

# Readiness and Challenges of Prishtina University Students for ESP Classes

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**Abstract**—Learning and teaching a language for specific purposes, in our case English language, is quite a new approach at the Public University of Prishtina, which was established only in 1970. Considering this fact, English language teaching in Kosovo has been around ever since. It was initially taught as General English (GE) in the schools of the capital city and later, namely from the 1980s to date throughout the country. Nevertheless, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is one of the most recent courses that have started to attract the attention of the domestic teaching authorities, mainly at the university level, while it continues to be absent in secondary schools. Despite this, the reason for the absence of ESP in secondary education relates to the lack of planning, extracurricular teaching materials or specific textbooks. In this paper, we will review the current state of GE at the University of Prishtina by assessing the English language first-term exam results for two groups of students in the first year in the Departments of History and Political Sciences, with the aim of finding out whether they are ready to attend ESP courses in the second semester. Research has taken place amongst male and female students, aged 18-19, who attended the A1 and B2+GE level as per the CEFR requirements. The students who pass the exam may be qualified to attend the ESP classes in the second semester, whereas students who did not should continue with GE classes.

**Index Terms**—ESP, GE, university students, B2, comparison

## I. INTRODUCTION

The capacity to communicate successfully in English is fundamental to everyone. Learners have different levels of language ability, and opinions about English language level can be subjective, as some skills could be developed better than some others. In this context, there is a need for a clear objective to describe language skills to foster debate amongst academics.

As communication is the main goal for people to learn languages, much research has been done on foreign language teaching and learning approaches, methodologies and techniques. Generally, methods of learning are related to the respective curricula objectives but they largely depend on the educational circumstances, the difficulty of the language, the types of learners and teachers and their aptitudes for language learning. However, with new teaching and learning opportunities, students are enabled to fulfil their goals and demands for a higher English language standard. To this end, in Kosovo, learning and teaching ESP is a relatively new approach that has begun to attract a level of growing interest in academic circles.

This specialized area aims to equip students with the language skills needed for specific professional, academic, or occupational purposes. Even though ESP programs have some limits to their effectiveness, there is a rising global demand for them. In her research, Gollin-Kies et al. (2015) investigated the notion that ESP's interdisciplinary nature does not *per se*, make it a specialized sub-field of teaching, arguing that language for specific purposes (LSP) is: "interdisciplinary even within linguistics and other academic disciplines, gains insights from, and contributes to, fields such as pragmatics, discourse analysis, motivation theory, philosophy of science, genre and register theory, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, technical and professional communication, literacy, terminology studies, intercultural communication, epistemology, management communication, computational linguistics, lexicography, language planning, semantics, text linguistics, stylistics, language acquisition, translation and interpreting and many others" (p. 17).

She explains that the prior knowledge, use of authentic materials, and experience in ESP are to be taken as an advantage, as authentic materials can also help learners develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to succeed in their target profession or context.

In this framework and even though English language teaching in Kosovo has been taught since as long ago as the mid-1970s/early 1980s, the interest in ESP teaching started only after 2000. This watershed came in 1999 when the war

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ended in Kosovo and the international community started to govern the country, which subsequently influenced the demand for ESP courses in various fields of study.

Although, such an aspiration was present in higher education at that time, it was not possible to begin with content-related books as no specific teaching materials existed; no textbooks were in place nor there were any appropriately designed courses for specifically interested groups of learners. Similarly, no related training was offered, such as the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach.

On the other hand, since students in Kosovo learn General English (GE) language from kindergarten and primary school age, it is reasonable for students to start learning ESP at university level. One may understand the need to teach and learn ESP as a combination of related teaching techniques with suitable teaching materials, important for the students' level of knowledge and the purpose of their field of study at the university, which ultimately prepares them for a successful professional career.

In Kosovo, students start the first university academic semester with their GE knowledge, and as they move on to a second semester they need to have a specific consolidated vocabulary to be prepared for their future academic and/or professional careers. Therefore, ESP primarily gives students the opportunity to hone their English knowledge and skills towards their specific professional profile. These new opportunities in learning ESP would help them write better projects and seminars and attend foreign lectures at university level or participate more successfully in different exchange programs.

Bearing all the above mentioned in mind, the aim of this paper is to investigate the implication of ESP in Kosovo by reviewing the level and the competence of the students learning ESP at the Public Prishtina University.

The research included 126 students from the two Departments of History and Political Sciences; 82 students from the upper-intermediate level (B2+) in the Department of Political Sciences and 44 students from the intermediate level (B1) in the History Department. Evaluation of student readiness was explored through a test which included a placement grammar test, (articles, prepositions and vocabulary), and a reading comprehension taken from the textbook they had learned during semester one (On Screen B1, Virginia Evans, Jennie Dooly; On Screen B2+, Virginia Evans, Jennie Dooly). After evaluation, recommendations on continuing with the ESP course in the second semester became possible.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The overall research objective is to assess whether students of the Departments of History and Political Sciences are ready to attend ESP classes in the second semester of the first year of studies.

Specifically, the aim of the research is to evaluate the preparation and challenges of students of respective departments in the University of Prishtina through testing, which includes vocabulary, selected grammar exercises and reading comprehension at B1 and B2+ level according to the CEFR.

The following hypotheses have been developed:

1. Students of Political Sciences will show higher results in the test related to vocabulary compared to History students.

2. Both groups will show similar results regarding grammar structures and reading comprehension.

The paper also aims to answer questions related to barriers and/or advantages that hindered or supported the current level of ESP students in respective departments.

To back up the named questions, we developed additional hypotheses, including suppositions that while benefits for students from general English textbooks may include a consolidated general reading comprehension level, they may have a restricted specific vocabulary due to a lack of extracurricular material to motivate them to become familiar with ESP.

From observation and intermediary formative assessment taken with the respective students beforehand, the following findings may be related and relevant to the research:

- The level of the students varies from beginner, namely A2 to pre-intermediate or B1 (according to the CEFR).
- The class teaching material includes textbooks (Evans and Dooley; On Screen B1 & On Screen B2+, 2014) with adjusted extracurricular activities selected by respective teachers, namely the authors of this research.
- There are three classes per week, lecturing and exercises of 60 minutes each.
- Students are tested regularly, sitting two mid-term tests and an end-of-term main exam (the final assessment depends on both test results and other academic requirements, including attendance, activity and homework).

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses have gradually become popular in the field of language education. ESP is designed to meet the language needs of students who are preparing to enter a specific field of study or work. The courses help students develop the necessary language skills in order to communicate effectively in their preferred field. However, there is a common challenge among students when it comes to their readiness for the ESP classes, as well as the various challenges that arise during the course. In this review the readiness and challenges of students for the ESP classes will be explored through several authors, including Anthony (2018), Hutchinson and Waters (1987),

Kováčiková (2020), Fortanet-Gómez and Räisänen (2008), Boulton, Carter-Thomas, and Rowley-Jolivet (2012), Kırkgöz and Dikilitas (2019), Sarré and Whyte (2017), Hyland and Wong (2019), and Habibie and Hyland (2019).

Anthony (2018) highlights the importance of assessing students' needs for the ESP courses, stating that: "For a needs analysis to be reliable, it should produce the same results if repeated (adjusting, of course, for time). To be valid, the needs analysis should reveal the individuals' different perspectives on needs, and not some unrelated other factor. In contrast, to be practical, a needs analysis should be designed in a way that allows it to be carried out within a reasonable time and cost" (p. 71).

This shows the significance of conducting a comprehensive assessment of students to determine their language proficiency and tailor the course content to their needs.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide a framework for the design and implementation of ESP courses. They emphasize the importance of setting clear objectives and determining the needs of the target group. This helps to ensure that the course is designed to meet the specific language needs of the students, thereby improving their chances of success. They argue that the objective of ESP is not to teach English as an end, but to equip students with the language skills they will need for their academic or professional lives through a process, highlighting that: "A truly valid approach to ESP must be based on an understanding of the processes of language learning" (p. 14).

Kováčiková (2020) sheds more light onto questions around ESP, the relationship between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and ESP and the challenges faced by teachers and students in ESP courses arguing over joint purposes and objectives between ESP and CLIL. She states "CLIL and teaching ESP have common objectives, beliefs, principles, and approaches. The aim of both is to work on the communicative competence of learners, and by using the proper means, methods and techniques, this aim will surely happen even in the most specific contexts. As for the oversimplification of language in CLIL, which is critically claimed by some teachers, we must add that ESP does not work with advanced learners only. Simplification of scientific language is necessary at A2 and B1 levels (according to the CEFR) as well, and it does not mean that the content of the subject is poorer. It has been mentioned that ESP prepares students for the real world by developing their language skills with learning how to write, for example, reports, presentations, or proposals; this would not be in conflict with CLIL methodology" (p. 30).

This highlights the need for teachers to create engaging and relevant course content that aligns with the students' interests and goals. Additionally, she points out that students may struggle with the specialized vocabulary used in ESP courses, as it may be unfamiliar and challenging for them.

Related to this, authors Kırkgöz and Dikilitas (2019) explore the challenges faced by students and teachers in ESP classes from a variety of perspectives. They argue that since students from different cultural backgrounds may have different perspectives and expectations from the course, teachers should analyze their needs, stating that: "They might then analyse their students' needs before developing materials and a curriculum which address these needs in as authentic a way as possible" (p. 103).

Fortanet-Gómez and Räisänen (2008) argue that ESP programs should be designed to meet the specific needs of students in terms of their language proficiency and the demands of their academic and professional fields. They point out that ESP programs must take into account the linguistic, cultural, and academic background of the students, as well as their motivations and expectations. This requires close collaboration between language teachers and other subject teachers, to ensure that the language and content of the courses are integrated and relevant to the student's needs. Similarly, Sarré and Whyte (2017) emphasize the importance of taking into account the needs and expectations of the students in ESP classes. They argue that ESP courses should be designed in such a way as to address the linguistic and communicative needs of the students, while also providing opportunities for them to develop their intercultural communication skills. The authors stress the importance of considering the students' perspectives and preferences, in order to ensure that the courses are engaging and relevant to their needs.

On the other hand, Boulton et al. (2012) argue that corpus-informed research can be a valuable tool for ESP teachers in the design of courses and materials. By analyzing the language used in real-life texts and contexts, ESP teachers can gain a better understanding of the language needs and demands of the students and their fields. This information can then be used to design courses and materials that are relevant, engaging and effective for the students. Additionally, Hafner and Miller (2018) argue that ESP courses should be designed using a multidimensional approach, taking into account the linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary needs of the students. They argue that ESP courses should be designed in such a way as to provide opportunities for students to develop their language skills within the context of their academic and professional fields. By integrating language and content, ESP courses can provide a more meaningful and engaging learning experience for the students.

As noted, respective authors highlight the importance of considering the readiness of and challenges to students in ESP classes. By considering the linguistic, cultural, and academic background of the students, as well as their motivations and expectations, ESP programs could be designed to meet their specific needs. This requires close collaboration between language teachers and subject teachers, as well as a multidimensional approach to course design that integrates language and content. Ultimately, the goal of ESP programs should be to provide students with a meaningful and engaging learning experience that helps them achieve their academic and professional goals.

To this end, authors Hyland and Wong (2019) discuss the challenges faced by students in ESP classes and the impact of these challenges on their language development. They argue that students may struggle with the language demands

of ESP classes, which are typically taught at a higher level than general English classes. This can lead to feelings of frustration and anxiety, which can in turn impact their motivation and learning. They suggest that ESP teachers need to be aware of these challenges and develop strategies to help students overcome them.

Likewise, Habibie and Hyland (2019) examine the challenges faced by novice writers in publishing their research in English. They argue that ESP classes are crucial in helping students overcome these challenges and become successful writers, noting that the main difficulties are related to expressing their ideas in a clear and concise manner, lack of knowledge of the conventions of academic writing, and the pressure to conform to the norms of the academic community. They argue that ESP classes can help students overcome these challenges by providing them with the language and writing skills they need to succeed.

Both authors emphasize the importance of ESP classes in helping students achieve their academic and professional goals. ESP classes can provide students with the language support they need to succeed in their studies and ultimately reach their full potential. However, it is important for ESP teachers to be aware of the challenges faced by students and to develop effective strategies to help students overcome these challenges.

In conclusion, authors Hyland and Wong and Habibie and Hyland provide insights into the readiness of and challenges to students in ESP classes. They cite that ESP classes are crucial in helping students overcome the challenges they face and achieve their academic and professional goals but at the same time ESP teachers should be aware of these challenges and develop effective strategies to help students overcome them. Since the authors' works provide valuable insights into the field of ESP, they may be used as very useful resources for ESP teachers, students, and researchers.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The authors of this paper drafted and administered the test, which consisted of vocabulary, grammar structures and a reading comprehension section. Students were given 60 minutes for the test, which included a total of 100 points. 50 points were for specific vocabulary, 25 for grammar structures and 25 for reading comprehension. Test results identify student levels from A1 to B2 based on the CEFR.

In order to evaluate the test, use was made of numerical assessment from five (5) as the lowest grade to ten (10) as the highest.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF GRADES BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

Grade	History	Political Sciences
10	1 student	5 students
9	1 student	6 students
8	3 students	7 students
7	9 students	6 students
6	6 students	16 students
5	22 students	33 students
Abstain	2 students	9 students

Table 1 shows a comparison of grades between two departments, History and Political Sciences. The grades range from ten to five (10 to 5), with ten (10) being the highest and five (5) being the lowest. The data shown in the table indicate that the distribution of grades in the Political Sciences Department differs from that of the History Department in that out of 44 students only one student achieved the maximum score, or 100% of the calculated points. In addition, only one student achieved 9, while three scored grade 8. Nine students achieved 7, while six passed the exam. Twenty-two failed with two not sitting the test.

On the other hand, the Political Sciences Department produced better results. Out of 82 students, five of them achieved the top grade; six students achieved 9; seven achieved 8, while six others got 7 and 16 of them only just passed. In the end, 33 students failed the exam while nine students did not take it.

One potential explanation for the differences in grades between the two departments could be the level of difficulty of the courses offered at each department. It is likely that the courses in the Political Sciences Department are more challenging and require a deeper understanding of the material, leading to a higher number of students with lower grades.

Another factor that could contribute to the differences in grades is the study habits and academic abilities of the students in each department. It is possible that the students in the Political Sciences Department have stronger study habits and academic abilities, which equipped them to get better grades, though this would need to be verified through further research. Moreover, it is to be noted that they did not miss classes and showed higher interest through their participation during exercises in classes as well as being more active during class assignments.

In conclusion, the respective departmental results were not very different in terms of the overall grades but only in correlation to the number of students with high and low grades. Possible explanations for the respective differences may include the following factors observed and recorded throughout the semester:

- Prior diverse levels of school education
- Differing academic abilities of the students in each department
- Lack of previous ESP courses

- Lack of previous GE courses
- Unequal economic family circumstances preventing attendance on private English courses

TABLE 2  
COMPARISON OF RESULTS DIVIDED ACCORDING TO TEST REQUIREMENTS

Departments	Articles	Prepositions	Vocabulary	Reading comprehension
Political Sciences	40 (+)	37 (+)	55 (+)	50 (+)
	42 (-)	45 (-)	27 (-)	32 (-)
History	19 (+)	14 (+)	24 (+)	31 (+)
	25 (-)	30 (-)	20 (-)	13 (-)

The provided data shows the results of Political Sciences and History students in four areas of grammar: articles, prepositions, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It reflects mixed results of the students' language abilities, showing that the most consolidated grammar area is vocabulary, followed by the reading comprehension section, while articles and prepositions are indicated to be the most challenging test items. In light of this, the category of articles shows that 59 students from both departments scored above the threshold while 67 students scored below. This suggests that a significant number of students from both departments struggled to achieve testing requirements.

#### V. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The above numerical analysis indicates that several factors may be related to the result. Lack of understanding of the rules and conventions surrounding respective sets of articles, or lack of exposure to the language in real-life situations may be the predominant factors. When paired with the lack of tentative listening and consequently lack of attention to details, this presents a worrying writing-skills deficiency.

On the other hand, the results in the categories of vocabulary and reading comprehension are more favorable. This is likely due to more frequent exposure to the language, reportedly via social media and other outlets as well as the extracurricular reading materials completed as homework assignments.

This suggests that students in general have a good understanding and command of the language; they can comprehend the message; they can relate the reading experience to the written assignments they had to fulfill as part of their academic demands and to some extent can connect previous experiences. Yet, they are some distance from achieving the B2+ level.

It may be suggested that to improve their overall English language abilities, the respective students may use additional support or resources, available at the Prishtina University Campus, such as the American Corner situated on the premises of the Kosovo National Library and the Language Center on the premises of the Philology Faculty.

It is again interesting as to why respective students showed more advanced vocabulary and reading comprehension skills as foreign language learners compared to other parts of grammar. One can argue that this is because vocabulary acquisition is easier, bearing in mind contextual teaching and learning factors. It is their previous learning experience, such as teaching in Kosovo that may still encourage memorizing and repetition as specific abilities.

During lectures, it was brought to the attention of the authors that during their high school studies, students had spent a considerable amount of time memorizing and practicing new vocabulary, which consequently reflected in an improved ability to connect any potential similarities between the reading comprehension section and its better understanding.

Reading comprehension requires a broad vocabulary to make connections between words and understand the meaning of complex sentences. Moreover, foreign students may have a greater motivation to improve their reading and vocabulary skills, which translate into career or personal growth opportunities in the international market.

Additionally, while grammar is crucial, certain of its components might be harder to understand than vocabulary or reading comprehension. For instance, mastering articles and prepositions involves regular rehearsal and real-life situations because they may be complicated by the contrasts between the two languages using them, especially related to the use of prepositions. Therefore, students need to put emphasis on the shortcomings related to grammatical constructions because failing to master them may jeopardize students' ambitions to access education mobility courses abroad and other interests related to career development and labor market opportunities.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Even though ESP has not been learned in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo, the research has shown that students at the University of Prishtina are ready to proceed with learning ESP courses in the second semester.

The research showed that ESP could provide students with a consolidated and communicative language skill, especially when combined with CLIL, as shown with the case of Political Sciences students who would present a valuable group of highly qualified future professionals with opportunities for a promising, bright career in their respective domestic and international fields.

It is essential for university teachers to activate and endorse the various ESP teaching approaches and curriculum. This would equip students primarily with good reading skills and specific vocabulary since they need to be updated with the latest textbooks in the relevant fields, as this is important for further developing their professional knowledge.

In conclusion, both benefits and disadvantages have an impact on the present level of ESP students. To overcome these obstacles, ESP teachers must ensure that their lessons are tailored to the requirements of their students in order to inspire them to participate fully in the learning process. ESP teachers may also use the constructivist approach to use students' past knowledge and experience even though that may involve memorization, as well as use of authentic resources in their teaching to maximize the associated benefits. By doing this, ESP teachers may enhance the value of their classes and assist students in achieving their personal and academic objectives.

Designing appropriate ESP courses for various groups of learners may serve as a professional recommendation to the Ministry of Education, since GE in Kosovo continues to prevail in all secondary schools. Since the Ministry has not yet developed any ESP curriculum for secondary schoolteachers, this task may be assigned to the English Department professors from the Public University of Prishtina, who strive to follow modern, global approaches to language teaching.

The English Department would rather develop a specific training package on approaches, methodologies and techniques over materials and accompanying didactic means to master ESP for all university departments. This should ensure that concerns over potential misconstructions and retrogression on the advancement of the ESP do not arise.

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