TEACHING FUTURE TEACHERS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This paper aims to show the analysis of the survey prepared for first-year students in the grades of primary education. It presents the questionnaire designed to ascertain the expectations and needs in the English class of undergraduate students who will be primary school teachers in the near future. The study shows a wants and needs analysis of the respondents based on their answers and indicates the main needs of the Spanish English learners.

Keywords: wants and needs questionnaires, English language skills, Spanish undergraduate students, EFL teaching

1. Teaching English in the Grades of Primary Education

1.1. English within the European Education Framework

English language occupies a crucial role as an international language as a consequence of globalisation. As Vez (2002: 149) suggests: "the globalisation which accompanies the neo-liberal ideology of the free markets is closely linked to the expanding international use of English". The importance of learning languages, and in particular English, has been recognised by the European Union. An example of this is the different research programmes included in the lifelong learning programme fostered by the European Union for the development and improvement of the quality of language teaching and learning.

The need for these programmes is clear if one considers the report published by the European Commission in "Europeans and their languages" (European Commission, 2006). One of the first things that catches our attention is the fact that Spain is one of the six Member States – Ireland (66%), the United Kingdom (62%), Italy (59%), Portugal (58%), Hungary (58%) and Spain (56%)– where the majority of the population indicates that they do not know any foreign languages (European Commission, 2006: 10). Equally important is the fact that "English remains the most widely-spoken foreign language throughout Europe. "38% of EU citizens

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state that they have sufficient skills in English to have a conversation" (European Commission, 2006:12). However, the percentage of people who speak well enough to be able to have a conversation is lower in Spain. According to the European Commission (2006:13), only 27% of the population in Spain declares that they would be able to hold a conversation in English, and 12% in French (see Table 1).

Table 1. Which languages do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation, excluding your mother tongue?

THREE MOST WIDELY KNOWN LANGUAGES - % country									
BE		**CZ**		**DK**		**DE**		**EE**	
English	59%	German	28%	English	86%	English	56%	Russian	66%
French	48%	English	24%	German	58%	French	15%	English	46%
German	27%	Russian	20%	French	12%	German	9%	German	22%
EL		**ES**		**FR**		**IE**		**IT**	
English	48%	English	27%	English	36%	French	20%	English	29%
German	9%	French	12%	Spanish	13%	Irish/Gaelic	9%	French	14%
French	8%	Spanish	10%	German	8%	German	7%	Other regional language	6%
CY		**LV**		**LT**		**LU**		**HU**	
English	76%	Russian	70%	Russian	80%	French	90%	German	25%
French	12%	English	39%	English	32%	German	88%	English	23%
German	5%	Latvian	23%	Polish	15%	English	60%	Other	11%
MT		**NL**		**AT**		**PL**		**PT**	
English	88%	English	87%	English	58%	English	29%	English	32%
Italian	66%	German	70%	French	10%	Russian	26%	French	24%
French	17%	French	29%	Other	13%	German	19%	Spanish	9%
SI		**SK**		**FI**		**SE**		**UK**	
Croatian	59%	English/German	32%	English	63%	English	89%	French	23%
English	57%	Russian	29%	Swedish	41%	German	30%	German	9%
German	50%	Czech	25%	German	18%	French	11%	Spanish	8%
BG		**HR**		**RO**		**TR**			
Russian	35%	English	49%	English	29%	English	17%		
English	23%	German	34%	French	24%	Turkish	7%		
German	12%	Italian	14%	German	6%	German	4%		

Regarding these figures which relate to countries where English is the first choice, Spain (27%) has the second lowest number of English speakers behind Turkey (17%). Considering other countries where English is the second option, the percentage of people able to hold a conversation in English is higher than the 27% in Spain where it is the first option, excluding Czech Republic (24%), Hungary (23%), Bulgaria (23%), which show even slightly lower percentages.

From the European report, it can be deduced that both the level of language skills, in general, and of English in particular, is below par in Spain in comparison with other European countries. This leads us to think about the ways in which language skills could be improved in Spanish education.

1.2. The subject of English in the Grades of Primary Education

The model of education proposed by the European Higher Education Area is related to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This system that sets a relationship between the learning outcomes and the time students need to achieve them (workload) has also modified the way in which teaching is understood. The concept of lecturing has been revised as well as the roles of lecturers and students.

English for Primary Teachers is a subject implemented at the Faculty of Education that carries 6 ECTS . 6 ECTS amounts to 150 hours for the student, 50 hours of which are class hours, distributed across lectures and seminars, and 100 hours of autonomous learning. The high percentage (75%) of student workload that relates to autonomous learning reflects the new active role of students in the learning process.

Autonomous learners are those who explicitly accept responsibility for their own learning (Little, 1991) and who show initiative regarding learning, and participate in monitoring progress and evaluating the extent to which learning is achieved (Schunk, 2005). Students take control of their learning; however, teachers have a major impact on their progress towards autonomy (Reinders and Balciakanli, 2011: 15).The introduction of this type of learning has also led teachers to create a wide range of activities which foster fruitful learning and which monitor the students' learning process. Besides, the activities to be done both within and outside the classroom must be designed carefully paying particular attention to the point of departure of the students and to their strengths and weaknesses. Taking all this into account, it was proposed that a wants and needs analysis be conducted on the first day of class in order to understand the real position of our students with regard to English and their language skills.

2. Methodology

2.1. Aim and participants

As said before, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education has become a crucial curricular element in the educational systems of developing societies like that of Spain. However, the results do not seem to correspond to its importance. Moreover, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR), the product of more than two decades of research, is just a framework of reference that provides "a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency" (Council of Europe, 2013). After having taken the CEFR as the basis for the syllabuses designed for the EFL subjects in the grades of

Primary Education in the University of Zaragoza and the comparatively low level of language skills based on the students, we considered the necessity of the elaboration of a questionnaire that could shed light on the wants and needs of our students.

In our case, the wants and needs analysis would involve collecting information from participants about their language learning skills and what they would like to learn. This extremely quick brainstorming method to gather data about user needs from multiple users simultaneously (Courage and Baxter, 2005) was chosen as it would be the best to help us to identify the expectations and requirements of our students.

The wants and needs analysis was carried out in the English class of first-year undergraduate students in the grades of Primary Education. The group of participants for this research consisted of 100 students in their freshman year whose age range was from 19 to 40. 76 of the respondents were between 19 and 21, 22 respondents were between 22 and 30 and only 6 respondents were older than 30 (31-40). The respondents' profile in terms of age was especially relevant as it could be connected to the length of time in which they have not taken English lessons and the changes in methodology for teaching English.

2.2. Procedure

A questionnaire was the principal instrument selected as it would allow us to collect data for the wants and needs analysis. Data collected from the respondents would evaluate the factors influencing the learning process and would shed light on the needs of the EFL students. Although the questionnaire was in English, the lecturers translated it into Spanish in class to ensure that all the questions were understood. Table 2 presents the questionnaire designed for the wants and needs analysis:

Table 2. Questionnaire designed for first-year students in the grades of Primary Education

Q.	Question	Possible Answers
1	Number of years you have studied English:	4-6 years 7-10 years 11-13 years 14 < years
2	When did you have your last English lesson?	1 year >1<5 > 6

Q.	Question	Possible Answers
3	Where have you learnt English? (You can tick more than one option)	- At primary and secondary school - At the Escuela Oficial de Idiomas. Level: _____ - At the Centro Universitario de Lenguas Modernas (former Instituto de Idiomas). Level: _____ - Private one-to-one lessons - At private language schools (academias de idiomas) - At summer camps - Travelling / living abroad - Others (specify)
4	Have you got any English level certification:	- KET Cambridge certificate - PET Cambridge certificate - FCE Cambridge certificate - CAE Cambridge certificate - Trinity. Level _____ - IELTS. Score _____ - TOEFL. Score _____ - Others (specify) ___
5	Have you ever been to an English-speaking country?	- No - Yes - Number of weeks spent in an English-speaking country:_____ - Date(s) _____ - Country/ Countries
6	I consider my **general level** of English to be:	- Basic - Lower intermediate - Intermediate - Upper intermediate - Advanced
7	I consider my **oral/interaction skills** in English to be:	- Basic - Lower intermediate - Intermediate - Upper intermediate - Advanced
8	I consider my **listening skills** in English to be:	- Basic - Lower intermediate - Intermediate - Upper intermediate - Advanced

Q.	Question	Possible Answers
9	I consider my **writing skills** in English to be:	- Basic - Lower intermediate - Intermediate - Upper intermediate - Advanced
10	I consider my **reading skills** in English to be:	- Basic - Lower intermediate - Intermediate - Upper intermediate - Advanced
11	Mark the statement that best fits your feelings:	- I feel highly motivated to take this course and improve my English language skills. - I feel motivated to take this course and improve my English language skills. - I don't feel motivated to take this course and improve my English language skills. - I don't feel motivated at all to take this course and improve my English language skills.
12	Mark the type of activities that you like doing in the English class: (Tick as many options as you want)	- Grammar exercises - Vocabulary exercises - Reading comprehension activities (i.e. reading a text and answering some questions, putting paragraphs in the correct order, including headlines, etc.) - Listening comprehension activities (i.e. listening to a text and answering some questions, putting pictures in the correct order, etc.) - Watching videos - Writing tasks (i.e. drafting a short text such as a letter, a tale, etc.) - Oral presentations - Oral discussions in small groups - Short conversations in pairs - Role plays - Computer-based exercises and tasks - Others (specify)___

Q.	Question	Possible Answers
13	Mark the type of activities that you **DON'T** like doing in the English class: (Tick as many options as you want)	- Grammar exercises - Vocabulary exercises - Reading comprehension activities (i.e. reading a text and answering some questions, putting paragraphs in the correct order, including headlines, etc.) - Listening comprehension activities (i.e. listening to a text and answering some questions, putting pictures in the correct order, etc.) - Watching videos - Writing tasks (i.e. drafting a short text such as a letter, a tale, etc.) - Oral presentations - Oral discussions in small groups - Short conversations in pairs - Role plays - Computer-based exercises and tasks - Others (specify)__
14a	How do you prefer to work in the English class?	- Individually - In pairs - In small groups - In whole group
14b	Indicate the type of activities you prefer to do	- Individually - In pairs - In small groups - In whole group
15a	Do you intend to attend class on a regular basis?	- Yes - No
15b	Do you intend to hand in all proposed assignments?	- Yes - No
15c	Do you intend to do additional exercises outside the classroom and on Moodle?	- Yes - No
16	Write two paragraphs: one introducing yourself and another on your decision to choose this degree and what you expect to learn in this English course.	Open answer

The first question (Q.1) alluded to the number of years the students had been learning English. Four different answers were proposed: 4-6, 7-10, 11-13 and more than 14 years. The division was made taking into consideration the age of our students and the fact that they belonged to different education systems which proposed a different number of years for language learning.

Q.2 ("When did you have your last English lesson?") offered three possible answers: 1 year, 2 to 5 years and finally more than 6 years. The reason for this distribution was the heterogeneous background of the students we have in class. Most of them are 18 years old and enter university after passing *selectividad* (the Spanish equivalent to A-level exams). However, since 2010 students who have been doing two or four-year modules of vocational training are able to enter university. In those modules, students do not usually have English as a subject, which makes revision necessary. The third group would include those students who are either post graduate students doing another degree, or mature students who have retaken an academic career.

The third question offered several possible answers, which would allow us to see in detail the options and preferences of our students in terms of the places to learn English. In spite of the broad range offered, the results were classified, for analytical purposes, as those who had learnt at school and those who had learnt in other places apart from school.

Q.4 aimed to observe the number of students who already had a certificate in English. We considered this question important in order to find out the students' level and also their concern about the world in which they live. As we are in an international society that is increasingly demanding certificates that prove the proficiency in languages for job applications, students have to be prepared to be qualified in order to fulfil the labour requirements.

Regarding the time spent in an English-speaking country (Q. 5), we dismissed those answers which refer to stays of less than two weeks, as they would probably refer to pleasure trips.

In the case of those questions related to the students' level of English (Q. 6-10), a five-option scale was used. Basic, lower intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced were the nomenclature that substituted the CEFR levels A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 so that it would be easy for participants to make a selection and the analysis of the results would be more accurate. The C2 level was dismissed in this questionnaire considering that they are freshman students.

Q. 12 and 13 included a wide variety of items, as we wanted to know the specific types of activities that they liked and did not like doing in the English class, in order to adapt the design and types of activities for the course. However, for analytical reasons the possible answers included in these two questions were divided into two groups: oral and non-oral activities.

Similarly, the answers of Q. 14a and 14b were firstly analysed according to the four possible options in the questionnaire –individual, whole group, in pairs and small groups; and secondly by distinguishing between those which could involve individual work (individual and whole group activities) and those which could involve group work (in pairs or small groups).

Q. 15a, 15b and 15c were proposed in order to assess the level of motivation of our students. In terms of education, this is particularly relevant because the students' lack of interest can make the learning process difficult. If this happens, suitable rewards should be provided in order to generate the necessary motivation for getting the desired results.

In the last question, Q. 16, students were asked to write two paragraphs. By this means, we were able to carefully evaluate their writing skills such as whether they were able to organise their ideas in a clear and coherent way or not; and we were also able to form an idea of their interest in the degree and their expectations regarding the English course.

3. Findings

After collecting and examining all data, the results of the questionnaire are summarised in Table 3:

Table 3. Summary of the results of the questionnaire

#	4-6 years					7-10 years					11-13 years					14 < years				
1	7					18					58					17				
2	1 year	>1<5	>6			1 year	>1<5	>6			1 year	>1<5	>6			1 year	>1<5	>6		
	2	4	1			8	9	1			50	8	-			16	1	-		
3	school	School+				school	School+				school	School+				school	School+			
	4	3 (EOI)				12	6 (3 privlgscho/3trav)				40	18 (privalg/4camps)				8	9 (private lg school/)			
4	No	Yes				No	Yes				No	Yes				No	Yes			
	5	2 (3rd EOI)				16	2 (PET/Trinity 6)				56	2				13	4 (3 EOI Inter+1Trinity)			
5	No	Yes >2weeks				No	Yes >2weeks				No	Yes >2weeks				No	Yes >2weeks			
	6	1				14	4				47	11				13	4			
6	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad
	4	2	1	-	-	8	6	4	1	-	27	9	17	2	-	3	4	10	-	-
7	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad
	5	2	-	-	-	10	5	3	-	-	31	10	7	2	-	4	4	9	-	-
8	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad
	3	1	1	-	-	9	5	3	1	-	27	18	9	3	-	8	5	9	-	-
9	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad
	4	2	1	-	-	7	8	5	1	-	25	9	20	2	-	2	6	9	-	-
10	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad	Bas	LI	Int	UI	Ad
	4	1	2	-	-	6	6	6	1	-	13	14	17	6	-	2	4	8	1	-
11	Highly	motivated	Don't	At all		Highly	motivated	Don't	At all		Highly	motivated	Don't	At all		Highly	motivated	Don't	At all	
	1	6	-	-		5	14	-	-		20	35	2	1		11	6	-	-	
12	Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral			
	1	6				5	13				9	49				4	13			
13	Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral				Oral	Non-oral			
	6	1				13	5				49	9				13	4			
14	Indivu	Pairs	Group	Class		Indivu	Pairs	Group	Class		Indivu	Pairs	Group	Class		Indivu	Pairs	Group	Class	
	1	2	4	-		4	8	7	-		7	15	31	5		3	6	8	-	
15a	Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No			
	6	-				18	-				58	-				17	-			
15b	Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No			
	6	-				18	-				54	4				16	1			
15c	Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No				Yes	No			
	6	-				18	-				55	3				17	-			
16	WRITING					TWO PARAGRAPHS					INTRODUCING YOURSELF					WHAT U EXPECT TO LEARN				

According to the findings of the wants and needs analysis carried out in the subject "English for primary teachers" we observed that the majority of students have been studying English for between 11 and 13 years. 76% have taken English within the last year and only 2% had not taken English lessons within the last 6 years. This 2% were mature students who were unemployed and had returned to university to improve their qualifications.

The survey reveals that in the majority of cases (64%), students had **only** studied English at school. The remaining 36% of students had studied English not only at school but also at different places, sometimes combining more than one of the options proposed in the questionnaire. The most popular option, apart from school, was the Official Language School with 22%, followed by private language schools (18%), private lessons one to one (10%), summer camps (8%) and travelling abroad (5%).

The high percentage (90%) of students who did not have any certificate stood out. Only 10% stated that they had a certificate. From the 10 students with a certificate, 8 had a certificate from the Official Language School and 2 students had Trinity College certificates. However, the level of their certificates was A2.

Also, the fact that 80% of the students had never been to an English-speaking country and 15 out of the remaining 20% were enrolled on English courses running abroad was very enlightening. It was also significant that those who stated that they had been abroad were the ones who had English certificates.

The results of the questions related to the students' language skills (Q.7-10) are summarised in the following table (Table 4):

Table 4

Q.	Skills	Basic	Lower intermediate	Intermediate	Upper intermediate	Advanced
7	Oral/interaction	50	21	19	2	-
8	Listening	47	29	22	4	-
9	Writing	38	25	35	3	-
10	Reading	25	25	33	8	-

Considering the four questions as a whole, we observed that there is an increase in level as we progress from Q. 7 to Q.10 and that none of our students consider their language skills to be advanced despite the considerable number of years they have been learning English. A similar high percentage of the participants consider their oral/interaction skills (50%) and their listening skills (47%) to be basic; whereas there is a significant change in the tendency if one refers to writing and reading skills. Therefore, Spanish students seem to feel more self-confident when dealing with writing and reading skills than with those which involve some type of oral intervention.

In relation to the way the participants prefer to work in class, the questionnaire reflects the type of learning received in their past. They tend to prefer individual to team learning as they have followed the Traditional Learning Model, defined by Michaelsen (2013) in the following terms:

The Traditional Learning Model defines the instructor primarily as a dispenser of information, solely responsible for ensuring that learning occurs. The student is defined as a passive receiver of information and few if any of the resources they bring to the classroom are incorporated into the learning process.

Finally, we cannot ignore the high motivation expressed by students to take the course (Q. 11) and to participate both in class and out of class, as part of their autonomous learning (Q.15a-c). This is an incredibly positive aspect that works in the teacher's favour. Scholars like Eccles and Roeser (2011) and Thanasoulas (2000), claim that it is unlikely that a student with poor academic confidence would easily become an autonomous learner and that the student's motivation contributes to the achievement of academic confidence and goals.

4. Conclusions

In light of the above-mentioned results, we can establish a direct relationship between the students who were in English-speaking countries and getting a certificate in English. Thus, we can state that spending some time abroad has a beneficial impact on the students' level of English.

The students' feeling that they have a higher level in writing and reading skills in comparison with oral and listening skills reflects that a traditional approach in language teaching where the student does not interact with others is still present in our classes. This leads us to seriously consider the necessity of a change in the type of activities to be done in and out of the class. Students showed their dislike of interactive activities such as role plays, oral presentations, discussions in small groups and short conversations in pairs. However, these activities should be promoted in class and, consequently, monitored by teachers to improve their level of oral skills and subsequently of listening skills, as they would have to understand each other as part of the communication process.

The analysis reveals that the students need to develop their listening skills. Therefore, more listening activities should be proposed not only in class but also as part of their autonomous learning. We would suggest the use of new technologies for the improvement of this skill. The incredible number of websites that propose listening activities and the use of audiovisual material (Talavan 2007) become incredibly useful and fruitful in the students' learning process. Likewise, the use of the application *Moodle* as a platform by which the student would do some exercises and tests, would allow the students' development in ICTs and consequently of transversal skills.

According to the findings, we will have to design activities that will address specific areas of weakness, so as to foster the students' mastering of the English language. The low level in oral and listening skills stands out and, taking into account that the objective of language learning is to achieve an effective communication, a different approach to the traditional one needs to be adopted for the improvement of students' fluency in English. This reality makes us opt for a new approach in the teaching process. Students should take a more active role in class, which would involve more participative tasks and team work. Students should work in pairs and small groups improving their team work skills, which are highly demanded by the labour market.

In order to conclude, we could point out that the analysis has revealed the main pitfalls for and skills of the Spanish students. The data collected from the questionnaire has allowed the lecturers to "re-design" and "re-orient" the approach to deal with certain aspects of the subject. From the research, the students' self-consciousness about their low level of oral communication skills has been made patently obvious by the high percentage of the respondents who expressed their rejection to do or participate in oral activities.

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