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# English for specific purposes: Public administration and political sciences

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the process of creating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for the students of Public Administration and Political Sciences (PAPS) at the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Macedonia. The necessity to modify the existing syllabus for this course and change the complete approach in teaching it arouse from the expressed concern about its efficiency by all stakeholders: students, administration and employers. This concern was mainly related to the communicative competence of students that were expected to demonstrate speaking abilities when applying for jobs in the Public Sector at times when Macedonia was aspiring for integration in international organizations such as NATO and EU. After a brief description of the language policy at SEEU, an overview of ESP as a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT) is presented. Recommendations about the communicative orientation of ESP courses are taken as a basis for creating the new model. Developing student speaking abilities necessary for active use of the English language in the future professional settings from these two fields is the core component for the syllabus creation together with careful selection of materials based on student needs. Student satisfaction demonstrated through discussions with them, as well as the results on the final achievement test indicate that the course was effective although some more complex investigation of the perceptions of all parties involved and other evaluation tools are needed to confirm this result.

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## 1. Introduction

The necessity to search for a new, more efficient model of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for students of Public Administration and Political Sciences (PAPS) at the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Macedonia, appeared as a result of the concern that was expressed first of all by students themselves and then by the teachers, administration and employers. Very often, students from this faculty would complete all required professional courses, but could not graduate because of the English requirements obligatory for all students at SEEU, no matter of their field of study.

What is more, in spite of the ambitious English program, students did not seem to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of English at their administrative positions in the Public Sector which required young professionals who could represent the new and modern public administration to perform the necessary reforms in the country on its way to integration in international organizations such as NATO and EU.

Therefore, creating a new course that would satisfy the needs of students and give them a competitive advantage on the labour market was our responsibility as educators and as representatives of a higher education institution that has been trying since establishment to respond to the demands of the changing society. As stated in the February 2012 report of the Centre for Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton, "modern universities are not only educating more graduates, they are also educating graduates with the kinds of skills required by 21st century knowledge economy employers".

## 2. The language program at SEEU

At SEEU, language skills development is a central part of every student's academic career, both as required subjects and as elective courses. Part of the University's mission is to promote a multilingual approach to learning, stressing the importance of local and international languages. Every student, no matter what he/she studies, takes an English placement test when enrolling. There are four levels of Basic Skills English (BSE), from elementary to intermediate, and Academic English for students who reach a required skills level. After finishing the BSE programs, students can take ESP courses which are specific for the five faculties: Business Administration, Law, Public Administration and Political Sciences, Computer Sciences and Communication Studies. Students study in groups of no more than 25, with hours/credits which vary from Faculty to Faculty. Courses are divided into two levels, the first more academic and the second more work orientated.

Students enrolling at the PAPS Faculty traditionally come with poorer English skills. Therefore, they struggle a lot with the English courses because of the quite strict criteria according to which they can receive a passing grade. There is a continuous assessment and components such as class attendance, participation, presentation or project, speaking and writing skills evaluation, quizzes, and final exam count towards the final grade. But still the English skills of these students did not appear to be at a satisfactory level after graduation as reported by the stakeholders during their regular meetings with the faculty management. The institutions from the public sector, such as different governmental bodies, ministries, the local government, public enterprises, the courts and other public organizations need administrators with good communicative skills in English for their contacts with the international community and the representatives of international organizations in the country on topics and with vocabulary related to the filed of public administration and politics.

## 3. What is English for Specific Purposes?

English for specific purposes (ESP) is that area of English language teaching which focuses on preparing learners "for chosen communicative environments" (Mohan, 1986, in Graham and Beardsley, 1986, p. 228). Its communicative orientation is also highlighted by Hutchinson and Waters (2002) who define ESP as a branch of the tree of English language teaching (ELT) but the roots that nourish it are communication and learning. Learners, the language required and the learning context establish the primacy of need in ESP. As Belcher (2006) notices, the descriptors most likely to spring to mind when referring to ESP by those who are familiar with it, include terms such as "needs-based, pragmatic, efficient, cost-effective, and functional". (p. 134). This author further states that needs assessment, content-based teaching methods, and content-area informed instructors have long been considered essential to the practice of specific-purpose teaching.

From this, it is clear that although ESP is a form of language teaching (Hutchinson and Waters, 2002) it is critical to understand the language use in the specific context. Rather than ESP professionals working in isolation, exemplar texts from the learners' fields of study or work and cooperation with subject-area specialists should be common in the ESP teaching practice. A learner-centered solution to the content knowledge dilemma has been offered by Dudley-Evans (1997, in Belchar, 2006), who feels it essential for ESP teachers to learn how to learn from and with their students, engaging with them in genuinely participatory explorations of discourse domains.

As an ESP course, the course for PAPS described in this article, had as its main goal more effective oral communication by the students in situations likely to be encountered in their future professions. Analyzing their needs was done based on the ESP literature and the syllabus was created in consultation with colleagues from the Faculty of PAPS. The teaching methodology was chosen according to the SIOP model (Echevarria, Vogt and Short, 2008).

## 4. Designing the syllabus

### 4.1. Needs analysis

Students' needs are the absolute characteristics of ESP (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 1998) together with using the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and focus on the language (grammar, lexis, register) skills, discourse and genre appropriate to these activities. As recommended by Richterich and Chancedrel (1980, in Belchar, 1986) a needs analysis considers the needs expressed by the learners themselves, by the teaching establishment, by the user-institution, or by all three. In analyzing the needs of our students, we administered a questionnaire on the first class, we consulted the teachers who had taught this course previously and whose syllabus we could consider and finally, we talked to our former students who were employed at the institutions from the public sector.

Students in class gave us the most valuable information about what they thought they would need English most. Since that was their second year at University, they had all completed the professional courses from the two previous semesters and were able to list the topics they wanted to be discussed in class. This is referred to by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) as personal information and relates to "factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experience, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectations of it and attitude to English" (p. 125). Later, we developed these themes into modules and they became parts of the syllabus. Not surprisingly, these topics reflected the current Macedonian political and state issues, as well as the international affairs and contained areas such as: EU and NATO membership, the name dispute with Greece, resulting from the fact that there is a

geographical area in Greece named Macedonia, the elections that were about to happen in Croatia and Russia, the political system in the country, international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and some topics from HR management and the structures of the enterprises.

In order to get information about learners English skills, the "present situation analysis" (Dudley Evans and St. John, 1998) during the first class, we also administered the same institutional proficiency test that SEEU students take at enrolment to check if and what kind of progress they have made. In addition, at the same class, students were encouraged through some interactive activities to start communicating using specific words from the field of public administration and political sciences that were already familiar to them.

"Target situation analysis" (Dudley Evans and St. John, 1998) was managed by interviews with our former students, employed at the institutions from the public sector. They pointed out in which areas from their everyday working experiences English was most useful. For instance, one of them who worked at the Ministry for Local Self-Government said that he was the responsible one for the contacts with European cities with which they had close cooperation and even translated for them during the visits. We were able to deduce from this, the possible topics of their conversations, but also it was valuable information that elements of business correspondence, email and letter writing should be a part of the syllabus, as well.

## 4.2. Course design

Topics identified through the needs analysis were used as a basis for creating the course. Some appropriate texts were found from various resources. Sometimes it was necessary to make some adaptations on them for use in class, but they provided the theme for a discussion and the range of vocabulary needed for that particular area. In this way we were able to create different modules and divide them into weeks and hours of instruction.

Every lesson was carefully prepared to make sure that it contained both content objectives and language objectives. As recommended in the SIOP model, "all the content and language objectives should evolve from the lesson topic and be part of the instructional plan" (Echevarria et all, 2007, p. 27). Since this was an ESP course, very often these objectives were interrelated. For instance, the key vocabulary in this course referred to the technical or specific terms and one language objective such as being able to define the term *accession* required some content knowledge of how countries acquire membership in international organizations.

More attention was given to developing student production skills, speaking and writing, because these skills were pointed out by the needs analysis both from students themselves and their potential employers. Therefore, language functions, referring to the ways students use language in the lesson, were intentionally neglected. As Graham and Bearsley have pointed out: "Like others (Krashen, 1981; Yalden, 1983), we believe the most effective learning takes place if the emphasis in the class is on communicative competence rather than formal accuracy" (1986, p. 232). Nevertheless, we did not think that this was a huge issue, since students' level of English was about high intermediate (B2 according to the European Framework of Reference).

It was also critical to provide structured opportunities for students to use the language as much as possible. This was especially important taking into consideration that English was a foreign language for all students and they did not have other possibilities to practice it outside of the classroom. We needed to offer to our students opportunities for interaction and one way to achieve this was to elicit more extended

student contribution by asking them to elaborate their answers. Student interaction was also promoted by making them ask and answer questions in pairs or small groups, by role plays and simulations, by giving and justifying opinions, by generating 'hot' topics for debating which students especially enjoyed.

## 5. Evaluation and discussion

The assessment was both formative, through different components and summative. There was a final exam at the end of the term. Evaluative activities followed the learning activities and matched the lesson objectives. They contained rubrics by which it was clear to students what was expected from them and how many points they could earn for every single step of the activity. Individual student conferences were organized to provide feedback on their written assignments.

The class consisted of 18 students, out of which 10 were from Public Administration and 8 from Political sciences. All students passed the course, including the 5 who had failed it previously. However, we can not draw any conclusions based on this fact, since neither the syllabus, nor the grading criteria were the same as before. Nonetheless, they were all very regular in class and expressed high satisfaction from the course informally and through the evaluation form given at the end of the course.

For more serious course evaluation, some other formal tools will be needed. Administering some standardized English proficiency tests at the beginning and at the end of the course might be very useful to see if there was indeed some learning progress. But in spite of the lack of these measures, it was evident that students enjoyed the course and what they were doing seemed very relevant for their future. Based on this experience, we would recommend to the ESP teachers to reconsider their syllabi and try to adjust them to match students' needs. Permanent contacts with content area teachers are also a must in ESP courses as well as consultations about the course content with all relevant subjects.

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