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A focus on objectives, outcomes, and learner needs in ESP courses

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In light of the growing demands for English language acquisition, various stakeholders within the domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have directed their focus towards the elaboration of learner needs and the attainment of learning objectives and outcomes. Thus, the aim of this paper was to illustrate the importance of needs analysis in ESP by defining relevant learning objectives and outcomes, as well as to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the challenges of ESP course design. The course syllabuses and coursebooks of four ESP courses were subjected to analysis. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four ESP teachers in order to gain an understanding of the challenges that emerge in the process of ESP course management. The results of the study revealed that learner needs, objectives, and outcomes generally align with recent research within different fields of study; however, the development of interpersonal communication skills and intercultural competence requires further consideration. In addition, it was found that ESP teachers need more support in the process of dealing with subject-specific phenomena and material selection. Furthermore, as informed by the results of this research, the attainment of learner autonomy within large heterogeneous environments is another challenge that still needs to be overcome.

Key words: *ESP, learning objectives, learning outcomes, learner needs, teacher attitudes*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid economic and technological advancements of today's globalised society have affirmed the English language as an indispensable resource for academic and vocational advancement. In light of such societal demands, interest in English language acquisition has never been greater. Alongside the increasing demand for general English courses, there has been a rising need for the expansion of language learning within specific occupational fields. In order to respond to such demands, a distinct sphere of English language learning, entitled English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has assumed an important position within the domain of English language teaching. In simple terms, ESP is a peculiar type of language learning driven by an observable purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The instrumental nature of ESP places considerable pressure on the teachers, who are expected to meet specific learner requirements and needs (Ahmed, 2014). In order to successfully complete this task, ESP teachers place significant importance on the elaboration of desired learning objectives and outcomes. In the founding years of ESP, desired learning objectives and outcomes were considered in terms of a successful juxtaposition of both language- and subject-specific knowledge (Basturkmen, 2006). However, objectives and outcomes in ESP today are directed towards the acquisition of "language in context", inseparable from the students' professional worlds, rather than grammar or language structures (Daulay, 2019, p. 60). Moreover, Dudley-Evans & Johns (1991) state that learning outcomes in ESP are mainly practical in nature and designed in accordance with specific learner needs.

Therefore, an awareness of learner needs appears to be the basis of ESP course design. However, the question of what is taught in accordance with current views of second language (L2) teaching needs to be taken into consideration as well, including the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Applying the principles of CLT is an essential prerequisite of ESP, as such courses are largely driven towards preparing learners for authentic communication in occupational environments (Hutchinson & Waters, 1984). In addition, emphasis on various aspects of L2 learning, such as the development of the four basic language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), vocabulary, and grammar, along with functional aspects of language, need to be taken into consideration in ESP courses (Topuzov et al., 2020). In short, depending on learner needs, course objectives and learning outcomes will focus to varying degrees on language skills and functional language based on real-life situations.

Although the phenomena of learner needs, objectives, and outcomes in ESP courses have been investigated in foreign contexts, these issues have not been adequately recognised in Croatia. Therefore, it is essential to address the existing research gap by exploring current ESP syllabuses and course materials in order to investigate whether learner needs are addressed, as well as the experiences of ESP teachers. In other words, the aim of this paper¹ is to determine, through the analysis of various course objectives and learner outcomes, how learner needs are being met and to describe the challenges faced by different university-level ESP teachers in Croatia.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. English for Specific Purposes

The rapid development of ESP as a distinct field of language study was a consequence of the growing societal demands for English language acquisition. In other words, the demand for ESP courses was a result of the increasing importance of the language in numerous fields of economic activity such as accounting, engineering, or IT technology (Daulay, 2019). ESP branches out from the fields of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), both of which stem from English Language Teaching in general (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As opposed to General English (GE) language instruction, characterised by unspecifiable, widely applicable academic contents and demands (Duenas, 2001), ESP is a type of purposeful language instruction restricted to specific technical or scientific fields within which the English language has assumed certain importance.

The origins of ESP can be traced back to the end of World War II, when the first papers regarding English for Science and Technology (EST) were published (Tahir, 2009). This was a period marked by rapid economic and technological development, and it was the English language that fulfilled the growing need for a new universal “lingua franca”, the function of which was to enable international communication and facilitate global commerce (Taguchi & Ichihara, 2018). In other words, the increasing popularity of the field is not a result of deliberate planning, but rather a consequence of the technological and commercial expansion of the global economy. However, the rapid development of ESP cannot be regarded as a universal pheno-

¹ This paper makes reference to data from the master's thesis of one of the authors (see Blažević, 2021).

menon; the field did not evolve at the same rate in different geographical settings. Moreover, distinct scientific branches of ESP have been recognised more than others. Due to the rapid technological advancement of modern society, EST is currently considered to be the most quickly changing and incessantly growing area of ESP (Musikhin, 2016).

2.2. Needs Analysis in ESP

The process of needs analysis may be defined as an investigation of the requirements, wants, and priorities of learners in particular educational settings (Axmedovna et al., 2019). Understanding and defining specific learner needs entails the processes of TSA (Target Situation Analysis), LSA (Learning Situation Analysis), and PSA (Present Situation Analysis), which address various aspects of language learning such as language requirements, subjective perceptions regarding language learning, and learner strengths as well as weaknesses (Rahman, 2015). According to Cowling (2007), a needs-driven approach to ESP is required by all students because in today's rapidly changing modern society there is increasing demand for an efficient and adaptable workforce. In other words, ESP courses tend to be marked by an external drive for language learning, and learner needs are elaborated in light of the future benefits attainable through advancing one's linguistic proficiency.

According to Mohammadi & Mousavi (2013), the "efficiency of any ESP course depends, for the most part, on the quality of the needs analysis" (p. 1019). Therefore, a well-organised and carefully conducted assessment of learner needs is likely to determine the success of the entire language-learning process. However, the process of devising the methods and practices which respond to specific learner needs is not necessarily a progressive one. Rather, teachers in ESP often adjust and re-evaluate their teaching practices in accordance with their students' input. Hence, various aspects of ESP courses are often mediated to suit specific learning environments (Koteva, 2015).

2.3. Objectives and outcomes in ESP

Learning objectives may simply be defined as the goals of a specific course. As such goals and expectations are shaped by the needs of the learners, objectives and outcomes in ESP are defined on the basis of a detailed needs analysis (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2014). In other words, an appropriate needs analysis is an essential prerequisite for successful course design. Course

objectives are understood in terms of the outcomes which follow from their attainment. In this sense, learning outcomes may be defined as the desired results, as well as the ultimate purposes, of ESP courses.

In simple terms, learning outcomes in ESP are clear statements of the supposed knowledge learners are expected to acquire and apply within their respective fields of study (Du & Wang, 2019). That is, course outcomes in ESP are inseparable from the learners' future occupations and are elaborated in close proximity to the demands of their profession. Learning outcomes are explicitly stated at the beginning of the course and are carefully considered throughout the process of language learning. Defining course objectives and outcomes is thus a delicate process in ESP. Once defined, learning objectives and outcomes function as guidelines of future course-related action and may contribute to higher levels of student motivation (Chovancová, 2014).

2.4. Research in ESP

Studies carried out in various contexts (Garner, 2001; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2011) have found that speaking and writing skills in addition to technical vocabulary are essential in ESP courses for law students. Comparable findings have been reported by Jalil & Kamarudin (2009) and Axmedovna et al. (2019), who discovered that integration of the four language skills was pivotal in the legal ESP context. In fact, they observed that ESP courses for lawyers specifically focused on the development of satisfactory speaking skills as well as the writing of essays, formal letters, and summaries for cases.

Upon conducting a study of ESP course effectiveness at the Department of Business Administration in Macedonia, Hadri (2010) found that integration of the four language skills was essential for business students. Other studies of ESP in the business context (Briguglio, 2005; Freihat & Machzumi, 2021; Van Horn, 1995) proposed that greater focus be placed on familiarising business graduates with effective interactional patterns in the workplace, as they frequently interacted with colleagues, followed instructions, and participated in informal social conversations. Similarly, in their analyses of course objectives and outcomes for students of economics, Koteva (2015) as well as Ismagilova and Polyakova (2014) emphasised the importance of attuning the learners to the economic register. Finally, Briguglio (2005) found that the development of intercultural communication skills was a necessary prerequisite for professional advancement in the business domain. Developing intercultural communication skills, as Kim and

Paek (2015) point out, is a demanding endeavour requiring both linguistic and intercultural competence. Nevertheless, due to the global expansion of the English language, causing multinational intersections and multicultural patterns of interaction, the acquisition of intercultural skills has become a salient issue in ESP (Briguglio, 2005).

Kaewpet (2009) conducted a study focusing on the skills that students of engineering in Thailand needed to develop through their English language instruction. The results of this study indicated that the development of the four language skills was relevant for both the academic and vocational advancement of engineers. Numerous other studies in the engineering context (Du & Wang, 2019; Sarjit & Hua, as cited in Mohamed et al., 2014; Naqvi & Mathew, 2010; Patel, 2015; Sari et al. 2019) have highlighted the importance of oral communication skills for information technology graduates, finding that such skills determined their ability to participate in social events, as well as to perform various work-related tasks. Furthermore, according to Mohamed et al. (2014), ESP courses for future engineers ought to focus on the development of peculiar, socially bound communication skills, also referred to as *soft-skills*.

In a similar manner to the above-mentioned studies, Indrasari (2016) found that physics students also required an integration of the four language skills in the ESP classroom. Speaking skills were rated as most important, whereas writing skills were considered as least relevant in terms of future professional advancement. Interestingly, the students also expressed a need for focused grammatical instruction, as they stated that the mastery of English grammatical constructions was the most challenging aspect of the language-learning process. In addition, Koch and Eckstein (1995), investigated the relationship between critical reading skills and problem-solving ability in ESP courses for physics students and claimed that the development of both skills ought to be encouraged in ESP.

Although not many studies have been conducted on the topic of learner needs, objectives, and outcomes in the Croatian ESP context, certain interesting findings have been reported. Exhaustive contributions regarding the needs of undergraduate business English students in Zagreb have been offered by Rajh (2015), who unearthed the issue of limited time resources and claimed that learner needs were not being adequately addressed due to inflexible and outdated methods of needs analysis. Comparably, Birtić Vučić and Štulina (2020) investigated the challenges of ESP course design at the University of Zadar in Croatia and found that the students were not able to perceive the benefits of the course, as they were not able to imple-

ment the acquired knowledge during the course of studies, but only in the distant future. Issues regarding an excessive dependence on “in-house” materials (including scientific papers and student-made materials), as well as low proficiency levels were also expressed.

In addition, Liszt, Krnajski Hršak and Domljan (2005) investigated the importance of skill-development in ESP courses with regard to contemporary changes in the labour market. They found that the development of both semantic and transversal skills was crucial for students of economics in Zagreb. *Semantic skills* were described in terms of the lexical aspects of English, including individual lexical items, collocations, linking words, synonyms, and others, whereas *transversal skills*, specifically emphasised by the researchers, included presentation skills, critical thinking skills, as well as the skills of summarising and argumentation. Similarly, Jurković (2011) found that simply integrating the four language skills in ESP courses was no longer sufficient to meet current occupational demands in various scientific fields. According to Jurković (2011), the reinforcement of emotional intelligence and social skills has become pivotal in ESP. Moreover, Pašalić and Plančić (2018), as well as Ivić (2004) discussed the necessity of training students to cope with work-related situations by implementing authentic materials and real-life simulations in the ESP classroom.

Thus, although scarce, the research on ESP conducted in Croatia has offered valuable insight into the peculiarities of Croatian ESP courses. Nevertheless, the aforementioned phenomena require further investigation and elaboration. Therefore, the following sections of this paper will present the findings which have emerged from this research, directed towards the analysis of learner needs, learning objectives, and outcomes in ESP courses.

3. AIM AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim

The aim of this paper was to illustrate the importance of needs analysis in ESP courses in the Croatian context by defining relevant learning objectives and outcomes, as well as the necessary skills ESP learners may utilise in their future professions. Moreover, the aim of the research was to understand how these reflect teacher attitudes and beliefs with regard to the various challenges which emerge in the process of ESP course design in Croatia. The research has attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. a) What are the objectives and learning outcomes in various ESP courses?

- b) Do they reflect the skills required in the various fields of study?
2. What is the relationship between course objectives, learning outcomes, and course materials?
 3. What are the teachers' attitudes regarding the challenges of ESP course design?

3.2. Sample

The investigation focused on four ESP courses currently held at four different universities in Split, Croatia (the Faculty of Law; the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism; the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture; and the Faculty of Science). The sample included four ESP course syllabuses, four ESP coursebooks, and four ESP teachers (see Appendix A for the course titles and a list of the analysed coursebooks). Four teachers currently employed at the respective universities participated in the study. The teachers within this sample were females who had obtained their teaching qualifications at various universities of arts and humanities. One interviewed teacher was a native speaker of English, whereas the remaining three were native speakers of Croatian.

3.3. Procedure

In order to answer the three previously stated research questions, the investigation was carried out in three sequential stages. Prior to the analysis, checklists of learner outcomes and specific skills required in various areas of study were devised on the basis of recent scientific contributions in the field of ESP. The first research question was addressed by conducting a qualitative content analysis of four course syllabuses in order to investigate whether the elaboration of the course objectives and outcomes reflected the previously defined set of skills (see Appendix B for checklists of required skills in various fields of study). Secondly, the contents of ESP course materials were analysed with reference to the syllabuses to examine whether the formally stated learner needs, course objectives, and learning outcomes were considered. A single coursebook was analysed for each ESP course. The materials were examined in order to identify the manifestations of learner needs, course objectives, and learning outcomes formally stated within the course syllabuses. Specifically, the choice of technical texts and nature of related exercises were analysed. Finally, with the provision of the teachers' consent, the final research question was addressed by conducting four semi-structured interviews with ESP teachers in Croatia. The devised

protocol contained questions which, although open-ended, were structured to direct the participants' attention to challenges emerging during the process of ESP course design and administration. For instance, the teachers were inquired about their needs analysis criteria, means of material selection, teacher roles in ESP, and recurrent challenges in ESP teaching (see Appendix C for the entire interview protocol). The conversations were recorded, transcribed, coded, and interpreted qualitatively. The interviews were conducted during the course of April and May 2021. Two interviews were conducted online, via *Zoom* and *Google Meet*, whereas two were conducted in person.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Objectives and learning outcomes in ESP courses in terms of the skills required in various fields of study

With regard to the first research question, the results of the syllabus analyses revealed that current ESP courses generally did reflect ESP learner needs in terms of the skills needed in various fields of study. As was expected, objectives and learning outcomes of analysed ESP courses differed in terms of their specific professional backgrounds. Accordingly, significant similarities were observed between the syllabuses of English for Engineering and Computing and English for Natural Sciences, courses which were understood in terms of their "technical" background.

Table 1

Objectives and learning outcomes of ESP courses, as stated in analysed syllabuses

Ciljevi i ishodi učenja kolegija, prema navodu u analiziranim izvedbenim planovima

ESP Course	Objectives and Outcomes
English for Law	Integration of the four language skills Development of oral and written language skills within the specific context of law Focus on reading skills, the analysis of technical texts as the basis of course activity Acquisition of technical vocabulary
Business English	Development of communication skills within professional environments Acquisition of technical vocabulary Acquisition of "skills appreciated in the international business world"
English for Engineering and Computing and English for Natural Sciences	Acquisition of technical vocabulary Integration of the four language skills Development of oral and written communication skills within specific occupational contexts Focus on translation and grammar skills

As may be observed from Table 1, focus on the integration of the four language skills in ESP courses, as emphasised by numerous researchers

(Hadri, 2010; Jalil & Kamarudin, 2009; Jurković, 2011; Kaewpet, 2009), was recognised within the analysed syllabuses accordingly. However, the results of the syllabus analyses indicated that different ESP courses tend to focus on various aspects of language learning. For instance, the development of reading skills specifically, was the basis of course design in the context of legal English. More precisely, the learning outcomes of the *English for Law 1* course included the development of reading skills and strategies for the comprehension of legal texts. Students were expected to familiarise themselves with the standard layout and paragraphing conventions of different legal text types. In addition, the acquisition of technical vocabulary in the legal context was explicitly stated in the course syllabus, as one of the course outcomes referred to the ability to express oneself, both orally and in written form, while implementing basic legal terminology. The development of both oral and written language skills within the specific context of law was therefore essential for future lawyers, as perceived by the course designer of *English for Law 1*. Nevertheless, the development of reading skills did take precedence over speaking, listening, and writing in this course, as the analysis of various legal texts appeared to be the basis of course activity. This finding was inconsistent with the results presented by Jalil and Kamarudin (2009), who perceived speaking and writing skills as primary in the context of English for legal purposes.

Ample studies (Briguglio, 2005; Patel, 2015; Sari et al., 2019; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2011) have claimed that the development of oral and written communication skills ought to be one of the most relevant aspects of ESP course design. It was noted that the importance of developing communicative competence was mostly accentuated within the syllabus of *English in Economics 1*, as it focused on effective communication within the international business context. As was stated in the syllabus, the fundamental course objective was to “enable the students to communicate in the international business environment”. Moreover, the process of skill-development was closely related to contemporary requirements in the business sphere. For instance, as stated in the syllabus, the learners were expected to understand processes such as *company recruitment, retail, product presentation* and other business-related phenomena. The acquisition of technical vocabulary was thus highly recognised within the sphere of business English, as it enabled the learners to participate autonomously in various occupational surroundings.

Furthermore, learner outcomes were elaborated with reference to the fundamental course objective. This meant that *the application of specific*

vocabulary, the ability to write a CV, present a product, and other course requirements were in fact manifestations of the English language within the world of business. Hence, the language skills fostered throughout the course were observed in close proximity to the students' future professions. Occupational benefits obtainable from the course were referenced within the analysed syllabus, as a commitment to providing the students with the skills appreciated in the international business environment was explicitly stated. Similar findings were presented by Briguglio (2005), who postulated that common work-related tasks in the business context, such as writing e-mails or informal reports in English, require both oral and written communicative competence.

The acquisition of subject-specific terminology was given explicit attention in all of the four syllabuses. In accordance with these findings, numerous studies have indicated that technical terminology was an important element of ESP course design (Garner, 2001; Ismagilova & Polyakova, 2014; Koteva, 2015; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2011). Furthermore, the implementation of traditional methods, such as explicit grammatical instruction and translation, were noted within the frameworks of English for Electrical Engineering and Computing, as well as English for Natural Sciences, i.e., courses for students with "technical" backgrounds. For example, specific linguistic structures – namely, the passive voice, non-defining relative clauses, compound words and others – were recognised as valuable tools that facilitate the comprehension and interpretation of technical texts. Similar findings were expressed by Indrasari (2016), who investigated the role of focused grammatical instruction in the context of ESP for future physicists.

One analysed course showed inconsistent results with current ESP teaching. Specifically, the definition of course objectives and outcomes in the syllabus for business English was not entirely consistent with contemporary requirements of the business world. Thus, the development of intercultural competence, greatly emphasised by Briguglio (2005) and Van Horn (1995) as an essential prerequisite for work-related communication in the international business context, was not a stated course requirement. Furthermore, *transversal skills* (presentation skills, critical thinking skills, and the skills of summarising and argumentation), described by Liszt, Krnajski Hršak, and Domljan (2005) as highly appreciated in the context of the contemporary labour market, were almost completely overlooked within the course syllabuses (presentation skills were the only referenced set of skills).

Moreover, *soft-skills*, emphasised by Mohamed et al. (2014) as an indispensable tool for social interaction in the workplace, were not recognised

within the syllabuses. Finally, the acquisition of informal language, accentuated by Freihat and Machzoomi (2021) in the context of common day-to-day interactions in the work-place, was neglected within the course syllabuses. Thus, although the importance of developing oral communication skills was formally recognised in the course syllabuses, the contemporary requirements within specific fields necessitate further elaboration of such aspects in ESP courses.

4.2. Course objectives, learning outcomes, and course materials

With regard to the second research question, the results of coursebook analyses indicated that the course objectives and learner outcomes referenced in the course syllabuses were generally consistent with the organisation of the course materials. For instance, one of the fundamental course objectives of *English for Law 1* was the acquisition of technical vocabulary and the mastery of authentic legal texts; this was reflected in the coursebook as it consisted of numerous authentic reading texts and technical gap-filling activities. Although the coursebook contained an abundance of gap-filling exercises and wordlists, the definitions of technical terms were not provided, but the students were expected to search for these independently. The development of dictionary skills was thus reinforced within the materials and sections entitled *Dictionary use* were noted containing instructions regarding the use of legal dictionaries. However, students were advised to resort to the dictionary only if it was not possible to make inferences on the basis of various contextual features, as strategic reading of technical texts was fostered throughout the coursebook. Similarly, the importance of implementing authentic reading texts in ESP courses was emphasised by Blagojević (2013) and Carver (1983), who claimed that exposure to such materials facilitated future occupational performance.

In addition, the results of the coursebook analysis in the case of *English in Economics 1* indicated a harmonious relationship between the official syllabus and the materials. The fundamental course objective, as stated in the syllabus, was to prepare the students for authentic communication within a business environment. For this purpose, the textbook was filled with activities simulating common interactional patterns within the business domain (i.e., conversations with clients, planning marketing campaigns or writing professional profiles). In addition, the students' conversational skills were fostered through an abundance of exercises focusing on appropria-

te discourse turn-taking norms and various conversational stages within business settings.

The business English textbook also contained activities that stimulated critical thinking, namely debates and discussions. For instance, the students were invited to think of the advantages and drawbacks of closing down a hypothetical onsite company restaurant. The purpose of such a task was the development of argumentation skills as well as the implementation of conversational strategies; specifically, students were invited to exhibit conversational turn-taking, express agreement or disagreement, and use methods of conversational interrupting, all while discussing various subject specific phenomena. Such activities fostered the students' communication skills and enabled them to autonomously participate in various occupational interactions. The coursebook did not contain cultural references; the acquisition of intercultural competence, a skill overlooked within the official syllabus, was neglected in the course materials accordingly.

In the case of *English Language 1* (English for Electrical Engineering and Computing), the course syllabus was marked by a preference for technical vocabulary, translation skills, and grammatical competence. Correspondingly, the coursebook mainly consisted of technical gap-filling exercises, as well as translation tasks. Activities regarding the development of the four language skills or the acquisition of communication skills (as formally stated objectives) were not observed within the framework of the coursebook. Very few speaking activities were noted in the coursebook, mainly in the form of closed-ended introductory questions. The contents were rather outdated and inconsistent with recent developments in the field. As has been accentuated in ample studies (Kaewpet, 2009; Mohamed et al., 2014; Patel, 2015), success in the contemporary engineering labour market entails the reinforcement of oral and communicative competence – skills which are neglected within the analysed coursebook. The coursebook did align with the syllabus in terms of technical vocabulary, translation skills, and grammatical competence; however, both oral and written communication skills, recognised within the official syllabus, were not attainable within the framework of the coursebook.

The most significant discrepancies between the formal course requirements and the course materials were observed in the context of English for Natural Sciences. The objectives stated within the course syllabus predominantly addressed the acquisition of technical vocabulary, as well as grammatical correctness, whereas the investigation of course materials revealed that the development of communication skills and conversational strategies

was the basis of the coursebook design. Specifically, the appropriate usage of linking words and conversation fillers was fostered throughout the coursebook. In addition, a plethora of exercises regarding general conversational skills were observed. For instance, the students were introduced to conversational expressions and strategies commonly used in basic communicative situations, such as agreeing and disagreeing with somebody, interrupting, asking for clarification or repetition, asking for someone's opinion, saying something in a different way, giving oneself time to think, summing up, and others. Granted, such a disparity between formally stated requirements and coursebook design ought to be positively regarded, as achieving communicative competence has become an important goal of ESP teaching.

4.3. Teacher attitudes regarding the challenges of ESP course design: Interview data analysis

With regard to the third research question, the results of the investigation revealed that the most significant challenges of ESP course design and management were inadequate teacher training, difficulties with material selection, time management, large heterogeneous groups of learners, and the attainment of learner autonomy.

The results of the interviews indicated that ESP, as a specific domain of language teaching, required distinct teaching skills and competences. In other words, the occupational requirements of the learners, as well as the changes within their respective professions, shaped teacher expectations and practices in ESP. Research results revealed that ESP teachers in Croatia were not provided with enough formal assistance nor support in the process of course development and administration. As the interviewees were formerly general teachers of English, they stated that teaching processes in ESP implied considerable self-instruction in domains other than language studies:

There are many, many complex words which I hadn't got much input on from my earlier education, so sometimes I would need to go through the paragraph over and over again to figure out what they wanted to say in Croatian so that I could translate it into English. (Teacher of English for Economics, May 12, 2021)

The four teachers described the nature of ESP as extremely dynamic and working within such an environment required continuous learning and teacher-development. All the interviewed teachers emphasised the importance of various educational programs, such as conferences, projects, or

other forms of teacher training, which facilitated the transition into specific occupational realms of ESP. Unfortunately, the teachers stated that, although valuable, such educational opportunities were hardly available in Croatia. Similar findings were demonstrated by Poedjiastutie (2017), who expressed a demand for teacher training in ESP and noticed that ESP teachers who underwent technical training in Indonesia demonstrated significant improvements in the workplace.

In order to provide a solution to the issues of teacher development in ESP, the interviewed teachers were asked about the cooperation between English teachers and field-specific professionals. They believed that such a collaborative effort would be very useful to both the students and themselves. Even though instances of collaborative teaching were very rare in Croatia, primarily due to logistical constraints and limited resources, all four teachers stated that they tend to interact with expert colleagues and query them for professional advice or clarification. However, one teacher stated that instances of such exchanges usually occur informally, outside the classroom.

It was also noted that the teachers tend to capitalise on the students' expanding technical knowledge by seeking their assistance with understanding subject-specific phenomena. They claimed that teacher and student roles in ESP often reverse if the students are able to provide more insight into the technical peculiarities of the profession. As one teacher stated: "... but you know what, I usually ask the students because with ESP, you learn as much from the students as they learn from you, because they are becoming experts in their field" (Teacher of English for Law, April 2, 2021).

In brief, the four ESP teachers indicated that, since they are not experts in the scientific fields they are teaching in, learning about the subject matter is a long-lasting, strenuous effort. The interviewees emphasised that entering the world of ESP was a complex process which required a lot of patience and commitment, as in the following account:

So I learned it step by step. Firstly, I learned the vocabulary and the meaning of every word without any connection to what is actually in the reading part, the text. Then I learned what is explained in the text, and now I think I'm more or less capable of deciding whether a certain text is of their interest or not, which is really a huge progress, but it has been twelve years since I started teaching this subject, and I'm still not very confident when I talk about some things (Tea-

cher of English for Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Naval Architecture, April 7, 2021)

Another challenge regarding ESP course design was the choice of appropriate materials. All teachers stated that the materials were chosen with reference to the set of predefined objectives. One teacher claimed that the criteria for teaching-material selection in ESP stem from the definition of learner needs and determine the attainment of course requirements. Upon completing the course, this teacher found that the materials did not stimulate the learners and thus felt that the course objectives had not been achieved.

Moreover, most interviewed teachers noted that adaptation of existing materials was a common practice in ESP. Only one teacher was satisfied with the range and availability of the course materials; the remaining three, however, emphasised a lack of available ESP materials and claimed that they were often forced to expand the existing corpus and refer to additional resources. The teachers also stated that, as the composition of teaching materials was not within their job description, they were often not equipped with the knowledge or the skills to deliver this type of work. Unfortunately, they were often expected to complete this task without the provision of necessary support or training.

In addition, two teachers stated that, due to the dynamic nature of ESP, coursebooks become outdated fairly quickly. Besides, it was noted that, regardless of the credibility of available materials, the data within the coursebook must always be re-evaluated and critically examined before the onset of every ESP course. For instance, one teacher utilised a coursebook intended for already employed English learners, rather than ESP students, and emphasised that such materials required constant adjustments if the needs of students who have yet to enter their respective professional realms were to be met. Similar findings were found by Naqvi and Mathew (2020) and Rajh (2015), who claimed that ESP teachers must keep adapting and supplementing course materials on the basis of learner needs, as well as the changes in specific scientific fields.

With regard to materials selection and development in ESP, it was also noted that all four teachers capitalised on usage of the Internet and digital media. They claimed that, since they were not experts in their teaching fields, they often had to resort to the Internet to investigate various subject-matter phenomena. The Internet is thus a valuable source of content, as well as a useful tool for language acquisition in the ESP classroom. Moreover, one teacher stated that the implementation of online quizzes in the ESP

classroom was both beneficial and entertaining. She stated that students preferred such interactive activities to traditional modes of instruction and suggested that the use of various digital tools in the classroom increased student motivation.

Other significant challenges regarding ESP course design expressed by the teachers were time management and large heterogenous groups of learners. They claimed that English classes were generally administered over the course of two academic semesters, which in their opinion, was a rather brief period of time. Large classes proved to be an additional burden, as may be grasped from the following statement:

We have one semester and three contact hours a week. It seems like a lot of time, but it isn't. And one of the problems is that we have to deal with very large groups of students here. So forty, fifty, sixty, seventy students, and when it comes to time management, for one teacher, it could be too much. (Teacher of English for Natural Sciences, April 22, 2021)

All four teachers noted that another challenge of ESP course design was the recognition of learner needs within a vastly heterogenous environment. The development of unified course syllabuses or the selection of appropriate materials in ESP tend to be hindered by the diversity of student populations. One teacher stated that the development of speaking skills was often thwarted by large student populations and variable proficiency levels. As a result, a genuinely learner-centred environment in which every student can fully expand their linguistic abilities was hardly a feasible goal in ESP; according to this teacher, "And mixed ability, that feeling that you cannot help everybody.... How can you have an individual approach in a group of forty, fifty, sixty students? I think that is utopia, it's impossible." (Teacher of English for Economics, May 12, 2021).

The other interviewees also noted that working with large, heterogenous groups of students was overwhelming and psychologically demanding. They claimed that responding to the needs of such chaotic student populations without straying from the framework of the syllabus may be the greatest challenge that all ESP teachers continuously battle with. In other words, the teachers believed that teaching in ESP required a lot of negotiation and flexibility. Similar results were expressed by Topuzov et al. (2020), who found that the methodological choices in ESP were driven by varying levels of student aptitudes, learning styles, and language proficiencies.

Finally, the attainment of learner autonomy was noted as a prominent challenge in the Croatian ESP context. According to the interviewed teachers, one important aim of ESP courses was to enable the learners to independently manipulate various occupational encounters within English-speaking environments. As one teacher stated: "I want them to think like lawyers and speak English in the legal context." (Teacher of English for Law, April 2, 2021)

It was noted that learner autonomy was rooted within the methodology of the ESP as all four teachers believed that creating an environment in which the learners may become independent language users was crucial. They claimed that effective communication within authentic contexts was related to achieving the right balance between fluency and accuracy. All interviewees shared the opinion that accurate linguistic expression or grammatical correctness ought not to take precedence over spontaneous communication in ESP courses. Moreover, one teacher realised that restricted linguistic capacities were likely to trigger language anxiety and emphasised that reinforcing student self-assurance and assertiveness was pivotal in ESP.

In addition, two teachers stated that ESP courses were usually taught in the first year of undergraduate studies, when the students are still being introduced to an entirely new realm of knowledge. One teacher expressed her belief that the learners would be more likely to achieve learner autonomy if the courses were presented to them once they had become fully attuned to various field-specific phenomena. Another teacher claimed that, at the very beginning of their studies, the students' subject-specific knowledge was not yet advanced enough to be effortlessly verbalised in a foreign language. In other words, it was noted that learners in ESP were encouraged to become confident language users; however, the teachers were rather sceptical with regard to the attainment of genuine learner autonomy at such an early educational stage. Similar findings were indicated by Birtić Vučić and Štulina (2020), who accentuated low maturity levels of ESP students at the University of Zadar.

Finally, according to the interviewed teachers, limited linguistic capacities, as well as a concern for grammatical accuracy, affected the learners' self-confidence and prevented them from demonstrating their linguistic knowledge in the ESP classroom. Hoa and Mai (2016) addressed similar issues and found that the differences between the mother tongue and the target language, as well as limited vocabulary resources, significantly obstructed the progress of ESP learners. Our research was also homogeneous with the findings presented by Dja'far et al. (2016), who claimed that learner autonomy in ESP was impeded by peer pressure and student fragility.

Nevertheless, the ESP teachers participating in this study noted that, despite such challenges, the reinforcement of learner autonomy in ESP remains a fundamental aim of course design and management.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to illustrate the importance of needs analysis in Croatian ESP courses by focusing on relevant learning objectives and outcomes, as well as on the skills ESP learners will need to utilise in their future professions. Moreover, the study was aimed at investigating the relationship between course objectives, learning outcomes, and course materials in ESP. Finally, the study investigated teacher attitudes regarding various challenges in the process of ESP course design and management.

The results of the syllabus analyses indicated that ESP courses in Croatia focused on the development of the four language skills within a communicative framework. It was found that the majority of course objectives and outcomes in the courses analysed were defined and elaborated with reference to the students' future occupations, as well as predictions of future professional implementations of the English language. This includes a focus on technical and functional vocabulary within each field of study, along with an emphasis on different language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Thus, the majority of the formally stated course requirements, such as the integration of the four language skills or the development of oral and written communicative competences, did align with current occupational demands of various fields of study. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicated that certain ESP courses in Croatia ought to place greater emphasis on the development of interpersonal communicative skills and intercultural competence.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that ESP course materials were generally in line with the course objectives. The mastery of technical terminology was reinforced through numerous authentic reading texts, whereas the acquisition of oral and written communicative competence was addressed through various exercises focusing on general language skills. However, it was discerned that certain coursebooks in the Croatian ESP context were rather outdated and inconsistent with current developments within respective fields of study.

Moreover, the results of the study unravelled a plethora of challenges these ESP teachers have struggled with in the process of course design. The most prominent issues we observed included inadequate teacher training,

difficulties with materials selection, time management, large and heterogeneous groups of learners, and the attainment of learner autonomy. In addition, this research has revealed that ESP teachers in Croatia are not provided with enough support or guidance to keep abreast of the dynamic nature of ESP.

Although the multitude of issues regarding ESP course design have been present for a long while, it may be concluded that the recognition of such problems has unfortunately been scarce and negligible in the Croatian ESP context. Perhaps the reasoning behind this may be associated with the aforementioned paucity of scientific research regarding learner needs, objectives, and outcomes in the Croatian ESP context. Even though the results of this research have revealed certain peculiarities of ESP in the Croatian context, this investigation has focused on four courses, which is why the results do not necessarily reflect the actual state of ESP in Croatia. Nevertheless, these findings certainly indicate that various spheres of ESP in Croatia are in dire need comprehensive re-evaluation, informed by the dynamics of contemporary globalised society.

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APPENDIX A

Course titles and list of analysed coursebooks

Course title	Analysed coursebook
<i>English for Law I</i>	<i>Izbor tekstova i vježbi za Engleski jezik I</i> (Bonačić, 2016)
<i>English in Economics I</i>	<i>Business Result Intermediate</i> (Hughes & Nauton, 2017)
<i>English Language 1</i> (English for Electrical Engineering and Computing)	<i>English in Electrical Engineering and Computing</i> (Štambuk, 2005)
<i>English for Specific Purposes</i> (English for Natural Sciences)	<i>A Course in Scientific English</i> (Ferčec, 2001)

APPENDIX B

Checklists of required skills in various fields of study

Field of study	Skills required
English for Law	Integration of the four language skills Speaking skills Writing skills Acquisition of technical vocabulary
Business English	Integration of the four language skills Oral and written communication skills Formal and informal modes of expression Acquisition of technical vocabulary Intercultural competence Development of <i>transversal skills</i>
English for Engineering and Computing	Integration of the four language skills Oral and written communication skills Formal and informal styles of communication Acquisition of <i>soft-skills</i>
English for Natural Sciences	Reading skills Speaking skills Grammar skills

APPENDIX C

Interview protocol

1. How do you define the needs of your learners?
 - a) Once defined, are these fixed or may they be altered throughout the course?
 - b) What are the skills you focus on in designing your course?
2. How relevant is development of the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) in your course?
 - a) How important are communicative skills for your students?
3. What are the desired learning objectives in your course?
4. Do these objectives address learners' needs?
5. What are the desired learning outcomes in your course?
6. What practices do you use with your students to achieve these objectives and outcomes?
 - a) What activities do you incorporate to achieve desired objectives and outcomes?
7. To what extent are your desired learning outcomes and objectives reflected in your assessment practices?
8. How do you organize materials to facilitate the acquisition of desired learning outcomes?
 - a) To what extent are the materials you use authentic?
9. What are the most important roles you take on as a teacher?
 - a) Do you find learner autonomy important?
10. What are some of the challenges you face as an ESP teacher?
 - a) How do you consider students who have different levels of fluency in English in the process of defining course objectives and outcomes?

Ciljevi, ishodi i potrebe studenata u nastavi engleskoga kao jezika struke

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Zbog porasta interesa za usvajanje engleskoga jezika u profesionalnim kontekstima, također je porasla potreba za redefiniranjem nastavnih ishoda i ciljeva u kontekstu aktualnih potreba studenata u stručnim okružjima. Shodno tome, cilj ovoga rada bila je analiza aktualnih nastavnih ciljeva i ishoda nastave engleskoga kao jezika struke. Nadalje, istraživanje je za cilj također imalo razumijevanje stavova profesorica prema mnogim izazovnim aspektima predavanja engleskoga jezika struke. U svrhu postizanja istraživačkoga cilja, izvedbeni planovi i nastavni materijali četiriju sveučilišnih kolegija engleskoga jezika struke podvrgnuti su analizi. Osim toga, provedena su četiri polustrukturirana intervjua u svrhu razumijevanja procesa izrade i provedbe kolegija engleskoga jezika struke u hrvatskim kontekstima. Iako su rezultati istraživanja ukazali na relativnu dosljednost između nastavnih ishoda engleskoga jezika struke i suvremenih istraživanja unutar različitih okupacijskih sfera, u određenim nastavnim kontekstima engleskoga jezika struke izostaje interes za razvoj međuljudskih komunikacijskih vještina i međukulturalne kompetencije. Štoviše, pokazalo se kako profesorima engleskoga jezika struke nisu omogućeni adekvatni resursi u procesu svladavanja tehničke terminologije te razumijevanja i odabira nastavnih materijala. Konačno, učenička autonomija u kontekstu mnogobrojnih i heterogenih studentskih populacija, prema rezultatima ovoga istraživanja, još uvijek ostaje neostvareni ideal u nastavi engleskoga jezika struke u Hrvatskoj.

Ključne riječi: *engleski jezik struke, nastavni ciljevi, nastavni ishodi, potrebe studenata, stavovi profesorica*

