

Deliberate Techniques in Teaching ESP at Polytechnic University of Tirana

Fatmir Vrapi

Centre of Foreign Languages Faculty of Mathematics and
Physics Engineering Polytechnic University of Tirana

Viola Karapici

Agency for Quality Assurance in the Pre-University
Education Ministry of Education

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to present and find out the techniques used in teaching English for Specific Purposes at Polytechnic University of Tirana, whether the syllabus and materials used are effective, and whether the feedback from the students is positive. This is mostly a qualitative study. Two lecturers from the Foreign Language Centre, part of the Polytechnic University of Tirana, were selected in this study to obtain and analyze the real data. There was also a questionnaire from two students' groups that had already taken ESP classes, a subject in their first semester. The data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis. The results showed that teachers used a variety of methods in teaching ESP to students of Engineering Branches. The methods resulted mostly successful, and there was mainly positive feedback from students, but it also leaves space for improvement and suggestions on steps that could be taken in order to achieve more and better practical outcomes. After having studied the textbooks and CD, teachers modified these teaching materials based on students' prior knowledge in the field of ESP and adapted them with their syllabuses and lesson plans. The materials used tend to develop all the necessary skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) and competencies needed from the students (linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic) in compliance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As an assessment method, both oral and written tests were used at the end of the teaching period that corresponded to the end of the Semester. However, continuous assessment, including also the constant feedback during the classes, was part of the general assessment for the students to obtain the final mark.

Keywords: ESP materials, GE level, feedback, setting, assessment, Polytechnic University.

INTRODUCTION

English for specific purposes has always been a subject of discussion among educators and academic managers. Due to the prevalence of it, nowadays, it is highly important to determine the teaching methods and designed materials, on how they could be taught and developed for learners to faster build up the needed abilities and skills in order to use them in a specific field of study, inquiry or workplace.

The emergence of English as a world language has led in recent years to the necessity of developing a more specific language learning that will be appropriated to the labour market. However, what is ESP sprout and why is it important?

According to Strevens (1977) “ESP concerns the emergence of a number of activities, movements and subjects that are carried out predominantly, not exclusively in English across the world”. This means that learners will exploit their knowledge for occupational or study purposes.

While Coffey (1985), on the other hand, observes that ESP is “a quick and economical use of English language to pursue a course of academic study (EAP) or effectiveness in paid employment (EOP)”.

Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) state that: “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reasons for learning”. So, Hutchinson emphasizes ESP to be an approach to motor product which means that language learning and not language use is highlighted. This will point out that ESP will develop a career like law, engineering or business, in general.

With all the above definitions mentioned, Lorenzo (2005) also reminds us that ESP “concentrates more on language in context, than on teaching grammar and language structures”. Because of this, different factors have to be taken into account to better understand how the communicative, social, interpersonal and discursive content shapes its form and usage. For this reason, the current paper aims to mention deliberate techniques in teaching ESP to students and question the fact that with ESP only, a “language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smoothen the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments”, Basturkmen (2006:18).

Notwithstanding the fact that the term ‘lingua franca’ can be mostly adapted by English language pro-motors, recently, there are still plenty of other challenges and hints of teaching it as a language to foreigners. Not only the acquisition of the abilities and skills can be really hard, but also under certain circumstances and classroom settings, grammar and vocabulary of General English. pose obstacles in professional teaching. This means that students will learn ESP, while practicing GE. as the best conjecture to practice the language.

In Albania, English for Specific Purposes is normally conducted and taught at University. It is part of the Higher Education Curriculum and in most cases, it is covered in the First Year of Bachelor Studies. ESP is usually spread among Specific Faculties as a tool to help students get used with a specific glossary and terminology, and further on with their study research areas, by taking into consideration the fact that a lot of their literature and study materials are covered by English language. ESP covers 5 classes per week, out of which 4 seminars and 1 lecture.

What is worth mentioning is that ESP and GE are different from the methodology, and also from the materials used in the classroom. Students use materials that are suitable with the Profile Subject they are studying. Since the materials of students are ready-set from Engineering Textbooks and their subject objectives are well defined from the very beginning of the academic

year, theoretically, it should not seem to be a complex issue. But, the reality of academic-setting is quite different. According to the pre-university curricula, student should have achieved B2 level as an exit- level from Comprehensive School. Supposedly, they are proficient in understanding and speaking General English, and there is no need for the university teachers to furthermore explain grammar rules and regularities. Presumably, this means that teachers should no longer focus on GE, rather than on ESP materials. Nevertheless, this is an issue often raised among educators regarding their professional proficiency in teaching ESP. The widespread assumption and view is that the ESP teachers are mostly language teachers, and are not required to have been specialized in subject areas of knowledge. An educator teaching mechanical engineering, not necessarily needs to be specialized in mechanics, but one needs to have an understanding of the subject area and certain activities.

To conclude the point, when teaching ESP classes, teachers of the specific subject need to have some general knowledge on the subject-matter they are teaching, but also display a genuine interest and zeal towards it, and ideally, support and encourage students to extend their knowledge on their subject area.

SCOPE AND REVIEW OF ESP

Over the years the definition of ESP has changed, improved, but has also remained the same in substance. Hutchinson stated (1987) ESP is an approach of teaching a language having proper command on syllabus, methods and the activities used for learning a language on the basis of the needs of the learners and for the antecedent of their learning.

According to Dudley- Evans & John (1998, p.1): Nowadays, ESP has been shifted from modals to general ELT, still it has reserved its focus on the practicalities of the results. ESP has always been concerned with the needs analysis, so together with the help of tracking the needs, we can see and also enhance the abilities and skills of the learners, so that they can communicate effectively in their work and study with the help of well-defined tasks through higher integrated skills.

According to Evans (1977) ESP is delineating to encounter the distinct needs of the learners. ESP lays emphasis on the language appropriateness and its semantic and morphological meaning, not on the lexical or syntactic meaning of the language.

Hereupon, based on linguistic terminology, ESP means what learner needs in the target situation or what one wants about his function of language usage (Khan et al, 2011).

TRAITS OF ESP

Stevens' (1988) definition of ESP makes a distinction between 1) *absolute characteristics* and 2) *two variable characteristics*

According to Stevens' (1988) the absolute characteristics of ESP are determined as follows:

- Meet specified needs of the learners;
- Content- centred on particular subjects, professions and social activities;
- Centred on that language, which is appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics and analysis of the discourse;
- Contrasting with General English (GE)

According to Strevens' (1988) the variable characteristics are described as follows:

- Restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);
- Not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, pp. 4-5) on the other hand, have introduced an adjusted definition of ESP as claimed by Strevens' (1988). According to them, absolute characteristics include: a) ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner; b) ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; and c) ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres, appropriate to these activities

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES USED IN TEACHING ESP TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN ALBANIA

Hutchinson and Waters (1990) stated that for language learning, relevant knowledge and grasp is not enough for learners to make things meaningful, but the fulfilment of needs and requirements to be adopted and replied in language; the learner is communicatively competent in one language, but does not necessarily know the special terms or specific forms of the relevant language. This means that language use and application differ a lot, from language learning. Knowing a language does not give you the ability to speak it fluently, and this is all about the environment and setting in which students have learnt English, how much they have used it, and how much they have acquired for their vocabulary to be expanded and utilized into real usage situations.

When we discuss about methods and approaches in teaching ESP, does not necessarily mean that we want or use an appropriate method, rather than a specific approach. Depending on the level of GE of students enrolled in the Course, teachers decide how to adapt and communicate the syllabus. In most cases, students that learn ESP are required to be at least at pre-intermediate level/B-B1 and possess the basics of grammar usage already settled and because this is a pre requisite for the enrolment; we usually admit students that are B1 and above the threshold. Another reason is also the exit level of English from the pre -university curricula that describes students to be B2 level according to CEF for Languages.

Based on this, the acquisition of grammatical structures and its usage is not frequently part of the methods used when teaching ESP at PUT. Teachers use techniques to develop communicative and integrated skills in order to increase the use of the vocabulary terms from the students' discussions and dialogues. Examples of this would be by improvising a dialogue or setting up a learning situation where students are allegedly seated in a workplace, and are requested to use technical vocabulary.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment involves the use of empirical data on student learning to review and adjust the programmes, and improve student learning. (Assessing Academic Programmes in Higher Education by Allen 2004). Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, comprehend, undertake and can do with their knowledge as a result of their previously educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve

subsequent learning and course assignments. (Learner-Centred Assessment on College Campuses: shifting the focus from teaching to learning by Huba and Freed 2000).

Due to the importance of assessment, especially when trying to examine whether the course has resulted successful and the methods used have been proving fruitful, we try to assess students' performance during the Course as well, not only at the end of the Semester. Daily quizzes that involve vocabulary acquisition are carried out constantly in order for the students to be consistent to their tasks and studies. Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programmes undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. (Assessment Essentials: planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education by Palomba and Banta 1999). Thereupon, when asking students to demonstrate their understanding in the subject- matter, plays an essential role to evaluate whether the standards of the English Group have been properly developed.

Before the time the students could obtain their marks from final assessment, they are asked to handle a project at the end of the semester. The project is usually a research work performed by them individually or as a group with two to three students. The topic of the project is in most cases assigned since the beginning of the year, so that the students are given the opportunity to start working on the project whenever they feel comfortable. The topics proposed are related with the terminology, and also the Branch/Profile that students are studying, in a way, they can further expand and better use their vocabulary while in the process of learning and researching. At the end of the semester, after successfully concluding the English curricula, and after meeting the objectives of the syllabus the students receive the final evaluation score that is composed of all the above components, together with the presence/attendance during the classes and their participation.

DATA, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As it was previously mentioned in this article, there has been an interview with two teachers from the Foreign Language Centre in the Polytechnic University of Tirana and also short questionnaires completed by Two Students' Groups that had already taken ESP Courses during the first Semester.

The interview questions were mainly about the methodology used during the teaching classes of ESP. The first question consisted in the obstacles that the teachers had encountered during the process, and they both agreed that the most difficult burden in teaching ESP was the battling students with low GE level. One of the teachers stated that the first week of teaching she would do a revision of all the grammar structures with exercises and additional materials for a brief recapitulation of items that are considered relevant and helpful.

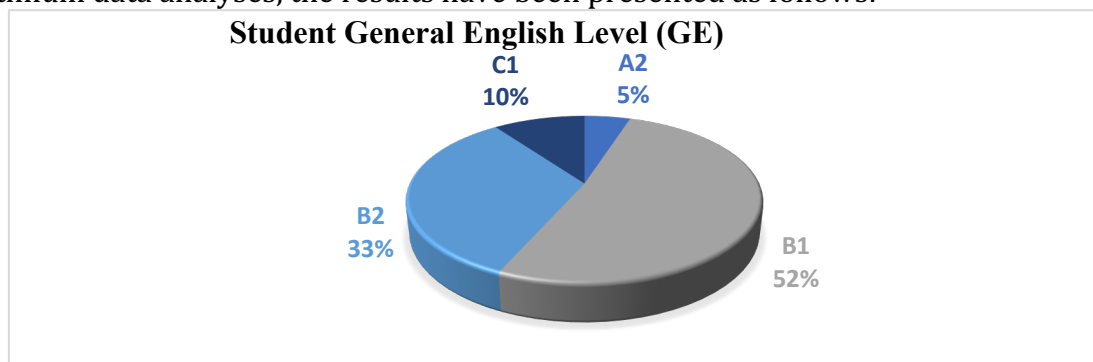
Another question addressed to the teachers was about the materials used during the ESP classes. The teachers stated that the book was the main tool used in accordance with the programme and syllabus of the subject. The textbook contains also a CD for the students to listen and simultaneous complete audio exercises, so they would also develop the auditory learning. One of teachers added that sometimes additional materials were applied, especially when time promises for these materials to be reviewed with students. The extra material consisted in extra reading passages, containing some more technical terms for the students to acquire.

When asked on barriers that teachers come across during teaching ESP, the teachers unanimously talked about the lack of training and updating their teaching methodologies. Another issue they came up with was the unavailability of infrastructure in some of the Engineering Faculties.

The next question consisted on the motivation of the students to learn ESP. One of the teachers stated that students are usually much involved in learning the terminology, because they see it as a way to improve their English skills in their new domain of study. They also consider it as a tool to explore in their future venue for foreign literature research in other subjects. The teachers mentioned the interest of students in ESP as well, because it is one of the easiest subjects in their curricula. Students consider it a very enjoyable experience, especially when diversified class activities and learning are combined together, for a better learning environment and sociable treatment.

The last question of the interview was about the process of assessment and evaluation. Both teachers agreed that this was not an easy task because the students paid considerable efforts in learning ESP and fulfill the mandatory tasks and requirements from the teachers. They used the continuous assessment that combines the presence of the students during the class as well as their participation in the lesson. They also pointed out the importance of quizzes to help them better understand the acquisition of the new vocabulary from students. At the end the evaluation is concluded with the summing up of the marks from the continuous assessment, the mark of the project, and the mark of the final test, at the end of the semester. This method has resulted successful as a very straightforward way to evaluate students' results and performance.

Simultaneously the study includes a short questionnaire from students of two groups that had already concluded English classes in the first semester. The sample consisted of 60 students, with optimum data analyses, the results have been presented as follows:



As seen in the chart, most of the students that come from high school are considered to be B1 or B2 Level, and this means that they have already acquired grammatical structure and function. This is why, it is much easier for teachers to find methods to implement and help them acquire vocabulary and technical texts, without focusing on grammar.

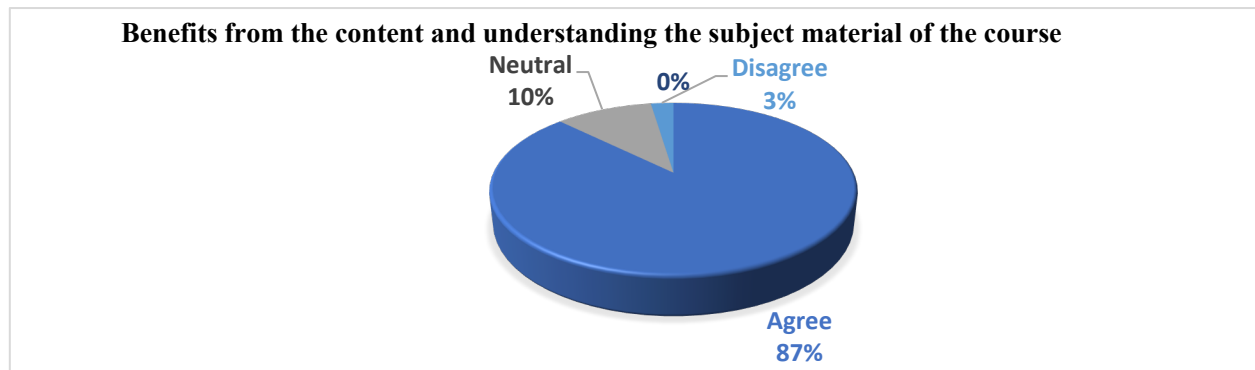


Figure 2. Content and subject-material

From the second question, we objectively understand that the English course is successful in terms of clarity and explanation. This means that 87 % of the students agree that the contents and subject material is understandable and contains usable information.

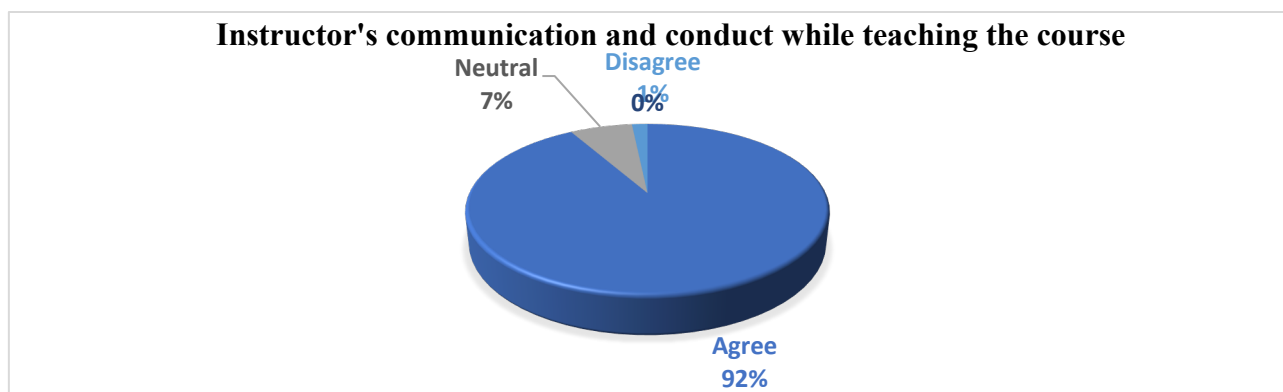


Figure 3. Clarity in speech

The third chart commends and brings forth a plain commitment and case on the professionalism and performance of the teachers at Polytechnic University of Tirana. 92% of the students agreed that the instructor was very enthusiastic about teaching the course. This means that students get motivated and the content of the syllabus is acquired better. In general, it also displays that the classes are fun and entertaining, students are encouraged to study further ,and their attention is kept alive during the whole period of instruction.

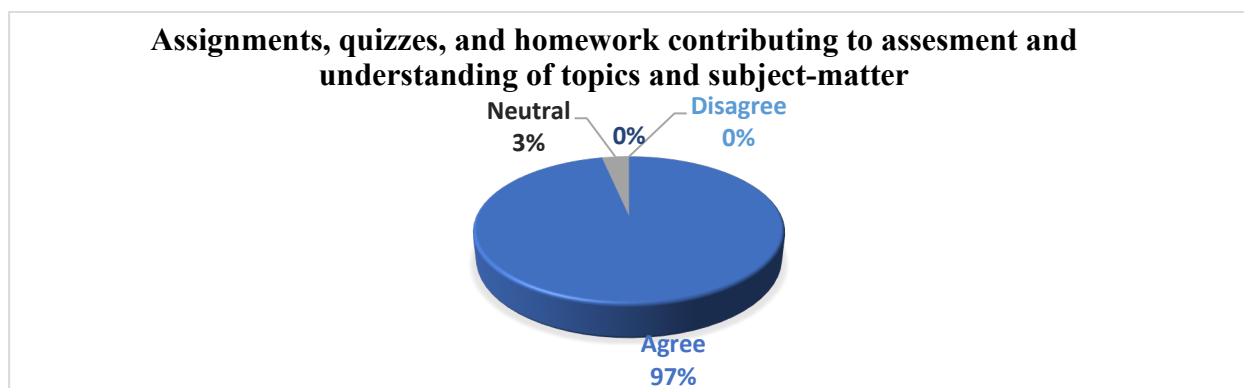


Figure 4 Assignment, quizzes and homework

In the above question on how the assignment, quizzes and homework have had a positive impact on students understanding of the subject, 97% of them did agree. It means that students agree that the syllabus is considerably attractive and effective.

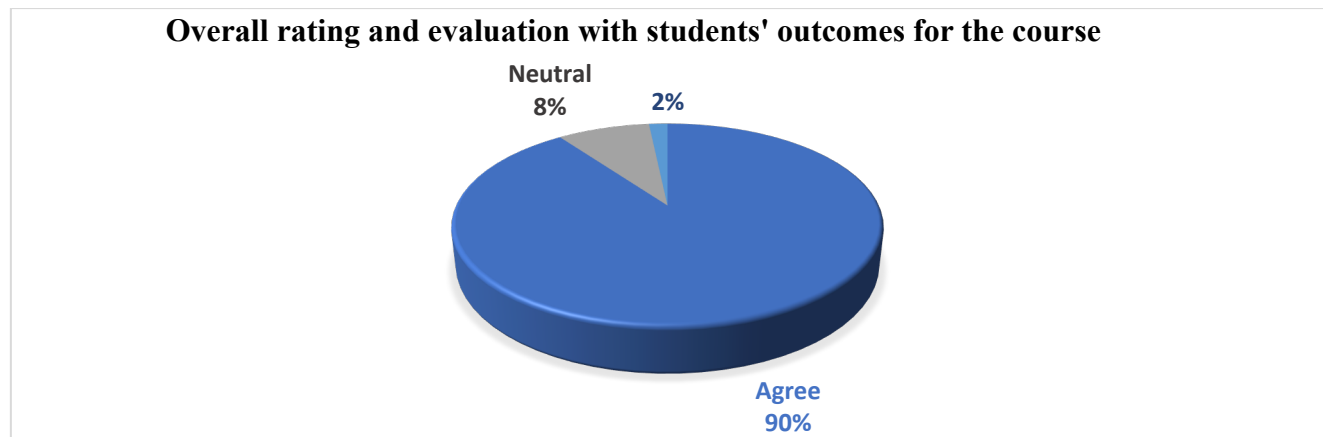


Figure 5. Overall rating

At an overall rating of the Course, 90% of the students agree that the outcomes are successful and the feedback seems very positive. There are 8% of the students who pose as neutral, because they might not feel they are ready to use the technical vocabulary in the workplace, but there is always room for adjustments and improvement.

CONCLUSION

As Prabhu said in 1990, 'there is no best method' when teaching. It can be said that methods and teaching approaches may vary in accordance with the teaching environment, students' background, their English level and factors may differ from one semester to another. What is worth mentioning is that during the teaching marathon, every English educator should bring the passion that motivates and encourages students to study and increase the attendance and commitment for languages.

There are numerous things that could be adjusted and accomplished better. However, this takes time, numerous efforts and loads of working hours. We need to operate more on the syllabus and deem on innovative ways for developing new methods and approaches, not only for the infrastructure and facilities, extra-curricular materials, but also for students' attitudes toward learning English, and more specifically on the technical terms, and simultaneously by helping them to acquire self-esteem in performance with more effective integrated skills.

References

- Adler, J. (2013). *Teaching perspective*. London: Longman
- Dudley-Evans, T. (1998). (Forthcoming) *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multidisciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Pr
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning- centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prabhu, N.S. (1994). *Second Language Pedagogy*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Swales, J. (1992). Language for specific purposes. In W. Bright (Ed). *International encyclopedia of linguistics (vol 2, p. 300)*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Vrapi Fatmir (2003) Baseline Study 2003, English Language Education in Albania

Vrapi Fatmir (2020) Interpreting and treatment of certain terms in English language, Balkan Journal of Interdisciplinary Research