

CEF Requirements and ESP Courses for Engineers - A Challenge to Designing Material and Testing Skills

Globalisation in business, technology and science requires new approaches to the teaching of foreign languages and the testing of the acquired proficiency in order to properly prepare students for the new communicative challenges in their multicultural professional life. The development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) aimed at providing such a unique evaluation instrument on diversified levels.

But does the CEF actually measure the language level required for coping with professional settings? Can companies rely on such general language proficiency evaluation? To what extent can the CEF be applied to define language requirements students need to meet before they can study abroad or apply for an internship abroad? Is the CEF an instrument that can help to measure LSP proficiency? What types of tests are needed to evaluate the proficiency level? To what extent do renowned international tests match with the CEF proficiency levels? And what effect does the harmonization of current education schemes (as a consequence of Bologna) have on the teaching of languages at tertiary level?

The paper discusses these questions and provides an insight into the organizing of ESP courses for engineers after the modularization process of Diploma, Bachelor and Master courses of study at the University of Applied Sciences Zwickau (Germany). Both the language course schedule and content structures are outlined and exemplified using material from subjects like automotive engineering, traffic systems control, microsystems technology and computer science. The second part of the paper describes the results achieved in these courses and provides an insight into the tests which were developed to evaluate the proficiency level of the students and certification. Finally, the paper suggests some guidelines along which language courses need to be designed following the restructuring processes at universities and colleges in order to be valid and provide comparable results focusing on in-class instruction and self-directed instruction.