

# TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AND TEACHER TRAINING

*Msc. Morena Bracaj*

Lecturer “Aleksander Moisiu” University, Albania

---

## Abstract

The need for a lingua franca of science, technology, education, and business has led to the worldwide demand of English for Specific Purpose (ESP). The field of ESP has rapidly developed recently to become a major part in English language teaching and research. Therefore, the needs to understand the requirements of other professions and willingness to adapt to these requirements make a specific group of learners prepare differently from those learning general English, because they need English for specific purposes rather than using it in daily life. Thus the ESP approach provides opportunities to the learners to acquire English naturally, which means that, by working with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting. But, what is the situation in Albania? Are the university classes in Albania applying this approach and what efforts are they making about ESP application, since students are in need of learning not only English for general purposes. Therefore, this paper aims to discuss some basic concepts of the 'English for Specific Purposes' (ESP) approach to language teaching, types of ESP, the ways how ESP teachers should be trained so that they can be professionals and well-prepared to meet learners' needs, and lastly a comparison is made between the “General English” teacher and the so-called ESP practitioner proposed by Dudley- Evans and St. John under the headings of teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher, and evaluator.

---

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teacher role, esp course, teacher development

## 1. What is English for Specific Purposes?

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Special Purposes arose as a term in the 1960's as it became increasingly aware that general English courses frequently did not meet learner or employers needs. As English continues to dominate as the lingua franca of business, media, technology, medicine, education, and research, the demand for ESP is

growing rapidly, particularly EFL countries where English is mainly used for instrumental purposes. People in these countries including Albania, learn English in order to fulfill the school curriculum requirement, to pass standardized English proficiency tests, or to obtain promotion or professional development at work. Instead of learning English for such purposes, isn't it better and in their favor to learn English regarding their professional fields so that they can easily find a job in their future and can also be more professional?

Are our universities in Albania applying ESP courses? But should they try to implement such courses for university students? Should students' interest be raised toward such an approach?

To answer such questions are not so easy, because first of all there must exist special courses with specific curriculum offered by our universities and also another important point is teacher training which means that teachers should obtain special training, should be more specialized in order to teach such courses because they are not only teaching English but also special technical terms according to different subjects. More and more universities all over the world are offering ESP courses to meet the global need as well as to meet students' future career needs. The demand for ESP has led some higher education authorities and administrators in many countries to claim that ESP should replace EGP, the long-existing practice of English language teaching in many universities, and thus become the mainstream of college English education. In Albania ESP courses are not applied but it would be better if they are because from different companies' interviews they are claiming that they are searching specialized people to work for them but they have difficulty in finding those persons. Therefore, EGP is basic language learning to be studied before, but not during college; College English should be more advanced, more specialized, and match students' majors of study, particularly in technological universities where students are trained to perform on-the-job; and finally, compared with EGP, ESP is more effective in increasing students' learning motivation because it relates to their fields of study and caters to their needs.

Therefore, "English for specific purposes is a term that refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career (like law, medicine) or for business in general". (International Teacher Training Organization, 2005). There is a specific reason for which English is learned. Pauline C. Robinson (1989) describes ESP as a type of ELT (English Language Teaching) and defines it as: "Goal oriented language learning. " (Robinson, Pauline C.ed. Hywel Coleman, 1989, p 398) that means student has a specific goal that is going to be attained.

If we focus on the origin of ESP and its development is closely linked with learners' interest in various specific disciplines e.g. 'Law English',

‘English for Hotel Industry’ or ‘English for Tourist Management’, English for business, English for medicine etc. Students learn English for a specific purpose, represented by studying subject matter, to gain and develop appropriate knowledge and skills through English. Students study ESP not only they are interested in English language but because they have to perform a task in English. Their command of the English language must be such that they can reach a satisfactory level in their specialist subject studies. In other words, students who have studied English for Specific Purposes during their universities years, would be easy for them to adapt to their work conditions and would be easily employed in their fields.

The fact that “learners know specifically why they are learning a language” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 6) is a great advantage on both sides of the process. The group of ESP learners is going to achieve the same goal in the field of studying branch, so learners’ motivation, in a form of the same aim, enables teacher to meet learners’ needs and expectations easier. Learner and the way of learning (‘acquiring language’) are considered to be the main factors in the whole process. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) emphasize ESP to be an approach not product that means language learning not language use is highlighted. They draw the attention to a ‘learning-centered approach’ “in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 19). In fact, it always comes to our mind such a question, ‘What is the difference between the ESP and “General English” approach?’ According to Hutchinson, the answer to this question is quite simply, “in theory nothing, in practice a great deal”. In 1987, of course, the last statement was quite true. At the time, teachers of ‘General English’ courses, while acknowledging that students had a specific purpose for studying English, would rarely conduct a needs analysis to find out what was necessary to actually achieve it. Teachers nowadays, however, are much more aware of the importance of needs analysis, and published textbooks have improved dramatically allowing the teacher to select materials which closely match the goals of the learner. Perhaps this demonstrates the influence that the ESP approach has had on English teaching in general. Nevertheless, the line between where ‘General English’ courses stop and ESP courses start has become very vague indeed. Although many ‘General English’ teachers can be described as using an ESP approach, basing their syllabi on a learner needs analysis and their own specialist knowledge of using English for real communication, many so-called ESP teachers are using an approach furthest from that described above. Thus, it can be said that ESP derives from the need to use language as a tool in facilitating success in professional life.

## **2. Types of ESP**

How many types of English for specific purposes do we have and what does each of them study in particular? What are the expectations of ESP learners who attend such courses? Regarding to the expectations, learners have at least three kinds of expectations:

1. Cultural-educational
2. Personal and individual
3. Academic/occupational

The first two have a close relationship with the learner's own background and his view of himself as a learner, his expectation of success, his optimism or pessimism about the ESP course in terms of what he expects to learn. The last ones relate to the branch of ESP, which represents the type of ESP. These sets of expectations (academic or occupational) are the ones most commonly expressed in advance, when a needs-analysis is carried out. With reference to "ELT" these two kinds of expectations are mainly two types of ESP according to the motivation, position, and status of the learners which become reasons of learning English: English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) add more type of ESP according to the need of scientists and technologists. This type is called English for Science and Technology (EST). The first two types are as follow:

### ***1. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)***

EOP is taught in such a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work or profession (Kennedy and Bolitho, 1984: 4). There will be differences in such courses depending on whether the learners are learning English before; during or after the time they are being trained in their job or profession. The content of an English program for someone actually engaged, for example, on a secretarial course - with its acquisition of practical skills and theoretical knowledge - is going to be different from a program for someone who is already a qualified secretary but now needs to operate in English.

### ***2. English for Academic Purposes***

EAP is taught generally within educational institutions to students requiring English in their studies. The language taught may be based on particular disciplines at higher levels of education when the student is specializing (in study) or intends to specialize (pre-study) in a particular subject. In cases such as an overseas student studying in university level, the learning of study skills (listening to lectures, taking notes, writing reports, reading textbooks) will probably form a major part of the student's English course. Frequently in such a situation it is common to find the aims and

methods of the English language department at variance with the requirements of science and technology departments, the former still concerned with drilling conversational English and manipulating structural patterns while the latter require swift and effective reading skills. However, in these situations, there is a need to see the role of English basically in terms of its providing accessibility to knowledge contained in textbooks, periodicals, and journals, reports, and abstracts (Mackay and Mountford, 1978:7). Further they will have to involve in presentation of new knowledge such as papers, university theses, longer reports, articles in scientific journals, and others.

### **3. Characteristic features of ESP course**

Another thing that should not be forgotten while dealing with such courses is the organization of course which means that should be a different curriculum with different types of exercises and different materials. Why is organizing an ESP course important and how can it be implemented?

Organizing the ESP course is very important step to achieve a satisfying goal in the course. There exist many factors playing a crucial role in organizing ESP course without them the learning process would not lead to effectiveness. The term “specific” in ESP refers to a specific purpose for which English is learnt and teacher should be familiar with. He or she should be able to find an answer to what Hutchinson and Waters (1992) describe as “language description”. The “language description” involves questions, e.g. What topic areas will need to be covered? What does the student need to learn? What aspects of language will be needed and how will they be described? (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 19, 22). Hutchinson and Waters (1992) speak about “learning theory” which provides the theoretical basis for the methodology, by helping us to understand how people learn. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 23). It is natural that learning strategies vary and corresponds with learners’ groups, their age, level or reason they study. The way adults acquire language is differ from children, the group of advanced expects different attitude from beginners and teachers determine which aspects of ESP learning will be focused on to meet learners’ needs and expectations successfully. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) point out another aspect affecting the ESP course as well. It relates to learner’s surrounding and discusses the questions of “who”, “why”, “where” and “when” connected with the nature of particular target and learning situation. They describe them as ‘needs analysis’. (p 22) To organize the ESP course effectively and consequently achieve a satisfactory goal, having respect for all three factors is evident:

### **A. Selecting material**

Choosing ESP materials determines the running of the course and underlines content of the lesson. Good material should help teacher in organizing the course or what is more it can function as an introduction into the new learning techniques, and support teachers and learners in the process of learning. Materials are also a kind of teacher reflection, “they should truly reflect what you think and feel about the learning process”. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 107). Good material should be based on various interesting texts and activities providing a wide range of skills. Teachers determines which aspects of ESP learning will be focused on but one piece of material can serve for developing more than one skill, e.g. reading, listening, vocabulary etc. Materials should also function as a link between already learnt (‘existing knowledge’) and new information. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992).

### **B. Types of activities with text**

Text as a learning material can be used for learning and practicing wide range of skills. In ESP course it can be source for new vocabulary, communicative or reading skills. To make working with a text as much effective as possible it is necessary to involve all students’ skills. It is preferred to combine working with printed text with listening to audio-cassette or video-cassette that means receptive with productive activities. Concerning the ESP activities it is necessary to keep in mind the context that should be consistent with studying subject matter.

### **C. Creating a learning environment – motivation**

The last criterion is very important which should be applied during such courses. Creating a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom is a primary step for achieving setting objectives and goals. It makes teaching and learning more pleasant for both sides of the process, for a teacher and a learner, and it supports students in their work. Creating a positive learning atmosphere is closely linked with motivation. Motivation is also an important and a necessary part of students’ work that affects their future success or failure. It is a kind of inner motor that encourages us to do our best to achieve a satisfactory goal in our activity. Harmer describes motivation as “some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action“(Harmer, 1991, p 14). The role of motivation during each activity is inevitable. Students should be motivated as much as possible to enjoy the activity and achieve its real aim.

### 3. The role of ESP teacher

Many linguists admit that the ESP teacher` work involves much more than teaching. Dudley-Evans and St.John (1998) prefer the term” ESP practitioner” as this definition seems to be more detailed and complete. They distinguish the following key roles of ESP practitioner:

- teacher
- course designer and materials provider
- collaborator
- researcher
- evaluator

The first role as 'teacher' is synonymous with that of the 'General English' teacher. The methodology changes as the teaching becomes more specific. In the case of ESP classes, the teacher is no longer a “primary knower”. The students themselves are frequently the primary knowers of the content of material. The teacher`s main role is to create real, authentic communication in the classroom based on the students` knowledge. The second role as a course designer and materials provider, teacher`s role is planning the course and providing materials for it. Provision of materials does not only mean choosing materials and making a suitable number of copies for the class; the teacher`s task also includes adapting material when published materials are unsuitable or writing his\her own materials. But, one of the main controversies in the field of ESP is how specific those materials should be. Hutchinson et al. (1987:165) support materials that cover a wide range of fields, arguing that the grammatical structures, functions, discourse structures, skills, and strategies of different disciplines are identical. The third role as collaborator, in order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and activities of the target discipline, the ESP Practitioner must first work closely with field specialists. This collaboration, however, does not have to end at the development stage and can extend as far as teach teaching, a possibility discussed by Johns et al. (1988). When team teaching is not a possibility, the ESP Practitioner must collaborate more closely with the learners, who will generally be more familiar with the specialized content of materials than the teacher him or herself. An ESP teacher should also be a researcher to fulfill the students` needs. First of all, s\he should research their aims in what they really want to achieve. Then, the research is necessary to design a course, to write teaching materials, and to find out the ESP students` particular interest. Many ESP practitioners are therefore left with no alternative than to develop original materials. It is here that the ESP practitioner's role as 'researcher' is especially important, with results leading directly to appropriate materials for the classroom. The final role as 'evaluator', which is not a new function and evaluation is present in General classes also but in case of ESP, this role seems to be very important.

All teachers should be involved in various types of evaluation and the most popular one is testing students. Tests are conducted to evaluate the students` progress and teaching effectiveness. However, in ESP classes an additional kind of testing should take place, which is the evaluation of course and teaching materials. As ESP courses are often well-adjusted, their evaluation is crucial. General English courses are well-studied and improved by a group of methodology specialists. On the other hand, ESP courses are unique, as it is not possible to create one ESP course that would satisfy all ESP students, therefore, the evaluation is a must.

#### **4. Training of ESP teacher**

Training of the teachers is very important for ESP courses because they should be well specialized so that they can meet students` needs. Therefore, the staff or the teachers should follow some steps about themselves.

1. **Selection.** It means that not every teacher can be specialized for these courses but only those who feel that they can do such a thing and they are ready to contribute for it. Thus, the first step is selection phase.

2. **Continuing personal education.** Teachers should be well-educated people. There are variations in how the trainee`s personal education is improved – either simultaneously with his/her professional training; or consecutively where first two or three years of study with no elements of training as a teacher are followed by the fourth year containing methodology of foreign language teaching or one year post-graduate course of teacher training; or, as in many countries, by in-service courses.

3. **General professional training as an educator and teacher.** This element involves what *all* teachers need to know regardless of which subject they teach. This means that educational psychology, social psychology, and the principles of educational thought are crucial and the elements lead the trainee to understand the nature of education, outline the organization of education, know and manage the different skills of students, and also understand the role of syllabus and teaching materials.

4. **Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language.** This element is also important because special training of teacher make them understand students` needs better, which is in fact very important for ESP courses because based on what they need the teachers can offer them the appropriate knowledge and this knowledge would be very helpful to them

#### **Conclusion**

In my paper I concerned with “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP). I introduced the theoretical background concerning ESP and mentioned some characteristic features closely connected with process of ESP learning. I



drew the special attention to organizing ESP course and selecting material as an important phase to fulfill its demands and to achieve satisfying goals in ESP process of learning. I also pointed out some differences between the role of “ESP” and “General English” teacher and stressed the importance and possible ways of evaluation. I mentioned learning centered approach based on learners’ needs, expectations and learners’ way of learning language. They are mainly learners’ needs that must be met rather than teachers’ ones and it depends on learning strategies and teachers’ attitude to ESP course that is why a motivation was emphasized as a necessary part of a learning process as well.

Moreover, the role of ESP teacher is studied in details and it seen as more complex and more responsible than teaching General English. The ESP teacher is more than a teacher, and he or she is rather a “practitioner” who apart from teaching, provides material, designs a syllabus, collaborates with subject specialists, conducts research and evaluates the course and the students. The teacher’s role is also to organize the class, to be aware of the class objectives, to have a good understanding of the course content, as well as to be flexible and willing to cooperate with learners and have at least some interest in the disciplines s/he is teaching.

### **References:**

- Anthony, L. (1998). *Preaching to Cannibals: A Look at Academic Writing in Engineering*. Proceedings of the Japan Conference on English for Specific Purposes (forthcoming).
- Dudley-Evans, T. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, D., Hawkey, R., Kenny B., & Storer G. (1986). *Patterns of thought in scientific writing: A course in information structuring for engineering students*. *English for Specific Purposes*, 5:147-160.
- Hansen, K. (1988). *Rhetoric and epistemology in the social sciences: A contrast of two representative texts*. In D. A. Joliffe (Ed.), *Writing in Academic Disciplines: Advances in Writing Research*. Norwood.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learner-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jenkins, S., Jordan, M. K., & Weiland, P. O. (1993). *The role of writing in graduate engineering education: A survey of faculty beliefs and practices*. *English for Specific Purposes*, 12:51-67.

- Johns, T. F. & Dudley-Evans, T. (1988). An experiment in team teaching overseas postgraduate students of transportation and plant biology. In J. Swales (Ed.), *Episodes in ESP*. Prentice Hall.
- Johns, A. M. & Dudley-Evans, T. (1991). *English for Specific Purposes: International in Scope, Specific in Purpose*. TESOL Quarterly 25:2, 297-314.
- Stevens, P. (1988). ESP after twenty years: A re-appraisal. In M. Tickoo (Ed.), *ESP: State of the art*(1-13). SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Swales, J. (1988). *Episodes in ESP*. Prentice Hall.
- Anthony, Laurence. *Defining English for Specific Purposes and the Role of the ESP Practitioner*. 1997. *Journal Papers*. 1 May 2007 < <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html> >
- FIORITO, Lorenzo. *Teaching English for Specific Purposes*. 5 May 2007. < <http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/teaching-english-special-purposes.html>
- Graves, Kathleen. *Teachers as course developers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999
- Harding, Keith; HENDERSON, Paul. *High Season: English for the Hotel and Tourist Industry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004
- Harmer, Jeremy. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman, 1991