discuss the significance of needs analysis in tailoring ESP courses and designing courses that address learners' linguistic weaknesses fostering a more effective learning experience.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted at the Agricultural University of Tirana (AUT), Faculty of Economics and Agribusiness. A needs analysis questionnaire was distributed to 115 first-year students. These students are all pursuing a Bachelor's degree and have Business English as a compulsory course during their first year. The course comprises 56 teaching hours, and by its conclusion, students are anticipated to attain a solid understanding of business terminology. Therefore, the knowledge and skills they acquire during the course must closely align with their specific needs in business English.

The questionnaire was designed to assess the most important concerns of the students regarding their language needs, particularly about business terminology. It incorporates various response scales, including the Likert scale, to measure students' perceptions on a range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The survey consists of 21 questions aiming to gather data on students' perceptions of their linguistic deficiencies, preferred teaching methods, and expectations for the course.

Participants were encouraged to provide their views on the needs analysis for the Business English course, covering various aspects such as language needs, knowledge gaps, and preferred teaching methodologies. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on existing literature and previous studies and was tailored to address the specific context of ESP. Understanding needs analysis is crucial for setting syllabus objectives, selecting appropriate course materials, and choosing effective teaching methods. Prior to data collection, all the students were informed on the research's objectives and assured that their opinion would remain anonymous. Given the significance of needs analysis in course design, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Needs analysis is important for identifying students' linguistic needs and adapting the curricula based on their needs.

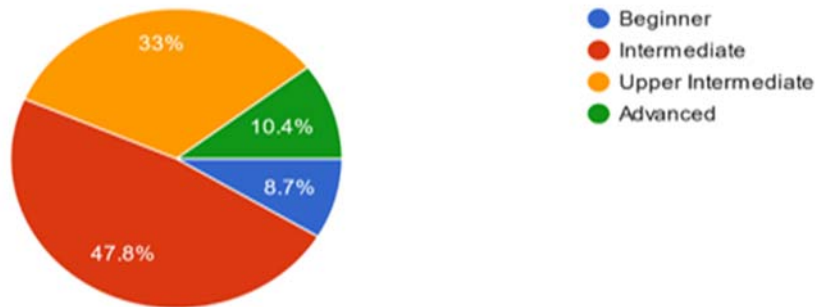
H2. Students recognize the importance of ESP in their academic studies and work.

4. Results

The participants were predominantly female, comprising 78.3% of the sample, while 21.7% were male. All the participants are first-year students enrolled at the Agricultural University of Tirana. Furthermore, 95.7% of the students in the survey are between 18 - 20 years of age.

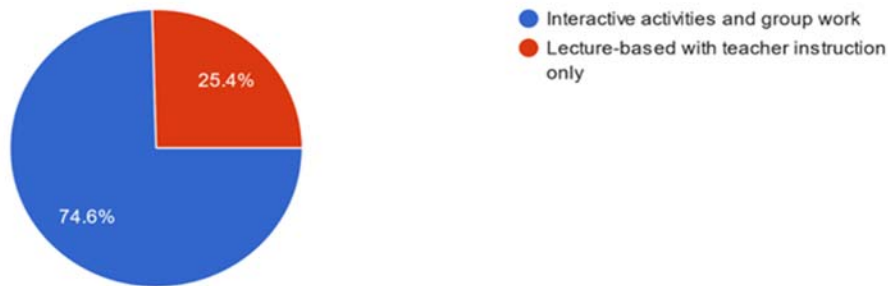
Perceived Level of English Skills

Figure 1 provides a detailed overview of English proficiency levels among students. According to the figure, 47.8% are categorized as Intermediate level, 33% are categorized as Upper Intermediate, 8.7 % are categorized as Beginners, and 10.4% are categorized as Advanced. This distribution indicates that the majority of the students have an intermediate level of proficiency in the English language.

Figure 1. English level

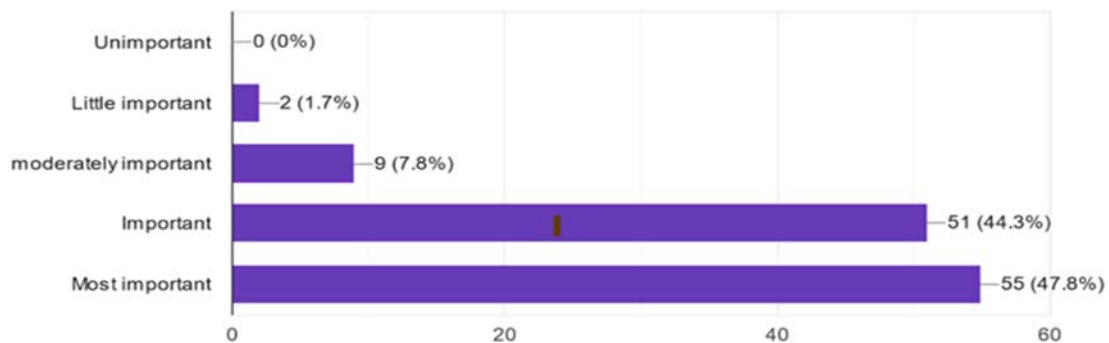
Source: own calculations.

The majority of students (74.6%) prefer interactive activities and group work over traditional lecture-based instruction. Therefore, lecturers should organize their classes to align with this preference, emphasizing interactive group activities. By meeting the needs of our students, we can enhance their motivation and improve their learning outcomes. Students need to work in a classroom that supports their learning methods, with teachers acting as facilitators of this learning process.

Figure 2. Data on student's perception of interactive vs. lecture-base

Source: own calculations.

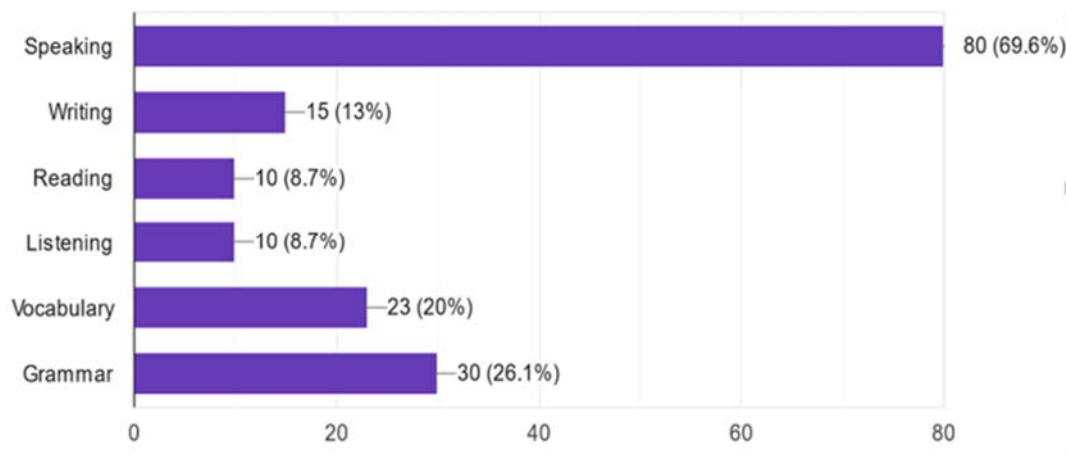
Students are fully aware of the significance of English for their future careers. A notable 47.8% and 44.3% consider English “important or most important”, respectively. This data highlights their interest in and appreciation for the value of English proficiency, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Student's perception of the importance of English in their study

Source: own calculations.

An important question in identifying key areas for development in a Business English course is, “What skills do you need to improve?” Based on students’ responses, the most common need in learning Business English is the improvement of speaking skills, as illustrated in Figure 4, with 69.6% of students indicating that they require improvement in this area. Limited proficiency in speaking can lead to communication breakdowns and difficulties in effectively conveying the intended message. The second most common need identified is grammar, which is crucial because using the incorrect tense can lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, attention must be given to both grammar and vocabulary, as they are essential for mastering Business English. Choosing the appropriate materials and textbooks to meet students’ needs can be quite challenging for lecturers.

Figure 4. Student’s perception of skills to develop

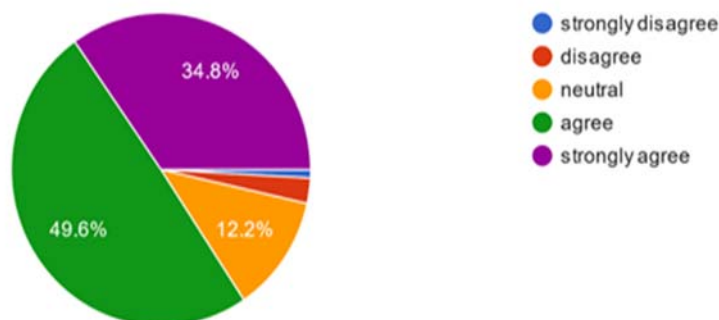


Source: own calculations.

From the data, it is evident that needs analysis is an important tool to help educators identify students’ needs, thus supporting hypothesis H1. This enables educators to adapt curricula based on students’ needs.

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on analyzing students’ awareness of the importance of ESP. This section investigates students’ perceptions of ESP courses in developing their language skills, particularly their understanding of Business English terminology. As illustrated in Figure 5, 49.6% of students agree, and 34.8% strongly agree that the ESP course is essential for enhancing their understanding of business terminology.

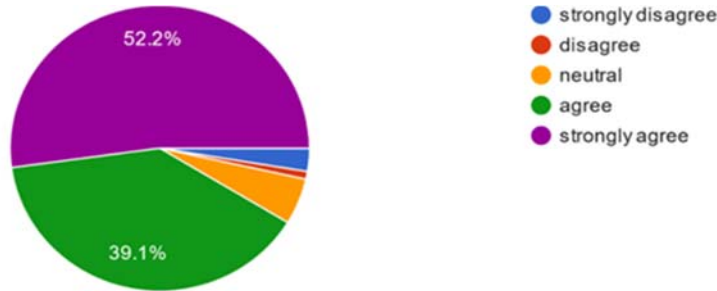
Figure 5. Students’ perception regarding the importance of terminology



Source: own calculations.

ESP courses play a crucial role in helping students write cover letters, create CVs, and apply for jobs. According to the data, 52.2% of students strongly agree and 39.1% agree with this statement, as illustrated in Figure 6.

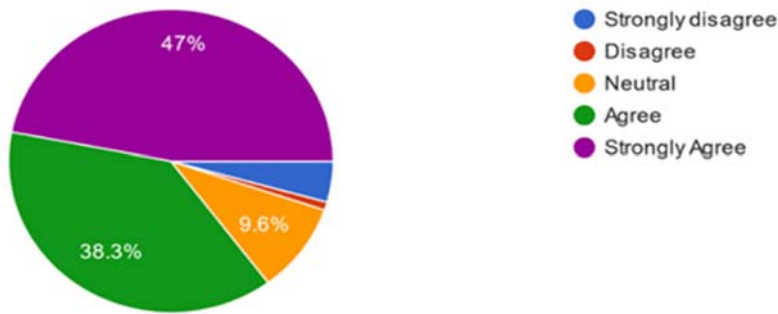
Figure 6. Students' perception regarding the importance of English on job application



Source: own calculations.

ESP holds significant importance in understanding cultural differences in business. Evidently, 47% of students strongly agree with this statement, while 38.3% agree to a considerable extent. ESP plays an important role in helping students understand cultural differences in business.

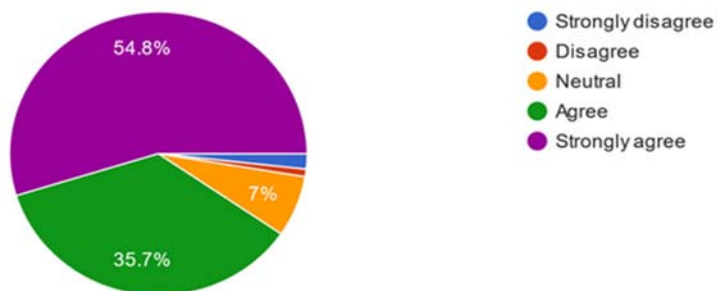
Figure 7. Students' perception of the importance of understanding cultural differences



Source: own calculations.

The vast majority, 54.8% and 35.7% of respondents consider collaboration with foreign companies important. They agree that the ESP course plays an important role in helping them collaborate and work with foreign companies.

Figure 8. Importance of collaboration with foreign companies



Source: own calculations.

From the data, it is observed that students are aware of the importance of ESP in their studies and work. Therefore, hypothesis H2: “Students recognize the importance of ESP in their study and work” is supported by this data.

The final results of the questionnaire show that:

- 69.6% of students identified speaking as the skill they need to improve
- Almost all the students agree that English is important for their future careers.
- 74.6% of students expressed a preference for interactive activities and group work.
- A significant number of students emphasized the importance of business terminology

Course content – ESP course overview

At the Agricultural University of Tirana, ESP courses are offered during the first year of the Bachelor’s degree program. The ESP course lasts 28 weeks and uses the textbook *English for Business and Finance*, (published in 2018), which covers general business topics. The curriculum is designed to develop linguistic skills that enable students to communicate effectively in their future careers in different business sectors.

Below is an outline of topics covered during the first semester:

Week 1	Business Talk
Week 2	Applying for a job
Week 3	Job interviews
Week 4	Returns, Wages and other Benefits
Week 5	Business News
Week 6	Doing Business in Albania
Week 7	Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders
Week 8	Launching a new product
Week 10	The art of advertising
Week 11	The music industry
Week 12	Training Companies
Week 13	Niche vs Mass market
Week 14	Tobacco industry in Albania

The topics covered both in the first and second semesters are designed to enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively in their future jobs, focusing on the business sector vital to Albania’s economic growth. According to the questionnaire results, many students appreciate career-focused topics such as job applications, CV writing, job interviews, and their practical applications. Students have also shown interest in understanding business cultures therefore educators can expand the curriculum to include more content on international business norms, preparing them for the labour market.

Suggested curriculum improvements

Based on the data and feedback from the needs analyses, the following curriculum improvements are proposed:

- Include activities that address students’ identified needs and learning preferences, with a particular emphasis on speaking activities. For example, focusing on topics related to business meeting, negotiations etc.
- Adapt materials based on students’ needs, proficiency levels, and learning pace to ensure a learner-centered approach.
- Integrate interactive learning through group project and case studies.
- Get students’ feedback on areas that need improvement.
- Encourage students to engage more in discussions on topics like business negotiations, marketing strategies, financial planning, etc.

- Expand business terminology cover: Add more sections that emphasize technical business terms
- Include not only general business English topics but also specialized topics on agribusiness, such as marketing strategies in agriculture, negotiating contracts in agricultural export, managing agribusiness enterprises etc., that are relevant to Albania's economy.

Implementation plan

1. Outline the entire syllabus to ensure each unit covers the newly identified objectives and integrates interactive activities.
2. Ensure the syllabus is regularly updated and progressive.
3. Develop strategies to effectively implement learner-centered teaching and encourage autonomy in learning.
4. Review and adapt the textbook materials to meet students' learning needs and preferences.

ESP course equips students with skills directly applicable to their careers, especially in the sectors that contribute to Albania's economic growth. The curriculum can be further enhanced by increasing speaking activities, expanding coverage of business terminology, and introducing more topics that align with the economic and agribusiness sectors.

Discussions

Conducting a needs analysis questionnaire is a critical step for teachers when designing an ESP syllabus, particularly in the field of Business English. In order to support the discussion, Giannarou (2021), Rose and Sookraj (2015), Trujeque-Moreno et al. (2021), Guo and Modehiran (2023) highlight the essential role of needs analysis in designing effective ESP courses that prepare students for their professional careers. They collectively agree that needs analysis is a crucial element of curriculum development, ensuring that the course aligns with the specific linguistic needs of the students. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of continuous feedback from students, allowing educators to improve the course curriculum. By understanding students' specific needs, teachers can develop an appropriate syllabus to enhance students' language skills effectively. It is evident that all students need to learn how to use appropriate business language both in written and spoken form. Educators must ensure that the revised syllabus addresses these specialized needs, enhancing both spoken and written communication skills in professional contexts. Throughout the course, educators should continuously get feedback from the learners and make the necessary changes as needed to optimize learning outcomes. Richards (2001) highlights that needs analysis can occur before, during, or after the course. The findings of this study indicate that students lack speaking skills necessary for effective communication in their future careers. The small number of participants in the questionnaire restricts the ability to generalize the findings. Future researchers should include a larger sample size, considering students from both public and private universities to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the specific linguistic needs.

5. Conclusions

The process of gathering information for needs analysis is essential in developing a curriculum that effectively addresses the specific linguistic needs of students. This involves identifying gaps in the current ESP curriculum and making necessary improvements based on the results of the questionnaire. The primary aim of the study is to improve the course syllabus by taking into consideration the student's needs and preferences. By doing so, the curriculum can better prepare students to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of the global market and enhance graduates' opportunities for employment on a global scale. Our goal extends beyond equipping students with these vital skills; it also includes providing opportunities for them to practice these within the educational setting.

The findings of this research highlight the importance of needs analysis in creating an effective ESP curriculum. By tailoring ESP courses to students' specific needs, educators can better prepare students

to succeed in their professional careers, thereby increasing their employability opportunities. From an economic perspective, equipping students with strong language skills, especially in Business English, can have a profound impact on Albania's economic development.

In conclusion, education plays an important role in fostering economic development. Graduates equipped with these language skills can directly contribute to Albania's economic progress. By enhancing the language skills required in the marketplace, graduates can be part of international research projects, participate in global best practices, attract foreign investment, and create new job opportunities for growth and investment.

Authors' contribution: Introduction: Enkeleda Jata and Arjan Shumeli. Literature review: Enkeleda Jata and Elsa Zela. Methodology and data: Enkeleda Jata. Conclusion: Enkeleda Jata and Irena Shehu.

References

- Anthony, L. (1997). ESP: What does it mean? Why is it different. <https://laurenceanthony.net/abstracts/Aizukiyo97.pdf>
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J. (1998). *Development in English for Specific Purposes. A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Flowerdew, J. (2013). Need analysis and Curriculum Development in ESP in B. Paltridge & S. Starfield "The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes. (pp. 325-346) Wiley-Blackwell
- Giannarou, E. K. (2021). Learner needs analysis in an ESP Class. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 11, 174-200. DOI: 10.4236/ojml.2021.112015
- Guo, Y., & Modehiran, P. (2023). A Research on Needs Analysis from Students for Developing an Intercultural Communication Course. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 3 (6), 179-190; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60027/ijasar.2023.3470>
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centered Approach*, Cambridge University Press.
- Lasekan, O.A, Moraga-Pumarino, A.F. & Pachava, V. (2023). Using needs analysis to foster sustainability of business English courses: A case study of a university in the south of Chile. *Sustainability* 2023, 15, 16074. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152216074>
- Richards, J.C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, P.V., & Sookraj, R. (2015). Needs Analysis: Undergraduates' Evaluation of University-wide English Language Course. *Caribbean Educational Research Journal* Vol.3. No.1, April 2015, 62-75 <https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/fhe/education/publications/past-issues/volume-3-number-1-april-2015/articles/article-p-rose-and-r-sookraj.aspx>
- Trujeque-Moreno, E. E., Romero-Fernández, A., Esparragoza-Barragán, A., & Villa-Jaimes, C. J. (2021). Needs Analysis in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Approach: The Case of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. *Mextesol Journal*, 45(2), n2. DOI:10.61871/mj.v45n2-17