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The English language skills in ESP for law course

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ABSTRACT

English for specific purposes (ESP) is considered as a new trend in English Language Teaching. It is our belief that ESP courses help students become more proficient in their field of study. The present study was done during academic year 2009/2010 at the Department of Law, South East European University (SEEU) and it is based on the importance of language skills, students' and teachers' attitudes towards an ESP course and the importance of needs analysis. ESP course took place once a week and it had two classes of 45 minutes each. The participants of the study were 40 Law students, both genders, 8 departmental instructors and 4 administrators. The participants had different ethnic backgrounds, Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish. The data collection was done through questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that the participants perceive ESP courses to be very important for their study and future career and there seemed to be considerable motivation and interest in taking ESP courses and strengthen knowledge in English language. In terms of the importance of language skills in ESP, specific terminology is an obstacle to effective communication in English, therefore there should be a bigger focus on learning vocabulary. After analyzing all study results, we strongly believe that its results can help teachers at the Law Department in designing their ESP curricula and

can be used for learners and teachers by serving as a reference to facilitate learning English for Law.

Keywords: ESP course, Law Department, language skills, needs analysis, University.

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged from the development of the world economy in the 1950s and 1960s. Other important factors that facilitated the growth of ESP include the growth of science and technology, the fact of English being an international language, and the increasing number of international students studying in the English speaking countries (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). It is often questionable whether teaching ESP should be taught by English language teachers or a specialist in a field but Dudley Evans & St. John (1998) identify five key roles for the ESP practitioner: teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator.

Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998, cited in Gatehouse 2001) define ESP as being generally designed for intermediate or advanced students and likely to be suited to adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. If we ask a question “What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?” Hutchinson et al. (1987) answer that “in theory nothing, in practice a great deal” which for us as teachers means that a teacher who teaches ESP for Law should closely work with an expert in the field or be well equipped with excellent knowledge in technology (p. 53).

Another important question that should be addressed in teaching ESP courses is why the learner needs to learn a foreign language. Some ESP researchers focus their studies on business English, others on legal English and

another group on scientific and technology English but the common thing of all these courses are specific learner's needs, lacks and wants.

Educational psychology stressed the significance of the learners and their attitudes to learning. New ideas in Education Psychology geared the attention towards the learners, recognizing diverse learners. Diverse learners have diverse needs. Students' needs have an important influence on their motivation to learn. If the students were more motivated to learn, it was because they were more interested in the topic. Therefore, it can be said that the new developments in educational psychology, elaborating on the reasons why students learn, and the great need for English to address specific students' needs, brought the rise of the ESP division in ESL.

Fiorito (2005) stresses that in ESP classes English should not be used in isolation but in appropriate authentic texts for the respective fields. Using English in relevant texts will enable learners to learn the ways and situations they need to use the language in their perspective fields. If ESP students learn English in isolation, without meaningful and authentic texts, they will be less motivated to attend the classes and to learn. Moreover, since these ESP students have already chosen these specific fields for their future professions, learning English will only complement their choice. In addition, ESP learners learn new vocabulary using various strategies in their native languages, because learning a language is a life-long process. Thus, the ESP learners can apply these language learning strategies from their native language to learning English vocabulary necessary for their field of study.

It is often said that the name "English for Specific Purposes" does not serve its purpose or is "misleading" because "all education exists for specific purposes" (Orr, 2002). The ESP classes are really specific because they are more than the general ESL classes. Orr (2002, p. 2) mentions the following three characteristics of ESP:

1. "ESP is a specific subset of the English language that is required to carry out specific tasks for specific purposes,
2. ESP is a branch of language education that studies and teaches subsets of English to assist learners in successfully carrying out specific tasks for specific purposes, and

3. ESP is a movement that has popularized the ESP profession and its work with ESP discourse”.

ESP courses are mainly designed to meet students’ needs based on their field of study. The goal is to strengthen students’ proficiency and help them to get ready to cope with everyday situations and deal with professionals in many fields such as: engineering, medicine, education, IT, etc.

2. The English language skills in ESP

It is widely believed that language skills reading, writing, listening and speaking are very important in teaching ESP courses but it often depends upon the learners’ needs and interests. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998, p. 41) point out that:

English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) “isolates the skills associated with study activities such as reading textbooks, articles, writing essays, listening to lectures, [etc]’ on the other ESP courses are combination of subject matter and English language teaching, students are definitively more motivated to study English for computing.

2.1. The importance of needs analysis

Before starting teaching an ESP course, teachers should perform needs analysis. The groundwork includes checking literature for relevant articles, looking for ESP teaching material, contacting colleagues and organizations that might have experience of such groups, reading material about the subject or discipline. It is done in order to learn what we did not know, not waste our students’ time, appear much more professional and find out how to analyze the data.

Needs analysis has gone through many stages so far, nevertheless, the most complete definition is provided by Richard (1990, p. 2). According to him, needs analysis serves three functions in language curriculum design: 1) It involves a large group of people such as learners, teachers, administrators and employers

in the planning process that needs analysis provide a mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input in the contents, design, and implementation of a language program; 2) It serves to identify general or specific language needs so that they can be addressed while developing goals, objectives, and content for a language program; 3) It provides data that can serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating an existing program.

The teacher should look closely at learners' reasons for learning as well and do Target Situation Analysis. According to Hutchison & Waters (1987) the procedure includes the questions such as: Why is the language needed? How will the language be used? What will the content areas be? With whom will the learner use the language? Where will the language be used? And, when will the language be used?

Finally, evaluation is an integral part of any course. Course evaluation might focus on the material used in class, classroom activities, different projects, class presentations, tests etc. In teaching an ESP course, the evaluation is usually described as formative or summative. ESP teachers are more concerned with formative or ongoing evaluation which takes place during the lifetime of an activity and the findings help to shape the course during its lifetime (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). It can be qualitative and quantitative. Tests and different questionnaires provide numbers while interviews and discussions are less comparative.

2.1.1. Previous studies

Briguglio (2005) in her study explores the use of English as a global language in multinational settings, particularly in regards to business context. An analysis of the language practices in two multinational companies; one in Malaysia and the other in Hong Kong served to explore the global role of English. Such observation helped to identify the English and intercultural communication skills that business graduates will require operating successfully in multinational context. Among the skills that were found to be important were the use of English for e-mail communication, greater tolerance for and accommodation of the different accents and varieties of English; development of both oral and written communication skills in English to high levels; the ability to write

informal reports in English, and the ability to work collaboratively with people from different national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The study had implications for the future preparation of business graduates. It highlighted the fact that intercultural competences will be crucial, not only for business graduates, but for all graduates in the future.

Mazdayasna & Tahririan (2008) conducted a study with Iranian students from the faculty of nursing and midwifery. The purpose of this study was “to investigate the foreign language learning needs of undergraduate medical sciences students.” 681 undergraduate students, 168 subject-specific instructors and 6 EFL instructors participated in the study. The results revealed that students needed to master the English proficiency because they needed to use not only Persian, but also English sources to study their subjects.

Civilkienė, Daraškaitė, Lauruškienė, & Toropovienė (2009) in their study investigated the role of text-based activities in teaching ESP. The results showed text-based activities for ESP students are used for three main reasons:

- It will help students use language structures easily and frequently, and it will help them adapt the language usage to a variety of situations.
- Students will be able to participate in discussions and express their ideas related to specific topics in specific fields, and
- Students will demonstrate an ability to use learned vocabulary correctly for specific situations.

Moreover, they emphasize teaching students the prefixes and suffixes and their meanings and how to use them to construct vocabulary, instead of using specific vocabulary related to a specific field. They are also proponents of dictionaries for specific fields, which are already established and in use for specific fields, since many of the dictionaries provide pronunciation and images.

A study conducted by Hadri (2010) at South East European University, from the Business Department attempted to identify and analyze the Business Administration students' needs at SEEU for ESP courses and their needs in regard to the English language skills, through the perceptions of the students, the course instructors, the departmental instructors, a graduate of the course and a professional practicing in the field of Business Administration. The results

obtained from the three study instruments were concerned with the perceived importance of the students needs in particular language skill(s). Each of the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, was perceived to be important in different frequencies. Even though each unit of the course book starts with a reading passage, it is not the skill that is more emphasized than the others.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research questions

The South East European University, where this study was done, has five faculties: Law, Business and Economics, Public Administration, Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, and Languages, Cultures and Communications. All students take general English courses first and then take ESP courses offered by teachers well-trained in teaching methodology. The present study was conducted during academic year 2009/2010 at the Department of Law where the ESP course took place once a week and it had two classes of 45 minutes each. The following research questions are its objectives:

1. What are the students' and teachers' attitudes towards an ESP Course in the Department of Law at SEEU?
2. Which language skill is perceived as the most important one for Law students?

3.2. Participants

There were 40 students included in the study, 8 instructors and 4 administrators. Ninety students were in the second year of the study at the Department of Law. They were taking ESP courses in the fall and spring semesters of Academic Years 2009-2010, which were included in the study. The students' age was between 20-23, 24 students were male while 16 students were female. Participants had different proficiency level: excellent, good and poor.

The interviews were held with both departmental instructors and administrators, the Dean, a Pro-dean and the Head of the Department. The instructors were teaching ESP to LAW students, therefore they were expected to give accurate and valid responses to the interview questions. The data collection was done through questionnaires and interviews. All results were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.3. Instruments and procedures

The research procedure started with a student questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed from different ESP books and it contains closed ended questions where the participants are asked to choose *Agree*, *Neutral* or *Disagree* for any given question. At the end of the regular class time, I explained the purpose of the questionnaire and that there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to any question. The questionnaire was distributed in students’ native languages, Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish. The participants were asked to read the questions carefully and then circle the correct statement. The questionnaire contains 10 questions and it asked the participants about the importance of ESP courses (see the Appendix). All questions deal with the importance of ESP and other language skills. The participants were informed in general of the purpose of the research project and were asked if they are willing to participate and support this project. The questionnaire was distributed to 2 different groups, who study at the Law Department.

Afterwards 8 departmental teachers and 4 administrators were interviewed individually in order to elicit some responses about the importance of the ESP course; the importance of a particular language skill; and the Law students’ language difficulties, lacks and wants regarding to the ESP course. A representative sample, 8 departmental teachers and 4 administrators, were involved in either teaching ESP courses or designing ESP curricula. The interviews were conducted separately in the Language Center and they were recorded. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). The interview contains ten questions (see the Appendix).

3.4. Data analysis

3.4.1. Results obtained from the questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire show that the majority of the participants hold a positive attitude towards an ESP course at the Law Faculty, SEEU. The results of five questions are presented in Figure 1.

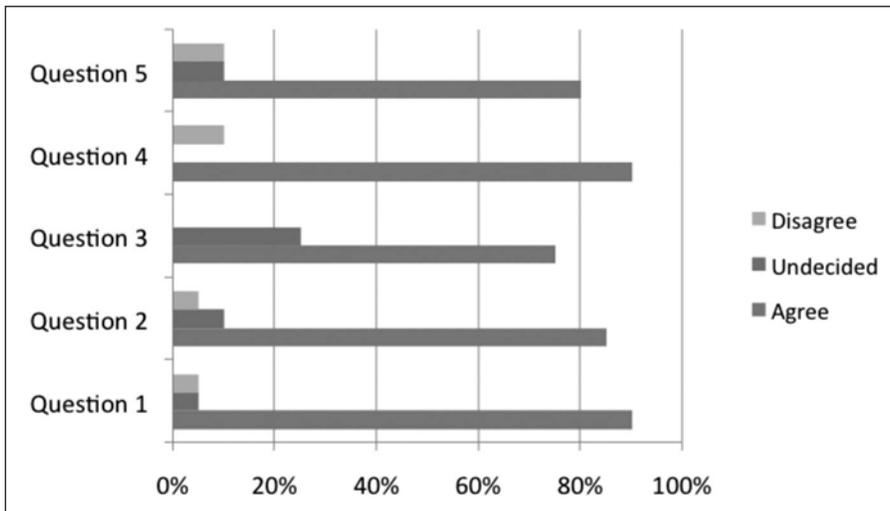


Figure 1. Questionnaire results (Questions 1-5)

Item one is “Is English important for your future career?” and ninety percent of the participants agreed with it, five percent were undecided and five percent disagreed. Item two is “Would you like to take more English classes related to your field of study?” and eighty-five percent of the participants agreed, ten percent were undecided and five percent disagreed. Item three “I want to improve my English to find a good job” seventy- five percent agreed, twenty percent were neutral. Item four “I will speak better if I take an ESP course” eighty–five percent agreed and fifteen percent disagreed. For item five “I need

English to read books for my study” eighty percent agreed, ten percent were undecided and ten percent disagreed. The results of five last questions in the questionnaire are presented in Figure 2.

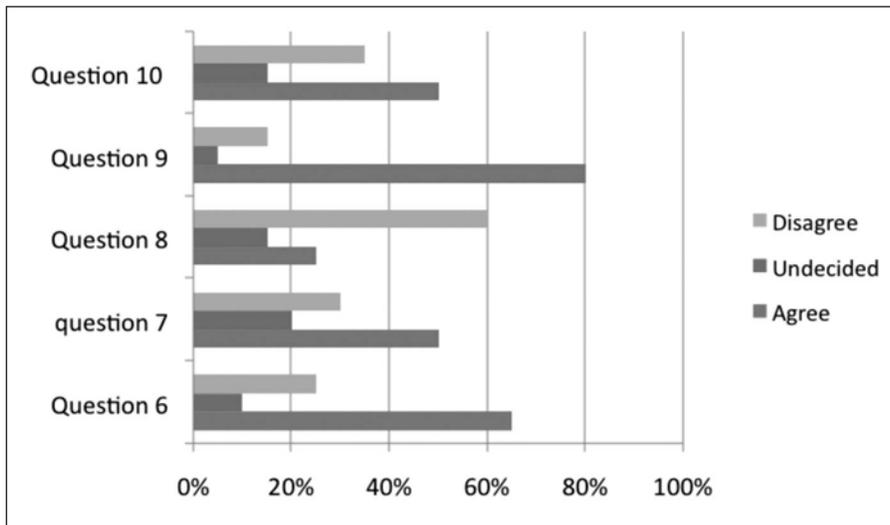


Figure 2. Questionnaire results (Questions 6-10)

Item six “I think that an ESP course can improve your communication skill in English” and sixty-five percent agreed, ten percent were undecided and twenty-five disagreed. Item seven “I think grammar should be included in an ESP syllabus” and fifty percent agreed, twenty percent were undecided and thirty percent disagreed. Item eight “I think that an ESP course should run parallel with a General English course” twenty-five percent agreed, fifteen percent were undecided and sixty percent disagreed. Item nine “I think that an ESP course should be focused on specific vocabulary” eighty percent agreed, five percent were undecided and five percent disagreed. Finally, item ten is “I need English to attend lectures given by international professors” fifty percent agreed, fifteen percent were undecided and thirty-five percent disagreed.

3.5. Results obtained from the interviews

In order to elicit some data about the students' lacks, wants and needs, 8 departmental teachers, and 4 administrators were interviewed. Even though the answers varied all the interviewees hold the same positive view about an ESP course at the department.

The first interview question is **“What are the benefits of an ESP course at your department?”**, four teachers answered that the students will learn specific vocabulary better, two other teachers answered that the students are able to read more books in their field of study, one teacher believes that the students can find a better job and one teacher believes that the students can communicate better in English. Similarly, three administrators answered that the students could communicate better in English and one administrator answered that the students will be acquainted with the elementary and essential computing tasks that they will have to perform in the future.

The second interview question is **“Are ESP courses useful for achieving success during or after studies?”**, two teachers assert that once students take an ESP course they will use it in their future career. Similarly, one teacher thinks that ESP courses are important for and after they finish their studies while one teacher believes that students need ESP to achieve success after their studies. All four administrators share the same opinion that ESP courses are important for achieving success during and after studies.

The third interview question is **“Do you think that four classes per week of ESP are enough?”** and here we have various answers because departmental teachers state that four classes of ESP are not enough, while three administrators assert that they are enough and one administrator believes that 2 classes of ESP are enough.

The fourth interview question is **“Which language skill (reading, writing, speaking, or writing) should be emphasized ahead of other skills?”** and two departmental teachers think that speaking is the productive skill, speaking and writing are more important than receptive skills, one teacher thinks that all of them are equally important and one of them thinks that terminology is the most important one. Surprisingly, three administrators state that they are all important and one of them believes that speaking is the most important one.

The fifth interview question is **“Do you want your students to improve their English for their career or for other reasons?”** All participants believe that ESP is important for their future career because they have to read different books and attend international conferences.

Finally, the sixth interview question is **“What are the Law students’ difficulties, lacks and wants regarding their English for Law course?”** It seems to be the most complicated question because the interviewees gave different answers. Departmental teachers assert that their students have difficulties in attending an ESP course because they are mixed ability students and they strongly believe that an ESP course should be taken in the third semester of their study. The administrators think that the students have problems in communicating in English because they lack specific vocabulary. In the end, departmental teachers believe that the Law students should improve their reading ability and read more books written in English. On the other hand, administrators believe that specific vocabulary is crucial for their success.

Generally, the questionnaire results show that English is very important for the career of the study participants because they will have better job opportunities. In fact, in Macedonia applicants who have a good knowledge of English can get employed more easily than those applicants who do not have any English knowledge. There is no doubt that the participants need to develop a speaking skill and an ESP course is a very good chance for them. In the end, young people attend many international conferences and English is always the conference language. These facts show that participants need more ESP classes in order to improve their knowledge in English language.

Similarly, the interviewees share the same opinion that ESP is very important because it can help the Law students to develop their speaking skill in English but also vocabulary is very important. It was also stressed out that the Law students need more than 4 classes of ESP because the students have different level of English proficiency. Reading is also another important skill that these students should develop more because they have many visiting professors coming from English speaking countries and they have to attend lectures in English. The results of this study are all important because the ESP teacher can use them in teaching, material and syllabus design, while the students can use them to think more about their needs, lacks and wants.

All in all, all stakeholders have positive attitudes towards ESP courses and they expressed their willingness to support similar projects in the future.

4. Conclusion

This paper attempted to identify and analyze the Law students' and teachers' attitudes towards an ESP course and learners' needs in regard to the English Language skills. It offers an important and novel angle because ESP courses are recently introduced at the SEEU.

This study shows that all stakeholders, students, teachers and administrators, perceive EPS to be very important for the students' future career. Similarly, a study conducted by Hadri (2010) showed that Business students at SEEU have a very positive attitude towards ESP in their Department. It reveals very useful information in terms of the use of language skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking in the English language classroom and also the importance of specific terminology that students should master in order to be able to communicate in English.

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) ESP vocabulary is used in general life contexts but has a higher frequency of occurrence in scientific and technical descriptions and discussions. Jurkovic (2006) emphasizes that an ESP teacher should be familiar with vocabulary learning strategies in general and include vocabulary learning strategy programs in their regular instruction.

Based on the study results, the participants perceive ESP courses to be very important for their study and future career but the majority of them do not like the idea of having two courses, general English course and ESP course at the same time. Grammar should not be a part of the ESP syllabus but ESP teachers should focus a lot on specific terminology. Therefore, a strategy training program would be beneficial for the learners.

It is perceived that specific terminology is an obstacle to effective communication in English therefore there should be a bigger focus on learning vocabulary and it is believed that the students have difficulties in attending ESP courses because they are of mixed abilities and that an ESP course should be taken in the third semester of their study. In terms of language skills, speaking and writing are the

most important skills and the questionnaire and interview results coincide with each other. Finally, participants share a common opinion that knowledge gained from an ESP course can be used after their studies and that mainly in using additional literature and to attend lectures given by international lecturers. The aforementioned perceptions are reliable data since the respondents considered it from their point of view from their real life and working experience, both from the point of view of those that lacked knowledge. The students' positive attitude is very important because motivation is affected by the learners' attitude toward learning the language (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

All in all, after analyzing all data obtained from the study instruments, the ESP course is very important for the Law Department. There seems to be considerable motivation and interest in taking an ESP course and strengthen knowledge in English language. ESP courses are and will be a very important part of the SEEU curricula and will always play a vital role in the learning process at this institution.

The results of the study should be used as a reference for syllabus design, materials design and development and course evaluation. Program evaluation being an on-going process and needs analysis, as an essential component of this process, cannot be considered as a one-time procedure. Needs of the students will change over time, depending on the constantly changing qualities of target population and situation. The findings of this study can be quite a useful reference to other needs analysis studies at the institution where the study was conducted and the other five departments at South East European University, at which the students are offered ESP courses.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Please, circle the correct answer about the given statements. There is no “right” or “wrong” answer and you don’t even have to write your name on it. Please, give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

1. English language is important for your future career. Agree Neutral Disagree.
2. I am interested in taking more English classes related to my field of study. Agree Neutral Disagree.
3. I want to improve my English to find a good job. Agree Neutral Disagree.
4. I will speak better if I take an ESP course. Agree Neutral Disagree.
5. I need English to read books for my study. Agree Neutral Disagree.
6. I think that an ESP course can improve one’s communication skill in English. Agree Neutral Disagree.
7. I think grammar should be included in an ESP syllabus. Agree Neutral Disagree.
8. I think that an ESP course should run parallel with a General English course. Agree Neutral Disagree.
9. I think that an ESP course should be focused on specific vocabulary. Agree Neutral Disagree.
10. I need English to attend lectures given by international professors. Agree Neutral Disagree.

Interview questions

1. What would be the benefits of an ESP course at your department?
2. Are ESP courses useful for achieving success during or after studies?
3. Do you think that 4 classes of an ESP course are enough?

4. Which language skill(s) (reading, listening, speaking, or writing) should be emphasized ahead of other skills?
5. Do you want your students to improve their English for their career or for other reasons? Please, specify.
6. What are the Law faculty students' difficulties, lacks and wants regarding their English for Law course?