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## ESP IN SLOVENIAN SECONDARY TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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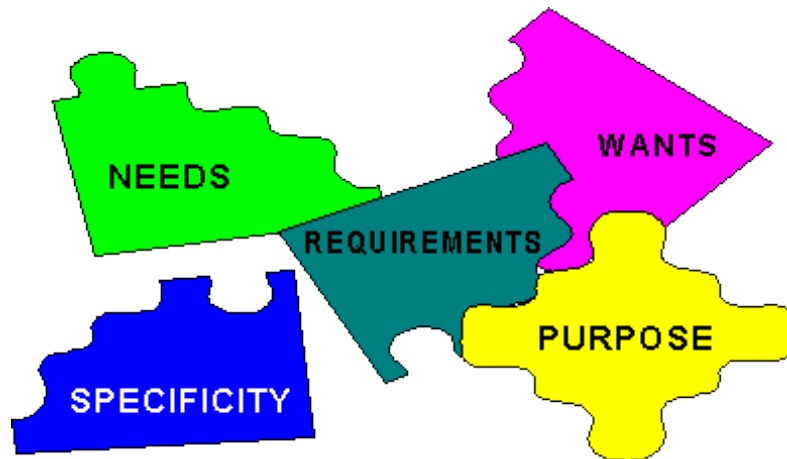


Figure 1: Key concepts in teaching English for specific purposes

### ***Introduction***

Students who attend secondary technical and vocational schools in Slovenia are 15 - 19 years old. 80 % of them take English as the first foreign language (18.7 % of them take German and 1.3 % Italian). Others (can) take it as their second foreign language according to the needs of the program. Their total workload of English is 420 (four-year programs) – 520 (five-year programs) hours.

In 1996 a curricular reform started. Planning and designing new curricula for all levels and subjects of primary and secondary education was an important phase of this reform. The task was entrusted to the Curricular Committees which were appointed by the Ministry of Education. The Curricular Committee for English consisted of 7 members, teachers of English at different levels from primary to university.

In this paper I would like to describe the curriculum development process and present how ESP was introduced into our new curriculum framework for secondary technical and vocational schools.

## *Curriculum development*

We started our work examining the existing curricula from 1992 (eg. ZRSŠ Š1992) which reflected much of the previous social and political system within the educational policy called Career-Oriented-Education (Trbanc 1997). The curricula contents and their form were out-dated and needed to be renewed and redesigned.

Anyway, the 1980's represent the period when teaching language for specific purposes (TLSP) was present in our secondary schools. There were 60 (14.3 %) out of 420 hours of English lessons dedicated to ESP, but language teaching was too often remote from reality requiring short-term 'cramming' of vocabulary and grammar rules in artificial exercises with sufficient accuracy to pass the exam. The future use of student's language knowledge in real target situations was hardly considered (Seliškar 1990).

While researching our guidelines for the new curricula content we endeavoured to meet the needs of students, fulfil the expectations of teachers and demands of the Curriculum Council. Furthermore we followed, studied and considered the recommendations of the Council of Europe Modern Languages Project 'Language Learning for European Citizenship' (1996) and others (e.g. Rüschoff and Fitzpatrick 1995, Egloff and Fitzpatrick 1997).

On this basis we were able to make an initial analysis and plan of the guidelines for the design of the new curricula. The following items became obvious :

1. **A learner- and learning-centred approach** - a move from teaching to learning
2. **A communicative and task-based approach** with authentic communication tasks and learning tasks
3. Emphasis on **developing language skills and strategies**
4. Emphasis on **learning to learn**, encouraging **creativity**
5. **ESP in higher classes** - better preparation for work or study tasks
6. More intensive use of the **modern language** in the classroom developing **language awareness**
7. **Variety** in working methods
8. Use of **information technology, multimedia, E-mail** etc.
9. Encouraging **learner autonomy, self-assessment, cross-cultural awareness**
10. **Project work** (not only traditional tests)

The members of the Curriculum Committee were all teachers, researchers and curricula developers at the same time. This enabled us to bridge the gap between educational researchers and teachers. As students of teaching and planning we were inspired primarily by the desire to understand the unique characteristics of a particular situation and the needs of the individual group of students in that situation. We were doing our regular jobs in different schools with different level programs between our meetings. So we had enough opportunity to observe, discover and define problems, to reflect on them, think of alternatives of solving them and share them.

At the beginning of our work we were all involved in all levels of primary and secondary education. After a few months, our work became so complex that we divided our tasks according to our regular teaching engagement. Since I was involved in ESP teaching, and also additionally deeply interested in it, the curricula for secondary vocational and technical education became my priority. Knowing how important the **needs analysis** is in designing an ESP curriculum I decided to do the research. The following diagram demonstrates how the analysis was carried out.

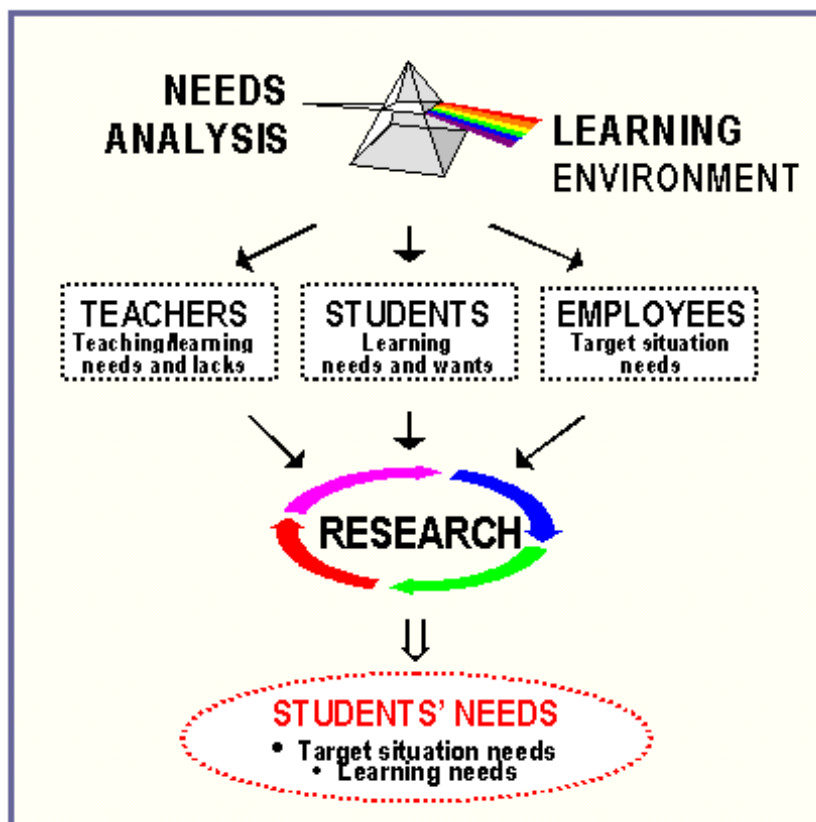


Figure 2: Needs analysis within the curriculum development process (Potočar 1998)

I was convinced that not only students but also teachers and people already employed in different professions would have interesting things to say about students' needs: teachers as facilitators of learning and employees as former students using their acquired knowledge in real situations. When viewed from different perspectives, needs can better be recognised and defined and thus provide a more objective data base. So I designed three different questionnaires: **Learning needs and wants** for students, **ESP - teaching /learning needs and lacks** for teachers, **Target situation needs** for employees.

Over 4000 students (20.71 % of the whole population of students in the higher classes of secondary vocational and technical education), 166 teachers of English and many people with different qualifications employed in different occupations were involved in the survey. The purpose of this research was to establish a common core of needs, wants, attitudes and areas of deficient knowledge among students which were compared with the target needs of people already working in those professions. Students' reasons for learning English, from study to work purposes, should represent the starting points which determine the language to be taught (Robinson 1991, Dudley-Evans and St John 1998). The research questions were:

1. What could be specific about ESP learning process, both in general and particularly in the Slovenian context?
2. How should this specificity be reflected in terms of curricula content, its general aims and objectives?
3. How should this specificity affect the assessment criteria to evaluate the benefits of learning?
4. In what way and to what extent should the curricula reflect the above mentioned specificity?
5. What, if any, are the special problems of Slovene learners?
6. How can the curriculum provide for systematic language build-up on the level of 'creative' language use?
7. What aspects of language learning seem to be common to all students within secondary

vocational education?

8. What is the relationship among individual language skills within language use in different disciplines?
9. Is it possible to establish 'common core' frameworks for the curricula according to different disciplines?

The above issues were studied in terms of target situation needs and language learning needs and the research findings had to be sandwiched between the immediate work. After a year the curricula appeared in draft forms and were discussed and evaluated by teachers in study groups. Their comments and opinions were taken into account at our further work on them.

### ***From EFL to ESP within the new curriculum framework***

Throughout the development of the curriculum framework the Curricular Committee endeavoured to design curricula which would provide support and guidance as working documents as well as leave room for the individual experience, creativity, and initiative of teachers. These principle concepts of the curriculum refer to ESP and EFL teaching in general. **'What distinguishes ESP from general English is an awareness of the need (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 53).'** Teachers move into the area of ESP when teaching for a purpose that suggests they should be concentrating on one group of language topics, skills and genres rather than another. At the same time different subject-areas are governed by the same linguistic themes or the same skills issues or even provide access to one another (Holme 1996: 3-4). One of the significant research findings of the needs analysis was therefore the recognition of disciplines that are related in this sense. According to the language skills needed to achieve communicative competence in specific contexts four major groups of disciplines or occupations were identified (e.g. for secondary technical schools: Retailing and services, Catering and tourism, Technical disciplines and science, Business and administration) as shown below.

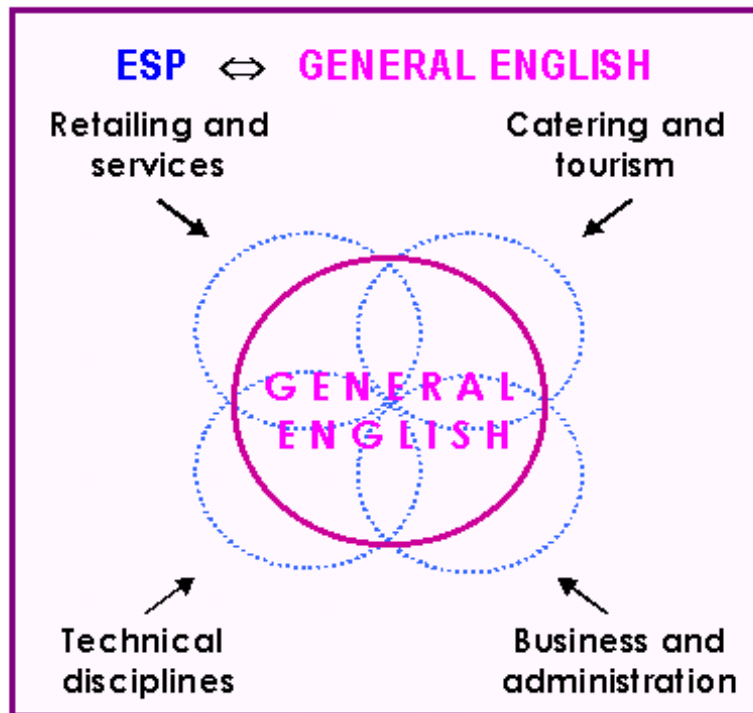


Figure 3: Major groups of ESP topics, skills and genres overlapping each other and the area of general English (Potočar 1998)

These four groups of disciplines are included in the curricula in the form of tables in order to help teachers to choose an appropriate teaching and evaluation technique. Trying to find suitable activities for each specific situation is like taking the first steps towards a recognition of needs for

a particular group of students and ‘ESP can be viewed as a narrowing of these needs’ (Holme 1996: 3). Therefore, some kind of ‘needs analysis’ is always a necessary part of an ESP endeavour and we should constantly ask ourselves ‘Who are our students?’.

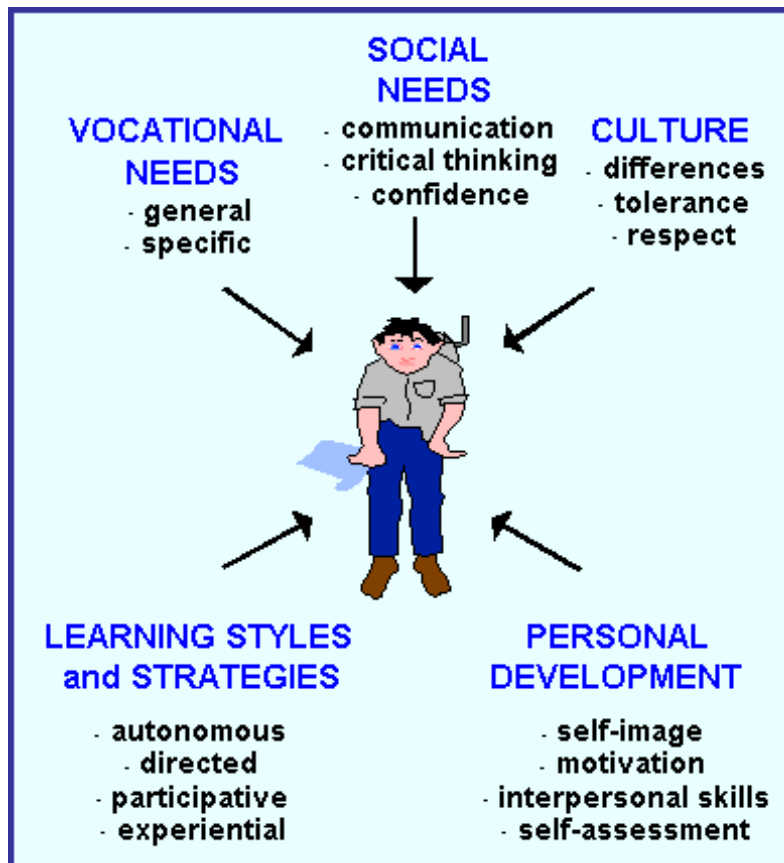


Figure 4: Who are the students in Slovenian secondary vocational and technical education? (Potočar 1998)

With the new Slovenian curricula, vocationally oriented language learning has become a systematic part of instruction in higher classes of secondary vocational and technical education. At this level most students are 17 - 19 years old. At the end of secondary vocational or technical education students are at the beginning of their specialism. On the other hand they have already learnt enough general English to start with ESP. In this situation teaching and learning ESP represent a continuum of general English on a higher, more specified level, integrating occupational, linguistic and social skills in order to prepare students for work and life. Thus the aim of ESP teaching is to introduce students to the kind of English they will meet in real situations in their future professions or need for their further education. In the language teaching and learning process students should combine directly work-related skills with personal growth and social awareness - this instruction should offer them the necessary tools to deal with their knowledge (e.g. Grosman et al. 1998).

All this should increase students’ general language awareness, monitoring skills, perception of the value of reflection, their willingness to hypothesise, guess and take risks, as well as their self-awareness - linguistic and personal. In this way teaching and learning are seen as an important step towards the development of learner autonomy which should help students ‘**to transfer school knowledge into action knowledge**’ (Little 1995, 1997, Krijgsman 1997). If school knowledge cannot be transferred into action knowledge it will always be the knowledge of someone else and cannot be integrated into students’ own personal constructs. In teaching LSP teachers should aim at ‘**freedom**’ in language use in terms of ‘**how**’ and ‘**what**’. They should be looking for ways to move the students from a role as a ‘**consumer**’ in the classroom towards a role as a ‘**producer**’ (Littlejohn 1997: 29). At the same time teachers must realise that they are not expected to become experts in any occupational area, but should merely open their minds and

acquire a certain interest in how things work. Present TLSP can be characterised as a **dynamic process-oriented approach**. The emphasis is not on the activities themselves, but on the process of how to use techniques and activities teachers are familiar with from general English also in ESP. In this sense the role of the language teacher has changed: this takes her/him out of the centre of the learning process. Language learning thus becomes a collaborative effort where the teacher's role is that of a facilitator. The non-linguistic information brought to language learning should be viewed as an enrichment and as a step towards learner independence (Bauer 1997, Köster 1997).

Our new curricula gradually began to be implemented in 1998 and were completely adopted in the following three years. Teachers were offered training workshops on ESP syllabus, course and materials design as well as testing. To support and complement the methodological changes of the new curricula an expert team of teachers from different secondary technical schools was appointed in 2001 by the Institute of Education in order to design a standardised professional school-leaving exam - **Professional Matura**. In its draft version Professional Matura consists of three components: non-profession specific reading comprehension and language knowledge sub-test, and writing and speaking/listening sub-tests which are partly profession specific.

Based on the analysis of target language use situations, from which characteristics of test content and method are derived, as well as an interaction between language knowledge and specific purpose content knowledge, our fundamental goal is to engage test takers in **communicatively purposeful activities**. As Douglas (2000: 71) argues LSP test tasks should offer interactional authenticity in order to involve negotiation for meaning or creation of discourse.

### ***Conclusion***

It is not an easy job to be a teacher of ESP, but it is a very challenging one. And that is the reason why creative, flexible and self-aware teachers find it interesting, exciting and rewarding. TLSP enables teachers to come closer to the very heart of what students really need in order to communicate and be successful in their near future professions or studies, and students know that language is most certainly easier to learn when it is real and natural, when it is whole, sensible and relevant. It is easier when it belongs to the learner, has purpose for him/her, when the learner chooses to use it and has the power to use it (Goodman 1986).

In an ESP classroom, selection of specialist text can not and should not in itself make a course an ESP course. What is more important is a demonstrated need, which may be for specialist text or for some other kind of material. What we are really involved in as ESP teachers is teaching English to specified people. In this way teachers should follow student's target situation needs and learning needs, or as Ellis and Johnson (1994: 26) say we are supposed to focus on the systems, procedures and products that are at the heart of what the students do in English and to be able to deduce from this knowledge the language needs of each type of learners.

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