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Perceptions of ESP Instructors in Higher Education Institutions on Meeting the Demands of Interdisciplinary and CLIL Education

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical framework and explores the potential relationship between ESP and CLIL education. Furthermore, it delves into the perceptions of ESP instructors employed at faculties outside of the philological field, with regard to their interdisciplinary competencies and the integration of professional content into an ESP course (CLIL-enhanced ESP). The research involved the administration of a questionnaire utilizing various types of questions (demographic questions, rating scale questions, open-ended questions, Likert scale, and multiple response questions), enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The findings of this study, among other insights, underscore the necessity of supporting teachers in the cultivation of their interdisciplinary competencies and in the development of syllabi, didactic resources, and materials. Furthermore, the results reveal a significant need for interdepartmental collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of interdisciplinary and cross-curricular educational practices. (примљено: 5. фебруара 2024; прихваћено: 12. маја 2024)

1. Introduction

The changes in the socio-economic, technological, and cultural landscape inevitably lead to the necessity of education to follow. Technological advances, greater mobility of people, the need for better intercultural understanding, as well as greater competitiveness at the job market, all contribute to the emphasis of internationalization at tertiary educational institutions. Universities are facing the task of equipping their students with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to the challenges, and in order to achieve higher levels of internationalization, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in non-English-speaking countries have resorted to the use of English as a language of instruction (Arnó/Guzman, 2015), which has taken different forms: from English Medium Instruction (EMI), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and all their variations. The paper directs its focus towards the latter two, specifically emphasizing and delving into their fusion, often referred to as CLIL-enhanced ESP or integrated ESP.

Paltridge and Starfield (2013: 2) assert the following:

A key feature of an ESP course is that the content and aims of the course are oriented to the specific needs of the learners. ESP courses, then, focus on the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English.

On the other hand, CLIL presupposes simultaneous content and language learning and “it does not give emphasis to either language teaching or learning, or to content teaching and learning, but sees both as integral parts of the whole” (Marsh, 2002: 58).¹ According to Kordic and Papa (2014), efficient CLIL education assumes acquiring skills and knowledge through interaction that supports intercultural awareness and tolerance; at the center of it all lies professional content which uses academic, subject-related, and authentic didactic materials which emphasize the importance of professional terminology and phraseology while developing professional and academic skills. The aforementioned makes the unison of ESP and CLIL logical, natural, and potentially seamless.

CLIL finds its foundation in official European policies, where the European Commission assigns a central role to CLIL methods in fulfilling clearly defined learning objectives for some of the 24 official languages of the European Union (European Commission, 2024). This approach is geared toward promoting a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual Europe, fostering European plurilingual citizens, and deeming it desirable that every EU citizen speak two or more EU languages, apart from their native. In a push for internationalization, HEIs are increasingly incorporating CLIL (Mehisto et al., 2008; Arnó/Mancho, 2015; Fajardo et al., 2020),

1 Given that CLIL is seen as an umbrella term, in order to make a relevant theoretical framework for this paper, the basic, generalized, and simplified version of CLIL definition, without defining different types of CLIL, will suffice.

despite realistic hurdles that need to be overcome: lack of funds and institutional support, lack of target language knowledge or confidence in that knowledge of subject teachers and students, lack of cooperation between ESP/EFL teachers and subject teachers, etc. Given that the official policy of the Republic of Serbia is an aspiration towards European integration, it is reasonable to expect tertiary education institutions to follow this trend. The inclination towards internationalization and greater mobility is evident in higher education institutions in Serbia. One of the crucial factors in achieving this goal is the adoption of foreign languages and the development of language skills. While the “Regulation on Detailed Conditions for the Implementation of Bilingual Teaching” from 2015 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 105/2015, 50/2016) regulates bilingual teaching in primary and secondary schools, this is not the case for HEIs. Some faculties have opted for a bilingual model of an entire program or individual subjects (e.g., University of Belgrade: Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Mining and Geology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine). These programs or subjects often take the form of EMI studies, where English serves exclusively as a tool for acquiring specialized content, while study programs incorporating CLIL principles are scarce (Faculty of Philosophy (Đorović/Zavišin 2018), Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (Mirić/Đorović, 2015), and Faculty of Mining and Geology (Beko, 2013) of the University of Belgrade).

Initially, CLIL methods were primarily applied in primary and secondary education. However, student mobility, as well as that of teaching staff, and the evolving epistemology of university disciplines in globalized educational institutions (Wilkinson/Zengers, 2008) have influenced the increased implementation of CLIL programs in higher education (Beko, 2013). Although most of the studies that indicate the effectiveness of this method refer to primary and secondary schools, there is a significant number of studies which indicate its effectiveness in tertiary education (e.g., Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014). Still, further research is needed concerning higher education (Järvinen, 2008; Fajardo et al., 2020).

The objectives of the CLIL method, in line with the spirit of the Bologna Convention, encompass the acquisition and development of intercultural and cognitive skills: the so-called four “Cs” – content, communication, cognition, and culture (Coyle, 1999). These skills also find their place in ESP classes. The question of whether CLIL and ESP are “two sides of the same coin” is a subject of debate, and there is no consensus on whether the acquisition of content is or should be one of the goals of ESP courses. Some authors, such as Habul-Šabanović (2023), consider teaching and acquiring content to be integral parts of ESP, unlike the traditional understanding of ESP instruction (e.g., Mičić, 2005; Ardeo, 2013). Furthermore, the traditional understanding of CLIL posits that the language has a triple role: language of learning, language for learning, and language through learning (Coyle, 2000, 2002); this paper proposes that language plays the same role in ESP instruction.

The rapid spread of English outside of standard language courses raises substantial questions about the function, status, and future of language courses

and departments, particularly regarding traditional ESP courses (Dearden, 2014; Wozniak, 2017). In the emerging context, ESP instructors find themselves in a position where their role is being reexamined. The previous focus solely on language has been broadened to include content (Taillefer, 2013; Airey, 2016; Inozemtseva/Troufanova, 2018). While ESP literature thoroughly explores strategies for enhancing language learning for specific purposes through specific courses and materials based on carefully conducted and comprehensive needs analysis (e.g., Harding, 2007; Paltridge/Starfield, 2013; Banegas, 2017), less attention has been devoted to the role and impact of studying and acquiring domain-specific content within the ESP framework.

This study suggests a hybrid model that incorporates elements of ESP and CLIL instruction, thus taking the form of integrated or CLIL-enhanced ESP, and in that context, some key aspects of ESP education are examined. The focus encompasses teachers' attitudes and practices related to integrating language and content, their perceptions concerning the use of authentic materials for student motivation, the level of interdepartmental cooperation between language and subject teachers, the extent of institutional support, and the challenges faced in ESP courses. Through detailed analysis, we intended to gain profound insights into these crucial areas, aiming to enhance the effectiveness and quality of ESP education. By understanding these dynamics, we are better equipped to foster an educational environment where language and subject matter seamlessly converge, leading to a more enriching learning experience for students.

2. Literature review

This section provides a comprehensive review of existing literature pertaining to the aspects of ESP instruction relevant for the conducted research, including teachers' attitudes towards integrating language and content, perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials for student motivation, the level of interdepartmental cooperation, institutional support, and challenges faced in ESP courses.

2.1. Integration of language and content in ESP classes

The traditional understanding of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) posits that "the discipline merely serves as a platform for language practice," (Fortanet-Gómez/Bellés-Fortuño, 2008: 150) emphasizing language refinement over domain-specific knowledge (Tarabar, 2014). It is contended that the subject matter of a specific discipline holds no inherent value for the learner, as students do not internalize the content itself. Consequently, the content functions merely as a tool or resource for acquiring the target language (Hurajová, 2015: 90). Moreover, the role of an ESP teacher is frequently seen as not the one who is to teach the content, but the one that in fact should become a student interested in the content while teaching the language (Mičić, 2005).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), for example, assert that all decisions related to both the content and teaching methods in ESP are grounded in the learners'

language learning rationale, and numerous authors and teachers (the author of the paper included) emphasize the necessity for comprehensive needs analysis (e.g., Harding, 2007; Beko, 2013; Paltridge/Starfield, 2013). Consequently, if we assume that the content is carefully chosen, possessing its own epistemological, professional, and practical values, it naturally follows that emphasis should be placed on the acquisition of this quality content as well as the language used. This new focus on content acquisition, as well as content evaluation, within the context of ESP instruction – CLIL-enhanced ESP – becomes the framework within which the attitudes of instructors are examined in this study.

Brown and Lee (2008) conducted a seminal study revealing that a majority of ESP teachers express positive attitudes towards integrating language and content. They found that such integration not only enhances language proficiency, but also facilitates a deeper understanding of subject matter among students. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasized the importance of integrating language and content in ESP instruction, highlighting its role in promoting meaningful learning experiences. They argued that by contextualizing language learning within specific disciplinary contexts, ESP teachers can better address the linguistic and communicative needs of their students.

However, not all ESP teachers view integration positively. Swales (1990) noted that some educators express reservations about integrating language and content, citing concerns about the potential dilution of disciplinary knowledge or the imposition of linguistic requirements on subject matter instruction. Similarly, Dudley-Evans (1997) highlighted the tension between language and content integration, suggesting that some ESP teachers perceive it as challenging to maintain a balance between linguistic and disciplinary objectives. This tension underscores the complexities inherent in ESP instruction, particularly regarding the negotiation of language and content priorities within specific professional contexts.

Despite these varying perspectives, research overwhelmingly supports the benefits of integrating language and content in ESP instruction (e.g., Beko, 2013; Paltridge/Starfield, 2013; Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014; Hurajová, 2015). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) asserted that such integration is essential for preparing students for the communicative demands of their professional fields, emphasizing the need for ESP teachers to balance language and content objectives effectively.

2.2. Authentic materials

In the literature, conflicting information is encountered regarding what truly constitutes authentic materials, as opposed to pseudo or quasi-authentic ones, and their actual utility in education is examined. For the purpose of this research, materials considered authentic are those taken from the “real world” that have not been altered or abridged.² The fact that they might be considered “pseudo-authentic

2 The survey used in the research, for clarification purposes, provides definitions and differentiation among authentic materials, adapted materials, and materials specifically created for classes.

since their use in the language classroom is mostly unauthentic” (Đorović/Zavišin, 2018: 32) was not of relevance for this research; however, the true authenticity of the materials in the given context is worth further academic exploration.

Authentic materials have had their place in ESP classes for a long time, since both anecdotal and empirical evidence confirm their efficacy (despite certain shortcomings, e.g., complexity of language, length, difficulties to fit in the curriculum, etc.); many authors emphasize the advantages of incorporating authentic materials in teaching (e.g., Lee, 1995; Kilickaya, 2004; Cañado/Esteban, 2005; Benavent/Peñamaría, 2011; Beko, 2013; Blagojević, 2013). Flowerdew (2005), Dudley-Evans (2001), and Blagojević (2013) advocate for the inclusion of authentic materials, such as texts and multimedia resources, to enhance the authenticity and relevance of language learning experiences. They highlight that authentic materials expose learners to real-world language use, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and professional communication contexts. Hyland (2006) underscores the pedagogical implications of incorporating authentic materials into ESP instruction. He advocates for task-based approaches that integrate authentic materials into language learning activities. Hyland argues that tasks based on authentic materials promote active engagement, critical thinking, and language production skills, facilitating meaningful language acquisition and proficiency development.

Furthermore, Belcher (2006) and Swales (2009) emphasize the motivational impact of authentic materials on ESP learners. Belcher and Swales argue that authentic materials stimulate learner interest and engagement by providing meaningful and relevant content aligned with learners’ professional interests and goals. This intrinsic motivation fosters a deeper understanding of language use in professional contexts. While it has been found that students generally believe that authentic texts are important, as they are a source of domain-specific terminology and they help with their motivation (e.g., Đorović/Zavišin, 2018; Pintrich/Schunk, 2002), one of the goals of this research was to get an insight into teachers’ attitudes and practices regarding the use of different types of materials: authentic, adapted, and materials specifically created for classes.

Nevertheless, challenges exist in effectively integrating authentic materials into ESP classes. Richards (2003) and Basturkmen (2014) identify factors such as accessibility, appropriateness, and adaptation as key considerations for ESP teachers. They stress the importance of evaluating the authenticity and suitability of materials to ensure alignment with learners’ linguistic proficiency levels and professional interests.

The use of authentic materials in ESP classes offers significant benefits for learners, including enhanced authenticity, motivation, and language proficiency development. However, addressing challenges related to material selection, adaptation, and teacher training is essential in order to maximize the potential of authentic materials in ESP instruction.

2.3. Interdepartmental collaboration and institutional support

Interdepartmental cooperation between ESP and content teachers is crucial for delivering effective language instruction tailored to the needs of learners in specialized contexts, as well as for developing ESP courses that integrate language skills with subject-specific content. In order to create authentic and contextually relevant learning experiences, interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation are necessary (e.g., Hyland, 2006; Swales, 2009; Mirić/Đorović, 2015).

Various collaborative practices, including interdisciplinary curriculum development, joint assessment design, and co-teaching arrangements, have been identified, and the levels and extent of these collaborative practices have been explored in different studies (Dudley-Evans, 2001; Flowerdew, 2005; Belcher, 2006; Paltridge, 2012; Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014; Mirić/Đorović, 2015; Wozniak, 2017). The research indicates variations across institutions, with some fostering strong collaborative relationships between ESP and content teachers, while others face challenges due to departmental silos and conflicting priorities. Flowerdew (2005) stresses the importance of institutional support and proactive strategies, such as curriculum alignment workshops and joint lesson planning sessions, to promote effective interdepartmental cooperation. Paltridge (2012) argues that engaging in collaborative activities allows ESP and content teachers to leverage their expertise, creating integrated learning experiences that address the linguistic and content-specific needs of students.

The research regarding the impact of interdepartmental cooperation on student learning outcomes in ESP courses demonstrates a positive correlation between the level of collaboration between ESP and content teachers and student engagement, language proficiency, and subject matter understanding (Mehisto, 2008; Basturkmen, 2014; Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014; Johns, 2016; Wozniak, 2017). The importance of fostering collaborative relationships to enhance the quality of ESP instruction and promote holistic learning outcomes is underscored.

Despite the recognized benefits of interdepartmental cooperation, challenges persist in its implementation: time constraints, institutional culture and support, lack of funds, and disciplinary differences that hinder effective collaboration between ESP and content teachers (Richards, 2003; Bhatia, 2008; Basturkmen, 2014; Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014). Overcoming these barriers requires addressing structural and cultural factors within educational institutions and creating a supportive environment for interdisciplinary collaboration.

Interdepartmental cooperation between ESP teachers and content teachers is essential for delivering effective language instruction in specialized contexts. While challenges exist, proactive measures such as institutional support, collaborative practices, and professional development initiatives can mitigate barriers and foster a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration within educational institutions.

2.4. ESP Challenges

ESP teachers encounter various challenges in delivering effective language instruction tailored to the specific needs of their students in professional contexts.

The literature review points to the most frequent ones: developing course materials, use of authentic materials, lack of teacher training and professional development opportunities, maintaining relevance and currency of materials, language and content assessment, large mixed ability classes, decreasing number of ESP classes, and lack of interdepartmental cooperation and institutional support (Dudley-Evans, 2001; Hutchinson, 2001; Flowerdew, 2005; Belcher, 2006; Hyland, 2006; Bhatia, 2008; Swales, 2009; Plečaš, 2011; Basturkmen, 2014; Stojković/Piršl, 2014; Johns, 2016; Anđelković/Meršnik, 2022).

Dudley-Evans (2001) highlights the challenge of developing course materials and assessments that meet the linguistic and communicative needs of learners in specialized fields, emphasizing the importance of aligning course content with students' professional goals and integrating authentic materials to enhance relevance and engagement. In addition to material development, Belcher (2006), Swales (2009), and Stojković and Piršl (2014) point out challenges related to teacher training and professional development in ESP. They argue that many ESP teachers lack specialized training in language teaching methodologies and may struggle to adapt instructional strategies to the specific linguistic and communicative demands of professional contexts. Targeted professional development initiatives are recommended to equip ESP teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective instruction.

Basturkmen (2014) discusses the challenge of maintaining the relevance and currency of course content in rapidly evolving professional fields. She stresses the importance of ongoing curriculum development and revision to ensure that ESP courses reflect current industry trends and practices. Collaboration with industry partners and regular needs assessments are recommended to inform curriculum updates and modifications. Furthermore, a common challenge regarding assessing language proficiency and subject matter understanding points to the complexity of assessing language skills within disciplinary contexts and necessitates innovative assessment methods such as performance-based assessments and portfolio evaluations to provide a more holistic measure of student learning outcomes (Hutchinson, 2001; Hyland, 2006).

Despite efforts to address these challenges, Bhatia (2008), Johns (2016), and Plečaš (2011) identify institutional barriers that hinder effective teaching and learning in ESP programs. Factors such as limited resources, large and mixed ability classes, and bureaucratic constraints impact the quality of instruction. They emphasize the need for institutional support in order to create a conducive learning environment for ESP students and teachers. In addition, Anđelković and Meršnik (2022) have observed a drop in the number of ESP classes at Serbian universities. They also highlight a shift in the treatment of ESP from a compulsory subject to an elective one in many of these institutions.

ESP teachers confront a range of challenges in delivering effective language instruction in professional contexts. While efforts have been made to address these challenges through teacher training, curriculum development, and institutional

support, ongoing research and innovation are needed to ensure that ESP courses meet the evolving needs of learners in specialized fields.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions

The study aims to provide insight into teachers' attitudes and practices regarding some of the most important aspects of ESP. The focus encompassed teachers' attitudes and practices related to integrating language and content, their perceptions concerning the use of authentic materials for student motivation, the level of interdepartmental cooperation between language and subject teachers, the extent of institutional support, the challenges faced in ESP courses, and teachers' suggestions and solutions. The research questions are divided into 5 categories:

1. Duration and frequency of ESP courses – this section addresses questions related to the typical duration and frequency of ESP courses, both as compulsory and elective subjects during undergraduate studies. Specifically, the research seeks to determine the representative duration of ESP courses, the number of semesters students usually study ESP, and the academic years during which these courses are typically offered. Additionally, it investigates the comparative duration and frequency of compulsory and elective ESP courses, shedding light on variations in curriculum structure across different universities and faculties in the Republic of Serbia.

2. Integration of content and language – this segment explores the integration of content and language in ESP instruction. It seeks to clarify whether teachers believe integrating content is conducive to students' motivation and vocabulary retention. Moreover, it provides information on whether ESP teachers do integrate and evaluate content. In addition, it aims to discover whether teachers feel confident enough regarding their content knowledge and whether they believe it is important to learn content connected to a specific domain during their preparations for lectures. Additionally, it explores educators' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of content and language integration, providing insights into innovative instructional practices and opportunities for improvement.

3. Interdepartmental Cooperation – this section focuses on the extent of collaboration between language instructors and subject-matter specialists in designing ESP curriculum and didactic materials. It explores different joint activities partaken by language instructors and subject-matter specialists. Furthermore, it examines the perceived benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration in integrating language and content in ESP instruction, providing insights into effective instructional practices and areas for improvement.

4. Types and sources of didactic materials – this section examines the types and sources of instructional materials commonly used in ESP instruction. It investigates the alignment of these materials with topics in other subjects and explores the frequency of integration of authentic materials sourced from professional literature and specialized texts into ESP courses. Moreover, it explores the perceived benefits

and challenges of using authentic materials in ESP instruction, as reported by educators, offering valuable insights into instructional practices and strategies for enhancing language learning experiences.

5. Challenges faced by ESP educators, suggestions, and potential solutions – this section seeks to identify challenges encountered by ESP educators in delivering effective language instruction tailored to the needs of learners in specialized contexts. It explores the barriers and obstacles faced by educators in curriculum development, instructional delivery, and assessment practices. Furthermore, it aims to uncover teachers' suggestions and solutions for enhancing ESP instruction.

The responses obtained from this research offer valuable insights into the practices and attitudes of teachers, and as such, they can play a crucial role in formulating bottom-up educational policies. They shed light on areas that require enhancement and provide guidance on the necessary measures to create conditions conducive to modern and effective ESP classes.

3.2. Research design and data collection instrument

This study employed a survey-based approach, as it was deemed the most suitable method for gaining insight into teachers' attitudes and practices regarding ESP. A survey methodology allowed for the collection of data from a diverse group of ESP teachers dispersed across various cities in the Republic of Serbia.

Data were collected using Google Forms, chosen for their convenience and accessibility to participants located in different geographical locations. The survey comprised different types of questions, including demographic questions, rating scale questions, open-ended questions, Likert scale items, and multiple response questions, enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Demographic questions provided contextual information about participants; rating scale questions allowed for the measurement of opinions or preferences; open-ended questions enabled participants to provide detailed responses; Likert scale items gauged participants' agreement levels with statements; and multiple response questions captured a range of possible answers to specific inquiries.

The questions (38 in total) are divided into 6 sections:

- general information – questions regarding the title, institution (optional), and years of experience;
- ESP practice – questions regarding the number of classes and semesters for ESP lessons, the year(s) in which ESP is studied, and the number of classes and semesters that teachers believe ESP should be studied for;
- content and language integration section – questions regarding content acquisition as one of the ESP goals and outcomes, correlation between content integration and motivation, but also vocabulary retention, subject-specific knowledge ESP teachers possess and their confidence concerning this knowledge, etc.;
- interdepartmental cooperation section – questions regarding the importance and satisfaction with the cooperation, and forms and frequency of cooperation;

- authentic materials – questions regarding the frequency of use and usefulness of different types of materials: authentic materials, adapted materials, and materials specifically created for classes;
- challenges – open-ended questions regarding challenges and ESP course improvements.

Each section is accompanied by a dedicated space for commentary.

3.3. Sampling, sample size, and characteristics

ESP teachers from various Serbian state and private universities constituted the target population for this study. Efforts were made to reach potential participants by distributing the survey to nearly all ESP teachers identified (for some, no official e-mail address was to be found).

A total of 34 ESP teachers completed the survey. The optional nature of the question about the faculty and university preserved teachers' anonymity, with only 18 participants disclosing their affiliation. Among those who did provide this information, only two belonged to the same faculty; therefore, it is fairly safe to assume that the research includes teachers from around 30 different faculties.

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to extract meaningful insights. The integration of both types of data enabled a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

4. Results

4.1. General overview

4.1.1. Participants

The teachers who participated in the study were quite experienced in teaching ESP university courses: 21 with working experience of more than 10 years, 10 with 5–10 years of experience, and 3 teachers with under 5 years of experience. Out of 34 teachers, 17 are language teachers, 11 are assistant professors, 4 associate professors, and 2 full professors. It is worth noting that there is no observable correlation or pattern between the teachers' answers and experience.

4.1.2. ESP courses: current practice and attitudes

The study sheds light on the diverse landscape of ESP education within Serbian HEIs. ESP programs are not uniform; they can range from a single semester to a comprehensive eight-semester curriculum. Notably, ESP is mandatory for at least one semester across most faculties in all but two institutions, where elective ESP is studied at a rate of 4 classes per week (classes are 45 minutes long), spanning 2 and 4 semesters, respectively. Additionally, the frequency of classes varies significantly, oscillating between two classes a week and an intensive eight-class schedule in

one case (however, in this case, students have an ESP course for only one semester). In instances where ESP is mandated for a duration ranging from 2 to 4 semesters, approximately 30% of cases allow students the opportunity to choose an additional ESP elective course. These elective courses usually last for two semesters, with an average of three classes per week. Another variable factor is the academic year in which ESP is integrated, whether limited to the first year or extending into subsequent years as well (in nearly 70% of cases, classes are held in the first half of students' education). The median norm indicates that ESP education tends to be compulsory and is typically spread over 2–3 semesters in the initial academic year(s), and students commonly engage in three classes per week.

Quite surprisingly, only 14 respondents advocate for an increase in the number of ESP classes, which indicates that there is no demand for a more robust ESP curriculum in those institutions (6 teachers suggest that students should engage in ESP classes for eight semesters). The majority, 20 participants, are satisfied with the number of classes at their faculties and would not change it. Even more surprising is that in 5 cases, English is taught for only 1–2 semesters, and teachers are pleased with it. This is not the result that was expected, especially bearing in mind the global trend of internationalization at HEIs and the general competitiveness in job markets and academia. The result could imply a more traditional attitude with resistance to change. Nevertheless, regardless of teachers' attitude towards the increase of classes, the most frequent comment is that ESP classes should be reserved for final years (despite the fact that in the vast majority of cases the classes were held in initial years), since students do not have sufficient professional knowledge and struggle with terminology and concepts even in their native Serbian. This is one compelling reason why it would be beneficial for students to introduce and incorporate domain-specific content knowledge in order to promote and foster active learning of both content and language.

4.2. Integration of professional content and language

The results highlight a prevailing consensus among teachers (88%) regarding the significance of content learning as a fundamental objective and outcome for students in ESP classes. Teachers universally acknowledge the significance of aligning class objectives with the mastery of both language and subject matter, recognizing that this integration enhances the overall educational experience. Moreover, 80% advocate for ESP materials complementing professional content studied in discipline-specific subjects, underscoring the importance of integrated learning.

However, the educators' confidence in actually integrating and evaluating professional content within ESP courses appears nuanced. Specifically, 14 teachers express only partial agreement with the statement that "they believe they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to incorporate and evaluate professional content within ESP classes," showcasing a balanced perspective and potentially reflecting professional humility in their self-assessment. While most teachers agree, to a

certain extent, on the importance of studying professional content in their own lecture preparations, there are 4 exceptions who state that they do not believe it is important to study professional content while preparing for the lectures.

Despite general agreement on the role of content learning in enhancing vocabulary retention (3 teachers disagree with the notion that learning domain-specific content in ESP classes is conducive to vocabulary retention), there is uncertainty among teachers regarding its positive impact on student motivation. About 20% partially disagree, while 30% partly agree, and 50% completely agree with the notion.

Whereas most teachers do acknowledge the importance of content and language integration, only 14 teachers include non-linguistic elements in the goals and outcomes of their courses, and even fewer (10) evaluate the content along with linguistic elements through colloquia, assignments, and exams. The discrepancy could be even higher, since a teacher who said they formally evaluated content stated that “In the context of ESP at our faculty, professional content is reflected in the acquisition and application of specialized vocabulary, rather than in testing knowledge of professional content.” This implies the potential misunderstanding of the question and what CLIL is, and since this teacher might not be alone in their opinion, it possibly implies an even greater discrepancy between acknowledging the importance of content and language integration and the actual integration and expected outcomes and evaluation.

4.3. Interdepartmental cooperation

The subsequent section of the survey sought to assess the extent of interdepartmental collaboration between language and subject instructors. Interdepartmental cooperation in ESP curriculum, syllabus, and material creation is recognized as vital. Among ESP teachers, 18 completely agree, 12 partially agree, 2 partially disagree, and 2 disagree with the statement that it is important to collaborate with their colleagues who teach domain-specific subjects in order to create curriculum, syllabus, and didactic materials. While a portion of 16 educators expresses partial satisfaction, and a total of 9 report complete satisfaction, 6 convey dissatisfaction, while 3 remain uncertain regarding their satisfaction with the interdepartmental cooperation. Notably, one-third express dissatisfaction with institutional support for curriculum and material creation, and they indicate the need for more robust support, especially with regards to professional education and training, financial support for material and course development, necessary changes in accreditation in order to improve the efficacy of classes (mainly more classes and moving classes to final years), smaller class sizes, better equipment, and support in the digitalization process.

In the next question, the participants were asked to mark all the interdepartmental activities from the provided list (more than one answer was allowed). According to their answers, interdepartmental cooperation in ESP education involves the following (from the most frequent to the least): collaborative efforts in selecting

topics, consultations on representative terminology, collaboration on curriculum and syllabus development, collaboration on pre-exam activities, and also teachers' team effort to choose texts and educational materials. Moreover, the number of selected activities also provides an insight into the extent of cooperation and further supports the general necessity for better interdepartmental cooperation: half the teachers marked 1 activity, 13 marked 2, and only 3 marked 3 activities, while just 1 teacher marked 4 activities.

4.4. The use of authentic materials

In CLIL-enhanced ESP classes, the integration of authentic materials plays a pivotal role. Extensive research, including studies by Tomlinson (2010) and Brown (2007), affirms the positive impact of authentic materials on student motivation, vocabulary retention, and content acquisition. In this portion of the survey, the teachers are asked about their attitudes towards the use of authentic, adapted, and specially created materials, as well as how frequently they actually use these materials in class.

Teachers have the most positive attitudes towards adapted materials (24 respondents accredit score 5 out of 5, 9 accredit score 4, and 1 accredit score 3). Generally, teachers find specially created materials more useful than authentic materials; however, these two materials did get unfavorable scores of 1 and 2 from 3 teachers each, while adapted materials did not get any unfavorable scores.

Interestingly, teachers predominantly favor specially created materials, followed by adapted materials, with authentic materials being used least frequently. Despite this, the majority of teachers opt for a combination of these materials in their classes, indicating a balanced approach. Only a small percentage (10%) exclusively rely on materials specially created for the course.

4.5. The challenges

The last portion of the questionnaire provided the opportunity for the teachers to share potential challenges and issues they face, but also to propose solutions and suggestions for improving the quality of ESP courses. The results of the survey point out that the educators routinely encounter shared obstacles and are quite motivated to share their issues in the comment section, since there was not a single one who left this section blank. Among the most prevalent impediments encountered are large class sizes (nearly a third of teachers) and students grappling with specialized terminologies and discipline-specific concepts in both Serbian and English (the main reason why 7 teachers felt the need to write an additional comment that ESP classes needed to move to later years in students' academic journeys). Several teachers reported students' low level of general English as a major obstacle (a teacher remarked that "If all the students were A2 level, we could talk about ESP," implying a worrisome level of general English and pointing to possible necessary changes in primary and secondary education, since most students learn English for 12 years). Another teacher suggests starting with GE classes in the first year

and following that with ESP in the next 3 years. Other teachers point to the lack of materials and resources (these were the teachers who were not satisfied with the institutional support they get to a greater or lesser extent). Likewise, teachers are calling for greater investments in professional development, digitalization, material, and textbook development.

5. Discussion

The ESP teachers are mostly very experienced, but while qualitatively analyzing the results, there were no discernible patterns between the years of experience and their answers. The teaching of English for Specific Purposes exhibits considerable variation across HEIs, encompassing diverse structures and formats, with the number of classes per week ranging from 2 to 8 (in this case, the students only have one-semester ESP course), the number of semesters from 1 to 8, and the status of ESP classes being compulsory or obligatory, or a combination of the two. Prior to the study, it had been expected that a vast majority of teachers would favor an increase in the number of classes, and not just 14, as the results show. Generally, the findings, supported by other research (e.g., Anđelković/Meršnik, 2022), indicate a rather unfavorable status of ESP within Serbian university settings, characterized by a discernible trend toward a reduction in the number of classes or years the course is offered, or a transition from compulsory to elective status.

In the majority of instances, when English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is not integrated throughout the entirety of students' academic journey, it tends to be concentrated within the initial years of their education. Interestingly, in many of these cases, educators express a consensus that relocating ESP classes to later years in the curriculum would enhance their effectiveness and overall benefit to the students. Comments provided by teachers shed light on the reasoning behind this perspective, with a prevalent observation being the students' lack of satisfactory domain knowledge: teachers noted that students often struggle due to their unfamiliarity with essential concepts and terminology, both in the context of ESP and even in their mother tongue. This issue has been underscored in other research as a significant impediment (e.g., Arnó/Guzman, 2015). The fact that students struggle with professional concepts and terminology points to a potential solution – the inclusion of subject specific content (e.g. through Project Based Learning, additional reading materials, etc.) in order to help students familiarize themselves with it. These insights underscore the importance of aligning ESP education with the students' evolving linguistic abilities, comprehension levels, and subject-specific content, emphasizing the need for a strategic repositioning of ESP classes within the academic calendar.

The majority concurs that the union of professional content acquisition with language knowledge and skills significantly enhances learning outcomes for students. This approach emphasizes a holistic educational experience, encompassing skills beyond mere language acquisition. Overall, instructors express a preference for the integration of language and content within ESP courses. While teachers generally

favor that approach, some of them might require support putting the ideas they endorse into practice: there is a clearly expressed need among teachers for better interdepartmental cooperation and institutional support. Another obstacle noted by teachers that is mentioned in other research as well (e.g., Pešić, 2016) is the low level of general English (Pešić reports that more than 80% of students at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism are at an A2 level).

However, despite the general support for content and language integration, a notable observation is the fact that there is limited inclusion of explicit content goals and objectives in ESP curricula, and even lower implementation of content evaluation practices among teachers: a minority of educators engage in assessing the retention of content knowledge. The results indicate a potential gap between the acknowledged benefits of content-language integration and its practical implementation and assessment in ESP education. These varied responses exemplify the diverse strategies employed by educators, reflecting the need for ongoing dialogue in educational circles regarding the optimal balance between linguistic and non-linguistic elements and learning objectives.

Teachers do recognize the importance of interdepartmental collaboration, but not as much as anticipated. This is especially surprising when we take into consideration the importance of a comprehensive needs analysis, which necessitates interdepartmental collaboration as an integral part of the curriculum development process (e.g., Arnó/Mancho, 2015; Wozniak, 2017). It feels natural and logical that subject teachers should be included in the needs analysis process, as it seems impossible to fully understand the 'needs' without consulting them. Since the cooperation requires improvement, it is not surprising that ESP curricula do not align completely with those of the other subjects. The vast majority of teachers who do acknowledge the importance of interdepartmental cooperation and express their partial satisfaction with it typically do not partake in more than one joint activity, which supports the general sentiment that cooperation should be improved.

6. Conclusion and implications for further research

Contemporary ESP tendencies include the integration of subject-specific content in language classes, and this version of CLIL-enhanced ESP or integrated ESP is increasingly gaining popularity (Banegas, 2018; Đorović/Zavišin, 2018; Moate, 2019). Moreover, significant research does confirm the efficacy of the integrated approach to ESP (Mehisto et al., 2008; Beko, 2013; Paltridge/Starfield, 2013; Gawlik-Kobylińska/Lewińska, 2014; Arnó/Mancho, 2015; Hurajová, 2015; Fajardo et al., 2020).

According to this research, ESP teachers employed at Serbian faculties acknowledge the importance of integrating elements of professional content into their classes, but in practice, while the didactic materials do focus on professional terminology and content, they are merely used as a vehicle to enable students to retain linguistic knowledge but not the content. It is even less frequent to test content knowledge. In order to have a successful integrated ESP course, strong

interdepartmental cooperation is necessary, and this is the aspect that generally needs much improvement at Serbian universities if we are to lay strong foundations for the implementation of integrated ESP courses or CLIL courses. Successful CLIL programs, which greatly depend on strong cooperation between departments and institutions fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, saw an increase in student engagement and motivation (Mehisto et al., 2008; Wozniak, 2017).

The efficacy of integrated ESP classes can be partly attributed to the use of authentic materials which enhance language learning outcomes, students' engagement and motivation (Cañado/Esteban, 2015; Fajardo et al., 2020), and which promote meaningful language learning experiences and enhance students' disciplinary knowledge (Benavent/Peñamaría, 2011). The research findings presented in this paper suggest a potential for greater incorporation of authentic materials within the instructional methodologies employed by Serbian ESP instructors.

Challenges identified in this research confirm previous findings (e.g., Bhatia, 2008; Swales, 2009; Plečaš, 2011; Basturkmen, 2014; Stojković/Piršl, 2014; Johns, 2016) in all aspects but one. In the majority of studies examining the challenges of ESP university courses, a prevalent concern often cited is the deficiency in teacher training and formal education, while in this research it was only once identified as a hurdle. This does not necessarily mean that ESP teachers in Serbia are able to get sufficient formal education and training, but that they potentially prioritize other issues: large mixed-ability classes, lack of didactic materials, students' low level of general English, students' unfamiliarity with professional terminology and concepts, lack of funding and institutional support, the need to move classes to later years of studying, better equipment and digitalization, and few classes. With the exception of low proficiency in general English, which ideally should have been attained during primary and secondary education, addressing these challenges could be remedied through adequate institutional support and the implementation of bottom-up policies.

It would be beneficial to conduct a more detailed analysis of how teachers incorporate content elements into ESP classes, how they evaluate the content, as well as the analysis of the nature and extent of their cooperation with other departments. By understanding teachers' attitudes, practices, and needs, we are better equipped to foster an educational environment where language and subject matter seamlessly converge, leading to a more enriching learning experience for students.

While change is inevitable, it is sometimes sluggish and reluctant, and tertiary educational systems are often no exception. Recognizing that university language policies relying on uniform and general approaches can be ineffective, it is worth highlighting a tailored approach to ESP education encompassing flexible and adaptable policies and acknowledging the varying aspirations, needs, and capabilities of students. These policies should take into account discipline-specific goals, specific genres within a particular discipline, and the role of the English language in creating and communicating disciplinary knowledge (Kuteeva/

Airey, 2014; Airey et al., 2017; Wozniak, 2017). In today's contemporary economic, technological, and cultural landscape, the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) continues to evolve and change. Modern ESP instruction is essentially cross-curricular and multidisciplinary, representing an approach that should contradict compartmentalized knowledge.

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Сажетак

ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈЕ ЕСП ПРЕДАВАЧА НА ВИСОКОШКОЛСКИМ УСТАНОВАМА О ИСПУЊАВАЊУ ЗАХТЕВА ИНТЕРДИСЦИПЛИНАРНОГ И КЛИЛ ОБРАЗОВАЊА

Овај рад представља теоријски оквир и истражује потенцијални однос између ЕСП и КЛИЛ образовања. Такође, дубље истражује перцепције ЕСП предавача који раде на факултетима изван филолошког поља у вези са њиховим интердисциплинарним компетенцијама и имплементацијом стручног садржаја у ЕСП наставу (CLIL-enhanced ESP). Истраживање укључује администрирање упитника са различитим типовима питања (демографска питања, питања са скалом оцењивања, отворена питања, Ликерт скала и питања са више одговора), омогућавајући како квантитативну тако и квалитативну анализу. Резултати овог истраживања, између осталог, истичу неопходност подршке предавачима у развоју њихових интердисциплинарних компетенција и у изради силабуса, дидактичких ресурса и материјала. Додатно, резултати откривају значајну потребу за интердепартаманском сарадњом како би се повећала ефикасност интердисциплинарних и кроскурикуларних образовних пракси.

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