

XVI. European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes (LSP)
Specialised Language in Global Communication
Theme: Pedagogical Aspects of LSP

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ABSTRACT

ESP TEACHER TRAINING NEEDS: THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

The present paper investigates ESP teacher training needs in Slovenia. In the recent years we have seen a considerable growth in the number of ESP courses, worldwide and in Slovenia. One of the reasons behind it is a trend towards increasing mobility around Europe and expanding markets, with the consequent need for specialised language skills. Parallel to this need exists the need for teacher training education, which has, unfortunately, not been paid much attention to, at least not in the non-native English speaking countries, including Slovenia. ESP teachers are traditionally educated/trained in general English 'system' and come across difficulties when faced with ESP teaching. The pioneer of ESP teacher training needs, J.R. Ewer (1983), concluded that ESP teachers face attitudinal, conceptual, linguistic, methodological and organisational difficulties. Unfortunately, only a few fragmented teacher training needs analyses have been carried out and reported since then. Despite the fact that native English speaking countries offer a variety of ESP teacher training courses/programmes, it remains questionable to what extent these courses suit the local environments of non-native ESP teachers around the world.

In Slovenia, English for specific purposes is currently taught in secondary professional and vocational schools, higher education institutions and several adult education institutions (e.g. private language schools). The aim of the ESP syllabi/courses is to introduce students to the kind of English they (will) meet in real life situations in their (future) professions or need for their further education. The majority of potential and practising ESP teachers in Slovenia at all levels have a general humanities background. Up until 2004 there had been no special teacher training programme provided (either pre-service or in-service), which would cater for ESP teachers' needs. The quality of teaching and learning of English for specific purposes could thus be questioned. There existed an apparent need to investigate the area. Consequently, a research on ESP teacher training needs in Slovenia was carried out in 2005 using three different groups of respondents: ESP teachers in secondary professional and vocational schools, ESP teachers in higher education institutions and potential future ESP teachers, i.e., students of English. The main aims of the research were threefold:

- to evaluate 32 ESP teacher (sub)competencies from three different viewpoints (i.e. the significance of various (sub)competencies, the evaluation of (sub)competencies at the graduation point, the evaluation of (sub)competencies as they appear in time of the research),
- to compare the existing ESP teacher training programmes around the world with the investigated and analysed needs in Slovenia and
- to set guidelines for future pre-service and in-service ESP teacher training programmes in Slovenia.

The research was tackled by means of three different instruments: a questionnaire, an interview and a comparative analysis of 11 ESP teacher training programmes around the world. The paper presented focuses on the obtained results. The results indicate that, although graduates gain knowledge and skills necessary to teach general English language, this does not suffice for effective ESP teaching. The majority of prospective and practising ESP teachers claim that besides the linguistic competence (with a special emphasis on the lexical subcompetence), a particular emphasis should be placed on certain language teaching subcompetencies, especially on the ability to evaluate, adapt and design materials, the ability to gain feedback from students (i.e. to assess and test), the ability to employ state-of-the-art methods, approaches and techniques and the ability to encourage, enhance and implement independent learning strategies. Interestingly, the ability to analyse specific purpose language and situations was not seen as one of the most significant competencies. Although the indicated levels of the importance of certain competencies remain more or less the same along all three respondents' samples, there is a significant statistical difference in the evaluation grades of the current level of competencies between secondary and tertiary level teachers. There also seems to be a great discrepancy between the indicated levels of the significance of certain needs and the evaluation grades awarded to the very same competencies at the end of graduation. In addition, students believe they are much more competent in the majority of ESP training needs at the end of graduation in comparison to already practising teachers.