

ESP TEACHING REFORM OF ROMANIAN ACADEMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The article makes a presentation of the evolution of the teaching domain of the foreign languages for specific purposes at international and national level. It also makes references to the curriculum reform of the domain that should be deepened and directed to the specific linguistic and communication competences of the Romanian professionals.*

Keywords: *foreign languages for specific purposes; curriculum reform; specific competences; professional competences; market economy.*

The new democratic conditions in Romania after the political and social movement in 1989 led to reconsidering the fundamental everlasting human and social values and determined great expectations about a thorough reform of the whole society.

The support of such an important transformation is, obviously, the educational system, which represents the basic institutional structure generating the natural, social and professional strata.

One of the most significant educational subjects, at all levels is represented by teaching the foreign languages especially English, which is also, a political target nowadays, because of the European reintegration of Romania.

At university level, English language is supposed to produce highly educated professionals, opened to a permanent specialization and to a high social and professional integration. The English language taught at this level, for different specializations are known under the denomination of "*English for special Purposes*".

The new tendencies in teaching ESP at university level are to be noticed when understanding first the administrative steps that were taken for a reformed curriculum.

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It is important to become aware of the significance of the moment, as there was no previous similar historical period for human society to experience the coming back from a society based on pretended equal rights of its members, to a society ruled by the natural principles of equal rights obtained through the fair competition towards quality provided by a fair and solid educational structure.

According to the new social and professional needs, the educational system is supposed to produce highly qualified specialists in different domains, in order to determine, to push the whole society reform.

1. Administrative reform of the educational system

It is to be noticed that the first step that was to be taken was in administrative domain, in order to create organizational opportunities for new educational developments. New legislation in the domain became permissive and now a lot of private institutions at high education are spread all over the country. More than that, the state universities became autonomous from administration point of view, allowing now competition among them, representing a way out to high quality of the educational social service.

2. Curriculum reform

The most significant aspect of educational reform in our country is the curricular one, as it is understood at the macro level down to the micro one of the individual students group and teacher, i.e. the process of learning itself.

At this moment I consider necessary to be more specific about the significance of the worldwide concept of curriculum.

There are two meanings of this concept:

1) It relates to the official documents issued by the political and educational bodies for the whole system in the territory, operating through school plans, programs, number of classes for each subject, their distribution for a school-year, term or week and so on.

2) Curriculum denominates not only the documents as a result of an educational policy, but it describes the process of education itself, at all levels including the *syllabus, the contents, methodology, forms and times of evaluation*.

The article makes reference to the author's point of view regarding the term of curriculum which represents both the official documents issued and the educational process itself down to the students group.

The status of autonomy allows universities to issue their own subject plans for each faculty, level and distribution of classes for a year, a term, a week, according to the needs analysis. ESP has become a separate subject to be studied in universities for different professional domains.

There are some categories of elements influencing the ESP programs to be taken in the account when drawing the syllabus:

- a) - the aims of the institution:
 - if ESP is a medium of instruction
 - if ESP is a subject in the curriculum
- b) - administrative resources and limits
- c) - the students motivation
- d) - the original level of English knowledge
- e) - the language teacher's professional capacity in the specific domain
- f) - free access to ESP resources and aids

The general usage adopted at university level in the world has become operational in our transitional country too. Thus, according to these categories, the language departments of the universities can draw their own syllabus according to the specific professional needs of the future graduates and to the labor force in the region. The natural and specific reasoning of the professional domain may provide efficient linguistic criteria for the selection and grading contents of ESP.

Not only the syllabus drawing is now a challenge for the English university teacher and a great gain for student learning, but also the permanent working with new materials too, represents a sign of independence and a way for the ESP teacher to manifest his own professional abilities and personality. It is an established tradition of ESP teachers producing *in-house materials*. This is not an easy target, taking into account the knowledge needed and the time consumed. Once the responsibility undertaken, the ESP teacher must define first the objectives of the materials:

- a) - materials provide a stimulus to learning. Good materials do not teach, but they encourage learners to learn. They must contain:
 - interesting texts
 - enjoyable activities which engage learners thinking capacities
 - opportunities for the students to use their existing knowledge skills
 - texts which both students and teachers can cope with

b) - good materials help to organize the reading - learning process by a clear and a coherent unit structure

- by enabling the teacher planning the lesson and encourage the students sense of progress and achievement
- it is not advisable to be tightly structured, to produce a monotonous pattern of lesson; it must be clear and systematic flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety

c) - good materials embody the teacher's view about what he thinks about language learning. If he thinks that students learn when their thinking capacities are engaged, as for learning- centered approach, he will provide exercises and activities for active thought. If he thinks that learning is experience with languages, as for the learner's approach, his materials will have human interests. The authenticity of the texts is one of the issues that is being debated among the ESP practitioners. Authenticity is not a clear characteristic of a text itself, but for a particular context. So, the character of authenticity is of no intrinsic merit, but a matter of fitness to the learning purpose. The authenticity of the materials must increase the learning motivation. The teachers designing new courses in ESP need to distinguish and synthesize from the range of options available those which best suit the particular circumstances.

Any model for language teaching will provide a coherent framework for the integration of various aspects of learning but allowing enough room for creativity and variety. It always consists of four elements:

- *input* - a text, a dialogue, a video recording, a diagram. It will represent a stimulus material for activities and it will contain new language items, correct models of language use and a topic of communication. It will also provide opportunities for the students to use their information processing skills for the existing knowledge both of the language and subject matter.

- *content focus*: the non-linguistic content conveyed through the language should provide opportunities for meaningful communication in the classroom.

- *language focus*: the materials should provide possibility of breaking the language into pieces to be processed according to the teachers view to learning process.

- *task*: materials should be designed to lead towards communicative tasks in which the learners use the content and the language knowledge they have built up through the unit.

3. ESP Specific Methodology

As I mentioned before, the concept of curriculum adopted here is a comprehensive one, including all the elements and levels of teaching and learning as an active process.

The methods for conducting this process are conveyed by the ESP materials and by the syllabus themselves, and they will be also according to the general theoretical view and experience of the teacher working out the materials and taking the risks.

Lately, the learning-centered methodology has become prevalent especially in ESP learning as it takes into account some features of the second language learning:

- developmental process, even if sometimes is an accidental one;
- a decision-making process made by the students: what knowledge is new, how does it relate to existing knowledge, which bits of information are relevant, and so on;
- an emotional and social experience.

4. Learning Assessment

Any language teaching course has certain evaluation requirements but in ESP they are brought sharply into focus by the fact that ESP course has a highly specific objective. The beneficiaries of an ESP course want to see a return on their investment of time and money. This produced a demand for more and better evaluation procedures. There are two levels of evaluation that have been brought into prominence for ESP courses:

A) Students assessment. The results enable the beneficiaries (companies, institutions, sponsors) to decide whether and how much language tuition is required.

It is usually performed by:

- a) placement tests at the beginning of the course
- b) achievement tests administered any time through the course for testing how well the students are keeping up with the syllabus
- c) proficiency tests assessing whether or not the students can cope with the demands of a particular situation.

An important aspect of any type of student assessment in Romanian university is the problem of objectivity. The new tendency is now to organize unique session of students assessments based on unique criteria and standards. This is a significant sign that a real reform of the educational system has begun.

B) Course assessment. The content itself helps to assess whether the course objectives are being met. The students' evaluation and the course evaluation are not always distinct as the evaluation of the students reflects not just the students' performance but to some extent, the effectiveness of the course too. Both have a similar function in providing the feedback on the ESP course. It is important that yearly the ESP materials should be evaluated objectively by teams of teachers.

5. New Realms of knowledge

ESP teachers have to struggle to master the language and the subject matter beyond the bounds of their previous experience. Teacher's competence is highly important. It is fortunate that many ESP teachers become course and material designers and they have the power to influence the syllabus and materials in order to accommodate their own capacities. He has to know the fundamental elements of the subject area not to become a teacher of it, but rather an interested student of it. ESP students might find themselves having to work in close cooperation with subject specialists who are responsible for the learners' work or study experience outside the ESP classroom. The team-teaching process is of great help as the subject specialist can help ESP teacher in learning more about the students' target situation and, at the same time, the ESP teacher can make the subject specialist more aware of the problems learners and ESP teachers face.

These are mainly the general aspects and points of view that I consider relevant for the necessary reformation of higher education in our country as premises of the successful transition to the natural, healthy and sound market economy.

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