

ESP TEACHING IN TERMS OF THE STUDENTS' NEEDS

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Abstract. *English has definitely been acknowledged as the language of modern global communication by the national authorities. Its introduction and existence in the school and university curricula in our country is an obvious confirmation of its importance as a tool for personal, social and professional communication. This survey was designed to establish the students' estimates and predictions about the role English is going to play in their future lives. The results are supposed to help in the design of the teaching materials primarily but also in the improvement of the overall goals of foreign language instruction.*

Key words: *ESP teaching, higher education outcomes and goals, foreign language skills, survey*

1. INTRODUCTION

English for specific purposes, or its abbreviated form ESP, is concerned with learning English for professional purposes. It is also learnt for academic reasons and this combination is logically associated with higher education institutions or their universities and faculties preparing students for different work and scientific fields. The English learnt there has a clearly defined purpose, to serve the immediate needs of the experts-to-be, who are bound to communicate with their peers at the international level. Thus it is a function of the content taught or learnt within the curricula of the higher education institutions.

The emergence of such a conception of English language learning could actually be traced back to three things: the newly formed situation in the world in terms of the economic and political power which brought English into the foreground, a revolutionary shift in linguistics turning away from abstract topics in favour of more practical usages, and, probably as a consequence of the second factor, the establishment of the focus on the foreign language learner or student. First of all, the end of the Second World War brought about an unprecedented expansion of the scientific, technical and economic activities

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surpassing the national boundaries. This gave rise to the need for a common language of international communication. English was chosen to fulfill that role as an understandable consequence of the USA dominance in the post-war world. For different reasons it continued to spread widely so that today it is undeniably a global *lingua franca* in professional and academic domains (ESP and EAP), among others. The second factor that influenced the emergence of ESP was a radical shift within linguistics from the abstract and theoretical issues towards the language usage in real communication situations. Dealing with language in this way shows that it is not static and that it differs in various situations. One step further was the realisation that foreign language teaching should be modified to suit the particular needs of the learner in specific, primarily professional situations. In later systematisations and generalisations this proved to be one of a few absolute characteristics of ESP. Finally, the third factor mentioned above is closely related to the previous one and refers to change of the foreign language learner's role. The method of learning and its application in the classroom is not a primary focus any more. Instead, the learners became the factor to be observed and analysed. They turned out to be different in terms of the previous language education and competence, their skills and learning strategies, and their needs and interests. These differences led to the crucial question – what reasons they had for learning some foreign language. Their needs therefore gave rise to a different teaching conception respecting the students' immediate goals and their time. The foreign language learning was to be both effective and efficient.

In order to sum up the relationships between ESP, or learning English for specific purposes, and the fields or disciplines that it covers, most theoreticians have come up with three *absolute* (as differing from *variable*) characteristics of ESP: 1. it should meet the specific needs of English language learners, 2. it should use the methodology and activities of the disciplines it is needed for, and 3. it should use the language, discourse and skills characteristic of these disciplines. In practical terms, these definitions contributed to greater flexibility in devising the language courses. On the other hand, the needs of the learners are seen as covering three aspects. The first one is successful communication in the professional context which involves satisfactory performance of the language users but also using the literature for further improvement. The second aspect refers to developing general academic skills necessary for sophisticated research and development. And finally, the third aspect to be covered in language teaching is the use of language in informal communication situations, both orally and in writing.

English teaching in higher education institutions is likewise to a great extent dependent on the scientific fields studied there, but also on the students' competence and needs. Unlike the professionals working in specific branches of human activities, students are a vague population – their needs, as far as English is concerned, are not as clearly defined or rather the students themselves are not fully aware of them. Teachers, on the other hand, should always have them in mind relying on the curriculum of the higher education institution. In this way they can act as valuable guides to the goals and outcomes of the academic and professional education. Their knowledge of the specific disciplines of study is absolutely necessary. It is also important for the right choice of the teaching materials and textbooks as well as the classroom activities, all of them leading to effective communication in the students' future work.

2. THE AIM AND METHOD OF SURVEY

English has definitely been acknowledged as the language of modern global communication by the national authorities. Its introduction and existence in the school and university curricula in our country is an obvious confirmation of its importance as a tool for personal, social and professional communication. This survey was designed to establish the students' estimates and predictions about the role English is going to play in their future lives. Its starting point was the establishment of the conditions in which English is learnt and the definition of the points to be stressed in the process of teaching, always having in mind the students' motivation as the force necessary for carrying their needs out. The results of the survey are supposed to help in the design of the teaching materials primarily but also in the improvement of the overall goals of foreign language instruction. The survey was carried out for three consecutive years, 2010, 2011 and 2012. It took place in November of each year, roughly at the same time, involving 69, 97 and 110 students respectively. The survey contained fifteen questions referring to the students' language experience or history, and their perception of what aspects of language learning will be most useful to them. Their answers were analysed using the descriptive and analytical statistics methods and the results were represented in terms of percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, variation coefficient and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The initial hypothesis was that it is important to be aware of the role of English learning in schools and universities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first half of the questions (1-8) was meant to sum up the respondents' experience about their learning and use of English. It could be subdivided into the questions concerning more or less objective facts (1-5) and those involving certain estimates and evaluations (6-8).

Table 1

Duration of state school learning	Percentage	Number of respondents
10 years	13.04	276
8 years	51.09	
less than 4 years	10.50	
none	19.41	
Year	Variations in the duration of learning	
2010	Cv =54%	
2011	Cv =63%	
2012	Cv =48%	

Once the students are enrolled at the faculty, there is nothing one can do about the different English competence they bring. The coefficient of variation is very high in all the school years investigated showing the "group's" heterogeneity. In this case, classroom work is bound to be less effective than desirable ($C_v < 30\%$). The best thing to undertake in the beginning is to organise work in groups comprising the students with the similar

level of the knowledge of English. This would involve having preferably three groups: beginning, lower-intermediate and upper-intermediate.

Table 2

Duration of private language school learning	Percentage
3-4 years	2.96
less than 2 years	9.63
none	87.41

Table 3

Way of learning	Percentage
Films	19.13
Music	6.86
TV	11.91
Internet	10.83
Books	1.08

The fact that a great majority of the students has never attended private language school courses nor learnt English in some other way using films, music, TV, the internet or books, (66.43%), indicates that it is vitally important for the authorities and English teachers alike to have sound policies in order to produce desirable results. English language learning is thus controllable to a very high degree. Just because of that the responsibilities are clear and cannot be averted.

Although the internet communication is supposed to open the national boundaries, our students do not seem to use it effectively – only every eleventh student communicates on the internet in English. One of the reasons might also be related to insufficient knowledge of English. Whatever the reason, the internet is simply not used either as a source of English learning or a medium for use and activating one's knowledge. One of the ways to improve this practice is to have as one of the tasks direct communication over the internet during the class or as a homework task.

Table 4

Travelling and staying abroad	Percentage
English-speaking countries	0.73
non English-speaking countries	34.78
none	64.49

Table 5

English use experience	Percentage
Internet	11.19
encounters with foreigners	9.03
none	52.71

Questions 4. and 5. refer to the respondents' experience in the use of English. The fact that more than half of the students have never used English for communication either

while travelling abroad or using the communication-in-English possibilities in our country indicates that the use of English is largely associated with English language classes which makes them even more important.

Table 6

Successful Communication	Unsuccessful Communication
35.51%	64.49%

The answers to this question are highly correlated with the answers to questions 4. and 5. The students who had never travelled abroad simply did not have the opportunity to communicate in English. Anyway, the number of students who felt unable to use English is very high considering the fact that almost the same number of respondents had been learning English at school for eight to ten years.

Table 7

Skill	Easiest skill			Most difficult skill		
	2010 rank	2011 rank	2012 rank	2010 rank	2011 rank	2012 rank
reading	2	2	2	3	3.5	3
oral communication	4	3	4	1	1	1
writing	3	4	3	2	2	2
listening	1	1	1	4	3.5	4

Table 8

Most necessary skill		
2010 rank	2011 rank	2012 rank
2	2	2.5
1	1	1
3	3.5	2.5
4	3.5	4

Table 9

Year	7.-9. (Rs)	8.-9. (Rs)
2010	-0.8	0.8
2011	-0.05	0.55
2012	-0.85	0.95

The answers to questions 7., 8. and 9. gave almost identical pictures as to what skills the respondents regarded as the easiest and most difficult. It is easy to see from the ranks that the skills that are considered to be most necessary for their future work are exactly the skills that are considered to be the most difficult to practice. These ranks however were used to correlate the ranks in every particular school year by means of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. This was meant to show the relationship between the easiest skill to practice (question 7) and the most difficult skill to practice (question 8) on the one hand and the most necessary skill on the other.

Question 7. R_s in 2010 shows a highly significant linear correlation between listening and oral communication – unfortunately, the students are aware that the more they need the skill, the less they are successful practicing it. The results in 2012 are quite similar. On the other hand, the 2011 R_s shows no linear correlation between reading and oral communication. This result could be significant in terms of relating it to $C_v = 63\%$ (question 1).

Question 8. The results in all three years show linear correlation between oral communication, which was marked as the most difficult skill by them, and the degree of the need for it. The difference though could be seen between 2010 and 2012 R_s showing highly significant linear correlation, and 2011 R_s being somewhat less significant.

The second half of the questions (9-15) is related to the future and is concerned with the respondents' opinions about the place of English and other foreign languages in their future professional work. Questions 10. and 11. refer to the job requirements or to what is expected be desirable qualifications in terms of foreign language competence.

Table 10

English is a job requirement	90.94%
English is not a job requirement	4.71%
English might be a job requirement	4.35%

Table 11

Some other foreign language is a job requirement	40.57%
Some other foreign language is not a job requirement	41.32%
Some other foreign language might be a job requirement	18.11%

These two questions go a step further – they deal with the actual necessity of foreign languages for professional communication. The indisputable role of English as the modern *lingua franca* has not been confirmed by the students' answers. What also strikes the eye is a certain discrepancy between these answers and the answers concerning the role of English as a job requirement – why should it be a job requirement if it is not going to be used at work? As for other foreign languages, they reflect the students' expectations of the prospective contacts at work.

Table 12

English will be necessary at work	72.46%
English won't be necessary at work	11.59%
English might be necessary at work	15.95%

Table 13

Some other foreign language will be necessary at work	23.19%
Some other foreign language won't be necessary at work	53.62%
Some other foreign language might be necessary at work	23.19%

Questions 14. and 15. are concerned with two apparently opposed aspects of English language competence. According to the findings of the survey, professional vocabulary or

terms are thought of as more necessary to learn than grammatical correctness. Although most students believe that grammatical correctness is significant because it helps them to avoid miscommunication and because it is a reflection of their general attitude to work, about a third of the students are convinced that *any* communication is satisfactory. These students reflect a tendency towards ELF or the English that is used for international communication rather than the communication with the native speakers of English.

Table 14

SP vocabulary is necessary to learn	93.78%
SP vocabulary is not necessary to learn	6.22%

Table 15

Grammatical correctness will be necessary at work	66.45%
Grammatical correctness won't be necessary at work	33.55%

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the survey show that even at the tertiary level of education English still has to be learnt not only as a means for further academic development but also as remedial and reinforcement procedures concerning the students' language competence. English as a subject at this level of education is obviously a very important way in the English language competence improvement especially considering the fact that for our students schools and universities are almost an exclusive way of learning but also of communicating in a foreign language. Productive language skills, oral communication and writing, although time-consuming and more difficult to practice, should be emphasised as most necessary. As for the standing dichotomy in ESP between the vocabulary to be learnt and practised, and grammar correctness, the results of the survey are in line with an emerging trend in language teaching to stress the importance of getting the message across even at a cost of perfectly formulated structures.

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ESP NASTAVA U ODNOSU NA POTREBE STUDENATA

Engleski jezik je definitivno priznat u državnim institucijama kao jezik moderne globalne komunikacije. Njegovo uvođenje i postojanje u školskim i univerzitetskim programima u našoj zemlji predstavlja očiglednu potvrdu njegovog značaja kao instrumenta lične, društvene i profesionalne komunikacije. Ova anketa je imala za cilj da utvrdi procene i predviđanja studenata u vezi sa ulogom koju će engleski jezik igrati u njihovim budućim životima. Njeni rezultati bi trebalo da pomognu prvenstveno u kreiranju nastavnih materijala kao i u poboljšanju sveukupnih ciljeva nastave stranih jezika.

Ključne reči: ESP nastava, ishodi i ciljevi visokog obrazovanja, jezičke veštine, anketa