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TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF STUDENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT OF THE UFV: CONTEXTS AND NEEDS

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Abstract: Although the English language is essential for Executive Secretariat professionals in the business environment, its teaching in undergraduate courses has a deficiency in the focus on the secretarial context, that is, in aspects that have applicability in the career, such as management, entrepreneurship, advisory and consulting. Thus, this study aimed to raise the context of English language teaching within the Business English subjects of the Trilingual Executive Secretariat course at the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) and the language learning needs, from the approach of English for Purposes. Specific Purposes (ESP), developed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). In methodological terms, it was a descriptive and quantitative study, whose data collection took place through a questionnaire applied to the students of the course in question. It is concluded that students are somewhat dissatisfied with the current teaching of the English language, seeing that most of them prefer a more dynamic teaching method, unlike what they were used to in Business English classes, which must include aspects of the secretarial profession, such as using e-mails and telephone. This way, it is expected that English language teachers for the Secretariat will be able to build on this study and adapt the content and objectives of their subjects according to the specific needs of students.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, Needs Analysis, Executive Secretariat.

INTRODUCTION

Since its advent in the 1990s, the phenomenon of globalization has made the means of communication between countries cheaper, culminating in the disappearance of geographical boundaries and the formation of a network of free access relationships, as stated by Santos (2012). For the author, this scenario directly influenced secretarial professionals, making communication skills (oral, written and reading) in foreign languages essential within organizations and, therefore, mastery of one or more additional languages had extreme importance. importance for executive secretaries to be able to enter and remain in the business environment.

However, with regard to the teaching of foreign languages, more specifically English, for undergraduate Executive Secretariat courses, as Cantarotti (2017) explains, there is a deficiency in the aspect of having an approach focused on the secretarial context. In addition, the author explains that there is a lack in the availability of materials focused on the area, both national and foreign, due to the fact that there is no academic training in Secretarial abroad and the profession is not recognized or valued.

This way, English for Special Purposes *(English for Specific Purposes* – ESP*),* which, according to Paltridge and Starfield (2013), concerns the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language, in which the objective of the students is to use that language in a specific scope, is shown to be appropriate to be applied in the context of the Secretariat. For such an approach to be used, the *Needs Analysis* (NA) is essential, as it takes into account the students' opinion as a starting point for the creation of a successful course.

Therefore, this study had as main objective to identify the teaching context and the learning needs, which took place from the survey of their preferences, baggage and beliefs about future demands, of the English language students of the Bachelor in Trilingual Executive Secretariat from the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV). This way, it was possible to survey the students' opinion about teaching and find out if it has deficiencies, as well as verify their learning preferences and beliefs about future language demands. Then,

the methodological procedures used will be presented, as well as the results and discussions provided by means of data collection.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

MASTERY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES

After their academic training, secretarial professionals will join organizations that interact with multiple countries on varied products and services, according to Santos (2012). Consequently, it is essential that these have oral, written and reading fluency in other languages and, particularly, in English, which is considered as the language of technology, telecommunications and international finance, in addition to being the most used in the area of computing, mainly due to the emergence of the *Internet*. Furthermore, the USA, according to Santos (2012), has significant economic power, as it maintains trade relations with most of the world's nations and is part of several organizations at a global level.

Additionally, Sanctis and Abib (2010) point out that, after the official regulation of the Executive Secretariat profession, which took place in 1985, it is the responsibility of secretaries, in addition to other functions, to write and translate specialized professional texts, even in foreign languages, aimed at meeting the needs of the organization in which he works. According to Santos (2012), due to the fact that these professionals are required to have skills both in their mother tongue and in a foreign language for the practice of their work functions, it is notable that, with the phenomenon of globalization, which was previously a priority, today it's a matter of demand.

In view of this, the relevance of Bachelor's Degree courses in Executive Secretariat is observed to present an approach focused on communication skills (reading, speaking and writing) in the teaching of foreign languages, seeing that fluency in a second or more languages will culminate in the emergence of opportunities professionals, as explained by Santos (2012).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT COURSE

According to Cantarotti (2017), the teaching of foreign languages for the Bachelor in Executive Secretariat is distinguished from the teaching of foreign languages in general for having specific purposes, seeing that the language will be used for professional purposes or international business communication. However, the author explains that the teaching of English in Brazilian Executive Secretariat courses focuses on: *Business English*, which is generalized from the business context, making vocabulary and other resources relevant to language learning addressed in a broad and non-specific way. This is because, according to the author, it is not possible to find materials available in local or international publishers aimed at teaching English to the Secretariat, due to the fact that this profession, although legal in Brazil, is not promising or, sometimes, not even even recognized in other countries. There are, for example, in England, Canada and the United States, personal or administrative assistants that are similar to the profession of Executive Secretary, however, they do not have the same nomenclature and, consequently, there is no higher academic training, as in Brazil, according to Cantarotti (2017).

This way, materials for teaching English that focus on the Secretariat are not produced, consequently, teachers choose to use imported materials that most closely resemble the professional context, in this case, those from: *Business English*, and, moreover, end up directing the curricula of the disciplines of the Secretariat courses to this scope, as

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the author states. In addition, Cantarotti (2017) points out that the profile of foreign language teachers in Executive Secretariat courses is usually foreign language teachers with different backgrounds. Christison and Krahnke (1986) complement by noting that, often in foreign language courses, most of what is taught is based on the teacher's beliefs rather than on facts.

However, it is necessary that future executive secretaries receive a "less generalist learning and more focused on the aspects that guide their career: management, entrepreneurship, advisory and consulting" (CANTAROTTI, 2017, p. 456). Thus, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) appears to be an appropriate approach for this context.

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES - ESP

According to Paltridge and Starfield (2013), ESP concerns the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language, in which the objective of students is to use that language in a specific context. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ESP is a form of approach, which must be based on the needs of students according to their respective areas of specialization. The authors also point out the importance and role of students in terms of the curriculum design of the course and its implementation both in the teaching and in the learning process.

Swales (1980) states that it is essential to include aspects related to students, such as, for example, their study habits and learning strategies. The author states that, for the curriculum design of a course, it is necessary to know, among other things, what students are capable of doing and what they are willing to do within their teaching environment. Additionally, Paltridge and Starfield (2013) state that ESP students are typically adults and are often a homogeneous group in terms of

learning objectives, but not always in terms of proficiency.

Furthermore, Paltridge and Starfield (2013) highlight that an essential aspect of ESP is that the content and objectives of the course are oriented towards the specific needs of students. Thus, the authors state that a needs analysis would be the first phase of developing an ESP course. In addition, Schutz and Derwing (1981) explain that many language programs end up failing due to the fact that they do not take into account the student's intention to use the language or because the person responsible for the curriculum design of the course or the teacher himself was based on their imaginations. instead of carrying out objective assessments of the students' situation, which, in most cases, is imprecise and inappropriate to their real needs.

NEEDS ANALYSIS - NA

Berwick (1989) defines the term "need" as the *gap* between what is and what must be. In other words, "what is" refers to the student's present state of knowledge and skills, and "what must be" concerns the requirements of the target situation, i.e., the situation in which the individual will need to use the language. learned. In addition, according to Astika (1999), in order to recognize a need, it is necessary to carry out a type of evaluation or research on a certain existing situation and, later, the results will reveal some deficiency, which will be the need.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) differentiate so-called "target needs" from "learning needs". The former concerns what students need to do in the target situation, and the latter concerns what students need to do in order to learn. Subsequently, they divide the target needs into (1) needs, that is, what the student needs to know to act effectively in the target situation, (2) gaps, that is, the discrepancy between what the individual already knows

and the need, (3) wants, that is, what the student really wants to learn and what he feels he needs, which may or may not be the same as perceived by teachers. Learning needs, on the other hand, cover aspects such as why students learn that language, how they learn it and what resources are available to assist them in this process, according to the authors.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach. Descriptive research, according to Gil (2008), aims to describe the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon. Quantitative research, according to the author, aims to demonstrate in numbers the opinions and/or answers obtained through research instruments. In this study, the quantitative character is used with the purpose of measuring the opinion of the students of the Trilingual Executive Secretariat Course at UFV about the need for teaching and learning the English language during the undergraduate years and their interest in using it in the future profession.

Regarding the study population, it was composed of the students of the course entering the year 2016 — a total of 15 students. In view of the proposed objectives, this group of students is considered the most relevant for data collection, seeing that they are the only ones who have already taken all Business English subjects (from I to IV) and can better point out the needs involving the teaching and learning of the English language in this context.

Regarding data collection, questionnaires were applied via an online tool: *Google Forms*, which were sent by email to the participants on October 12, 2019. The questionnaires were prepared based on the structure proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) of the needs analysis, which has a series of questions to be asked. be answered by the students that will contribute to the identification of the particular needs of the chosen group and that, in addition to teaching and learning issues, also include their opinions regarding the demand required in their future professional careers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The NA proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), as mentioned earlier, is divided between the so-called "target needs" and the "learning needs". This covers aspects such as why students learn that language, how they learn it and what resources are available to help them in this process. While the former concerns the target situation, that is, the situation in which students intend, or believe they intend, to use the language.

First, it is worth mentioning that, in the questionnaire, there were a total of 7 responses, which is equivalent to 46% of the total number of students. In addition, most respondents were female and only one was male.

Initially, the objective was to identify the students' learning needs. Initially, it was found that 85.7% of the students only took Business English I to IV subjects because they are mandatory in the curriculum, while 28.6% responded that there was also a need. Among the answers, it was possible to identify some of the reasons why students feel the need to study business English, namely: vocabulary improvement, importance for the job market and the fact that profession and money are involved. Then, we sought to understand the students' opinion in relation to the subject and it was noticed that half of them have a positive attitude, while the other half was divided between those who have a negative attitude (because they already knew the content) and a mixed attitude (in other words, they changed their minds over the

course of the course as it did not meet their expectations).

With regard to the students' English language background, it was observed that all of them already had prior knowledge, with half considering having an intermediate level, and the other 50%, advanced. As for the teaching style, 83.3% said they were used to a more objective method through the use of textbooks. Some even complemented their answers by pointing out elements such as "classroom in a circle", "few students" and the use of "slides". On the other hand, 16.7% stated that they were familiar with recreational activities, but did not specify them.

This scenario is inverted when the students' opinion is questioned. As for the teaching methodology that the respondents most like, it was found that most of them prefer a more practical class, with "dynamic activities", "debate", "conversation" and that demonstrate how the language is "applied in real life". On the other hand, only 33.3% of the students opted for the orthodox class option and commented that the "methodical way" and the use of "slides" are preferable.

Therefore, it could be observed that the data corroborate the ESP principle exposed by Paltridge and Starfield (2013) that students must be a homogeneous group in relation to learning objectives, but not necessarily in terms of proficiency. All students already had a good level of English language before the Business English courses, which may be related to the fact that most students responded that they only took the courses because they are mandatory in the course curriculum and did not specify whether felt the need to study it. It is worth mentioning that the respondents who claimed to have an intermediate knowledge of the language were the only ones who indicated that they felt a need to study it, seeing that, for them, the study of business English would be important for their professional careers.

Then, we sought to identify the teaching method preferences of the Secretariat academics, seeing that, for ESP, the inclusion of aspects related to students, such as learning strategies, is an essential point. In this case, it was possible to perceive that the majority prefers a style of class that incorporates "dynamic activities", "debate", "conversation" and that demonstrates how the language is "applied in real life". This may be related to the way students evaluated the current state of Business English classes, as only half showed a positive attitude towards the subjects. In addition, most said they were used to teaching with a more objective method through the use of textbooks and, as highlighted by some, the use of slides. Therefore, it is possible to infer that students prefer a more playful style of English language class, but lately they have experienced more pragmatic classes, which generates some dissatisfaction with the classes in the subjects in question.

The second part of the research sought to identify target needs. Initially, it was asked why Secretariat academics believed that the English language was important to them. Half of the respondents stated that the reason was a combination of study, training and work, while the rest were divided into two options: work only and another purpose, which was not specified. Concerning the students' belief in the use of the language in the future, there was again a division. During the course alone, 50% of the students said that the language would be used, while the other half stated that it would be used frequently in the future – more specifically, "on the job".

In addition, an attempt was made to determine the way in which the respondents considered that the language would be used, and in this question they could choose more than one option. About 83% mentioned the written medium, 50% the oral medium, about 16% others. It is worth mentioning that the

students mentioned the use of language "on the phone", "in person" and writing "scientific articles".

Additionally, as regards the communication channel, 66.7% indicated face-to-face communication, mentioning "employment" and "travel abroad", 16.7% using the computer and 16.7% using the telephone. The rest just said "other" and did not specify. Furthermore, with regard to genre or discourse, a question in which it was also possible to select more than one option, 50% pointed to academic texts, emails and formal conversations, while 33.3% mentioned professional events.

Regarding the interlocutor's profile, only 16.7% demonstrated that they would use the language with native speakers, in contrast to 83.3%, who indicated both native and non-native speakers. In addition, half of the respondents said that the relationship with the interlocutor would be professional, highlighting "co-workers", "superior" and "clients". Already 33.3% said it would be a friendly relationship, and the rest did not know how to answer.

Finally, regarding the linguistic context, when asked about the place where the language would be used, half of the Secretariat academics said it would be outside Brazil, while 33.3%, a combination of inside and outside and only 16.7%, inside. As for physical space, most responded that it would be in the office.

As for the second part, it was possible to raise other points relevant to NA, more specifically what Berwick (1989) classifies as "what must be", that is, the requirements of the situation in which the individual will need to use the learned language. In short, it was noticed that half of the students believe they will use the English language in the future, more specifically at work. It was also found that students think that the written

medium will be used mostly, mentioning the exchange of emails and reading scientific articles. Regarding the oral means, it would be by traveling abroad, using the telephone and formal conversations. Additionally, it was possible to infer that the majority believe that the English language will be used in the professional environment (in the office), with a combination of native and non-native speakers, who may be co-workers, bosses or clients, and this will occur outside the Brazil.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main objective that guided this research was to survey the teaching context and the learning needs of the English language within the Business English disciplines of the Trilingual Executive Secretariat course at UFV, based on the approach of NA and ESP. From the collection and analysis of data, it was possible to understand more deeply the mentioned aspects.

It is concluded that the academics of the UFV Secretariat show some dissatisfaction with the current teaching of the English language, seeing that all of them had a good level of proficiency in the language before taking the subjects and most prefer a more dynamic teaching method, unlike what they were used to in Business English classes. In addition, students facilitate the identification of aspects related to the future profession that can guide teachers during the course, such as the use of e-mails and telephone with co-workers, bosses and clients, in an international environment that mixes native and non-native speakers. natives.

It is hoped that this research can contribute to the teaching of the English language, as English language teachers for the Secretariat can base themselves on this study and apply and adapt it in their own classes, seeing that, according to Paltridge and Starfield (2013), a fundamental aspect of ESP is that the content

and objectives of the course must be oriented towards the specific needs of the students.

Finally, a more in-depth investigation of the profile of the learner and their teaching and learning needs is left as a suggestion for future research. This can be obtained through participant observation of English classes for Bachelor's Degree in Executive Secretariat courses, that is, when the researcher is incorporated as a member of the group to be researched, participating in daily life and activities. It is interesting that students entering the four years of the course are part of the study population and that a comparison is made between older and younger students regarding their expectations of the discipline, their linguistic background and their beliefs about the future use of the English language.

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