

Fostering Active Learner Engagement in ESP Classes

Nemira Mačianskienė and Vilma Bijeikienė

Abstract This chapter focuses on research into the quality of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with the focus on active learner engagement into the learning process. At the foundation of the study lies the belief that language learning, especially learning a language for specific or occupational purposes, is a lifelong learning endeavor. Participants of this study were 78 first-cycle and second-cycle students of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) who took four ESP courses, namely *Business English*, *English for Diplomats*, *English for Politics* and *Legal English*, in 2015 and 2016 spring and autumn semesters and 10 teachers of 15 different ESP courses. The study used the Mixed Method Approach to collect more comprehensive data and interpret it from different perspectives. Among other results, the study has revealed that most problematic is the development of those competences that relate to students' active participation in the learning process and their development of transversal skills. We hope that the findings of the study will contribute to the field of ESP methodology by providing insights into fostering active learner engagement through efficient ESP teaching and learning activities and methods.

Keywords English for specific purposes · Language for specific purposes · Active learning · Learner engagement · Formative assessment · Transversal skills

1 Introduction

Over the last decade European Space of Higher Education has experienced a skyrocketing increase in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS) (Milne et al. 2013; Dafouz and Smit 2016; Smit and Dafouz 2012; see also Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (see chapter “From EFL to EMI: Hybrid Practices in English as a Medium of Instruction in Japanese Tertiary Contexts” in this volume) for EMI in Japanese higher education and Soruç et al. (see chapter “Listening Comprehension Strategies

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of EMI Students in Turkey” in this volume) for EMI in Turkish higher education), which has triggered vast research on how content is taught using English as an additional language and as the main language of research and studies, or *lingua academica* to use Phillipson’s (2009) term. EMI is becoming a rule rather than an exception of a European university and this change has resulted in an extreme shift towards the research on the acquisition of content in EMI programs or dealing with international audiences leaving the development of linguistic competences largely of a secondary concern. Nevertheless, an increasing number of EMI study programs do not simultaneously guarantee either the quality of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that must be an indispensable part of such a study process or the competence of ESP that students and teachers must inevitably possess for such a study process to be implemented with efficiency and success. While ESP is generally regarded as a commonsensical and taken for granted part of EMI, it is of utmost importance to make every effort to ensure its quality in the teaching process and in the development of students’ communicative competences.

Education at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU)¹, established in 1922, closed during the soviet occupation, and re-established in 1989, is based on the principles of Liberal Arts and Sciences which embody the provision of broad versatile higher education, in-depth studies in the chosen major field and acquisition of transversal skills. The university adheres to its values – to be critical and engaged, to be international and multilingual, and to promote creativity in science and arts – listed in its Mission and Vision statements. *Artes Liberales* ethos permeates the organization of interdisciplinary studies in a broad range of fields ranging from humanities, social sciences and arts to the fundamental sciences, environmental sciences and biotechnologies. It fosters students’ creativity and social responsibility as well as active engagement in the study process through acquisition of analytical thinking skills, plurilingual communication competences, ethical decision making and lifelong learning skills, ability to cope with challenges of complexity, diversity and change and contribute to the well-being of the society.

Following the principles of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the university creates favorable conditions for language learning so that a student of any cycles and any major can choose any of the offered languages². For instance, a major in business administration may opt to gain communicative competence of Chinese or a major in IT may choose to learn Norwegian, thus generating a wide spectrum of language-enhanced specialty options. The English language, on the other hand, is obligatory to all majors of the first-cycle programs and strongly recommended to all other students.

¹ www.vdu.lt

² VMU offers around 30 languages as compulsory or elective courses including Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Modern and Old Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kyrgyz, Latin, Latvian, Lithuanian and Lithuanian Sign language, Modern, New Testament and Ancient Greek, Old Norse, Norwegian, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Yiddish.

The VMU model of Liberal Arts and Sciences uncovers vast possibilities for each student to develop their transversal skills including the improvement of communicative competences as enshrined in *VMU Language Policy* adopted in 2014 and the latest amendments of *VMU Study Regulations* of 2016. While the former document guarantees linguistic rights and language learning options for all VMU community, the latter document increases language learning options for the first-cycle students by the formula 12+12: all first-cycle students have to use 12 ECTS for language learning as compulsory courses and can spend the other 12 ECTS taking language courses as electives. Aiming at interdisciplinarity of the newly developed and current study programs – as one of the strategic University objectives – students are offered a number of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses (English, French, German, Latin and Russian) including such courses as *French for International Relations*, *German for Work*, *Business Russian*, and *Latin for Lawyers*. As far as the English language is concerned, the required competence for all first-cycle students is C1 level (according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 2001). Attuning to the CEFR levels and forming language groups on the basis of students' actual level of competence allows ESP teachers to avoid challenges of significant differences in students' proficiency, noted by Çelik, et al. (see chapter “[Are We Really Teaching English for Specific Purposes, or Basic English Skills? The Cases of Turkey and Latvia](#)” in [this volume](#)). It can be attained through a broad choice of skill-oriented C1 level courses, such as *English Grammar for Communication*, *English for Intercultural Communication*, *Reading and Listening*, *Academic writing* etc., and C1/C2 level courses of ESP for different specific domains like *Business English*, *Legal English*, *English for Diplomats*, *English for Art*, *English for Social Sciences*, *English for Natural Sciences*, *English for Politics*, etc.

The ESP courses provided at VMU were evaluated as “promising examples” and acclaimed as “using new technology and innovative combinations of other approaches” in the Report of the CELAN³ (*Language Strategies for Competitiveness and Employability*) project, coordinated by the Business Platform for Multilingualism. It is also indicated in the Report that the ESP courses delivered at VMU “cover a range of disciplines, including Psychology and Social Work, Political Science, Technology, Arts, Law, Education, and Business and Academic English”. These courses, as further maintained in the Report, focus on a variety of communicative and general skills: “teaching students how to negotiate, work in teams, organize discussions, write business letters and plans, and conduct job interviews”. Moreover, VMU utilizes the virtual learning platform Moodle to create a virtual environment for language learning, in addition to employing computerized learning advantages provided by multimedia classroom and resource management system SANAKO LAB 300”.

As a result, VMU English for Specific Purposes courses aim at helping students to prepare for carrying out efficient professional communication at the workplace, having acquired work related language and communication skills and having gained

³www.celan-platform.eu

understanding of the key principles and ideas of the professional field. Assuming that language learning, especially, learning a language for specific or occupational purposes is a lifelong learning endeavor, ESP courses aim at fostering the development of learner autonomy, enabling students to take control over their learning and learn to learn throughout their lives. Therefore, the engagement of learners into the language learning process encouraging them to become more autonomous is an acute problem in teaching ESP.

The **aim** of the present study is to analyze the implementation of ESP targeted to foster active learner engagement. The following **objectives** were set to achieve the aim:

1. To examine ESP course descriptions;
2. To identify the ESP learner needs;
3. To analyze methods and activities used in ESP courses as different from those used in General English (GE) courses;
4. To determine job related competences acquired in ESP courses;
5. To explore opportunities for active learner engagement in learning languages for specific purposes and assessment activities.

2 Theoretical Background

In his analysis of the current issues for language policy in Higher Education, Kelly (2013) states that teaching a foreign language at tertiary level has to be sensitive and responsive to the changing contexts in society and the labor market. Such responsiveness, or adaptation, as contended by Kelly, may include new materials which “address themes of current concern”, better fitting methods which have more focus on group work or independent learning, more use of technological tools, new organizational arrangements with more engagement of students as well as better “involvement of employers and other stakeholders in course development” (pp. 15–16). These observations of Kelly’s especially pertain to ESP courses, the fundamental features of which are variability and diversity in terms of content and methodology as predetermined by their purpose to serve the particular needs of students opting for perfection in their different study fields and specific subject domains.

Along the same lines, Paltridge and Starfield (2013) emphasize students’ specific needs as the common denominator in the development of the content and aims of ESP courses and single out their main focal points such as “the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English” (2013, p. 2). The scholars further raise the main questions to be answered while planning and designing ESP courses, namely “how to identify learner needs, the nature of the genres that learners need to be able to produce as well as participate in, and how we can know that our learners have been able to do this successfully, and, if not, what we can do to help them to do this” (2013, p. 2). Similar questions are

reflected and focused on in numerous studies on ESP origins and development (Hutchinson and Waters 1987), on its implementation, as for instance Belyaeva (2015), Bijeikienė and Meškauskienė (2013) in the context of English for Politics, Bartnikaitė and Bijeikienė (2017) and Juodinytė-Kuznetsova (2015) in the field of Legal English, Dudzik and Dzięcioł-Pędich (2017), Ferguson (2013) and Gutowska (2017) in English for Medical Purposes (EMP) to name a few.

Bijeikienė and Meškauskienė (2013) analyzed the specificity of ESP planning for students in the fields of political sciences and diplomacy. In addition to more universal components of ESP such as specialized vocabulary, terminology and collocations, as maintained by the scholars, students of political sciences and diplomacy have to gain mastery in political discourse analysis in order to be efficient and successful in politics related contexts. Given that political discourse is rich in literary tropes, euphemisms, double talk, indirectness and other linguistic and rhetorical devices (Charteris-Black 2014; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Wodak 2009), an ESP course for such students has to provide them with the skills and capacity to cope with these features of political texts. Thus, in their analysis of metaphor and metonymy in an ESP course *English for Politics*, the scholars aimed at investigating students' "awareness of the role of metaphor and metonymy in understanding and producing political texts" as well as their "experience and capacity to identify metaphorical and metonymical expressions in a piece of political discourse" (Bijeikienė and Meškauskienė 2013, p. 91). The scholars discovered that students' theoretical knowledge of metaphor and metonymy as well as students' comprehension of their importance in political discourse were quite satisfactory. Nevertheless, students' capacity to identify and analyze metaphorical and metonymical use in a piece of political discourse was not adequately developed suggesting that ESP courses have to equip students better with sound practical and analytical skills for their future careers.

Bartnikaitė and Bijeikienė (2017) carried out a needs analysis in the context of Legal English. Namely, they interviewed legal practitioners in two Lithuanian law companies and Kaunas district court to examine the adequacy of General English and Legal English skills that the respondents had acquired in tertiary education for their job related tasks. The study showed that up to 30% of the respondents evaluated their receptive and productive skills of General English as inadequate and even 50% indicated that their intercultural communication skills were not developed in tertiary education at all. This finding closely correlates with the findings of Dudzik and Dzięcioł-Pędich (2017) in their analysis of EMP courses where they state that "the notion of intercultural competence is hardly ever, if at all, presented to them [the students]" of medical programs (p. 64).

Communicative competences of Legal English in Bartnikaitė and Bijeikienė's (2017) study, such as using legal terminology, writing and translating legal texts as well as consulting clients orally and in writing, were self-evaluated by the respondents as even worse developed. The respondents especially highlighted their urge for more fluency in oral communication with partners and clients and their need to continuously update and enrich their personal Legal English repertoire. Such results not only propose the necessity to increase the quality of teaching Legal English to

future practitioners at universities, but also accentuate a high demand for the development of students' transversal and learning skills so that they are prepared for future autonomous learning, informal education and personal development. Likewise, Belyaeva (2015) in her study on the organization of ESP curriculum, emphasized the complexity and difficulty of planning an all-inclusive ESP course on the grounds that "future professional roles" (p. 87) of today's students are impossible to be clearly determined while planning an ESP curriculum; thus, students' preparation for lifelong learning is of utmost significance.

3 Research Design

A descriptive research was applied in this study which was primarily concerned with the following research question: Do ESP C1/C2 level courses provided at Vytautas Magnus University create opportunities for student active engagement in language learning and its assessment processes, allowing students to acquire independent and autonomous lifelong learner skills?

3.1 *Methods of Data Collection*

The Mixed Methods Approach (Cresswell et al. 2011; Gilbert 2008) was applied in the research using qualitative followed by quantitative and then again qualitative methodologies to gather and analyze the research data. The qualitative data were obtained through document analysis, i.e. the analysis of 6 ESP C1/C2 level course descriptions with regard to the aims and active learner engagement and using semi-structured in-depth interviews for teachers, followed by collecting quantitative data through questionnaire surveys for students. In total 100 questionnaires were administered to VMU first-cycle and second-cycle students who took four ESP courses in spring and autumn semesters in 2015 and 2016 with the return rate of 78%. The Mixed Method Approach helped to collect more comprehensive data and interpret it from different perspectives, thus increase its validity and enhance understanding of the phenomenon of teaching ESP at tertiary level.

3.2 *Participants*

The research participants were 78 students of 4 ESP C1/C2 level courses at VMU who returned the filled in questionnaire surveys: *English for Diplomats* (29.5%), *Legal English* (32.1%), *Business English* (26.9%) and *English for Politics* (11.5%). After the student surveys had been analyzed, semi-structured in-depth interviews

were performed with 10 teachers who deliver ESP courses at VMU: *English for Diplomats*, *English for Politics*, *Business English*, *Legal English*, *English for Social Sciences*, *English for Information Technologies*, *German for Professional Work* and *Latin for Lawyers*. Some courses (*Business English* and *Legal English*) are taught by two teachers each other semester and some teachers deliver more than one ESP course, thus in total the teachers provided their opinion on 15 ESP courses. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain teacher information on the research object and clarify some specific issues as well as to obtain more comprehensive data.

As VMU ESP courses are offered at C1/C2 level, the research participants were expected to have advanced English language competences of C1 level, thus they either had completed General English courses of B2 level while studying at secondary school or at the university prior to being enrolled in the advanced level ESP courses; therefore, not surprisingly, 80.8% of the research respondents self-evaluated their current General English language competence as rather good, 15.4% as average and only 3.8% as insufficient.

However, the results of the self-evaluated current ESP language competence were different, as a smaller number of students (61.5%) considered their ESP language competence to be rather good and 34.6% stated that it was average; the same small number of students evaluated it as insufficient (3.8%). With regard to the cycle of study, only six students were the second-cycle students, whereas the rest 72 were the first-cycle students. With regard to gender composition, 63% of the respondents were female students and 37% – male.

3.3 Instruments

A questionnaire for students was prepared for the research study targeted at identifying student opinion on ESP courses taught at VMU. The questionnaire for students contained 13 questions to identify students' language learning needs, current GE and ESP competences, their self-identified differences between these two types of courses, knowledge and skills developed in ESP courses, and student engagement and opportunities for active learning and assessment. There were 3 closed questions collecting demographic data, 5 open-ended questions and 5 questions with Likert-type scales where students had to choose the most suitable variant from 3-items (Yes. Sometimes. Never.) or 4-items (Yes. Not enough. No. I don't know (NA) or Yes. A little. No. NA). The Likert-type scales exhibited balance and symmetry, i.e. they contained equal number of positive and negative values. Furthermore, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed to identify teacher opinion on fostering active student engagement, evoke teacher self-assessment of the use of active learning methods and receive teacher comments and explanations on some data obtained from student questionnaires.

4 Research Findings

4.1 ESP Course Descriptions

At VMU the ESP course design and descriptions are based on a thorough analysis of literature on ESP, talks with discipline teachers and interviews with university alumni with improvements made on the basis of the comments received from the Attestation of Foreign Language Subject Committee; all courses have been attested till 2019. Analysis of course descriptions of 6 ESP C1/C2 courses provided at VMU (*Business English, English for Art, English for Diplomacy, English for Law, English for Politics and English for Social Sciences*)⁴ shows them to have a common aim, namely, improving students' receptive and productive skills through:

1. building up students' subject related vocabulary (e.g. "broadening specific vocabulary", "building on political concepts and the specialized political vocabulary", "acquiring appropriate terminology and the specialized vocabulary", learning to "use relevant legal terms and lexis");
2. reading, listening to, analyzing and discussing subject related texts (e.g. "political texts and events", "culture related texts and issues", "legal discourse", "various authentic texts on issues in social sciences");
3. developing written communication skills (e.g. "writing politics related analyses, practicing the relevant discursive strategies and brushing up the relevant grammar", "writing analyses of cultural events, learning and practicing the relevant grammar", "gaining the ability to write clear and succinct legal texts");
4. developing oral communication skills (e.g. learning "to present effective oral argumentation in a variety of legal settings", improving "language competence necessary for formal and informal communication in profession related fields", participating in "ongoing, integrated business simulations, which present everyday challenges for the motivated business person in the fields of intercultural communication and social activities, organizational behavior, human resources management, financial management, marketing", "performing and presenting a research").

Thus, on the basis of the analysis of the aims and content description, it can be presumed that ESP courses create possibilities for active student engagement as they focus on the analysis and discussion as well as communication skill development. Furthermore, most English C1/C2 level courses indicate the use of active learning methods directly, by focusing on the development of students' English language for specific purposes skills through individual, pair, group and class work, self-study tasks, practicing the language in simulated real-life situations, in SANAKO lab and virtual MOODLE environment (on-line activities, synchronous and asynchronous conversations and discussion forums, interactive tests and

⁴<http://uki.vdu.lt/courses/>

exercises). However, no direct or indirect indications of problem solving and transversal skill development were found in the analyzed course descriptions.

Aiming at sharing the best practices of ESP provision at VMU, the research further focuses on practical implementation of ESP courses, starting with the needs analysis based on two sources: the opinion of students (questionnaire surveys) and teachers (interviews).

4.2 Needs Analysis

Given that most of English C1/C2 level courses are offered as electives⁵, it was important to find out what determines the students' choice of an ESP course or, more exactly, what their needs were. It was assumed that motivation leads to more active involvement of students into the learning process.

The respondents' answers to the open question on their needs differed. More than half of the respondents (53%) stated that they needed a C1/C2 level course as a study program requirement. They further justified their choice of this particular ESP course by adding some specific reasons which were mainly related to their major: e.g., "I am studying marketing so Business English seemed to be the right English course to choose" or "I'm studying political sciences therefore a specific course related to this field was the main motive to choose the course". Other respondents expressed their intention to enrich their communication skills relevant to a particular study field, as for instance, English speaking and writing skills in *English for Diplomats* or to acquire new knowledge in *Legal English*. Yet another group of respondents opted for more general communication skills such as to improve "skills profoundly and gain new competences and approaches". There were respondents who intended to continue learning the language with an urge for more practical skills: a choice of Business English "as it is practically useful in life". Finally, some respondents chose an ESP course because of the teacher, like in the following case of selecting *Business English*: "the main reason of my choice was the lecturer. She is very professional, flexible and objective at the same time". In general, quite a high percentage (21%) of the respondents mentioned a lack of communication skills and "felt a need to further refine" them.

In addition to focusing on the students' perspective, the present study also aims at discovering the LSP teachers' attitudes regarding the needs of students who chose their LSP courses. The opinion of the teachers – research respondents – on the needs of their LSP students largely iterated the students' opinion by simultaneously providing responses that are more comprehensive. In teachers' view, students need to gain specialized vocabulary, e.g. "Students can communicate in general English quite well but have insufficient vocabulary in the specific area of their major, in

⁵*English for Diplomats* is compulsory for students of the study program Diplomacy and International Relations, *Legal English* is compulsory for Law program students. However, students from other study programs regularly take both these courses as elective ones.

particular, business or law". They also lack knowledge of and especially experience in "using more complex grammatical structures, which are encountered in difficult authentic texts and hinder their comprehension, e.g. contract texts in Legal English". Students who already work in the areas related to their studies (business enterprises, educational institutions, etc.) and have to use English in different work related situations lack practical skills in the application of their theoretical knowledge, thus they need "to improve their ESP competences in order to perform job tasks better and get promoted". Moreover, teachers believe that in LSP courses students opt for improving not only their practical communication skills but also their transversal skills to become more competitive in the labor market, e.g. "intend to prepare for their professional career better", "seek for broader opportunities in the prospective professional activity", or "have ambitions to better career prospects". Finally, there is a category of students who take their courses for more general reasons, e.g. "some simply like the English language" or they generally want to "improve their English".

4.3 Specific Features of ESP in Comparison to GE

Research on ESP acknowledges that ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves (Dudley-Evans and John 1998). Nevertheless, it is often the case that language teachers delivering ESP courses use learner-centered active language teaching methods which involve active learner engagement in the learning process and may proceed face-to-face as well as in the virtual environment. The students and teachers of the present study were asked to evaluate peculiarities of ESP courses and compare them to GE courses along the following parameters: teaching and assessment methods, activities, forms of learning and textbooks (see Fig. 1).

The research respondents-students were asked to express their opinion on all listed variables by choosing the suitable variants from four item Likert-type scale. In general, positive views towards the given statements seem to dominate all over the given options. According to the students, the most obvious feature of ESP courses is "studying specific, specialty related words and expressions"; the absolute majority (even 92.3%) of the respondents marked this option. In addition, 85.9% assert that ESP courses offer "more opportunities to express their opinion and give suggestions". Two thirds of the respondents find "analysis of complicated specialty texts" and "discussions on various work-related topics" (74.7% and 73% respectively) as other important features of ESP courses.

Considering different methods used in ESP, 67.9% of the respondents agree that different methods are applied and half of them (53.8%) admit that ESP courses offer analytical tasks which require the use of higher order thinking skills (27% chose the option "a little") and more creative tasks. Almost half (46%) of the students agree that ESP courses offer more pair and group work but one third of them disagree with this opinion (28.2%) and 19.2% agree only to some extent.

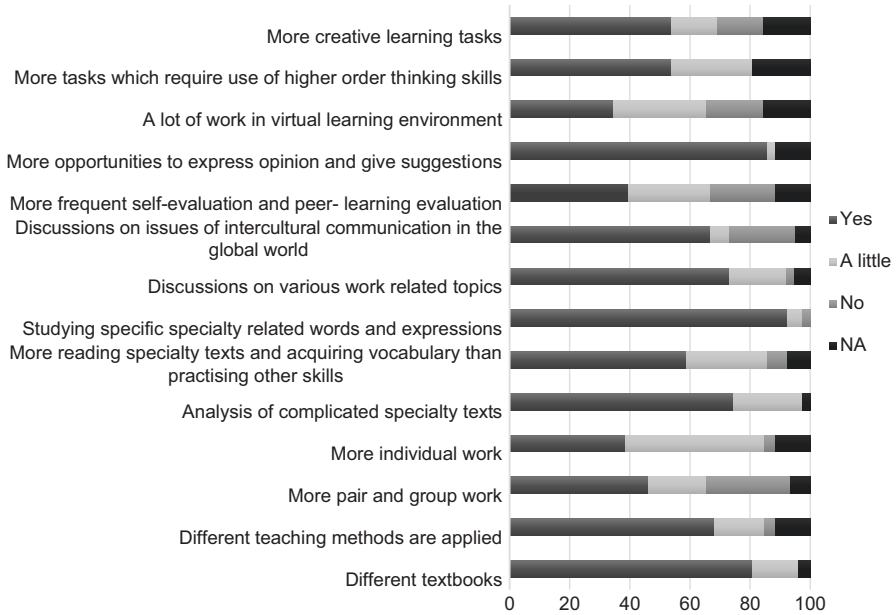


Fig. 1 Students’ opinion on differences between ESP and GE courses

Individual and independent work is another feature which evokes students’ different opinions: 38.5% of the respondents consider that ESP courses provide more individual work, whereas more students (46.2%) admit that there is only a little more individual work in an ESP course. Similar results are found while evaluating two other features: providing opportunities for self-evaluation and peer evaluation and work in virtual learning environment. With regard to the former, almost 40% of the respondents agree that self-evaluations and peer-evaluations are more frequent in ESP courses, but almost one fifth of them (26%) are of the opinion that these courses provide only a little more opportunities for self- and peer-evaluation; whereas 21.8% of the respondents disagree that there are differences in this respect. What concerns independent work in virtual learning environment (an indispensable element of teaching all language courses at VMU, including ESP), one third of the students agree and almost the same number (30.8%) agree to some extent that ESP courses provide more assignments for independent work in Moodle virtual environment. Only 19.2% of the students see no difference between the General English and ESP courses with regard to this feature. Finally, answers to open questions, which were also provided to the students, show that students find ESP courses “more specific and deeper than general English ones”. They also appreciate the fact that ESP courses are more concerned with practical skills, e.g. “ESP courses are more oriented to the functions that I will need to use in real life”, and that they are helpful to those who study in EMI programs, e.g. “we are studying the subject matter only in English”.

Teachers' opinion analysis shows that teaching methods and activities at large depend on the subject specificity, for instance, the courses of *English for Politics* and *English for Diplomats* require competence in recognizing, comprehending, analyzing and using rhetorical means such as metaphor, metonymy, irony, rhetorical questions, etc. because of such specific features of political discourse. Another type of specificity, namely, its specific legal vocabulary and terminology, is a distinguishing feature of *Legal English*. In *Legal English*, it is very important that students be able to differentiate between a mundane and a legal meaning of a word. *German for Work* involves assigning practical tasks and problem solving activities to students the solutions of which require addressing specialists in German enterprises in Lithuania; thus students work in teams practicing the language in real communication encounters. *English for Social Sciences* employs jig-saw activities, simulated press-conferences where students justify and defend their positions, perform small scale research drawing connections among ideas, select, analyze, graphically present and interpret data, formulate recommendations and design models of future actions. *Latin for Lawyers* focuses on the analysis of specific lexical connotations and lexical variances as well as on the use of aphorisms, maxims, sayings, statements and clichés; therefore, more individual analysis and synthesis are applied.

4.4 Job Related Competence Development in ESP

In order to identify if the aims of an ESP course have been met and if students have achieved the targeted learning outcomes, the research respondents-students were asked to self-evaluate if they have acquired job related knowledge and skills during ESP courses.

The absolute majority of the students (92.3% and 88.8% respectfully) have a unanimous opinion with regard to two job related competences: they have expanded job related vocabulary as well as independent and autonomous learner skills, i.e. now they are capable of learning /developing their ESP language skills on their own in their lifelong learning endeavors (see Fig. 2). About 70% of the respondents think they have gained experience to discuss various job related issues, and over 65% of the respondents have acquired job related English language knowledge and job related communication skills, but over 30% of them feel the lack of such knowledge and skills and one third of the respondents (30.8%) feel prepared not enough to communicate in English efficiently at the workplace. 23% of them admitted having acquired these skills but not enough, and one tenth (11.5%) evaluated their preparation to communicate in English at the workplace negatively.

Students' opinions diverged mostly while self-evaluating the development of problem solving skills (yes – 38.5%, not enough – 26.9%, no – 23.1%). Another aspect which received almost half of negative evaluations was learning complicated grammar structures of ESP (23.1% – not enough, 11.5% – no, 11.5% NA).

As some students study and work at the same time, they were asked to mark the situations where they apply ESP competences at the workplace (see Fig. 3). The

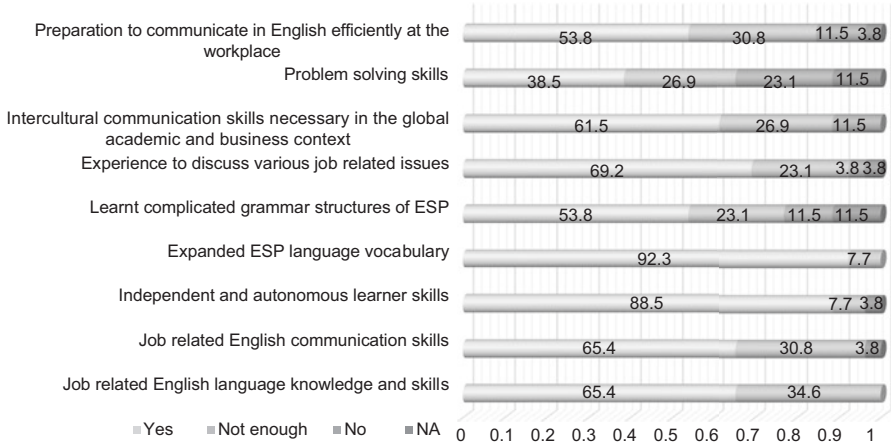


Fig. 2 Job related competences acquired by the students at the end of an ESP course

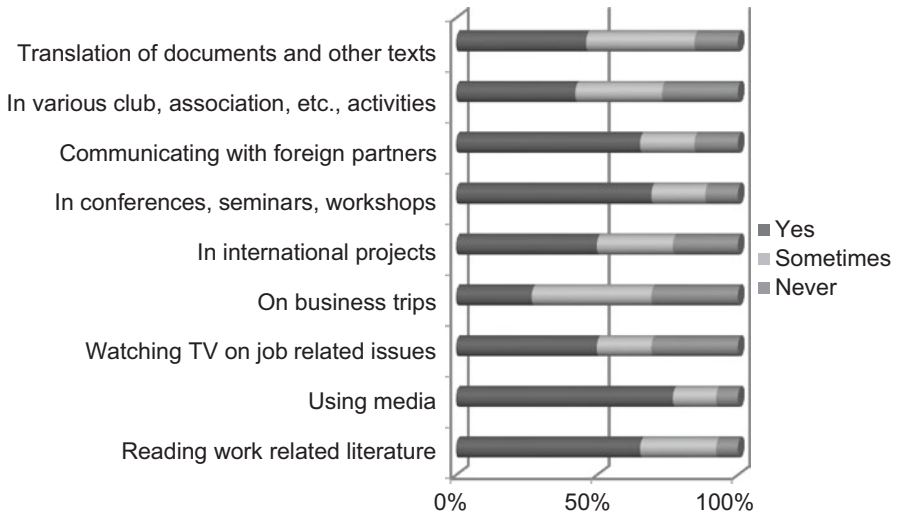


Fig. 3 ESP competences already applied at the workplace

students mostly apply competences gained in ESP courses using media (76.9%), in conferences, seminars, workshops (69.2%), reading work related literature and communicating with foreign partners (both 65.4%) and watching TV on job related issues (50%). Fewer than half of the respondents use knowledge and skills acquired in ESP courses in various club and association activities and for translating documents and other texts. Only one fourth use these skills on business trips.

Teachers asserted that the employed students are more concerned with the course content and skill development; they are more self-critical evaluating their current knowledge and skills and often request to revise some grammar topics (for instance,

tenses or articles) which are usually not analyzed in depth in advanced level courses as they focus more on perfecting students' English language skills.

As regards the development of intercultural communication skills necessary in the global academic and business context, the research results are rather positive in contrast to other research: it was found that 61.5% of the respondents-students feel they have acquired intercultural communication skills necessary in the global academic and business context, and one third of the respondents (26.9%) feel lack of such skills ("not enough").

4.5 Opportunities for Becoming Active Learners

It is assumed in this study that ESP courses should aim at providing opportunities for students to become active learners; therefore, it was important to find out if the research respondents – students feel themselves as being active participants of the study process. Almost two thirds of the students (61.5%) self-evaluated themselves as being active participants in the learning process and one third of them (34.6%) evaluated themselves as active, but not enough (see Fig. 4). Three students did not provide any answers to this question. Even 80.5% of the respondents admitted being encouraged to participate actively by the teachers and that their opinion and suggestions were appreciated in class.

Learning and developing English used at the workplace (specialty language) is a lifelong learning activity. Thus, the students were asked if they have acquired useful language learning strategies in this course (efficient ways how to learn, e.g. vocabulary, etc.) as necessary components of independent and autonomous learner who can continue learning beyond the class and throughout their lives. Even 69.2% of the respondents admitted having acquired such strategies with 15.4% who feel they

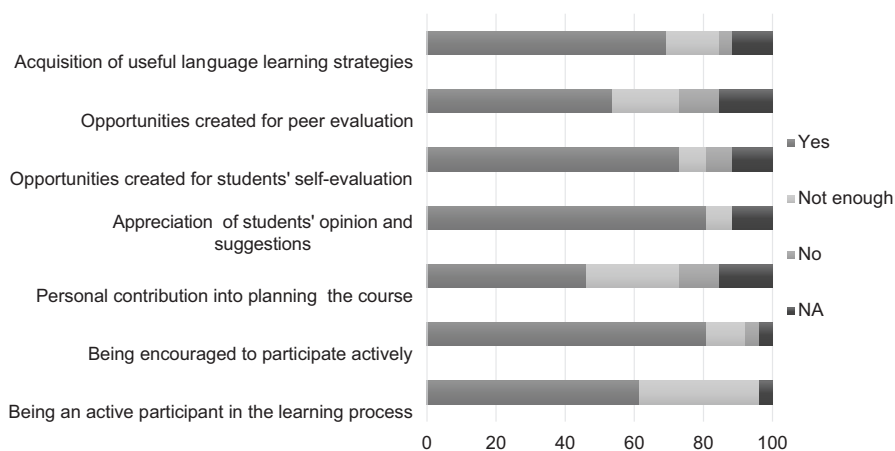


Fig. 4 Students' active engagement in ESP courses

have not acquired enough of the useful language learning strategies. The majority of the students are satisfied with the opportunities created for them to self-evaluate themselves (73.1%), but only half of them were satisfied with opportunities created to evaluate their peers (53.8%), 19.2% considered having not been given enough of such opportunities and even one tenth of the respondents (11.5%) denied having such opportunities in their ESP course. The opportunity to personally contribute to planning the course, e.g., suggesting topics for analysis or discussion, was evaluated lowest by the students, but quite moderate in general, as less than half of them (46.2%) admitted contributing to course planning with almost 27% who said “not enough”.

Teachers support the students’ opinion on creating opportunities for active student engagement in course planning as they see it as a possibility to better adhere the course syllabus to the students’ needs and as an opportunity to develop active learners who assume responsibility for their learning. In *English for Politics* courses “students’ needs and suggestions are taken into account more, particularly, when groups are multicultural or when students from different specialties join the group”. *English for Social Sciences* course teacher provides opportunities for students to discuss the course syllabus and make some amendments depending on their needs, i.e. suggest topics for discussion and analysis to be included in/excluded from the course syllabus. Students can also choose topics, material and form for their individual or pair presentations.

5 Discussion and Implications

The document analysis, namely, the analysis of ESP course descriptions, has revealed that most English C1/C2 level courses aim at development of subject specific vocabulary and work-related oral and written communication skills as well as other receptive and productive language skills. As far as the means for active learner involvement are concerned, they also include the use of active learning methods (such as group and pair-work) to engage students into active development of English language for specific purposes skills in face-to-face and virtual learning environments. However, the development of transversal skills (including problem solving, etc.) in the course descriptions could be more elaborated so that the preparation for lifelong learning through active learner engagement would be predetermined and justifiably expected by the learners while joining the course.

As the investigation of the needs analysis revealed, students’ and teachers’ opinions converged: although each second student chose an ESP course because they had to take a C1/C2 level course, but their choice of specific ESP course shows they were motivated to upgrade their communication skills in a particular field of studies. Thus students’ active engagement in the study process could have been presumed.

Comparing the students’ opinion with that of the teachers on specific features of ESP in comparison to General English courses, it is evident that both teachers and students share the same ideas except for some incongruences with regard to the

following activities: individual work, cognitively demanding problem-solving tasks which develop students' higher order thinking skills as well as self-evaluation and peer-evaluation. All the interviewed teachers have a more favorable opinion with regard to these activities which require active learning. First, teachers consider that ESP courses require more individual and independent work, whereas the students' opinion on this issue is inconsistent. When teachers were asked to provide reasons for such divergence in student and teacher opinion, the following assumptions were made: "some students might have studied a lot independently in lower levels of English and therefore do not see much difference here"; "frequent discussions, debates and pair/group work activities of ESP courses may take less time to prepare for some well-read on the subject and savvy students" or "class and group work prevail in advanced levels of English so students might not include homework which most frequently requires individual and independent work".

Regarding the second aspect, teachers assumed that their LSP courses developed students' problem-solving skills as they were created opportunities to negotiate and participate in business simulation and similar activities, still research respondents-students' satisfaction with the development of such skills was low. Analyzing teacher opinion on opportunities provided for self- and peer-evaluation, the majority of teachers admitted applying both formative and summative assessment methods in their ESP courses. However, some teachers indicated using more traditional methods of assessment such as a test or revealed that they were not sure about how to provide students with opportunities for self- and peer-evaluation. Consequently, the teachers of the Institute of Foreign Languages had an opportunity to participate in the Erasmus + project FAB⁶ – FAB – *Formative Assessment for Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* – an international educational project, financed through European Union funds under the Key Action 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practice in 2015–2017. The project aimed at improving the quality of language instruction through providing the language teachers with suitable formative assessment tools to evaluate speaking skills. A number of teachers participated in workshops where they gained theoretical knowledge, integrated formative assessment tools in their language teaching lectures and observed colleagues instructions nationally and internationally where they gained practical skills on integration of formative assessment in language teaching, including teaching ESP (see more <https://faberasmus.org/>).

As most of the research respondents-students admitted having expanded their job-related lexical domain and acquired independent and autonomous learner skills, it can be assumed that teachers aimed and succeeded at fostering active learner engagement by using various methods which require taking responsibility for task performance on the part of the learners. On the contrary, problem solving skills, although not indicated in course descriptions but mentioned as targeted at by some teachers, were evaluated the lowest by the research respondents-students. In addition to that, one third of the students admitted having acquired not enough job related English language knowledge and communication skills and feeling not enough prepared to communicate efficiently at the workplace; over one tenth of the respondents feel not having acquired such skills at all. In view of these two lowest

ranked results, it is possible to assume that even having gained high competences of English, as is also shown by the results, students might not feel secure about the sufficiency of this competence for their future jobs. Moreover, the results also suggest that students are also not sure about the acquisition of transversal skills as is evidenced by the low score of a problem-solving skill.

Although the comparison of responses across different ESP courses was not in the focus of attention in this study, however, the responses to the question on development of intercultural communication skills diverged at large. Therefore, the responses to the question of development of intercultural skills were compared course-wise and significant differences were revealed: the respondents of *Legal English* exhibited lack of acquisition of intercultural communication skills (only 24% were satisfied with the acquired skills) and even 44% felt they had not acquired enough intercultural communication skills and 32% admitted not having acquired such skills at all; whereas the responses of students of other courses were significantly more positive: almost 80% of students of other ESP courses admitted having acquired such skills, and one fifth – not enough. Implications can be drawn that *Legal English* courses are more focused on preparing students for national workplace and that issues of intercultural law and job-related skills for international workplace should be included in the curricula.

Teachers have also drawn attention to the fact that the work experience that some students already have when they take an ESP course may serve as a strong motivating factor for the students to become more active learners. These students show more awareness regarding the skills they have not developed yet that they assume they will need at the workplace and may have devoted more of the personal contribution to the course arrangement. Moreover, as some of the teachers have maintained, ESP is far from being just a language course, but rather a doorway to students' specialty field which offers opportunities for them to actively search for the favorite niches of their field of studies and to choose topics for presentations, course papers, group discussions and other personal initiatives in the course. On the other hand, however, such options as students' self- and peer-evaluation or their opportunities to influence the arrangement of ESP course content do not demonstrate much of teachers' support, even less support to these categories permeates through teachers' scarce comments on the means how such evaluation or influence can be achieved.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

Despite numerous examples of successful implementation of ESP at VMU, there is space to zoom in and to spot the aspects in need of improvement. Given that the main postulate of the present study is learners' active engagement in ESP classes, it is namely the skills that relate to students' active participation in the learning process and their development of transversal skills that pose the most concern here.

First, the relatively low scores of both the students and the teachers as well as the teachers' limited comments in the category of peer-evaluation suggest that students'

cooperation, initiative and collaboration can be and must be boosted by developing this skill. Teachers also would benefit from more awareness of application of formative assessment tools, expanding both their theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

Furthermore, the relatively low score in the category of *preparation to communicate in English efficiently at the workplace* shows that, having gained the robust competence of ESP in their respective skills, students do not feel confident and assured about being effective communicators of English in their professional life. This implies that teachers should revise the content of the courses by focusing more on workplace related problems and situations. As one of the possible remedies, more adherence to the genre analysis, as the source of the authentic input into the learning and teaching process, could be opted for (cf. Bhatia 2004; Paltridge and Starfield 2013). Soruç et al. (see chapter “[Listening Comprehension Strategies of EMI Students in Turkey](#)” in [this volume](#)) suggest “schema building activities”, “well prepared by the lecturers before the class considering students’ different needs in their major.”

Above all, the relatively poor support in the category of problem solving evidences more need of attention to the development of transversal skills in general.

Finally, for the arrangement of full-fledged quality ESP courses, the integration of the expertise of the professionals in the study field and the stakeholders relevant to the study field is of utmost significance and should not be neglected. This idea is also supported by Soruç, Dinler, and Griffiths, chapter “[Listening Comprehension Strategies of EMI Students in Turkey](#)” in [this volume](#) who see the collaboration between subject teachers/lecturers and language teachers particularly useful “while preparing course content or classroom materials, especially on the language level of the materials”.

6 Conclusions

We argue in the present study that ESP teaching can be highly enhanced through a more *learner-centered approach* which takes learner specific needs into account and bases the course on a range of *active learning and teaching methods* integrating independent, pair and group work in *real and virtual learning environments* through more *cognitively demanding problem solving* tasks which develop students’ higher order thinking skills. Moreover, we believe that ESP fits especially well within the *Liberal Arts and Sciences* model like the underlying model of VMU studies and research. Under the principles of *Liberal Arts and Sciences*, a student’s education in a selected study field is embedded in the development of his/her interdisciplinary competences, humanistic values, transversal and communication skills, creativity and initiative along with learning foreign languages. In other words, the *Liberal Arts and Sciences* model can be assumed to create favorable conditions for the implementation of ESP that integrates the above-mentioned aspects.

The survey analysis identified ESP students’ needs, assessed the efficiency of active learning methods and activities used in the ESP courses, acquired job related

competences and opportunities provided for active student engagement in learning. The analysis generally has rendered positive results as to how ESP competences are developed at VMU and how they contribute to fostering students' active engagement into the learning process. The large majority of questions in the students' quantitative survey display positive answers. High scores in such categories as the *appreciation of students' opinion and suggestions* or students *being encouraged to participate actively* in the learning process presuppose favorable conditions for learners' active engagement in ESP courses. Along the same lines, acquisition of the *expanded ESP language vocabulary*, also ranked high by the students, shows that students acquire a good foundation for the use of English at the workplace. Moreover, a high score in the category of *independent and autonomous learner skills* can lead to students' better lifelong learning preparation and capacity.

All in all, it is evident that ESP courses provide opportunities not only for acquisition of subject related vocabulary, development of receptive and productive skills, but also – which is of utmost importance while preparing students for efficient work in the global market – for the development of their transversal skills. Students learn to negotiate and collaborate, to arrive at particular solutions and express them, to support their opinion with sound arguments on the specialty related topics and, even gain more insights into the subject matter of their relevant study fields.

We dare trust that the findings of the present study will contribute to the field of ESP methodology by providing insights into efficient ESP teaching and learning activities and methods. We also hope that the findings will add to the research on ESP that targets the major aim of empowering students to become successful and efficient in global academia and in global labor market.

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