# A Model for Implementing Academic English Lessons: Anadolu University Case<sup>1</sup>

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#### **Abstract**

This study aims to provide a model used by Modern Languages Department of Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages, in order to implement Academic English courses as a result of a curriculum renewal project started in the 2014-2015 Academic Year. The curriculum renewal process started with the implementation of the needs analysis process that arose out of the problems experienced in the existing system. After gathering the opinions of the various stakeholders and identifying the needs of the learners regarding learning English at their departments, Academic English lessons were inserted into the programs as elective courses. Academic English lessons were designed to be implemented at 6 different proficiency levels (from A2 to B2+) with varying contents determined considering the needs of the learners according to their academic fields. This paper will explain the whole curriculum renewal process including how the syllabi, the materials and the evaluation procedures were determined, implemented and revisited based on the feedback gathered from the learners and the teachers. Academic English lessons' addressing students' needs revealed increase both in the teachers and the students' motivation level as well as facilitating cooperation between language teachers and content teachers.

Keywords: Academic English, curriculum renewal, needs analysis, cooperation between language and content teachers

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#### Introduction

You might be an engineer, a businessman, a chemist, a philosopher or an educator, if you want to follow what is going on in the world and what your colleagues are doing you need to have good literacy and communication skills not be out of the game, and you need to do all of these in English. As stated by Dr. Christian Dahlheim at the 4. International Education Forum (4. Uluslararası Eğitim Forumu) in 2016, each university graduate is expected to be able to function in English in the international arena and to be able to adapt to various international contexts. At the same Forum, Prof. Dr. Refet Gürkaynak argued that knowing English today is the same thing as knowing how to read and write in the Industrial Revolution. He believes that we cannot succeed teaching English to our students in our country efficiently.

There are various reasons for this failure and various sources to blame; managers blame teachers for not using teaching methods efficiently, teachers blame the system for over focusing on testing, and hence, not having enough time for teaching, the system blames the teacher education programs for not equipping their teachers, and this blaming cycle goes on (Aydın, 2017). Turkish students start learning English at the second grade at state schools. However, the real problems begin when they reach university level and are required to continue their education in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) environment. After having English lessons for almost 10 years, students are given a Placement Test by the Schools of Foreign Languages and a big majority of them are identified as beginner learners, 82% as found out in a study by Paker (2014).

Schools of Foreign Languages are mainly responsible for helping their students gain essential language skills and strategies to be able to cope with their departmental studies. They, nevertheless, experience many problems, as discussed at the annual Directors' meetings

organized since 2008. High expectations of the faculty members at the departments from the students who start their education with a very low proficiency level, the mismatch between stakeholders' expectations and what is presented during the preparatory year, the insufficient human source for areas required for the language program, in addition to the skill of teaching such as planning the curriculum, preparing valid and reliable tests and providing professional development activities for their teachers are few of these problems (10. Yabanci Diller Yüksekokulu Yöneticileri Toplantısı Sonuç Bildirgesi, 2016).

Similar problems were also stated by foreign researchers focusing on the language programs in Turkey. A group of researchers from Oxford University (Macaro, Akıncıoğlu & Dearden, 2016) carried out interviews with the university students and their teachers, and concluded that although students believe in the necessity of having education in English, they find it challenging and do not feel ready to be able to follow their lessons in their departments in the foreign language. They argued that the pedagogical knowledge and skills of the teachers in the faculties in delivering content knowledge in the foreign language is at least as important as the students' proficiency level.

The research conducted by the British Council in 2015 focused on the state of English at Turkish higher education institutions and found similar results; students start their intensive language education with a very low proficiency level and are not equipped with sufficient skills and strategies for their departments as they exit from the language programs. In addition to the problems during the preparatory year, problems were stated regarding the education at the departments. Teachers' reluctance in using the target language during the lessons and overreliance on the first language were mentioned as the main sources of the experienced problems. The report suggests that the cause of Turkey's 'English deficit' stems from the problems in the primary, secondary and high school systems. Students who graduate from high schools are not capable of communicating in English. Thus, it is 'virtually impossible' to

reach the target level of B2 in the eight month periods of the preparatory school program. The report recommends shifting away the curriculum from English for General Purposes (EGP) towards English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), and advices arranging EGAP classes to cater for students' specialist academic fields. According to the report, an elective English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) course should be available in the final undergraduate year for those seeking jobs, and the curriculum for all of these programs should be based on a full needs analysis.

The results of British Council's study also suggests a tendency among the students and teachers towards English for Academic Purposes, EAP (the kind of English required for university study, e.g. reading academic books or journals, writing academic assignments or papers, listening to academic lectures, and taking part in academic discussion). As explained by Jordan (1997), EAP instruction can range from discipline-specific (i.e., English-for-specific-academic-purposes instruction [ESAP]) to discipline-general (i.e., English-for-general-academic-purposes instruction [EGAP]).

As Hyland (2006) states, EAP pedagogy provides focused instruction which aims to help academically oriented learners in being equipped with the necessary skills in functioning in their academic discourses. Therefore, EAP instructors are expected to prepare their students' "situated language use" (Basturkmen, 2012) such as writing academic essays, listening to academic lectures, and taking lecture notes, in order to undertake academic work as university students. Different from EAP, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is concerned with teaching the kind of English that relates to a person's occupation or job, e.g. writing business letters, making business phone calls, reading professional reports, giving a business presentation, etc. (British Council, 2015).

This paper presents how the model of supporting learners throughout their 4-year education after the preparatory program was established at Anadolu University as an outcome of a curriculum renewal process which started in the 2014-2015 academic year.

#### The Context

Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages has two departments; Basic Foreign Languages Department offers intensive language education during an academic year in four languages; English, German, French and Russian. Students studying German and French are the ones who continue their education at the Education Faculty and are educated to become German and French teachers. Russian students continue at the Literature Faculty and study Russian Language and Literature. All these three groups of students need to have a sufficient proficiency level to be able to cope with the requirements of their majors. Students at the English Department are divided into three groups; the ones who have 100% English medium instruction, as in the Engineering Faculty, the ones who have only 30% of their education in English and 70% in Turkish, as in the Communication Sciences Faculty, and the ones who have 100% Turkish medium instruction but want to learn English voluntarily before going to their departments as in the Law Faculty. Starting in the 2014-2015 academic year, a curriculum renewal process has been implemented at the preparatory program. After identifying the problems and finding out the needs of the learners by gathering the opinions of all the stakeholders a learning-outcome-based curriculum was developed. Each component of the curriculum, including the materials, teaching methodology, assessment and professional development have been aligned to the learning outcomes of the curriculum (Aydın, 2017).

Modern Languages Department is responsible for providing elective courses for the students at different faculties in seven different languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian and Chinese). In addition to these elective courses, the program offered

compulsory language course as required by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) as well as the language courses different departments incorporated in their programs at different proficiency levels. However, there was a lack of organization and problems about the decisions made. To illustrate, students studying at the Faculty of Sports Sciences were expected to pass English course at Advanced level without having any background knowledge in the language. The dissatisfaction level of the students and the teachers made the curriculum renewal process an obligation to follow. The following steps were taken during the renewal process:

- 1. Identifying the problems and the needs of the stakeholders
- 2. Making necessary changes in the regulations
- 3. Involving the teachers in the development of the course contents
- 4. Introducing the new courses to the faculty members
- 5. Implementing the new curriculum and getting feedback
- 6. Making revisions based on the feedback

## 1. Identifying The Problems and The Needs of The Stakeholders

Needs analysis process included gathering the opinions of the students, teachers, department heads and the directors of the faculties. Various questionnaires were given to these groups to gather their opinions in addition to conducting semi-structured and focus group interviews. While diverse answers were gathered from all these groups, the overall results of this needs analysis process revealed that students having their education in an English medium instruction department mainly need to be able to;

a) understand their teachers' explanations in English and take notes during the courses,
 and follow the discussions in the classroom,

- b) ask questions to the teachers when they don't understand the concepts, participate in the discussions during the courses and make presentations when necessary,
- c) read and understand the books, articles and studies related to their fields, and
- d) write reports, projects and summaries of the studies in their fields.

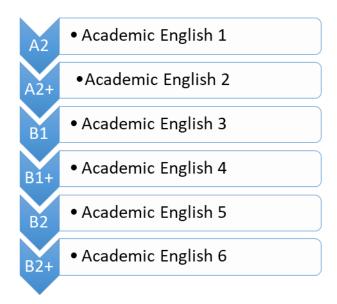
These results revealed the inevitability of developing language courses specific to different fields. It was clear that general language courses addressing all the faculty students with different needs at different proficiency levels were not satisfactory for them. The decision of changing the system necessitated making changes in the regulations of the university as well.

# 2. Making Necessary Changes in The Regulations

The first change began by transforming the compulsory YÖK language courses into distance education system. Getting benefit of the distance education provided by Open Education Faculty, students from all the faculties at the university were decided to take the 2-hour language course through distance education. Distance education provided various opportunities for the students through live lessons, e-books, extra materials for studying, study questions for the materials in the course book and sample exam questions were all built-in a learning management system including a mobile application. Additional support was also offered to the ones who needed face-to face education.

In addition to the compulsory language courses, a model system was created for inserting Academic English as elective courses into the programs of the departments. Academic English (AE) lessons were designed at six different proficiency levels (see Figure 1).

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The main idea of this system was controlling the proficiency level of the course and adapting the content according to the needs of the students at different faculties. Since a Tourism Faculty student has different needs from a Science Faculty student, the content of the courses would be designed addressing these different needs. While students who do not get preparatory education would start with Academic English 1, the ones who already had the intensive language education in general English would start with Academic English 3 at their departments. Students exit the preparatory education with a B2 level in general English, yet B1 level was thought to be appropriate for the students to continue language education incorporating mainly academic skills with the content in their scientific fields.

This new model required certain changes in the regulations of the University. In order to be able to make these changes, a series of meetings were organized with different groups including the highest level of management, that is the Rector and the related Vice Rectors, and the Deans and the Vice Deans of the Faculties as well as the personnel related with the student affairs and student information system. The meetings included explaining the results of the needs analysis process, the suggested model and the necessary adaptations that needed to be made in the regulations, the programs and the technical aspects (such as opening the

new Academic English courses and aligning the old language lessons to the new ones). The new system was then presented to Anadolu University Senate and approved by them. The Senate also approved the decision of indicating the proficiency level of the language course in the students' transcripts.

## 3. Involving The Teachers in The Development of The Course Contents

All 24 teachers of the Modern Languages Department were involved in the whole process since the beginning of needs analysis. After making the necessary changes in the regulations, a more in-depth study was necessary to develop the content of the courses. Firstly, teachers were given the choice of deciding the faculty they wanted to work at and to specialize more. They were informed that they were not expected to be experts in the fields, but being interested in reading materials, let's say in Communication Sciences, would make the whole process easier and more enjoyable for them. Before preparing the detailed syllabi for each faculty, an overall framework for each Academic English course was determined after a series of meetings with the teachers. Thus, the general picture of the courses was clarified for everybody. Samples of this general syllabi can be seen for Academic English 1 and Academic English 6 in Appendix A.

After placing the teachers to faculties and preparing the general framework, a more indepth study process began to determine the specific learning outcomes and to prepare the contents of the courses for each faculty. A large scale search for all printed and online material was the first step of this process. This search included talking to the teachers at the faculties and asking for their ideas about the content and sometimes getting the materials they were already using in their courses or they suggested. Teachers working together and sharing their sources had a busy and productive summer in 2014 and were ready for the first

implementation in the 2014-2015 academic year. A sample syllabus for Academic English 4 prepared for the Communication Sciences Faculty students can be found in Appendix B.

## 4. Introducing The New Courses to The Faculty Members

Once they were ready, Academic English courses were introduced to the faculties. Meetings were organized between two groups of teachers, the ones that would teach Academic English courses and the ones at the faculties. The managers were also invited to the meetings. The aim and the design of the courses were explained and their initial feedback was gathered before the implementation. Visual explanations were prepared showing how the old and the new courses would be aligned to each other, as seen in Appendix C. Especially advisors who would guide the students during the registration process were informed about these courses.

#### 5. Implementing The New Curriculum and Getting Feedback

2014-2015 Fall term was the first implementation of the new system. Contrary to the expectations, Academic English courses were not elected by many of the students in the first term. Immediate feedback gathered from the faculties revealed that students were reluctant to take these courses; they thought the courses would be very demanding because of the term "Academic". This situation required taking new decisions for changing the misconceptions of the students. The steps taken were explained below.

At the end of the term, students' and teachers' perceptions of the courses were gathered with a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked the subjects to indicate their opinions on various components including the objectives of the course, the materials used, the teaching methodology and their alignment with the proficiency level of the courses. The responses

revealed mostly positive perceptions of the students who had Academic English courses.

They mainly stated that;

- the course they took met their expectations,
- learning outcomes were clearly stated at the beginning of the lesson,
- teaching pedagogy was efficient,
- materials were interesting and compatible with the objectives of the courses, and
- the distribution of the skills was appropriate.

Students also indicated that Academic English course they took helped them to improve their general English proficiency level. They highlighted their belief in the usefulness of Academic English courses for their future jobs.

Some of the ideas of the students for open-ended questions were as follows:

- I liked this lesson a lot and I think it was very beneficial for us.
- We liked this lesson, materials and the teacher.
- At first, I was reluctant to choose this lesson because of the name 'Academic' but then
  I thought the lesson was nice and it included lots of materials for my department.
- We have a good rapport with the teacher and he motivates us to learn better.
- *I am very pleased about the content and the methodology of the course.*
- *I improved my speaking skill and learnt English in an enjoyable way.*

Teachers teaching Academic English courses were highly motivated and revealed similar positive responses. Some of the ideas gathered at the end of the first implementation can be presented as follows:

• The students were very interested in the course and they were motivated, this increased my motivation even more.

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• I was free to determine the content and felt more autonomous compared to the courses

I gave before.

#### **6.** Making Revisions Based on The Feedback

The first step that had to be taken based on the feedback was advertising Academic English lessons more to the students. Posters specific to each faculty were prepared by the teachers and were announced in various places. Some samples of the posters can be found in Appendix D. However, the main advertisement was made through the students who had the Academic English courses in the fall term. Sharing their positive opinions with their peers encouraged more students to choose these courses the following term. The increasing number of the students taking Academic English courses each term is a sign of changing perspectives. While 432 students enrolled in the courses in the 2014-2015 Fall term, this number increased to 1146 for 2017-2018 Fall term. Another sign of increasing motivation is the rising number of the courses at higher proficiency levels. That is, while we did not have any Academic English 6 and had only 5 students who had Academic English 5 in the 2014-2015 Fall term, now we have 5 Academic English 5 courses and 1 Academic English 6 course at different faculties in the 2016-2017 Spring term.

After implementing the new curriculum for three years, teachers were asked to make an overall evaluation of the new system. The results of feedback suggest that the new system is working successfully and addressing the needs of the students. Some examples of teachers' evaluations can be found below:

• I think we've achieved our goals with Academic English courses in Literature Faculty.

A student who starts with Academic English 1 has the opportunity of reaching at B2+

level with Academic English 6 until he graduates.

- There is a high demand and motivation for these elective courses. Students, especially the ones who think about having master's degree seem to be more motivated to get Academic English courses.
- Most of the students were positive about the course and advised it to other students.
   They were interested in the materials and participated in the classroom activities and fulfilled the requirements completely.
- According to feedback I got from students, it seems that reading, listening materials
  and videos related to their departments attracted their attention.
- Students stated feeling more secure because of following a content-based syllabus. I
  feel peaceful as a teacher for carrying out my lessons according to my students'
  needs.
- We work in coordination with the faculty members and department heads. Orientation seminars and informative meetings are organized for teachers and students in the faculty. Therefore, advisors having enough information about the content and levels of Academic English lessons can guide their students properly.
- Teachers' involvement of the decision making process on their workplaces increased our motivation and sense of belonging.

Student feedback was gathered at the end of each term. Some of the ideas of the students at the end of 2016-2017 Fall Term were as follows:

- This course is certainly beneficial. I want to thank to our faculty and the teacher.
- This course helped me to improve my speaking skills and continue to learn English in an enjoyable way after the preparatory year.
- I can take this course every term until I graduate because I like the teacher and find the lesson efficient.

As seen in the samples, students were mostly satisfied with Academic English courses.

Table 1. showing the perceptions of the students who had Academic English during 20162017 Fall term supports these positive views.

As the students' ideas reveal, their satisfaction with the Academic English courses were high; they were pleased with the objectives and the content of the lessons as well as the materials and the pedagogy. They thought their expectations were met and believed the courses to be helpful for their future jobs.

## Conclusion

Curriculum renewal is a never-ending process because each time curriculum is applied, it is revised according to feedback gathered. Therefore, as suggested by Bosworth, Einer and Smith (2013) curriculum-related documents should be regarded as work-in-progress. While there are always things to do in terms of increasing the quality of teaching, the increasing number of the students choosing the Academic English courses is a sign showing that we are on the right track. More research and more in-service teacher training on delivering academic content in the foreign language would always facilitate the system. Similarly, more cooperation between English teachers and teachers at the faculties is necessary for the betterment of the applications. However, it is possible to say that the whole process of creating a system for combining three components; academic skills, foreign language skills and the content knowledge facilitated students' learning process. Involving the students and the teachers in the process by analyzing their needs is a good starting point for sustaining language education throughout students' undergraduate education. The content prepared addressing their needs also seems to increase the motivation levels of both the teachers and the students, as well as preparing students for real life and giving teachers

autonomy in decision making. It also facilitated cooperation among language teachers and teachers at the departments.

Table 1
Students Perceptions of Academic English Lessons in 2016-2017 Fall Term

	Totally disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Totally agree		Av.
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Objectives of the lesson were defined clearly.	11	5.12	4	1.86	3	1.4	74	34.42	123	57.21	4.37
The lesson met my expectations.	13	6.05	9	4.19	9	4.19	76	35.35	108	50.23	4.2
Teaching was interesting.	13	6.05	10	4.65	18	8.37	59	27.44	115	53.49	4.18
Teaching met my expectations.	16	7.44	8	3.72	13	6.05	66	30.7	112	52.09	4.16
This lesson will contribute me in my future job.	14	6.51	11	5.12	24	11.16	65	30.23	101	46.98	4.06
I would like to get the next level of this lesson.	13	6.05	7	3.26	23	10.7	61	28.37	111	51.63	4.16
The content of the lesson was suitable for my English level.	14	6.51	11	5.12	16	7.44	68	31.63	106	49.3	4.12
Materials used were compatible with lesson objectives.	10	4.65	7	3.26	10	4.65	80	37.21	108	50.23	4.25
There were enough listening exercises in the materials.	12	5.61	13	6.07	18	8.41	76	35.51	95	44.39	4.07
There were enough reading exercises in the materials.	10	4.65	8	3.72	15	6.98	73	33.95	109	50.7	4.22
There were enough writing exercises in the materials.	10	4.69	17	7.98	22	10.33	70	32.86	94	44.13	4.04
There were enough grammar exercises in the materials.	8	3.72	14	6.51	15	6.98	79	36.74	99	46.05	4.15
There were enough speaking exercises in the materials.	14	6.51	13	6.05	17	7.91	81	37.67	90	41.86	4.02
Materials helped me participate in the lesson actively.	12	5.58	10	4.65	24	11.16	78	36.28	91	42.33	4.05
Materials used were interesting.	12	5.61	15	7.01	28	13.08	75	35.05	84	39.25	3.95
This lesson helped me to improve me English level.	14	6.51	16	7.44	20	9.3	72	33.49	93	43.26	4

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# Appendix A

# Samples of the general syllabi for Academic English 1 and 6

# **Academic English I**

Reading Skills for Academic Study: Understanding key vocabulary, Getting the gist of the text, Skimming and scanning, Understanding text organization, Developing basic vocabulary knowledge; Listening Skills for Academic Study: Listening for main idea, Listening for detailed information, Listening to short daily conversations, Listening for key ideas; Speaking Skills for Academic Study: Introducing oneself, Maintaining everyday conversations, Giving descriptions of events, Asking and answering questions; Writing Skills for Academic Study: Writing simple sentences, Writing notes, Writing basic descriptions of events, Writing informal letters.

#### **Academic English VI**

Reading Skills for Academic Study: Drawing conclusions based on the information in the text, Comparing and contrasting main ideas, Summarizing extracts from various sources, Evaluating information; Listening Skills for Academic Study: Following lectures, Synthesizing, Evaluating and transferring what was heard; Speaking Skills for Academic Study: Participating in discussions, Justifying point of view, Using strategies to achieve comprehension, Carrying out interviews, Summarizing discussions, Giving longer

presentations on academic topics; Writing Skills for Academic Study: Writing well-researched essays and reports, Writing commentaries.

# Appendix B

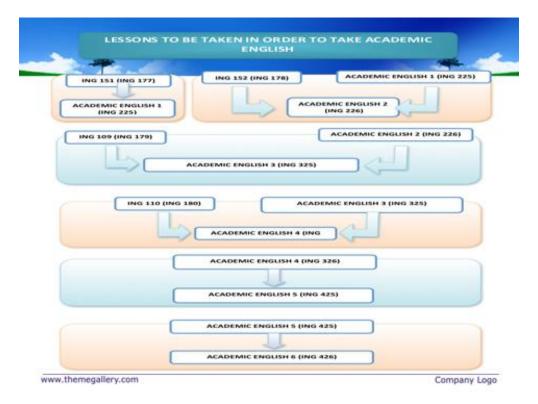
# **Academic English 4**

# **Communication Sciences Faculty**

Wee	Content
k	
Add	Introduction to the course; an interest survey
-	
drop	
1	Determining the key concepts: Creativity, Power and Technology
	a. The role of creativity in media, cinema, public relations,
	b. The role of power in media, cinema, public relations,
	c. The role of technology in media, cinema, public relations
2	Terminology research related with their departments ( Group-work Presentations)
2	Writing a CV
	Reading some samples of cover letters and creating one ;Using mind maps for organization Filling out a mini survey on the concept of power
	Listening and note taking
	The Basics of Doing Research
	The Busics of Bonig Research
3	Talking on leaders and their qualities
	Reading: "Move aside, president of Uruguay: We have a new 'poorest world leader'
_	Listening: Academic Survival Skills
4	Group work Presentations (Terminology research on their fields)
5	Useful expressions: Debate Language
	Group work Presentation for the Final Term
6	Mid term exams
7	Some important points on Academic Writing: Citation, giving text reference, borrowing ideas
	(paraphrasing, Summarizing, Direct Quoting)
	Reading on "Creativity"
8	Mind- Map on the topic "Creativity"
0	Wring the first draft of their opinion essays (be collected and given feedback)  The use of technology in cinema, advertising, public relations:
9	"Why I document the often violent and traumatic daily lives of others:"
	(http://blog.ted.com/2013/12/06/q-and-a-with-photographer-jon-lowenstein/)
	(http://ofog.tod.com/2015/12/00/q and a with photographor jon towerstein/)
10	Listening and Speaking Activities: "Media Literacy"
4.4	Reading an argumentative Essay: "Advertising Manipulates Viewers"
11	Talking about some of the unforgettable dialogues of some cult movies
10	Talking about the distinctive points of writing a dialogue or a script for an ad.
12-	Presentation weeks
13	Finale
14	Finals

Appendix C

Visual Explanation of Aligning Old English Courses to the New System



# Appendix D

# Samples of Posters Prepared for Introducing Academic English Courses



