

FACILITATING ECOLOGICAL LEARNING IN ESP FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES

Alina URLICA¹, Iasmina IOSIM¹, Veronica SARATEANU¹, Adalbert OKROS¹,
Maria LUNGU²

afiliation: ¹USVT 'King Michael I'; ²UVT - Timisoara, Romania

Abstract: *By conducting surveys and questionnaires, we have aimed at identifying the needs of students enrolled in academic programs within the domain of Natural and Life Sciences who also study English as a Foreign Language, as well as English for Specific Purposes. The analysis also targets students' perceptions and attitude toward recently developed EFL material and prospected ESP textbook materials targeting "Ecological English", as well as "English for the Life Sciences". With this purpose in mind, we wish to make better use of the students' feedback and be able to adapt our teaching materials to correspond to the learners' genuine needs and interests. The qualitative analysis of the students' feedback indicates that they are largely interested in understanding ecological processes and communication at all levels in nature. We also include examples of activities devised for the English language textbook, in the hope of developing optimized educational models and with a view to sharing best practices in foreign language teaching/learning. The major aim of our on-going interdisciplinary project is to promote chances of employability for students in natural science engineering and related areas, where communication remains an important issue. For this purpose, the specific aims which are targeted in the educational and English courses consist in the design of a set of didactic strategies informed by shared practices and the development of communicational learning materials.*

• Introduction

The undergraduate students at our university may opt for courses of foreign languages and pedagogical training, both of which focus on learning how to learn and on optimizing communicative abilities.

Researchers generally regard Language for Specific Purposes as a pedagogical concern, which entails a different choice of teaching materials rather than special teaching method.

Having this framework in view, our course of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) takes into consideration both didactics and pedagogy, while focusing on the pedagogical dimension, which is more practice-oriented.

We target the acquisition of an increased set of linguistic and communication competencies, especially transferable ones, which would be conducive to improved degrees of employability and larger career prospects. Also, we are keen on investing in human capital at all levels.

• Material and method

The ecolinguistic approach remains the preferred method employed in our research and collaborative endeavours, which is devised as a contribution to the development of holistic models of communication

• Results and discussions

The study raises several questions with regards to English for Specific Purposes and Content-based learning, which is correlated with the importance of communicating in a foreign language, in a context-specific and appropriate manner. Language for Specific Purposes essentially integrates content-based learning, given that educators tend to the specific needs of learners in their basic area of interest, which makes ESP more cost-effective than General English.

Among the issues we are taking into consideration is the importance of balancing content and language aspects, as well as teaching learning strategies in the process. Also, we aim at coordinating our efforts so as to integrate all relevant aspects: linguistic, cognitive, didactic, pedagogical, and affective factors in context.

• Conclusions

As a result, the academic groups we have targeted would benefit from: an enlarged awareness about constructing a positive learning and working environment; a familiarization with basic humanistic fundamentals which are useful on a general community level; increased modalities of learning which are indicative of an optimum achievable quality in didactics and foreign language learning.

By virtue of the didactic proposals advanced in this paper, we should be able to overcome some of the obstacles learners face in their learning styles and help conceptualize more effective learning strategies, according to the students' needs and highest potential.