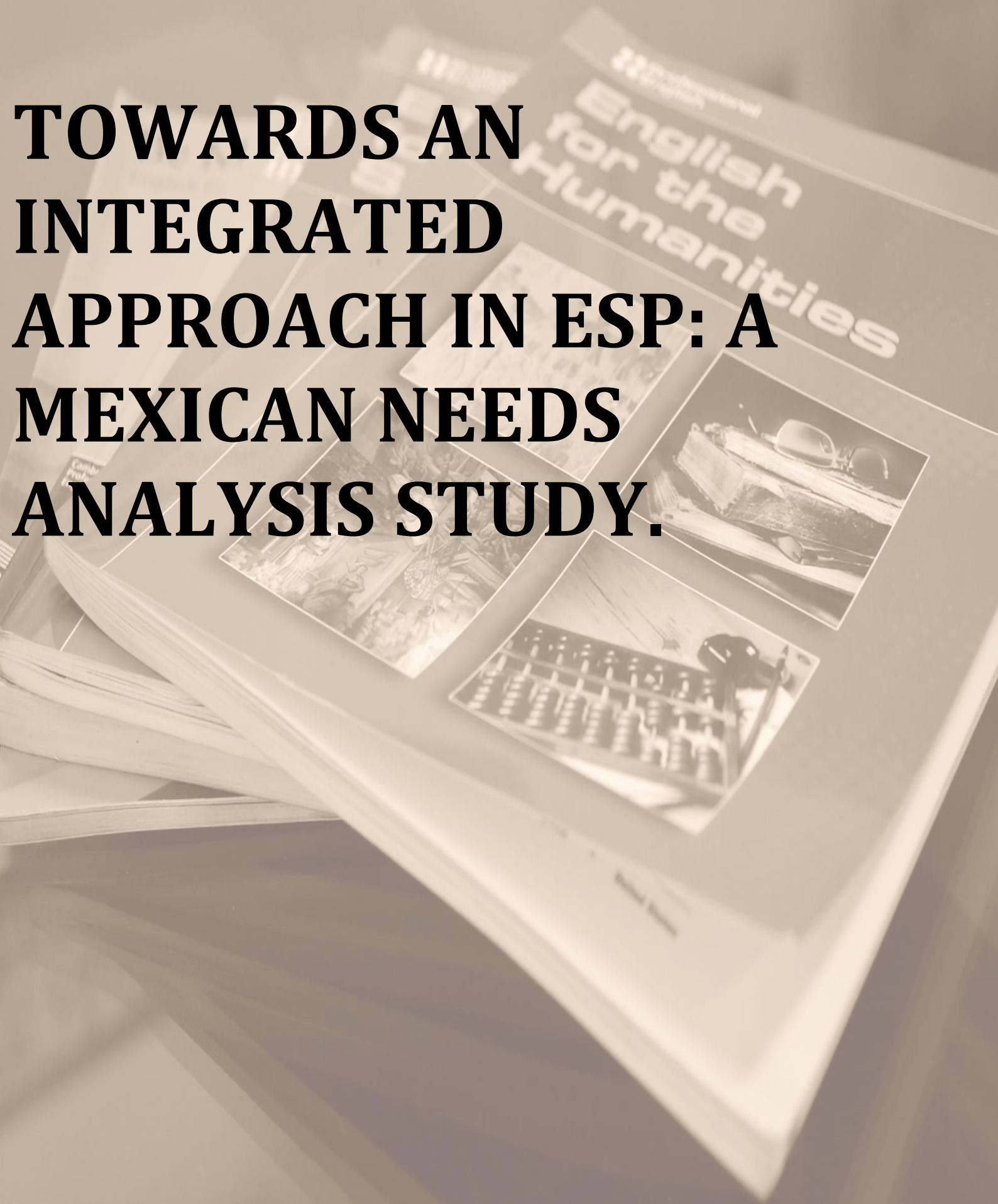


**TOWARDS AN  
INTEGRATED  
APPROACH IN ESP: A  
MEXICAN NEEDS  
ANALYSIS STUDY.**



# **Towards an Integrated Approach in ESP: A Mexican Needs Analysis Study**

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**Editorial Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas**



Editorial Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas

Escuela de Lenguas Campus IV, Tapachula

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ISBN 978-607-8459-36-0

No. Radicación 307244

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First published in [www.lenguastap.unach.mx](http://www.lenguastap.unach.mx)

Edited in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, México

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to conduct on a needs analysis on students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at the State University of Chiapas (UNACH) in order to identify what their language needs are and to what extent the current ESP course meets those needs. This study consisted on the Management of two research instruments: a questionnaire administered to 30 students and graduates; and an interview administered to 2 students, 2 graduates, 2 subject teachers and the English teacher of the group. The methodology used to develop this research was a mixed-method approach under a small dimension category (McDonough J. & McDonough S, 2005).

The results show that the current ESP course fulfill students' academic and professional needs only partially. Most of the information gathered reflects the necessity of including an integrated approach which includes the four macro skills: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Besides, a series of important conclusions were underlined, such as the need of implementing a needs analysis as a starting activity of each ESP course and moreover, the importance of translating these needs analysis results into the design of the ESP course for the MA in Business Management.

Based on the findings, the researcher concludes with some implications and suggestions for ESP course designers and instructors at UNACH and other institutions and contexts. Limitations of the study and recommendations for possible future research are stated in the final chapter of this book.

## Table of Contents

|   | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| ABSTRACT                                  | 4           |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS                         | 5           |
| <b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>          |             |
| 1.1 Background                            | 9           |
| 1.2 Rationale                             | 10          |
| 1.3 Research Purpose and Inquiries        | 12          |
| <br>                                      |             |
| <b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>     |             |
| 2.1 Background                            | 14          |
| 2.1.1 Defining ESP                        | 15          |
| 2.1.2 Origins of ESP                      | 17          |
| 2.1.3 Developments of ESP                 | 18          |
| 2.1.4 Current Approaches to ESP           | 21          |
| 2.2 The Role of the ESP Practitioners     | 22          |
| 2.2.1 The Role of the ESP course Designer | 22          |
| 2.2.2 The Role of the ESP course Teacher  | 23          |
| 2.2.3 The Role of the ESP course Learner  | 24          |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2.3 Needs Analysis                                    |    |
| 2.3.1 Defining Needs Analysis                         | 25 |
| 2.3.2 Approaches to Needs Analysis                    | 26 |
| 2.3.3 Current Views on Needs Analysis for ESP courses | 27 |
| 2.4 An Overview on Similar Research Studies           | 28 |
| 2.5 Summary   | 30 |

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3.1 Research Questions                         | 32 |
| 3.2 Research Design                            | 34 |
| 3.3 Participants                               | 35 |
| 3.4 Data Collection                            | 36 |
| 3.4.1 Designing of Data Collection Instruments | 36 |
| 3.4.2 Data Collection Procedures               | 37 |
| 3.5 Summary                                    | 39 |

### **Chapter Four: Results of Study and Discussion**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 4.1 Data Analysis  | 41 |
| 4.1.1 Analysis of Students and Graduates' Questionnaire    | 42 |
| 4.1.2 Analysis of Students and Graduates' Interviews       | 47 |
| 4.1.3 Analysis of Subject and English Teachers' Interviews | 52 |
| 4.2 Relating Research Findings to Key and Sub-questions    | 57 |
| 4.3 Summary of Research Findings                           | 61 |

**Chapter Five: Conclusion**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 5.1 Summary of the Study                                  | 63 |
| 5.2 Implications for Local and External ESP practitioners | 66 |
| 5.3 Limitations of the Study                              | 67 |
| 5.4 Suggestions for Future Research                       | 68 |
| 5.5 Conclusion  | 69 |

|              |    |
|--------------|----|
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 73 |
|--------------|----|

## APPENDICES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Appendix 1: Students and Graduates' Questionnaire   | 77 |
| Appendix 2: Students and Graduates' Interview       | 80 |
| Appendix 3: Subject and English Teachers' Interview | 81 |
| Appendix 4: Consent Form                            | 82 |

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

ESP today is one of the major branches in English language teaching and research. It is taught in many different countries and contexts (Basturkmen, 2006). The State University in Chiapas (UNACH), known as the most prestigious educational institution in the Mexican southeast region, is not the exception. Ever since 2006, the Language School of UNACH has implemented a 2-semester English course for all the students of Master's Degree programs, such as Chemistry, Biotechnology, Biological Sciences, Business Management, Tax Management, Financial Resources Management, Education, General Medicine, and Construction Basis, all of them offered at UNACH.

Recognizing this, this project describes the case of one of the ESP courses at the State University of Chiapas (UNACH), with the purpose of finding out strengths and weaknesses. Evaluating a course implies following a process that determines the students' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the course (Butarkmen, 2010:65). This book is divided into five chapters. Chapter One comprises the general information that provides the context in which ESP courses are given, including background, rationale, purpose, and inquiries. Chapter Two initially deals with general background of ESP: definitions, origins, development and current approaches to ESP. Then it revises the role of ESP practitioners. After that, it examines some theoretical background related to Needs Analysis. Lastly, it includes three ESP research studies which are



critically analyzed with the purpose of identifying similarities and differences with the present study.

Chapter Three of this book profiles the research methodology under which this study has been developed. It describes the research design, data collection instruments and procedures. The results and discussion of the findings are presented in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five, sets forth the conclusions, summary of the research, implications for local and external ESP practitioners, overall limitations as well as suggestions for further research.

## **1.1 Background**

Chiapas is the most southern state in Mexico. It borders with Guatemala to the south, the Pacific Ocean to its west, the state of Oaxaca to its north and the state of Tabasco to its east. The State University of Chiapas (UNACH) was officially founded in 1975. Since then, it has been recognized as the most important high-education institution in the state. It has nine campuses throughout the state.

Tapachula, where UNACH Language School is located, is only fifteen minutes from the Guatemalan Border and about twenty minutes from the Pacific Ocean. It is the most southern city in Mexico. Our tourism is business-oriented and agriculture is our main industry. Many of these products are exported nationally and internationally. English is used in transactions with international companies.

The authorities at the University have always been concerned about the academic needs of the students and the development of current programs to

cover those needs. In the year of 1992, the UNACH started to offer Master Degree Programs in different areas of study and in different campuses as well. These MA Programs included a 60-hour General English course which did not have an established syllabus or program. For many years, the instruction provided in these English courses depended on the English teacher assigned to each course.

In 2006, the Postgraduate Studies Authorities at UNACH decided to establish a Reading Comprehension Certificate as a permanence and graduate requirement for all MA students. As a consequence of this decision, the Language School in Tapachula implemented a 2-semester English course for all MA students at Campus IV.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The history of the ESP courses at UNACH started in 2006 when the Language School of Tapachula established a 2-semester English course for students of all MA programs. These courses have been taught in the different areas of Campus IV at the State University of Chiapas, for instance, Chemistry, Accounting, Management, Pedagogy, etc. The first semester of this course comprises 60 hours of class in which grammar, vocabulary and language functions are taught within a framework of General English. It aims to reach level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The second semester includes Reading Comprehension Strategies as well as technical terminology related to each MA specialty.

All students are required to finish a BA program before entering the MA in Business Management, most of them have a related career but a few of them studied in completely different areas. There is no entrance English requirement for the MA courses.

It is important to explain that all the decisions previously described were made on the basis of political and academic international trends, rather than on the outcomes of a needs analysis in our specific context. There was no analysis of our particular students' needs. On the contrary, ESP parameters were imported from foreign institutions and applied to our students without any recontextualisation, as it was agreed on the Office of Research and Post-graduate Studies of UNACH. This is why it is very important to evaluate these courses in order to determine whether or not they meet UNACH students' needs.

The high level of competitiveness and the constant certification process under which all educational institutions are always involved are some of the reasons for the relevance of this research study, not only for the institution, but for any institution concerned with offering courses which satisfy their learners' needs.

This area is important for UNACH because the Language School, Campus IV is concerned with offering ESP courses which enable students to develop linguistic as well as communicative competences in their specific field of study. This is important because most MA students and graduates have expressed that ESP courses are not completely fulfilling their professional needs and expectations. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) there are three main areas, an ESP course designer should focus on these areas: Language

Descriptions (syllabus), Learning Theories (methodology) and Needs Analysis (target situation). Related to this role of the ESP instructor, MA students have talked to their subject and English teachers about the necessity of including other skills and language content in the current ESP course in order to make it more effective and applicable to their work settings.

Based on these antecedents, but furthermore due to the absence of a formal Needs Analysis study I have decided to perform this piece of research. The results will be proposed as a basis for the revising and redesigning of the current ESP course for MA in Business Management.

### **1.3 Research Purpose and Inquiries**

Based on the aforementioned facts, this research aims to investigate what the MA in Business Management students' needs are and to what extent the current ESP course fulfill those needs. In order to achieve these goals, it is important to frame this research with the following inquiries:

- What are the academic and professional English language needs of current students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas (UNACH)?
- How far does the existing ESP course meet these needs?
- To what extent is English language needed in MA in Business Management students and graduates' occupations (from the students and graduates' perspective)?

- What kinds of knowledge and competences do students and graduates of the MA need in English to be effective in their current and future professional activity?
- What specific aspects (such as skills and language functions) of the current ESP course successfully provide students and graduates with useful language and skills for their studies and professions?
- How far does the content (topics) related to the MA subject specialty included in the existing ESP course meet the academic and professional needs of the students and graduates?
- To what extent do students and graduates of the MA in Management find the current ESP course effective and applicable to their professional contexts?

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

## **2.1 Background**

This chapter provides a critical review of some relevant literature related to ESP and its broad field of study. This review will serve as a framework for the development of this research paper and at the same time, it will show the influence of this analysis over the decisions and design of this research study. First, it attempts to define the concept and scope of ESP as well as its origins and recent developments based on different experts' opinions. Then, it examines the role of three key human elements in ESP courses: the ESP course designer, the ESP course teacher and the ESP student. A few similar research studies will be briefly summarized in order to establish some points of coincidence and differences from the present study. Finally, it investigates the field of Needs Analysis by defining the concept and exploring some approaches which helped to define the specific approach for the purposes of the present study. This literature review concludes with a discussion about the link between Needs Analysis and ESP and the way the former constitutes the basis for the development of a solid ESP course.

### **2.1.1 Defining ESP**

Since the emergence of ESP in the late 1960s, many authors, such as Strevens (1988), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Hutchinson & Waters (1987) among

others, have dealt with the not so easy task of defining ESP. To define ESP, it is necessary to analyze different authors' points of view in order to arrive to a workable definition. Anthony (1997) distinguishes between two different perspectives of seeing ESP: some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes.

For instance, Dudley-Evans (1997) displays a list of absolute and variable characteristics of ESP where he establishes a clear separation among those features, which are always included in an ESP course. These features are:

- a) ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
- b) It makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves
- c) ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

On the other hand, Dudley-Evans (1997) mentions some variables that may or may not be present in an ESP course. These characteristics are related to:

- a) the specificity of the discipline,
- b) the methodology used,
- c) the age of the goal learners, and
- d) the level of language systems knowledge ESP learners are assumed to own.

The definition offered by Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) who states that ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning represents a valuable resource for the present study since the authors declare a strong argument in favor of the implementation of a needs analysis as a basis of ESP courses.

After having analyzed these authors' opinions of ESP, it is time to establish the definition that this study uses as a basis. For this book, ESP is the teaching and learning of English as it is used in a specific, particular area determined by the student. ESP courses can be either simple or precise; on the other hand, regardless of how well-structured ESP courses are, they always coincide on an important characteristic: the emphasis on the learners' specific needs. This is what differentiates ESP courses from General English courses, since the former are shaped to fulfill the students' learning needs while the latter ignores these specific needs. Derived from this fact, there is a second essential characteristic in the definition of ESP courses: the importance of a needs analysis which evaluates as closely as possible what the learners will do through the medium of English.

### **2.1.2 Origins of ESP**

The emergence of ESP did not occur as a coordinated and coherent movement, but rather as a phenomenon driven by a number of forces, as highlighted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The first force mentioned by these authors is called the demands of a Brave New World, and it refers to the historical



expansion after the end of Second World War. This expansion included developments in diverse international fields, such as scientific, technical and economic activities. The economic power of the United States and their decisive intervention in the post-war world led to a mass of people wanting to learn English, not for the pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but because English was the key to the international currencies of technology and commerce (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:6).

The second force highlighted by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) was a revolution in linguistics. So far the focus of linguistics had been mainly on grammar; however, this focus turned to attend the needs of that generation of learners who wanted to perform specific tasks, such as selling their products, reading instruction manuals, etc. Widdowson (1978) presents this phenomenon claiming that the new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) finally hold that the third and final major force which influenced the emergence of ESP was related to educational psychology through the development of a new focus on the learner. At this point, the emphasis became centered on the student and the importance of taking into account their attitudes, needs and interests as well as their motivation to learn. To illustrate, the ESP courses implemented at the Language School Campus IV of UNACH are focused on the professional contexts in which students might use English.

In short, the origins of ESP can be found in three main elements: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and a focus on the Learner Approach. Hitchcock (1978) properly summarizes that ESP arose in the early 1960s in response to the need for improved communication between the developed and developing countries of the world.

### **2.1.3 Developments of ESP**

To talk about the development of ESP, it is necessary to consider ESP first as a major discipline as well as one of the most flourishing areas in English Language Teaching nowadays. Although Hutchinson & Waters (1987) recognize that ESP has developed at different speeds in different countries, they describe five phases in the development of ESP all over the world.

The first phase identified by Hutchinson et al (1987:9) is the Concept of Special Language: Register Analysis, which took place mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s. This phase is particularly associated with authors like Peter Strevens (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964), Jack Ewer (Ewer and Latorre, 1969) and John Swales (1971), who gave special attention to register analysis and favoured the designing of syllabus, which highlighted the language forms learners would meet in their science studies and minimized those they would not meet.

The second phase in the development of ESP was rhetorical or discourse analysis, which was based on the assumption that learners often lacked acquaintance with the use of English in the way sentences were combined to

create different results in meaning. Allen and Widdowson (1974) succinctly expressed their view about this approach:

*“We take the view that the difficulties which the students encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system of English, but from an unfamiliarity with English use, and that consequently their needs cannot be met by a course which simply provides further practice in the composition of sentences, but only by one which develops a knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of different communicative acts”.*

This rhetorical or discourse analysis approach to ESP tended to produce materials which led learners to recognize particular textual patterns and discourse markers in different areas of specialist use.

Target situation analysis, which was directly related to learners' reasons for learning was the third stage in the development of ESP. This approach was explained by John Munby in *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978), where he detailed a profile of the learners' needs in terms of communication purposes, communicative setting, the means of communication, language skills, functions, and structures. This approach focused its attention on identifying the learners' target situation in which they will use the language and then design an ESP course with the linguistic features of that situation.

Up to this stage, the developments of ESP had been focused on a rather superficial level of the language. The fourth stage of ESP presented a shift on attention and focused on the implicit interpretive strategies which reflect the thinking process that underlie language use. According to Hutchinson and

Waters (1987), this ESP phase of skills and strategies relied on the idea that underlying all language use there are common reasoning and interpreting processes, which enable us to extract meaning from discourse, regardless of the surface forms. Authors who are particularly associated with the skills and strategies stage of ESP include Françoise Grellet (1981), Christine Nuttall (1982) and Charles Alderson and Sandy Urquhart (1984), whose work concentrated on reading strategies and the theory that the learners are thinking beings who can analyze and reflect on the interpretive processes of the language, which in turn would enable them to cope with the surface forms as well.

One of the forces mentioned in the origins of ESP is the focus on new ideas about learning, which constitutes the basis of the fifth stage in major developments in ESP. So far, the emphasis on the linguistic aspect of the language had dominated the four previous stages of the ESP developments but now the urgent need for a more integrative focus led to the development of the learning-centered approach, which sees ESP not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:19).

#### **2.1.4 Current Approaches to ESP**

Carver (1983) describes three necessary features of ESP: the use of authentic material, the implementation of simulation and role-play situations and some degree of self-direction. The approach of using authentic material is based on the fact that one of the main ESP learners' needs is to handle authentic materials in order to perform real tasks with them. Carver (1983) believes that the only way students will be able to do this is through the exposure to such material. The approach of implementing simulation and role-play in the classroom lies on the idea of the use of authentic material to develop skill-centered activities, such as simulation of a conference, note-taking, purpose-oriented reading, etc. The self-direction approach refers to the opportunity for the ESP learners to participate in some decisions of the learning process, such as when, what, and how they will study.

Additionally, Carver (1983) furthers to propose three approaches related to ESP methodology: register, discourse and study skills. These approaches have been named according to the emphasis each one proposes; for example, Register Approach analyses the language through register systems and is very similar to the use of authentic material approach; Discourse Approach leads learners to examine aspects of cohesion and coherence which build language into discourse; and finally, Study Skills Approach discusses the teaching of the specific skills the learners need. Carvers (op. cit) subscribes to Rea's (1979) and Allwright's (1980) proposals that a study skills element in an ESP programme can, and perhaps should, be learner centered and partially self-directed in its nature.

The analysis of Carver's approaches (1983) helped to find several points of coincidence with the data collected through the questionnaire and interviews. These approaches also provided the theoretical support for conclusions and suggestions mentioned in Chapter Five.

## **2.2 The role of the ESP course practitioners**

Within the field of ESP, there is a key element which is essential to take into consideration: the human element. This section briefly analyzes the role of three human elements – the ESP course designer, the ESP course teacher and the ESP learner – in order to remark their key function in the development of an ESP course. The analysis of these three important elements in the ESP practice has raised awareness of the tasks and responsibilities each one should perform in order to achieve the steps for a successful ESP course.

### **2.2.1 The role of the ESP course designer**

The role of the ESP course designer includes fundamentally the task of asking questions with the purpose of providing appropriate theoretical support for the subsequent tasks of syllabus and materials design, classroom teaching and evaluation. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), there are three main areas an ESP course designer should focus these questions on: Language Descriptions (syllabus), Learning Theories (methodology) and Needs Analysis (target situation). In the real world, the ESP course designer will attempt to combine different sources to find the answers for these basic questions. These

sources can be: by research (questionnaires, group discussions, etc.); following theoretical models (Donna, 2000) or simply relying on the intuition and experience of previous cases. Another essential function of an ESP designer is the recognition that the learner rather than the teacher is the core element in the language learning process. This fact leads to the planning and implementation of this study with the purpose of considering the essential role of the learners within the ESP courses at Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas (UNACH).

### **2.2.2 The role of the ESP course teacher**

In most of the cases, the ESP teacher performs a variety of roles besides the normal functions of a classroom teacher within the process of an ESP course. Some of these roles are defined by Swales (1985) as follows: deal with needs analysis, syllabus design, materials writing or adaptation, and evaluation. This variety of roles is a time and energy consuming reality, which complicates the role of the ESP teacher; however, there is a number of recommendations different authors offer for improving ESP teacher performance.

An ESP teacher faces the challenge of acquiring the specialist subject knowledge required for the respective course. Related to this challenge, Clarke (1991) maintains that learners bring with them a great deal of experience and knowledge, a whole set of ideational, interpersonal and textual schemata which can enrich the classroom experience. He goes on to assert that a good teacher will exploit to the fullest extend all knowledge and experience learners bring into the classroom. In relation to the same challenge of mastering specialist subject knowledge, Hutchinson and Waters (1987:163) argue that ESP teachers do not

need to learn an exhaustive specialist subject knowledge but rather maintain a meaningful communication which involves negotiation and the ability to ask intelligent questions.

When it comes to the implementation of an ESP course, it is important to keep a balance and not to overuse the information gathered by the needs analysis. Although at least two kinds of information arise from students' analysis, namely, learners' current language level and learners' future language situation, there is still the need to integrate into the course design process other sources of information, such as experienced course designers' perspectives (authors), potential employers expectations, and institutional constraints, among others. In order to create an integrative ESP course the ESP teacher should not only teach what the learners want, but to consider the previously designed syllabus, institutional guidelines and standardization. This interesting conciliatory approach to ESP helped me in the design of key questions to make up this research questionnaire and interviews.

### **2.2.3 The role of the ESP learner**

In contrast to the General English learner, the ESP learner appears with specific expectations regarding the nature, content and achievements of the course. Harding (2007) highlights examples of some commonalities across the wide variety of ESP learners: the need to focus on specialist vocabulary, the use of visual and numerical displays and the need to use equipment efficiently and safely. Although the level of proficiency regarding General English may vary among the ESP learners, Yogman and Kaylani (1996) conclude that there



appears to be a minimum proficiency level that is required for students to participate in predominately content-related activities otherwise those students who struggle to catch up with general language proficiency will simply find the content activities overwhelming. It is important to recognize that most ESP learners bring with them a vast knowledge and experience (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) or at least an existing schemata of the subject specialist area along with particular affective, cognitive and linguistic needs, and that the consideration of these needs, knowledge and experience will result in the fulfillment of the learner's expectations. The importance of this learner's role within the development of an ESP course was one of the key reasons to lead into this research study.

### **2.3 Needs Analysis**

The origin of all courses is based on a perceived need of some sort. Within the field of ESP the implementation of Needs Analysis has constituted a vital element for the progress of ESP syllabus or as Harding (2007:17) points out: one of the main contributions of ESP to the wider world of English language Teaching has been the development of thorough needs analysis.

#### **2.3.1 Defining Needs Analysis**

Although needs analysis is not only associated with ESP, it is generally considered as critical to ESP. This is due to the vital information a needs analysis can potentially provide to the ESP practitioner in the process of

designing the syllabus. Richards et al (1992) described needs analysis as the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. Richards et al properly relate the concept of needs to the concept of priorities, since the data collected through a needs analysis should ideally lead to the translation of these necessities, demands, wants, likes, lacks deficiencies, and objectives into course design.

### **2.3.2 Approaches to Needs Analysis**

Several approaches to undertake needs analysis have been developed by different authors. These approaches vary with regard to the emphasis on the types of information to be taken into account as a basis for ESP syllabus design.

The Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was typically devised by Munby (1978) who focuses on the students' needs at the end of a language course. This author developed a Communication Needs Processor (CNP) through which the ESP designer would observe what situations the learner will need to function in the target language and then direct students' attention to analyse the constituent parts of those situations.

Richterich and Chancerel (1980) developed a different approach called Present Situation Analysis (PSA) where the emphasis is on the students' level of language at the starting point of the course. This approach analyses the students' strengths and weaknesses, obtaining this information from the students themselves, the language establishment, or the user institution.

TSA and PSA mentioned above focus attention on the present or future target situation; however, an ESP course designer needs to bear in mind both approaches in order to develop a more balanced syllabus. Studying these different types of NA affected the design of the items for the questionnaire and interviews. It helped to include present and target situation questions to find out the current language level of learners as well as their future needs within the Business Management field.

### **2.3.3 Current Views on Needs Analysis for ESP Courses**

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) developed a learning-centered approach to needs analysis. They distinguish between learner-centered (in which the learning is totally determined by the learner) and learning-centered (in which the learning is a process of negotiation between individuals and society). This current approach to needs analysis analyses target needs (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and learning needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn). Hutchinson and Waters further this approach by recognizing that there may be a contradiction between students' wants and institution's requirements, however, the course designer should bear in mind the importance of learner motivation to learn and not ignore their perceived wants. One way of maintaining a good level of students' motivation to learn can be based on the belief that, even though a given language activity may focus on a particular skill or ability, that activity will nevertheless usually require the learner to engage other aspects of his/her communicative competence (Widdowson 1978).

In this framework, the adoption of an integrative approach to ESP course designing and implementation will lead to a higher level of learners' commitment. Perhaps one of the most recent perspectives to needs analysis is the acknowledgement that it is not just a matter of an initial one-off activity, rather it is an ongoing process along the ESP practice. Within the ESP field, the practice of a continuous needs analysis process will help ESP teachers fulfill the required and desired goals and objectives. These facts are intimately related to this study in order to demonstrate the importance of needs analysis as a continuous process in the designing and implementation of an English for Specific Purposes course.

#### **2. 4 An Overview on Similar Research Studies**

Three related research studies will be examined in this section, although they will not be analyzed in detail; some similarities will be highlighted in order to find points of coincidence with the present study. These points of coincidence and the experience of these authors helped me to examine different approaches, processes, and strategies in conducting a research study as well as to select my own approaches, process and strategies for the present study.

The first research paper important to be analyzed is: Denhand et al (2010). This study was conducted in 2009 at Iran University of Medical Sciences with the purpose of revising the present syllabi of ESP postgraduate courses. To achieve the aim of the study, the authors designed and implemented the research on the basis of a critical approach to needs analysis. This approach was appropriate for this research because it also aims to conduct a needs

analysis with the students of the MA program at the Management College of Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas. Another similarity found with Iranian postgraduate courses is the lack of a formal research on needs analysis, which is similar to the situation with our courses where language needs have been determined by the heads of postgraduate departments while English educators, subject instructors and MA students have not been involved in this process. The study arrives at the conclusion that the ESP courses do not seem to meet students' needs and that there is a discrepancy between what the students expressed as their needs and what is actually in the syllabus prescribed by the Ministry of Health in Iran. The authors therefore validate their decision to carry out the NA study.

The second study in this brief overview is Benesh, S. (1996). It is interesting how this author highlights the political and subjective side of Needs Analysis. Benesh (1996) holds that it is more than simply identifying existing conditions and attempting to adapt students to them. She goes on to subscribe to Simon (1992), who holds that critical needs analysis acknowledges existing forms, including power relations, while searching for possible areas of change. In the same way, the present study aims to use a critical needs analysis approach in order to recognize the demands of the target situation of the MA course at the Management College of UNACH and to create possibilities for change. Benesh's research study relates the contradictions between the target situation of the psychology course and the students' demands; moreover, she relates the steps taken to create possibilities for changes. This study constitutes a good example of Critical Needs Analysis Approach and the way it can be used to

create situations for changes in institutional planned ESP courses, and had a strong influence in the way to approach its own Needs Analysis.

Finally, the third study to be described is Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008). There is a number of coincident aspects between this Iranian research study and the present study: (1) the purpose of investigating the foreign language learning needs of the students; (2) the mixed method approach used in the research process which included a qualitative-quantitative data analysis; (3) the research instruments through which the data was collected: interviews and questionnaires; and (4) the implementation of a needs analysis as the medium to collect students, subject-specific instructors and EFL instructors' expectations of the course. Reading this study helped me to consider the importance of including specialists and English teachers to be interviewed in order to obtain a more integral set of data.

Although the Iranian research study includes some aspects such as the number of students in each class, the teaching methodology and the method of evaluation which are not included in the present study, it constitutes an appropriate example of the process to be implemented in refining, revising and improving the practice of ESP instruction.

## **2.5 Summary**

Different aspects and perspectives of ESP and Needs Analysis have been revised throughout in this chapter as an attempt to describe the definition, origins, developments and current views of both concepts. Reading and analyzing these authors' arguments has helped to clarify the course of this

study, formulate the necessary definitions of the key concepts and make essential decisions through the development of this study. It is important to conclude that any well-designed ESP course should depend on the implementation of a needs analysis in order to integrate as much as possible all the participants' points of view and thus to assure a conscious ESP practice.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter includes the description of the questions this study aims to answer as well as the methodological approach used. The justification for the selection of participants, discussion of ethical issues and rationale for and description of data collection instruments and procedures are described in detail and a short section on methodological limitations.

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

This study focuses on investigating the English language needs of the MA in Business Management students at the State University of Chiapas (UNACH), and how far these needs are fulfilled by the current ESP course. This study sets out to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the academic and professional English language needs of current students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas (UNACH)?
  
2. How far does the existing ESP course meet these needs?

After several years of implementing the ESP courses at UNACH, these questions are considered to constitute a first step in the implementation of a formal process of Needs Analysis which, has been completely absent in the history of UNACH ESP courses, as it was explained in Chapter One.



On the basis of the key research questions, the following sub-questions arose:

- To what extent is English language needed in MA in Business Management students and graduates' occupations? (from the students and graduates' perspective)
- What kinds of knowledge and competences do students and graduates of the MA need in English to be effective in their current and future professional activity?
- What specific aspects (such as skills and language functions) of the current ESP course successfully provide students and graduates with useful language and skills for their studies and professions?
- How far does the content (topics) related to the MA subject specialty included in the existing ESP course meet the academic and professional needs of the students and graduates?
- To what extent do students and graduates of the MA in Business Management find the current ESP course effective and applicable to their professional contexts?

The design and implementation of two research instruments were developed with the purpose of collecting the necessary data to answer the research questions. These research tools were a questionnaire and follow-up interviews.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This research study was conducted at Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas (UNACH), Mexico under a small-scale dimension approach due to the number of participants that took part in the data collection (30 people). Following McDonough & McDonough (1997), this research was developed with a mixed-method approach that involved gathering both numerical and text information, which was interpreted under a qualitative and quantitative approach. The mixed-method research approach was the most appropriate for this research study because combining qualitative and quantitative data allows a wider scope of the problem as well as the integration of numerical and text interpretation of the results.

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of questionnaires and interviews. According to Cohen et al (2007), questionnaires tend to be more reliable because they are anonymous, which encourages greater honesty and participation. However, they do not allow rich descriptions or the possibility to get more in-depth answers, interpretations, beliefs and attitudes from participants as interviews allow. Based on these facts, a questionnaire and a follow-up interview were designed as research instruments in order to gather as relevant data as possible.

Some of the participants' answers were analyzed and presented using a rich-description text style with the purpose of clarifying as many details as possible from the data collected. Other participants' answers were examined and presented in a numerical form, using tables to illustrate percentages, frequencies and tendencies in the data obtained. I selected the most iterative

answers to be presented in Tables of percentages and the most extensive ones to be presented in text style with the purpose of maximizing the depth and richness of the data to address the research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

### **3.3 Participants**

The population of this study was formed by 23 students, 4 graduates, 2 subject specialist teachers and 1 English teacher all involved in the MA in Business Management at UNACH. They were all informed about the purpose of this research study and invited to participate in it. Of the 23 students and 4 graduates, 15 were male and 12 female. The 3 teachers were male. There was no sample selection, the 23 students that participated in this study form the 2012-2014 class of the MA in Business Management; the 4 graduates and 2 subject teachers participated on their willingness and the English instructor was the only one teaching this subject at the time of the study. The age range of the participants was 21-52 years old. All of them were Mexican.

Many of the participants had studied English in different private and public institutions for more than 2 years at the time of the present study while a few of them had studied English less than a year as it is shown in the data collection analysis section.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

This study used two research instruments: a questionnaire and a follow-up interview. These tools were the most appropriate means of investigation for the chosen area of research: Needs Analysis (Donna, 2000; Graves, 1996).

#### **3.4.1 Designing of Data Collection Instruments**

The questionnaire for students and graduates was designed for this study with a combination of closed and open-ended items. Among the closed-ended items, there have been included different options of questions, such as semantic differential scale, multiple choice, numerical rating scales and clarification questions (see Appendix 1). This selection of different types of questions was made with the purpose of obtaining quantitative and qualitative data. It was also considered the opportunity each type of question allows participants to give either concrete or extended answers.

Questionnaires have been used to gather different kinds of information. For example, Dörnyei (2007) has used them to gather data concerning participants' beliefs, attitudes and motivations. The questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990) has been used to gather data related to learning strategies. This questionnaire was designed to extract information from three different aspects. The first section of the questionnaire aimed at obtaining detailed information regarding students' perceptions of their needs on the four macro-skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) as well as on different language functions. Some of these language functions mentioned in the questionnaire are: making telephone calls, writing instant text messages, note taking at

meetings, report writing, face to face interaction, etc. The second section aimed at investigating the frequency and percentages in the use and application of the language by MA students. And finally the third section was directed to investigate students' perspectives of the focus of the ESP course. The questionnaire was applied to 23 MA students and 4 graduates.

On the account of the prevalence of interviews in qualitative research, Richards (2003:47) believes that they form the 'hallmark' or 'gold standard' of this approach. Interviews have been used with different purposes, such as a following up stage to get participants' reasons for their responses to questionnaire items, to identify areas for further research, to get learners or teachers interpretations, etc. 2 semi-structured interviews (McDonough & McDonough, 1997:182) were designed: one directed to MA students and graduates (see Appendix 2) and the other directed to subject and English of MA in Management instructors (see Appendix 3).

Due to time constraints, the students and graduates' interview was administered to 3 students and 2 graduates, and the teachers' interview was administered to 2 subject specialist teachers and 1 English teacher. In an ideal world, 30 participants of the questionnaire instead of only 8 would have been interviewed; nevertheless, this study was developed in only 6 months which constituted the key fact to reduce the number of interviews administered.

### **3.4.2 Data Collection Procedures**

At the beginning of this study, the Head of the Management College at UNACH as well as the MA in Management Coordinator gave their consent for the data

collection process. After that, I visited the MA 2012-14 generation to explain in detail the purpose of the present study. All of the 23 students were willing to participate because they understood the positive impact this study would have for the following generations.

The data collection of this study was performed in three phases. In the first phase, 5 students were given the first draft of the questionnaire to be piloted. Some problems arose from this piloting process: for example, there was the need to include the words 'current or future' as well as 2 lines of percentages in question 9, (see Appendix 1), in order to differentiate students' current and future application of the course. There were some other minor changes. In the second phase 23 students were given the consent form (see Appendix 4) followed by the students and graduates questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Later on, I contacted 4 graduates by phone and set an appointment to have the students and graduates questionnaire answered by them.

All of these questionnaires were administered in Spanish for a better understanding of the questions. Students were instructed to answer in their mother tongue: Spanish, so they could explain their answers thoroughly. The questionnaires were administered within the schedule of a normal English class. This was because most of the students expressed their impossibility to stay after class.

In the third phase of the data collection, 3 students and 2 graduates were chosen to be interviewed. This decision was made on the basis of interesting, relevant and potential questionnaire answers for the outcomes of this research project. Students had also expressed their willingness or not in the follow-up

interview. Students and graduates were contacted by phone to set an appointment for the interview. The interview was performed in Spanish at the library of the Management College. This location was chosen because of the following advantages: it is a familiar place for students and it provides a quiet space for an interview. Furthermore, two subject teachers and the English instructor were interviewed. These subject teachers were chosen following the criteria of those teachers who use English bibliography in their programs. The two subject teachers' interviews were performed by the researcher in Spanish. The English teacher's interview was performed by the researcher in English, with the agreement of the instructor. All the interviewees were informed that the interview was strictly willingly and confidential. They were given the freedom to refuse answering any uncomfortable question. Each interview took around 20 minutes and was recorded for its post transcription and analysis.

### **3.5 Summary**

Chapter Three described the methodology used in this research study. The small-scale dimension research approach of this study allowed the sufficient time to interact with different participants in order to consider their points of view objectively. It is important to mention some ethical issues that arose through the development of this piece of research:

- Related to the selection of the group of MA in Business Management. A negative aspect could be mentioned in the sense of gathering data obtained from a particular group. The main reason for this procedure was

the facility of administering the questionnaire to 23 students at the same time. 4 graduates from different groups as well as 2 subject teachers and 1 English instructor were included in order to compensate this limited source of information.

- About the relation between participants and the researcher, it can be stated that there was no relation at all prior to this study. However, they were informed that the Coordinator of ESP courses at Campus IV was the one administering the interviews and questionnaire. This might have affected their answers both positive and negatively. Negatively because they could have felt influenced by this knowledge and answer with certain preconceptions related to this power relationship. Positively because they might have concluded that their suggestions were going to be proposed to UNACH authorities. From this perspective, this knowledge could have given them the confidence that their answers will be used with a real and definite aim.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results of the Study and Discussion**

This chapter comprises the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews administered to MA in Management students, graduates, subject specialists and English instructors at UNACH as well as a discussion of the results derived from the data collection process.

#### **4.1 Data Analysis**

Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to analyze students and graduates' questionnaires; part of the data collected was examined using a descriptive approach whereas another part was statistically presented. The information obtained through the interviews was all presented in a descriptive form. It was decided to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches with the purpose of taking advantage of them in the presentation and analysis of the results. For example, most of the answers generated by the interviews were suitable to be presented in a rich description text style in order to reflect the interviewees' opinions as clearer as possible, whereas most of the answers derived from the questionnaires were numerical and therefore, suitable to be presented in tables of percentages and frequencies.

#### **4.1.1 Analysis of students and graduates' questionnaire**

The analysis of the information gathered through students and graduates' questionnaire has been examined in three different sections. The first section includes questions 6 and 7 and aims at understanding students' perceptions of their needs in relation to the four macro skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) as well as on different language functions. In this section the participants had the opportunity to choose their answers within a list of specific skills and language functions as well as to add their personal answers in the case of not finding the appropriate in the list. Items 6 and 7 of the questionnaire aimed at answer some of the research questions, for example, "What are the professional needs of current students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas (UNACH)?".

The second section of the questionnaire includes questions 8, 9 and 10 and focuses on frequency and percentages in the current and future use and application of English language by students of the MA in Management program. This section was important because it attempted to answer some of the research questions, for instance, "To what extent do students and graduates of the MA in Business Management find the current ESP course effective and applicable to their professional contexts?" Finally, the third section, which only comprises question 11, investigates students' perspectives about the general focus of the ESP course. In this section the participants could choose either one of the possible focuses for future ESP courses or add a different one according to their point of view.

The questionnaire was administered to 23 students and 4 graduates; among these, 56% were male and 44% female. Related to the age range, 18 of the participants were 21-30, 5 were in the range of 31-40, and 4 were older than 41. Related to previous English studies, 17 of the participants had studied English for more than 2 years previous the beginning of the ESP course, 6 participants had studied English for more than one year and 4 students had studied English for less than a year.

The answers to questions 6 and 7 of the questionnaire are presented in Table 4.1 in order to compare skills and language needed in their current professional activity (according to students' perceived needs) and skills and language developed on the current MA ESP course.

Table 4.1

Comparison between students' skills and language functions needs and skills and language functions currently included in the ESP course.

| Skills/language functions needed<br>In students' professional<br>Settings | Percentage of skills/language<br>functions needed according to<br>students' perceptions |
|---|---|
| Skills/<br>Language functions<br>Developed in MA ESP course               | Percentage of course<br>content devoted to these<br>skills/ language functions          |
| Face to face interaction  | 52%   |
| Telephone calls   | 22%   |
| Formal letters or faxes   | 30%   |
| Computer-mediated<br>communication  | 81%   |
| Giving presentations  | 48%   |
| Reading comprehension for<br>different purposes                           | 56%   |
| Attending meetings  | 11%   |
| Report writing  | 26%   |

|   |    |    |
|---|----|----|
|   |    | 7% |
| Other: attending English courses at work, help kids with English homework | 1% | 0% |

Note. The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths

As can be seen in table 4.1 in the case of Reading Comprehension for different purposes, which is the current focus of the MA in Management ESP course, the highest level of correspondence occurs in the case of ESP course content. Nonetheless, it only shows 56 percent of correspondence to students' perceptions of their needs. This is followed by Computer-mediated communication where the disparity is evident: students' perceptions of their needs reach 81 percent while current ESP course content is 0%.

Likewise, Face to Face interactions showed a noticeable difference: students' perceived needs registered 52% whereas current ESP course content is 0%. Another language skill where a marked difference is noted is Giving Presentations where students' perceptions reflected a %age of 48 and current ESP course content is 0%. It is important to note that Formal Letters and Faxes demonstrated a balance between students' perceived needs and current ESP course content, with an equal %age of 30. Students' perceptions of Report writing, telephone calls and attending meetings were considered important by 26%, 22% and 11% respectively, whereas the same language skills are represented with 0% in the current ESP course content. One student (4%) added attending English courses at work and one more (4%) mentioned helping kids with English homework as a skill needed by them.

Section 2 of the questionnaire, which comprises questions 8, 9 and 10 refers to current and future frequency and %ages in the use and application of skills and language functions according to students' estimation. The results of question 8 have been analyzed in Table 4.2 below, where students' perceptions of language skills and functions have been recorded according to their frequency of use.

Table 4.2

Students' perceptions of frequency of their current and future use of language skills and functions

| Language skills and functions      | Frequency of use |               |         |              |              |
|------------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------|--------------|--------------|
|                                    | 5 very much      | 4 quite a lot | 3 so so | 2 not really | 1 not at all |
| 1. Computer-mediated communication | 70%              | 10%           | 20%     |              |              |
| 2. Reading for different purposes  | 60%              | 20%           | 10%     | 10%          |              |
| 3. Face to face interactions       | 50%              | 30%           |         | 20%          |              |
| 4. Giving presentations            | 50%              | 20%           | 20%     | 10%          |              |
| 5. Formal letters or faxes         | 50%              | 10%           | 20%     | 10%          | 10%          |
| 6. Report writing                  | 30%              | 10%           | 20%     | 20%          | 20%          |
| 7. Telephone calls                 | 10%              | 10%           |         | 10%          | 70%          |
| 8. Attending meetings              |                  |               |         | 20%          | 80%          |

Note. The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

As can be observed in Table 4.2 70% of the students pointed out at Computer-mediated communication as the skill they were most likely to need and use in their current and future professions, followed by Reading for different purposes which was perceived as important by 60% of the students. Face to Face Interactions, Giving Presentations and Formal Letters or Faxes were marked by the same %age of students at the highest ranking of perceived frequency of use. Report Writing and Making Telephone Calls was ranked as less important, and least important of all was Attending Meetings which none of the students marked as useful in their present and future professional contexts.

Section 3 (question 11) of the questionnaire aimed at finding out more about students' perspectives of the general focus of the current ESP course and the results are summarized in Table 4.3 where the percentages of students' choices are included.

Table 4.3 Students' suggestions for the general focus of future ESP courses

| Suggested focuses                       | Percentages |
|---|-------------|
| An integrated skills focus              | 70%         |
| The current reading comprehension focus | 50%         |
| A conversational focus                  | 50%         |
| A listening comprehension focus         | 30%         |
| An academic writing focus               | 10%         |
| Other:                                  |             |
| A personalized focus                    | 10%         |
| A technical English focus               | 10%         |

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

In Table 4.3 it can be distinguished that 70 percent of the students suggested a change in the focus of the ESP course; an Integrated Skills Focus was perceived by the majority of students and graduates as the most appropriate type of course focus. The second most popular choice was the current Reading Comprehension Focus, followed by a Conversational Focus with 50% of the answers. Thirty percent of the students suggested a Listening Comprehension focus. Ten percent of the students chose an Academic Writing, a Personalized and a Technical English focus as most appropriate which represents interesting suggestions to be taken into consideration for future ESP courses.

#### **4.1.2 Analysis of students and graduates' interviews**

The data collected from students and graduates' interviews have been analyzed question by question and include some comments made during interactions with the interviewees. For students to remain anonymous, they will be referred as student A, B or C.

Question 1. Could you please say if you are a student or a graduate at the MA program?

Two of the interviewees were current students and 1 was a graduate from the 2010-2014 class.

Question 2. Which types of activities (Speaking, Reading, Listening or Writing) do you consider most useful for your current or future job?

Student A considers Reading activities the most useful for his current job followed by Speaking, Writing and Listening. Student B thinks the most useful

activities in English for her current job are Reading and Writing. Listening and Speaking are not as useful as the previous skills, according to Student B. Student C answered that none of the activities is especially useful for her current job since she has a job where English is not needed at all. She mentioned that due to her lack of English knowledge, she had not been able to apply for a better position in her company. However, she has been asked by her boss to improve her online English Reading and Writing skills in order to get access to a promotion. To emphasize this point, student C said:

“I really think that learning the four English skills: Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading is necessary for people, like us, who work in the Business Management field. The increasing of our knowledge of English language will allow us the access to more prestigious companies as well as to better paid positions.” (Student C/Interview 3/21.08.2013)

Question 3. What kinds of activities do you need to perform in each of these areas (Speaking, Reading, Listening or Writing)?

Student A mentioned that he needs to read financial journals and reports where he is asked to analyze tables and graphs in order to interpret the information contained there. He also said that occasionally he needs to make telephone calls or write e-mails and formal letters to his company's foreign providers. Student B answered that she is mostly asked to read and translate catalogues, user manuals and other technical instructive texts for using instruments and equipment. To emphasize this point, Student B said that:

“Before starting the MA ESP course I used to have a hard time to translate catalogues and user manuals. I hardly know the technical terminology



used there so I had to use a dictionary a lot. Now, after finishing the ESP course I have learned many words related to the Financial and Business area so I can do my job more effectively.” (Student B/Interview 2/ 22.08.2013).

Student C mentioned that in the future she may be asked to perform different online tasks, such as reading and answering formal letters or faxes, e-mails; attending video conferences with the consequent follow up writing report. All the interviewed students (A, B and C) mentioned that at least 2 of the MA subject teachers occasionally give them a link to read an English online article and present a written summary of it.

Question 4. Do you need to use English in any other contexts besides your current academic or professional settings? Could you give some examples, please?

Student A did not mention any other context where he would be in the need of using English. Student B mentioned her interest in helping her children out with English homework. She said that the language she has studied in the MA English course so far has served as a review of her previous English studies and has made her more able to assist her kids. Student C talked about her interest in traveling abroad and she recognized that developing the four English skills: Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading would make this activity more delightful.

Question 5. Have you found any aspects of this English course especially useful or applicable to your current academic or professional settings? Could you give some examples, please?

All of the interviewed students (A, B and C) agreed on the fact that most of the topics covered in the ESP course were of great help for their jobs. They mentioned some specific useful topics such as: job interviews, career planning, budgeting, advertising and marketing, curriculum vitae writing. Another useful aspect mentioned by student A was the reading strategies; he said that even in his mother tongue he had not reflected in the usefulness of these strategies and that after studying and practicing the applicability of each one he has developed a more analytical level of reading. To reinforce this point, Student A said that:

“Reading Business and Financial articles and journals in the ESP course gave me the confidence to subscribe to an online newspaper. It was challenging at the beginning, but after a while I could reach a better understanding. This fact has allowed me to participate in some meetings with more updated comments about international Issues.” (Student A/Interview 1/21.08.2013).

Student B commented on the advantage she has found in acquiring technical vocabulary related to her profession; she said that due to her increasing in technical vocabulary she is now able to read faster and to extract key information from the user manuals she is asked to read at work. Student C mentioned that even when the emphasis of the course was not writing, after reading and analyzing examples of curriculum vitae she could write her own CV in English. She was very pleased that she was accepted by a foreign institution to get into an online diploma program.

Question 6. Can you think of any aspects of this English course which were not useful or applicable to your current academic or professional contexts? Could you give some examples, please?

One of the facts student A mentioned was the only reading comprehension focus of the ESP course. He said that the two semesters of the ESP course could be maximized if other skills were included. Student B commented that in her opinion the logical consequent skill after reading comprehension is writing; therefore, the course should include more practice in writing to complete the learning cycle. Student C mentioned that according to her point of view the English teacher had made too much emphasis on grammar. She said that identifying grammar structures in text was a waste of time. To emphasize this point, Student C said that:

“I found it very boring and useless when the teacher made us identifying pieces of grammar in texts. I really do not find the purpose of this activity in real life.” (Student C/Interview 3/23.08.2013).

Question 7. In your opinion, how could we improve this English course so that it provides MA students with what they really need?

Student A mentioned the importance of including a wider variety of reading tasks. He said that reading printed texts and articles is not enough, but electronic letters, mails, messages, etc. He thinks that an exchanging of computer-mediated communication among students-teachers and students-students would be of great help for those who are required to do a similar task at work. To reinforce this point, Student A said that:

“Learning how to exchange on-line communication is one of the most needed skills nowadays. From my personal experience I think that starting an on-line group with my classmates would be an excellent practice so we can do

later a similar activity with English spoken people.” (Student A/Interview 1/21.08.2013)

Student B suggested that more hours of English class would constitute the crucial point to integrate other skills in the ESP course. Student B also suggested that implementing a questionnaire to find out students’ needs and priorities at the beginning of each English course would be important to establish a more suitable focus for the ESP course. Student C mentioned that the implementation of chat clubs where they could practice conversations related to their field would be of great help for them. She continued on giving some examples of the possible chat club topics: job interviews, introducing a conference lecturer, answering telephone calls and so on. Student C also commented about the importance of taking students’ opinions into account before defining the focus of the ESP course. She made emphasis on the fact that working with the basis of an imposed syllabus does not allow students to develop all their learning potential.

#### **4.1.3 Analysis of subject and English teachers’ interviews**

This interview was implemented with two subject teachers (one of them was the MA in Management coordinator) and the English teacher. The interviewees have been referred to as follows: coordinator of the MA in Management and subject teacher as well: Teacher A; Subject teacher: Teacher B; English instructor: Teacher C. The information obtained was analyzed question by question to allow a richer description.

Question 1. Is English a required language in your students' professional environment?

Teacher A answered that there is an increasing demand for professionals who can manage English language to a medium level at least. He said that most of the MA in Management students have studied 2 or 3 years of English previously and that they come to the ESP course with high expectations. According to his opinion globalization has gradually led to a higher demand of English language in all contexts and Management is not the exception. Interestingly, he mentioned that many of the MA students started to work for a company where English was not required at all however, these same companies have developed international agreements and negotiations with foreign countries where English is the main medium of communication. Consequently, more and more MA students have expressed their need of learning English to let them grow as the same pace of their places of work. To reinforce this point, Teacher A said that:

“I strongly believe that English is a necessary language for the Business Management professional. As a MA teacher I have had to grow professionally in the English language too because more and more students come to ask me including English material within my subject syllabus. This has led me searched for English bibliography and for English courses for me too!” (Teacher A/Interview 4/11.09.2013).

Teacher B mentioned that UNACH is located near a border area, which is why there is an important variety of transnational enterprises which continuously require bilingual staff who can establish contact with their foreign employees or

suppliers. Teacher C commented that after having taught the ESP course for several years, he can conclude that English is indeed a required language for more than 50 percent of the MA in Management students either for professional or academic purposes.

Question 2. In your experience, what are some of the things that MA students are required to perform in English in their professional settings?

Among the answers obtained in this question, the following are the most relevant since they were mentioned by both Subject teachers and English instructor: reading journals and articles in students' own field of study, read and reply computer-mediated communication, reading and translating brochures and manuals containing technical terms, making telephone calls, participating in international seminars and writing reports. To emphasize this point, Teacher B said that:

“During the last semesters several students have had the opportunity to attend to international seminars and conferences abroad. They have told me that there is not always a translator available and their low level of English has not allowed them to take advantage of the content of those important events.” (Teacher B/Interview 5/12.09.2013).

Question 3. Which skill (Speaking, Listening, Writing or Reading) is most needed in your students' work contexts?

According to Teacher A, students need mostly Reading and Writing. Teacher B stated that students need Listening, Reading and Writing. Teacher C mentioned that the four skills are needed by students. To emphasize this point, Teacher C said that:

“During the time I have taught this ESP course, several students have approached to me in order to ask me including activities for other skills different than Reading Comprehension. They have expressed their need for developing Listening, Writing and Speaking tasks considering that they are asked to perform a variety of activities in English at work”. (Teacher C/Interview 6/13.09.2013).

Question 4. How would you prioritize these needs in terms of percentages?

Teacher A prioritized Reading with a score of 90%, Writing with 70% and Listening and Speaking with 30%. Teacher B ranked Listening as top priority with 80% whereas he ranked Reading and Writing with 50%. According to teacher B speaking is the least required skill with 30%. Teacher C prioritized Speaking and Reading with 90% and Listening and Writing with 80%.

Question 5. In your opinion, is the current English course fulfilling your students' real needs?

Teacher A expressed that in his opinion the current ESP course is fulfilling students' needs just partially. He explained that students need an English course where all language skills are developed and therefore, the present reading comprehension focus of the course is not enough to provide students with an integral training for their professional contexts. To reinforce this point, Teacher A said that:

“Business Management is a very dynamic area in which professionals are required to perform a variety of tasks. In the past having a domain of our mother tongue was enough, but nowadays it is necessary to perform this variety of tasks in English as well. That is why I think the current ESP course is not

fulfilling students' needs, because it is focused in Reading Comprehension only." (Teacher A/Interview 4/11.09.2013).

Teacher B commented that the current reading comprehension focus of the ESP course has offered students a quite exhaustive training for applying reading strategies. However, he was of the opinion that it is not enough for the increasing demanding of the business world. Teacher C answered that the current focus of the ESP course does not fulfill students' language needs because in his opinion the only reading comprehension focus of the course is insufficient to meet the challenge of the variety of tasks and skills that students are expected to perform within their professional settings.

Question 6. How could we improve this English course in order to make students more competitive for the current professional demand?

Subject teachers as well as the English instructor agreed on the opinion that the best way of improving the ESP course was by implementing a needs analysis questionnaire and discussion at the beginning of each course. Teachers A and B acknowledged the unrealistic aspect of building a new syllabus for the ESP course every semester. Teacher C suggested that every semester the basic predesigned syllabus could be enriched with opinions and suggestions obtained from the needs analysis questionnaire and discussion. To reinforce this point, Teacher C said that:

"I have had the opportunity to teach this ESP course for several years. And I think it is necessary to implement a kind of questionnaire and a discussion of the needs of every particular group with the purpose of finding out the specific needs, wants and preferences of that group. It would be very interesting



to compare the ESP course syllabus with students' needs and then integrate them as much as possible." (Teacher C/Interview 6/13.09.2013).

Teacher B commented that the integration of productive skills such as Writing and Speaking would allow students to cope with the challenge of communicating more effectively with foreign colleagues. Teacher C expressed the view that the four skills: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing should be integrated in the English course syllabus. He also suggested that implementing a kind of social service within the local companies would be useful for students to realize the language demands they would face in the professional context. During this activity Social Service students would be immersed in a company where English is used to perform diverse activities, this way they would acquire first-hand experience in the management of Business English.

#### **4.2 Relating Research Findings to Key and sub questions**

In Chapter Three seven questions were raised to be answered throughout the development of this research. The analysis of the information obtained from questionnaires and interviews led to the following answers:

- What are the academic and professional English language needs of current students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at UNACH?

There is a variety of answers for this question and the answers comprise all the four macro skills to a greater or lesser extent. For example, within Listening skill participants mentioned listening to lectures, to presentations in meetings, to telephone conversations, etc; within

Speaking skill, they listed participating in Business negotiations, speaking at meetings, talking with professionals in real situations, etc; within Reading skill, they mentioned reading brochures and technical texts, reading business articles and journals, reading newspapers and magazines; finally, within Writing skill, participants mentioned taking notes at meetings and presentations, writing financial reports, writing CVs, etc. A common need mentioned by all participants was learning technical terminology.

- How far does the existing ESP course meet these needs?

According to students and teachers' answers, the ESP course does not meet all their academic and professional needs. All of them believe that reading comprehension is a necessary skill to be developed by the course, but the current percentage of course time devoted to this is insufficient.

- To what extent is English language needed in MA in Management students and graduates' occupations? (from the students and graduates' perspective)

Subject and English teachers as well as students and graduates agreed on the fact that either to a major or minor extent, all students of the MA in Business Management need English language to perform different tasks at work. Interestingly, some students reported having few opportunities to

use English in their current job however, they expressed a remarkable interest in learning English to be able to access to a better paid job. The majority of the participants have had the experience of having missed out on the opportunity to a better job, just because of their low proficiency in English.

- What kinds of knowledge and competences do students and graduates of the MA in Management need in English to be effective in their profession?

There is a variety of answers to this question. All the participants were of the opinion that they started the ESP course with quite an amount of knowledge of general English from their previous studies. However, they have not been trained to translate that knowledge into practical skills. Participants expressed their need to develop specific competences in the Management and Business field, among these competences the following were mentioned: knowing international conventions and politeness to establish oral communication with others, practicing strategies and tactics for negotiation, applying technical terms and idioms in their specific field of study, preparing and presenting oral presentations, using key information from articles to write reports, etc.

- What specific aspects (such as skills and language functions) of the current ESP course successfully provide students and graduates with useful language and skills for their studies and professions?

According to participants' answers, the present ESP course has helped them in two specific aspects. On the one hand, students reported having developed their reading skill. Some of them mentioned that the reading strategies learnt during the course have trained them to read faster and more analytically. On the other hand, participants acknowledged they have learnt a variety of technical terms and idioms which are useful in their professional contexts. Other students commented that in the past they used to find the English articles and texts given by subject teachers too difficult and boring. Now, on the account of the reading skills practice and the expansion of their technical vocabulary repertoires and idioms, they even enjoy the readings tasks they are asked to perform.

- How far does the content (topics) related to the MA subject specialty included in the existing ESP course meet the academic and professional needs of the students and graduates?

The majority of the participants subscribed to the opinion that the topics analyzed in the ESP course are quite useful to provide them with a general overview of the Management and Business field; however, they suggested enriching the course with subject teachers' bibliography in order to create a more updated content.

- To what extent do students and graduates of the MA in Management find the current ESP course effective and applicable to their current and future professional contexts?

Between 60 and 70% of the participants consider the ESP course useful and applicable to their professional settings, while the rest of them consider that the current reading comprehension focus of the course is not the most effective and applicable focus for their contexts.

### **4.3 Summary of Research Findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent the existing ESP course meets the current and future academic and professional needs of students and graduates of the MA in Management at UNACH. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of students and teachers agreed on the idea of an integrated skills focus for the ESP course. Computer-mediated Communication and Reading Comprehension were the most frequently used skills although other tasks included Writing, Listening and Speaking were mentioned as useful for the Business Management context. It is interesting to mention that within the responses of the interview, the fact that the Reading Comprehension focus of the current ESP course used to fulfill learners' needs was mentioned. However, many participants emphasized the importance of developing other language skills which allow them to get along well in the variety of tasks they are asked to perform in their work settings.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing my research findings, explaining possible implications for local and external ESP practitioners, describing the limitations of the study and making suggestions for future research.

#### **5.1 Summary of the study**

The aim of this study was to implement a Needs Analysis with the purpose of investigating the academic and professional English language needs of students on the MA in Business Management course, at the State University of Chiapas. This provided base line information to determine to what extent the current ESP course fulfills those needs.

With the aim of achieving this goal, two key research questions were raised:

(1) What are the academic and professional English language needs of current students and graduates of the MA in Business Management at the State University of Chiapas?

(2) How far does the existing ESP course meet these needs?

To complement these key research questions another five sub-questions were posed and answered:

(3) To what extent is English language needed in MA in Business Management students and graduates' occupations? (from the students and graduates' perspective)

(4) What kinds of knowledge and competences do students and graduates of the MA need in English to be effective in their current and future professional activity?

(5) What specific aspects (such as skills and language functions) of the current ESP course successfully provide students and graduates with useful language and skills for their studies and professions?

(6) How far does the content (topics) related to the MA subject specialty, included in the existing ESP course, meet the academic and professional needs of the students and graduates?

(7) To what extent do students and graduates of the MA in Management find the current ESP course effective and applicable to their professional contexts?

To answer the over-arching research and the sub-questions a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were administered to 23 current students, 4 graduates, 2 subject teachers and the English instructor of the group. All participants then were, or had been, involved in the MA in Business Management at UNACH either as students, graduates or teachers.

In order to have a solid theoretical framework for the development of this study, a critical analysis of some relevant literature related to ESP and Needs Analysis was conducted. Within this literature review described in Chapter Two, different authors and researchers' points of view were examined which helped to



develop my own perspective for the critical analysis of the design process and results of this study.

This research was developed using a mixed-method approach in the small-scale dimension category (McDonough & McDonough, 2005). Therefore, it only involved 30 participants. A mixed-method approach involves gathering both text information (e.g. from interviews) and numerical data (e.g. from questionnaires) which allows the final database to be presented in qualitative and quantitative forms (Creswell, 2003:20). This was a piece of primary research since it was based on information obtained from students and teachers directly. Very interesting and useful data was generated through the Management of the questionnaire and interviews. This data was analyzed and reported on, in Chapter Four and presented in Tables of percentages and frequencies as well as in rich description-style texts. The analysis of the data collected was used to answer the research questions with the reinforcement provided by some key authors' points of view mentioned in the Literature Review of this study (Chapter Two).

In sum, the findings suggested that the current ESP course does not meet Students' academic and professional needs completely. The analysis of the data gathered from questionnaires and interviews showed that the current Reading Comprehension focus of the course is indeed useful but needs to be complemented with other skills and language functions. This was explained in detail in Chapter Four of this study.

## **5.2 Implications for local and external ESP practitioners**

Based on the findings of the study three major implications seem to have emerged as relevant for both local and external ESP course designers and teachers.

First, teachers and others responsible for designing ESP courses should be reminded of the central principle that the learners' needs are of paramount importance to appropriate course design (Clarke, 1991). Apart from the real fact that every institution has its own political and academic guidelines underlying the wider curriculum, it is essential to recognize that those are not the only parameters to be taken into account when designing and implementing an ESP course. This was illustrated by the amount of useful information generated by the implementation of a Needs Analysis to an ESP course originally designed under institutional criteria only.

Second, and derived from the previous point, the focus of the ESP practice should shift from a rigid pre-established syllabus to a flexible one in which students' needs can be integrated. This was suggested by all participants of this study: current students, graduates, subject and English teachers and it is reinforced by Breen (1987) who believes that ESP teachers should be prepared to explore at least the idea of negotiated elements within existing syllabuses. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) confirm this by recognizing that there may be a contradiction between students' wants and institution's requirements, however, the course designer should bear in mind the importance of learner motivation to learn and not ignore their perceived wants.

Finally, ESP practitioners should be aware that one of the most appropriate ways of investigating learners' needs, wants, lacks, expectations and preferences is the implementation of a formal Needs Analysis which eventually leads to the reinforcement and enrichment of the existing syllabus course. In the context of my study, this was very clear from what I found out about the discrepancy between the existing course (designed only on the basis of institutional guidelines and teachers' ideas about what would be best for MA in Business Management students) and the real needs, wants and lacks of past and current participants, namely an Integrated Skills ESP course in which learners could practice and develop different skills and language functions related to their field of study.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

Among the limitations experimented in the development of this study was the reduced number of participants, which could lead to the idea that the data gathered is not sufficient to arrive at valid conclusions. This number of participants was decided on due to the time constraints related to the conclusion of this research. However, the inclusion of four different sources of information: students, graduates, subject and English teachers to enrich the information and integrate different elements' points of view compensated this weakness.

Another limitation identified through this study was the fact that questionnaires are necessarily restricted to specific areas identified by the researcher whereas there may be other relevant options which the researcher is not aware of and

has not included in the questionnaire. Related to this point, a semi-structured interview was designed with the purpose of allowing participants to answer more freely and independently and also to check the interpretations of answers from the questionnaire and to provide a space for participants to talk about issues which had not been included in the questionnaire.

The third limitation emerged at the stage of the implementation of questionnaires and interviews. It was about power relations. This fact could have influenced participants' answers in different ways. On the one hand, participants could have felt committed to answer positively to all questions. On the other hand, they were explained that one of the purposes of this research study was indeed to evidence weak aspects of the ESP course. The participants were also asked to answer as honestly as possible, precisely because their needs, perspectives, suggestions and expectations could be taken and present them directly to the people responsible for accepting or rejecting these proposals for syllabus changes in our University.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for future research**

Through the experience of developing this piece of research some interesting recommendations for future studies have emerged:

1. Although the findings of this research are very valuable and applicable to the Management Faculty at UNACH, it would be worth performing a similar study on other faculties of UNACH in order to generalize the results and make them more suitable to be implemented.

2. A similar collaborative research study with other Mexican or foreign universities would make it possible to compare the findings and examine similarities and disparities. In the context of Internationalization and globalization this type of research study would contribute to the establishment of some global needs for specialists in the area of Business Management to be able to communicate internationally effectively.
3. After the translation of these results into the MA in Management ESP course redesign, it would be interesting to conduct a future research to continue with the on-going process of Needs Analysis.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study aimed at investigating the English language needs of MA in Business Management at the State University of Chiapas. This was done through the Management of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to 23 students, 4 graduates, 2 subject teachers and 1 English instructor.

The findings of the study indicated that the current ESP course does not completely fulfill the students' needs. Although the current focus of the ESP course emphasizes Reading Comprehension, only 56% of the students were of the opinion that this skill was their main language need. Another interesting finding was the fact that 81% of the students chose Computer-mediated Communication as their top need whereas the current ESP course does not at the moment devote any attention to this skill at all. There were other skills and

language functions mentioned by a considerable number of students as necessary in their professional contexts, such as: Face to Face Interactions and Giving Presentations. This was an interesting finding since, again, there is no time at all devoted to these aspects in the current ESP course.

In relation with the frequency of using the language functions and skills, students highlighted Computer-mediated Communication as the most used, followed by Reading for different purposes. Half of the students emphasized Face to Face Interactions, Giving Presentations and Writing Formal Letters or Faxes as frequently used skills.

The three groups of participants: students, graduates and teachers agreed on the fact that the current focus of the ESP course used to be useful and sufficient for their professional contexts, but due to the widespread globalization phenomenon, it is necessary to update the focus of the course. The triangulation of the information obtained from teachers, graduates and students make it possible to draw the following conclusions:

- The current ESP course is indeed to some extent useful and applicable to students' professional contexts, but not sufficiently so.
- There seems to be a need to integrate the four skills (Listening, Writing, Reading and Speaking) to the ESP course in order to provide students with a more complete training for the demands of their actual and future professional contexts. Dudley-Evans (1997) establishes among ESP absolute features that it makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and that it is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study

skills, discourse and genre. Based on the participants' answers Business Management is a discipline which requires, either to a greater or lesser extent, the use of the four skills (Listening, Writing, Reading and Speaking).

- The importance of implementing a needs analysis previously the beginning of each English course was underlined. To emphasize this finding, Hutchinson et al (1987:19) states that ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning. The most appropriate way of investigate learners' reasons for learning English for Specific Purposes is by implementing a Needs Analysis as a starting activity.
- The importance of integrating students' most appropriate and relevant suggestions into the existing ESP syllabus was clear. This is emphasized by Richards et al (1992), who stated the fact that a needs analysis should ideally lead to the translation of these necessities, demands, wants, likes, lacks, deficiencies, and objectives into course design.
- The need to work along with subject teachers in order to bring up to date and enrich the ESP course content seems to be a priority. Related to this, Carver (1983) maintains that one of the main ESP learner's needs is to handle authentic materials in order to perform real tasks with them. One of the best ways to obtain authentic materials is to work in collaboration with subject teachers who have a lot of experience in the field of Business Management.

This study did not attempt to evidence the inefficacy of the current focus of the ESP course at MA in Business Management Faculty at UNACH. It rather aimed

at finding real information which evidences the need for a redesigning process within the ESP courses. The proposal is to implement an on-going Needs Analysis process as part of the ESP courses. It is not a matter of designing a new syllabus every semester, which would be completely impracticable, but the integration of the most appropriate and relevant results to complement the existing ESP syllabus.



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## Appendix 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about your MA English course. Your participation in this survey will be confidentially managed.

1. Would you be willing to be contacted by the researcher for a follow-up interview?

If so, please provide your cell phone number

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And your e-mail address -

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2. Current status on the MA program

- Current student
- Graduate

3. Gender

- Male
- Female

4. Age group

- 21-30
- 31-40
- 40 or older

5. Previous English studies before this course

- Less than a year
  - Up to one year
  - Up to two years
  - Other (please specify)
- 

6. Do you currently work in the Management field or in a different field?  
(please explain briefly)

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7. Skills and language functions needed in English, in your current occupation

- Face to face interaction
  - Making telephone calls
  - Reading and writing formal letters or faxes
  - Computer-mediated communication (e.g. instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms, etc.)
  - Giving and listening to presentations
  - Attending meetings
  - Report writing
  - Reading with different purposes
  - Other (please specify)
- 

8. Skills and language functions developed in your MA English Course

- Face to face interaction
  - Making Telephone calls
  - Reading and writing formal letters or faxes
  - Computer-mediated communication (e.g. instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms, etc.)
  - Giving and listening to presentations
  - Attending meetings
  - Report writing
  - Reading with different purposes
  - Other (please specify)
- 

9. Give a mark from 1-5 according to how frequently you perform the following interactions at your current occupation

1=not at all, 2=not really, 3=so-so, 4=quite a lot, 5=very much

- Face to face interactions
- Making Telephone calls
- Reading and writing formal letters or faxes
- Computer-mediated communication
- Other (please, specify)

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10. Percentage of applicability of the current ESP English Course to your current or future work setting.

Current

100% \_\_\_\_\_ 0%

Future

100% \_\_\_\_\_ 0%

11. If you rated the course as “50 or less percentage applicable”, please explain why.

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12. If you could suggest a different kind of focus for this course, which would it be?

- The present Reading Comprehension focus
- A listening comprehension focus
- A conversational focus
- An academic writing focus
- An integrated skills focus (reading, writing, listening and speaking)
- Other (please specify)

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**Thank you for contributing to this study!**

## Appendix 2

### FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW FOR STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

This interview was conducted with 3 of the students and 2 of the graduates of the MA in Business Management for the Degree of Business Management who had previously expressed consent in the questionnaire and whose answers in the questionnaire were of special interest for the research.

1. Could you please say if you are a student or a graduate at the MA program?
2. Which types of activities do you consider most useful for your current or future job? Speaking, reading, listening or writing?
3. What kinds of activities do you need to perform in each of these areas: speaking, reading, listening or writing?
4. Do you need to use English in any other context besides your current academic or professional setting? Could you give some examples, please?
5. Have you found any aspects of this English course especially useful or applicable to your current academic or professional settings? Could you give some examples, please?
6. Can you think of any aspects of this English course which were not useful or applicable to your current academic or professional settings? Could you give some examples, please?
7. In your opinion, how could we improve this English course so that it provides MA students with what they really need?



## Appendix 3

### INTERVIEW FOR MA SUBJECT AND ENGLISH TEACHERS

This interview was implemented with two of the subject teachers and the English teacher. They were contacted by phone to set an appointment for the interview.

1. Is English a required language in your students' professional environment?
2. In your experience, what are some of the things that MA students are required to perform in English in their professional settings?
3. Which skill (speaking, listening, writing or reading) is most needed in your students' work settings?
4. How would you prioritize these needs in terms of percentages?
5. In your opinion, is the current English course fulfilling your students' real needs?
6. How could we improve this English course in order to make students more competitive for their current professional demands?

## Appendix 4

### CONSENT FORM (*FACE TO FACE: Insert Version number*)

**Study title:** How far does the existing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course meet the academic and professional needs of current students and graduates of the Master (MA) in Management for the degree of Business Management at the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas?

*Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):*

Yes (Y)/No (N)

I have read and understood the information sheet (insert date /version no. of participant information sheet) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

#### *Data Protection*

*I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....