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A comparative ESP study: The case of Poland and Romania

Abstract:

The paper presents a study performed in two universities in Poland and Romania. It aimed to identify learners' needs and difficulties when learning ESP, and also what common needs students in the two universities have, in spite of the fact that they study different branches of ESP—English for Economics and Medical English, respectively. For this purpose, we designed a questionnaire containing 14 open and closed questions. The participants in the study were 100 students at the Koszalin University of Technology in Poland and 100 students from the “Iuliu Hațieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The results of the study showed that, in spite of their different fields of training, there were many similarities between the responses of the students, but also certain differences that derived mostly from the different background and specific language needs of learners. Therefore, we may conclude that university students who study sciences, in particular Business and Medicine, might have certain similar needs when learning Professional English. Moreover, being aware of the students' needs and difficulties, as revealed in the present study, might help their teachers to adjust the syllabuses of the ESP class to the learners' actual needs and abilities.

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been established as a relatively new scientific field and ultimately as a response to the increasing needs of learners interested in the practical application of language in a specific professional context. Specific language has become a part (if not a requirement) of the efficient functioning in the current professional world. People want and need to communicate on different issues using a unified, understandable code. It is this reason that has contributed to the widespread use of ESP/ LSP (Language for Specific Purpose) in specialised branches (e.g., timber processing). Consequently, ESP courses are offered as obligatory subjects in curricula at various university faculties. In many cases, the courses pose a real challenge both for students and teachers. For students, ESP learning differs from the usual sort of foreign language class in GE (General English, General Language) courses. Teachers, in turn, need to acquire basic subject-matter knowledge necessary for understanding and teaching the specific

field; besides, there is the lack of teaching materials and constant necessity to prepare their own materials for students matching their needs and knowledge of the language.

The focus of this paper will be on two groups of ESP learners, their needs, and their expectations with regard to the course of specific language.

1.1. Learning needs

There have been many difficulties involved in defining the nature of ESP. The common belief that ESP is nothing more than General English (GE) plus specific terminology has led to intensifying the focus on acquiring this specific terminology, whereas other elements (skills) of foreign language teaching have been ignored. Consequently, this way of thinking has led to the mere memorising of specific vocabulary without the ability to use it practically in context. According to J. Day and M. Krzanowski (2011: 5), ESP teaching and learning must be placed in the context of specific skills defined on the basis of learners' needs. Also, T. Hutchinson and A. Waters highlight the significance of identifying learners' needs as the core of ESP teaching: "ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product. (...) Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need" (2006: 19). J. Krajka (2015: 221) argues for the stated view. Learners of LSP are much more aware of their needs, which is why needs analysis has become an indispensable part of ESP course design.

Needs analysis is multidimensional and can include the following elements (M.H. Songhori 2007: 22):

- Target Situation Analysis (objective, perceived and product-oriented needs);
- Strategy or Learning Needs Analysis (subjective, felt and process-oriented needs);
- Present Situation Analysis (strengths and weaknesses in language, skill, learning experience);
- Means Analysis (the environment in which the course will be run);
- Register Analysis (focuses on vocabulary and grammar of the text);
- Deficiency Analysis (learners' present needs and wants);
- Discourse Analysis (how sentences combine into discourse);
- Genre Analysis (regularities of structure that distinguish one type of text from another).

All in all, the above-mentioned elements of needs analysis indicate that the phenomenon not only refers to the current needs of ESP learners, but also focuses on ESP in its own right (text structure, grammar, vocabulary of the specific texts) or on the strengths and weaknesses of the learners as identified in the learning process. Needs undergo permanent alterations triggered by changes in the setting and the individual experience of learners; in this context, the foundations of needs analysis are learners' reflections on their linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic content such as, for instance, learning strategies.

H. Basturkmen (2010) even states that needs analysis is a way of projecting the foreign language teaching and learning process and that the collected data complete

the diagnosis of language skills and subjective preferences of individual students. Moreover, the data should be collected during the whole duration of the course, enabling the continuous evaluation of the planned content. As T. Hutchinson and A. Waters state, “With the development of CNP (Communicative Need Processor) it seemed as if ESP had come of age. The machinery of identifying the needs of any group of learners had been provided: all the course designers had to do was to operate it” (1987: 54). The task of teachers seems to be more complicated, as

G. Johns (1990) emphasises, “ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time” (1990: 91). Planning ESP courses fitting the needs of ESP learners and simultaneously fulfilling the stated objectives leads to creating a set of challenges usually very different from those realised in general language course design and teaching (S. Munteanu 2013).

The research presented in this paper is an attempt to find a way of achieving this task.

1.2. The aim of the study

The aim of the study was to collect and analyse information about the difficulties LSP learners encounter when studying language for professional needs—Business English (BE) in Poland and Medical English in Romania—and also to perform a needs analysis that would allow us to adjust the content of our ESP classes to the students’ actual needs and interests. Moreover, we wished to find out what learners who study different branches of ESP share in common in terms of needs they have and challenges they face when learning Professional English.

Based on the unified questionnaire distributed and completed in both countries, research data was compared and analysed to identify the characteristics and sources of the potential problems ESP students might face and how these could affect the teaching and learning process.

There are also specific research questions both authors aimed to answer after analysing the results of the study:

- What is the motivation to learn a language for specific purposes?
- What kind of strategies are used to work on specific vocabulary?
- What kind of materials students use to learn LSP/ ESP?
- What can be done to increase the efficiency of the ESP teaching?

2. Methods

2.1. Motivation of the choice of the method

Questionnaire is an efficient tool for gathering a relatively large number of answers which can illustrate the research question, in a relatively short period of time. Questionnaires are completed anonymously, which contributes to the reliability of the shared opinions, cf. “The great popularity of questionnaires is that they provide a ‘quick fix’ for research methodology; no single method has been so much abused”

(B. Gillham 2011: 2). The biggest disadvantages of the method are its limitations in checking the state of emotions and changes in feelings. Moreover, the fact that some answers in the questionnaires can be completed only partially (because of the limited willingness of the participants or because of missing the total overview on the situational context) leads to the use of questionnaires together with other methods (S. Ackroyd/ J. A. Huges 1981).

The above-mentioned arguments are convincing for the use of questionnaires as a tool to draw general conclusions about the topic, which can serve as an introduction to further research. Therefore, the current study should be understood more as a preliminary study on the topic, which certainly needs further consideration.

2.2. Participants

The participants in the study were 100 students of Economics at the Koszalin University of Technology in Poland and 100 medical students from the “Iuliu Hatieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy (UMP) in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. At the Koszalin University, most of the students have knowledge of the English language at an intermediate level (B1/ B2 of the Common European Framework). According to the curriculum, students have two 45-minute language classes a week for two years. The questionnaire was filled in by the second-year students. The first semester of the language classes is devoted to repeating the main grammar and lexical issues to balance the level of students, since the second-semester program is designed to broaden their knowledge of LSP.

At UMP Cluj, Romanian students study a foreign language of their choice (English, French or German) in the first two academic years, for two hours a week and a total of 56 hours per academic year. They need to have at least an intermediate level in the chosen language so that they can study Medical English/ French/ German. Most of our students choose to study English for the two main reasons: first, in general, it is the foreign language they know best, and second, they are aware that learning Medical English is going to be very helpful in their future career, as English is the lingua franca of medicine. As most students have very good knowledge of General English, they start learning Medical English in the first semester of the first year of medical school.

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaire (see Appendix) is a result of both authors' collaborative work conducted via e-mail and Skype. The questionnaire was simultaneously distributed in December 2014 to students in Poland (Koszalin University of Technology) and students in Romania (“Iuliu Hatieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca).

3. Results

This section describes the data collected after the questionnaires completed were returned to the researchers.

3.1. Poland

The first question refers to students' knowledge of English. Sixty-six out of 100 students participating in the survey marked level B1, 15–level B2, 10–level C1, 2–level C2, and seven participants assessed their level of English language knowledge as being A2.

In the second question, students were asked to point out if learning General English is more difficult than learning English for Specific Purposes. Eighty-seven % of students agreed with the statement, 20 respondents shared the opposite opinion and three participants partly agreed. Only 57% of the inquired students gave reasons/explanations as to why English for Specific Purposes is more difficult than General English. The answers were divided into four categories:

- specific terminology (difficult to remember, new meanings of the vocabulary, difficulties with finding accurate equivalents);
- need for possessing subject content knowledge to understand and use English for Specific Purposes in a proper way;
- the formality of the language, structure, and the language of specific documents;
- using the specific language in artificial/ class context and simultaneously having no idea about the real usage in companies.

None of the students who disagreed that learning Professional English is more difficult than General English explained their opinion.

In the third question, students were asked to assess their knowledge of English in respect to learning ESP. Seventy-seven per cent of respondents considered their knowledge of foreign language as sufficient to learn ESP, 18% partly agreed, and 5% found their language knowledge insufficient to learn ESP.

The fourth question referred to the degree of fulfillment of needs and expectation of the students in reference to the ESP class. 88% of the students answered positively, meaning the ESP classes met their needs, 10 students partly agreed with the statement, and 2% disagreed.

The subject of the next question focused on the most difficult fields when it comes to learning professional English. The majority of the students (42%) marked specific vocabulary, 25% chose specific knowledge, 17% pointed out text structure, and 10% said specific grammar. Six participants chose the fifth answer and wrote down their own ideas:

- using the specific vocabulary in context (three students);
- understanding the meaning of the specific words, phrases, terms (two answers);
- finding the adequate translation of a given word (one answer).

The aim of the sixth question was to collect data about the skills students wanted to practice the most during the ESP class. Forty-eight per cent of students pointed out speaking, 22% writing, 20% reading, and 10% listening.

Answering the next question, 78% of the students agreed that grammar points should still be taught or revised in the ESP class. The rest of the participants in the survey disagreed.

The answers given to the eighth question aimed at finding out the main source of the specific vocabulary. For 73% of the students, these were course books and materials distributed by the English teacher, 20% pointed out topic-related journals or magazines, seven per cent of the students said they used the Internet as a basic source of learning materials. None of students gave their own choice for the source of teaching materials.

In the ninth question, interviewees shared their opinion about the subject-content knowledge and its utility in ESP learning. For 88% of asked students, subject-content knowledge supported the ESP learning, whereas 12% of students disagreed with that. In the question, students were also asked to explain their opinion. Only 65% of the participants gave an additional explanation. The answers were divided into two categories shown below:

- Knowledge supports understanding (e.g., ‘It is much easier to learn [memorize] things that you understand.’ [Q 11], ‘Without knowledge, the ESP learning is not possible because the specific vocabulary is based on the knowledge of some field’ [Q 25].
- Knowledge does not support understanding (e.g., ‘Knowledge of language does not depend on subject content knowledge. These are only terms and the subject-content knowledge does not affect their learning’ [Q 66].)

In the tenth question, students were asked to name the main difficulties they had when learning or using ESP. Only 78% of the participants answered the question. The replies were divided into the following categories:

- misunderstanding of specific terms;
- lacking subject content knowledge;
- missing good specific dictionaries, problems with finding good translation;
- lacking knowledge of grammar;
- lacking knowledge of Polish translation.

In the next question, students were asked what activities in the ESP class they found most useful. Some of them gave more than one answer. Eighty-seven per cent of the students mentioned speaking, 65% pointed out writing some useful forms (e-mails, offers, agreements), 53% of participants highlighted vocabulary work (revising, learning new vocabulary, automatizing new knowledge), 30%–reading, 30%–translation activities (also interpreting) and 10% mentioned listening.

The next question refers to the least useful activities in the classroom. Respondents gave the following answers:

- 13%–translation exercises;
- 15%–reading and understanding the texts;
- 27%–listening exercises;

- 18%–writing texts;
- 17%–preparing short presentations;
- 10%–all activities are useful.

The thirteenth question referred to the suggestions students had for useful activities in the ESP class. The answers were classified as follows:

- speaking (mentioned in 33 answers, e.g., ‘It is necessary to use language in practice; though the groups are big but I think it is really essential’ [Q50], ‘Speaking exercises are much needed, in the form of presentations, pair and group discussions’ [Q87], ‘Using language in context–speaking, preparing speeches, repeating new phrases’ [Q 17]);
- revising (mentioned in 25 answers) (e.g., ‘Still I would like to have more revising exercises to repeat the new terms and new contents’ [Q 28]);
- using original materials (mentioned in 13 answers, e.g., ‘I like working on original materials. I find it more useful and motivating than prepared texts’ [Q 76], ‘I think ESP class is a good place to be faced with original materials’ [Q78]);
- more exercises on vocabulary (mentioned in 10 answers, e.g., ‘Specific vocabulary is very difficult and it needs constant revising. I would like to do more exercises on vocabulary’ [Q10]);
- analyzing the structure of specific texts (mentioned in 3 answers, e.g., ‘I liked the exercise on analyzing the specific text, for example a job contract. I would like to do more exercises of this kind’ [Q 44]).

The last question refers to the utility of ESP learning and potential profits from knowledge of professional English in a future job. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents answered positively. Not all of them explained their choice. Below, the explanations given are categorized into the following groups:

- English is lingua franca in current business (e.g., ‘The knowledge of Business English is necessary in the current world’ [Q 21]);
- Professional English is verified in job interviews (‘You won’t get a job in a big corporation, if you do not know BE (Business English)’ [Q17]);
- many international companies (e.g., ‘There are more and more international companies on the Polish market, in which the knowledge of Business English is obligatory’ [Q 44]);
- work abroad (e.g., ‘I want to start working abroad and I need BE to apply for a job and communicate in my future company’ [Q 2]).

3.2. Romania

As stated before, the questionnaires were administered to 100 second-year medical students at “Iuliu Hațieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Answering the first question, most students (46%) in the EMP (English for Medical Purposes) class reported to have a B2 level of English (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), and 39% considered that their level was C1. Eight per cent% evaluated their level as being C2 and only

seven per cent% believed their level to be B1. Therefore, the level of English in the EMP class was high, 93% of the students having B2 level or above, which would normally allow them to study EMP without encountering major difficulties.

The answers to the second question were quite balanced. The majority of students (51) found learning Professional English (PE) more difficult than General English (GE), mostly because of the specific vocabulary or the lack of medical knowledge. 48 students thought quite the opposite giving different reasons, such as their pre-existing knowledge of medical terminology or the fact that most of the terms in PE are international terms.

As expected, considering students' answers to the first question, most students (72) agreed with the third question, stating they had enough knowledge of English to study ESP. Twenty-eight students partly agreed and none disagreed.

Similarly, 68 students agreed with Question 4, in which they were asked whether the content of the ESP class met their learning needs. Twenty-eight students partly agreed and four disagreed.

Answering Question 5, the majority of students (60%) identified specific vocabulary (a) as being the most difficult field for them when learning PE. Twenty-five students found specific knowledge (b) the most difficult, 16 thought specific grammar structures (d) posed the most problems, and 10 students said specific text structure (c) was the most difficult for them. Three students identified other fields which were most difficult for them, namely abbreviations, specific pronunciation, and semiology (which they had not studied yet, but needed in completing some tasks in class). Twelve students gave multiple answers to this question.

When indicating the skills they needed more practice in during the ESP classes (Question 6), most students chose Speaking (43), then Writing (22), Listening (20), and Reading (14). Seven students considered they did not need further practice in any of these skills. There were some multiple answers to this question as well.

The majority of students (46%) agreed with the idea that grammar issues should still be taught or revised in the ESP class (Question 7). Forty-two per cent partly agreed and 9% disagreed.

For 52 students, the main source of specific vocabulary (Question 8) was the Internet (c), for 46 of them it was course books and materials distributed by the English teacher (a), and for 14 articles from topic-related journals or magazines. Only two students indicated chat rooms or forums as their main source of specific vocabulary and four students mentioned other sources: English medical textbook (2 students), movies, and books.

The large majority of the students (96%) considered that subject-content knowledge helped them when learning ESP (Question 9), most of them basing their choice on the fact that in this way it was easier to understand or learn the specific vocabulary. Only four students disagreed with this question, and gave the following reasons: they did not have enough subjectcontent knowledge, terms could be explained, or they only studied basic EMP. Eleven students misunderstood the question and gave irrelevant reasons for their choice.

As to the main difficulties students encountered when learning or using ESP (Question 10), 43 students mentioned remembering or using the specific vocabulary, 15 of them said they did not have enough medical knowledge to do some of the tasks properly, six students referred to specific grammatical structures, seven to spelling, 11 to speaking (using the specific vocabulary, e.g. in doctor-patient conversations), seven students mentioned specific pronunciation, one pointed out reading and one listening (i.e. understanding Medical English). Three students mentioned the fact that EMP is not often used or is only used in class. Eleven students found no difficulty in learning EMP or gave no answer to this question. Some students gave multiple answers to this question as well.

Most students (47) identified speaking as the most useful activity in the ESP class (Question 11), in particular dialogues, role-plays, and oral presentations. Thirty-three students considered listening to be the most useful activity in class, 18 mentioned vocabulary exercises, 15 opted for reading activities, four for writing, three students referred to watching medical films and videos, two favoured group work (expressing their own opinion), one pointed out semiology (the branch of medicine dealing with symptoms), one referred to visual activities and one student found all activities done in class useful. Also, there were many multiple answers to this question.

As regards the least useful activities in the ESP class (Question 12), 36 students considered that there were no activities that were not useful, 24 of them considered speaking to be least useful (especially because of too many role-plays or too much 'team speaking'/ dialogues, mostly because of lack of specific knowledge), nine students pointed out activities that required background knowledge they did not have yet (such as making a diagnosis or explaining the physiopathology of diseases), seven students found listening to be least useful for them (because of bad acoustics/ because tasks were either too difficult or too easy, etc.), seven of them thought writing activities were the least useful ones (e.g., because of too many writing tasks/ writing long texts), six students pointed out the reading activities (some of those), six students said grammar exercises were the least useful, two of them referred to group work, two students to time-consuming ones, one mentioned making lists (in pairs or groups), and one student referred to pronunciation exercises.

When answering Question 13, most students (31) suggested watching more medical films and documentaries as other useful activities in the ESP class. Sixteen students indicated speaking activities and other 16 referred to reading activities. Only five students reported listening activities and other five suggested adjusting the tasks to the students' level of background knowledge. Three students mentioned grammar revision exercises and two students indicated the following: more vocabulary exercises, interactive games, presentations done by students, and classes on how to do research. One student mentioned: less time for easy tasks, less role-plays, and more interactive activities. Twenty-nine per cent of the students had no suggestions for other activities.

A large majority of students (95%) agreed that learning ESP was important for their future job (Question 14). Fourteen students did not explain their choice, but 81

students gave different reasons: most student (39) named working or studying abroad as their main reason; twenty-six students referred to the ability of reading medical books and articles; twelve students mentioned attending conferences; ten of them referred to developing skills for professional communication; eight students felt ESP improved their English and, for some of them, also their specific knowledge. Seven students mentioned the ability to speak with foreign patients, three of them gave as their reason the fact that English is the most spoken foreign language in the world, and one student mentioned that ESP was useful for practicing English (especially speaking). Five students disagreed with the question: two of them said they would probably not work abroad, one said the information was easy to find on the Internet or in books, and two students gave no reason for their choice.

4. Comparative analysis and discussion

Question 1

The English language proficiency of the students at the two universities in Poland and Romania differed. Most of the Polish students estimated to have an intermediate level of English or below (73%), while a large majority of the Romanian students (93%) considered their proficiency in English to be upper-intermediate (B2) or above, and only seven per cent% considered they had an intermediate (B1) level of English (see Chart 1). This difference in language proficiency might have influenced the students' answers to some of the questions in the survey.

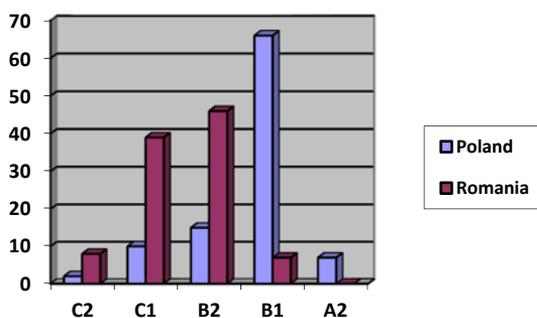


Chart 1. Students' English language proficiency

Question 2

Most students in both countries acknowledged that learning Professional English (PE) was more difficult than learning General English (GE), mostly for the same or similar reasons (see Table 1). However, more medical students than students in economics gave a negative answer to this question, medical students are more oriented to subject-related knowledge than to terminology used to convey that knowledge when they start studying PE.

<i>PE more difficult than GE</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Yes	80	51
+Reasons	- specific terminology - lack of subject-content knowledge - formality of the language - artificial (class-specific) context of use	- specific vocabulary - lack of medical knowledge
No	20	48
+Reasons	no reasons given	- students' pre-existing knowledge of medical terminology - most terms in PE are internationalisms

Table 1. Learning Professional versus General English

Question 3

Most students at both universities considered that they had enough knowledge of English to study ESP (see Table 2). It is interesting to notice that, although medical students claimed a higher level of English, ten per cent more of them agreed partly with the statement, and five per cent more Polish students agreed with it, which might account for the fact that their choice could have been influenced not by their proficiency in English, but by the difficulty of Professional English, as recognized by them.

<i>Enough knowledge of English to study ESP</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Agree	77	72
Disagree	5	-
Partly agree	18	28

Table 2. Knowledge of English to study ESP

Question 4

Similarly, the large majority of students in both countries considered that the ESP classes met their learning needs (see Table 3). Again, more medical students partly agreed with the statement.

<i>ESP content met SS' needs</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Agree	88	68
Disagree	2	4
Partly agree	10	28

Table 3. Content of ESP classes and students' needs

Question 5

Students in both countries gave similar answers to Question 5. Most of them found acquiring specific vocabulary to be the most difficult task when learning PE, and specific knowledge was the second most mentioned field (see Table 4). Specific text structure was more difficult for students of economics, while medical students found

specific grammar structures more difficult to deal with. Students at the two universities mentioned different additional difficulties they encountered when learning ESP, which were specific to their field of study. Some students gave multiple answers to this question.

<i>Most difficult field of PE</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Specific vocabulary	42	60
Specific knowledge	25	25
Specific text structure	17	10
Specific grammar structures	10	16
	6	
	- using specific vocabulary in context	3
Other	- understanding meaning of words/phrases/terms	- abbreviations
	- translating correctly specific terms	- specific pronunciation
		- semiology

Table 4. Most difficult field when learning Professional English

Question 6

Most Polish and Romanian students considered that speaking was the skill they needed to practice more during ESP classes (see Table 5). The second skill chosen was writing (22% of them in both cases). The third and fourth choices were different: Business English (BE) students considered they needed more practice in reading than in listening, while medical students favoured listening to reading activities. Also, seven Romanian students claimed they did not need further practice in any of the four skills, whereas none of the Polish students thought so. This might have been due to the difference in the level of the students' proficiency in English; the Polish students, declaring an intermediate level of English, may have shown more motivation to improve their level of English.

<i>Skills SS needed more practice in</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Reading	20	14
Listening	10	20
Speaking	48	43
Writing	22	22
None	-	7

Table 5. Skills needed more practice in during ESP classes

Question 7

Most students in both countries believed that grammar issues should still be covered in the ESP class (see Table 6). However, the difference between the Romanian students who agreed with the statement and those who partly agreed was minimal (one per cent%), while no Polish student agreed with it. On the other hand, 13 more Polish students than Romanian ones disagreed with the statement, which was considering that grammar is necessary in order to improve one's proficiency in a foreign language. However, as 26 more Polish students than Romanian ones agreed with the statement, this accounts for the fact that the majority of the BE students

probably wanted to improve their knowledge of English and acknowledged that studying grammar would help them in this respect.

<i>Grammar still taught in ESP class</i>	<i>Business English students</i>	<i>Medical students</i>
Agree	72	46
Disagree	22	9
Partly agree	6	45

Table 6. Grammar still taught/ revised in the ESP class

Question 8

When asked about the main source of specific vocabulary, respondents from the two countries provided different answers. While a large majority of the BE students (73%) favoured course books and materials distributed in class, most medical students (52%) considered the Internet to be their main source of specialized vocabulary (see Table 7). Class materials were the Romanian students' second choice, whereas Polish students considered press articles to be their second most important source of vocabulary. Surprisingly, only 7% of the BE students chose the Internet, with a difference of 45% between Polish and Romanian students. Medical students' third choice was specialized articles, but with 4% less choices than in the case of BE students. No Polish student opted for chat rooms and forums, or other possible sources, whereas two Romanian students chose the former and 4 the latter, mentioning English medical textbooks (two students), movies or books as being the main source of specialized vocabulary.

<i>Main source of specific vocabulary</i>	<i>Business students</i>	<i>Medicine students</i>
a. course books/ class materials	73	46
b. articles from journals/ magazines	20	14
c. the Internet	7	52
d. chat rooms/ forums	-	2
e. other	-	4
		- English medical textbooks
		- movies
		- books

Table 7. The main source of specific vocabulary for students

Question 9

When asked whether or not subject-content knowledge was helpful when learning ESP, a large majority of students in both countries agreed (88%; 96%), with six per cent more Romanian students considering that (see Chart 2). The main reason for their choice was, in both cases, the fact that it was easier to acquire the specific vocabulary if they had prior knowledge of their specialized field of study. Only twelve (in Poland) and seven (in Romania) per cent of students disagreed with the statement. The common reason students in the two countries gave in support of their negative answer was that terms could be explained and therefore subject-content knowledge was not necessary.

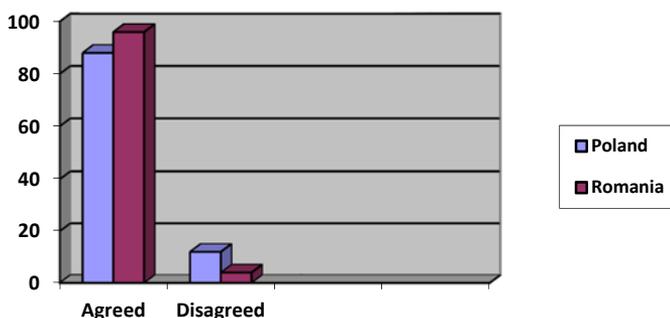


Chart 2. Subject-content knowledge helps when learning ESP

Question 10

When pointing out the main difficulties students encountered when learning or using ESP, both Polish (17%) and Romanian (15%) students referred to the lack of subject-content knowledge and to not knowing specific grammatical structures (ten per cent; six per cent).

Question 11

The most useful activities in the ESP class for both BE (87%) and medical students (47%) were considered to be speaking activities, although 40% more Polish students indicated that (see Chart 3 below). While BE students' second choice was Writing (65%), only four per cent of the medical students opted for writing activities. Romanian students' second choice was Listening (33%), whereas the smallest percentage of Polish students (ten per cent) made that choice. Vocabulary exercises was the third choice for students in both countries (53%; 18%), with 35% more BE students mentioning it. Reading was the fourth choice for both BE and medical students (30%; 15%), the percentage of Polish students who indicated this being 15% higher. Translation and interpreting activities, chosen by ten per cent of the BE students, were not included in the chart below as medical students do not do such activities in the ESP class. Similarly, other activities mentioned only by Romania students were not included either.

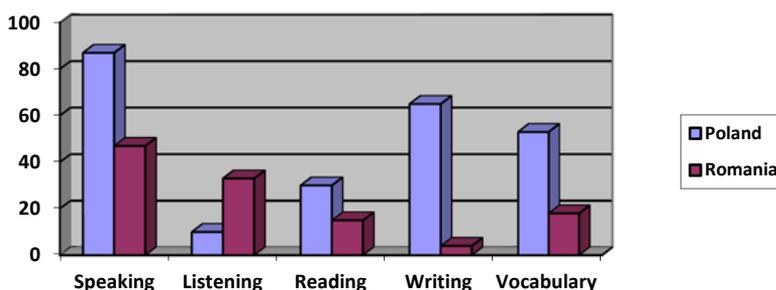


Chart 3. The most useful activities in the ESP class

Question 12

Most medical students (36%) reported no activities in the ESP class that were not useful, whereas only 10% of the BE students found all the activities useful (see Chart 4). The least useful activities for BE students were considered to be listening exercises (27%), while only seven per cent of the medical students referred to such activities. Polish respondents' second choice was writing activities (18%); seven% of the Romanian respondents indicated the same type of activities. The differences are similar for reading activities (15% vs? six per cent, respectively), but seven per cent% more medical students chose speaking (in pairs/ groups) as the least useful activity (24%); 17% of the BE students referred to preparing short presentations (17%), which may be considered as a speaking activity. Thus, we found no similarities in the answers to this question between the two groups of students.

The chart below includes only the activities students in both countries mentioned when answering this question. The rest of the activities appeared to be specific to the learning contexts of the two groups of students (e.g., translating exercises for BE students and activities that required background knowledge in the case of medical students).

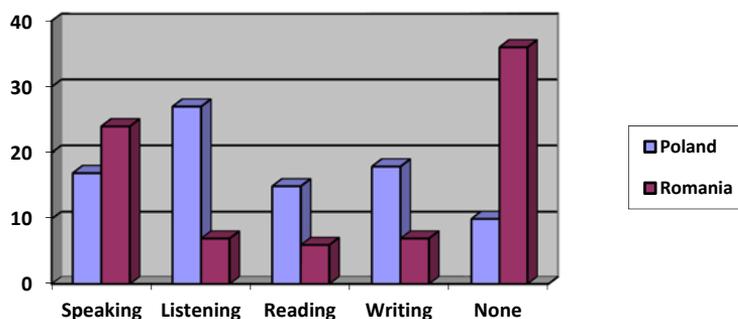


Chart 4. The least useful activities in the ESP class

Question 13

As to the suggestions students had for more useful activities in the ESP class, respondents in both countries referred to speaking activities (33 BE students and 16 medical students, respectively) and vocabulary exercises (ten per cent and two per cent). The rest of the suggestions differed and were mostly specific to the specialized subject and context of learning of each group of students.

Question 14

The majority of students in both countries (89% vs 95%) agreed that learning ESP was important for their future job, with slightly more Romanian students (six per cent) considering that (see Chart 5). Of the various reasons they mentioned, working abroad and the fact that English is the lingua franca of both Business and Medical English were indicated by some of the students in both countries. The other reasons

students gave proved to be significantly different when comparing the two groups of students, because they were specific to the two different fields of work, i.e. business and medicine.

Only five per cent of the medical students disagreed with the statement, mainly because they thought that they would not work abroad. More BE students disagreed with the statement (11%), but gave no reason to support they choice.

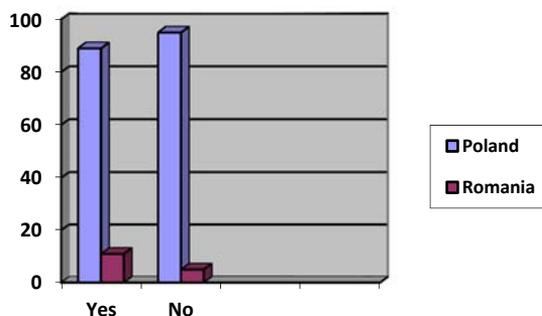


Chart 5. Learning ESP considered important for students' future job

5. Conclusions

Analysing students' answers to the fourteen questions included in the ESP questionnaire, we found out that although the respondents in the two groups studied English for different (business and medical) specific purposes, there were quite many similarities in their answers. Thus, the majority of both Polish and Romanian students believed that: (a) ESP classes met their learning needs, (b) grammar points should still be taught or revised in the ESP class, (c) speaking and writing were the skills they needed to practice more in the PE class, and that (d) subject-content knowledge helped them when learning ESP, being at the same time the main difficulty students encountered when learning or using PE. Most respondents considered speaking to be the most useful activity in the ESP class and also suggested that more such activities should be included in the ESP class. Finally, a large majority of students agreed that learning ESP was important for their future job, but gave different reasons in support of their view, which derived from the specificities of their two different fields of training. However, working abroad and English being an international language in both fields was mentioned by students in both groups.

Another finding is that the study revealed that most respondents at the two universities used different sources to acquire specific vocabulary, as more medical students used the Internet rather than class materials, which was the first choice of the students in economics. Also, there were no similarities in terms of activities the respondents pointed out as being the least useful in the PE class. Moreover, when it came to other useful activities in the ESP class, students in the two groups voiced different suggestions, also based on their specific and very different professional interests and aims.

We encountered some difficulties analyzing participants' responses, especially when students gave multiple answers to questions to which only one answer was expected (e.g., in questions 5, 8, and 10), when some respondents did not answer all the questions, or when some of them did not understand certain questions (especially Question 9) and provided irrelevant answers. These problems call for the need to reconsider building questionnaire questions that would be understood across different cultural groups and respondents with different levels of English proficiency.

The limitation of the study is that the results obtained only reflect two specific contexts of teaching and learning Business English and Medical English at two universities in Poland and Romania respectively, and might have been strongly influenced by students' proficiency in General English, the specific syllabuses taught, and even the teachers' qualities and abilities to teach the specialized language.

However, the results are indicative of certain learning needs of the students who study ESP at the two universities where the research was conducted, i.e. the Koszalin University of Technology in Poland and the "Iuliu Hațieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The study contributes to teaching ESP at the two universities, considering adjusting the content of the courses taught to the specific learners' needs that were brought to teachers' attention.

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Appendix

ESP questionnaire

Name of University:
Specialty:
Department:
Year of study:
Group:
Date:

1. What is your level of English? (Please circle one option.)

A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 C2

2. Do you find learning Professional English more difficult than General English?

Yes No

Why?

.....
.....
.....

3. Do you consider that you have enough knowledge of English to learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP)?

Agree Disagree Partly agree

4. Does the content of ESP classes meet your learning needs?

Agree Disagree Partly agree

5. What is the most difficult field for you when learning Professional English?

- a) specific vocabulary
b) specific knowledge
c) specific text structure
d) specific grammar structures
e) other (please specify):

.....
.....
.....

6. Which of the skills do you need more practice in during the ESP classes?

Reading Listening Speaking Writing None of these

7. Do you feel that grammar points should still be taught or revised in the ESP class?

Agree Disagree Partly agree

8. What is the main source of specific vocabulary for you?

- a) course books and materials distributed by your English teacher
b) articles from topic-related journals/magazines
c) Internet
d) chat rooms/forums
e) other (please specify):

.....
.....
.....

