THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING CULTURE IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

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Abstract

The importance of teaching culture within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs is underscored by the necessity for cultural competence and linguistic proficiency, particularly in professional communication. ESP differs from General English education by tailoring instruction to the specific linguistic needs within various professional and technical domains. As the globalised professional world increasingly demands effective intercultural communication, ESP programs must integrate cultural education to prepare learners for authentic interactions across cultural boundaries. This paper examines the importance of cultural aspects in professional communication and the integration of cultural education into ESP curricula, supported by the theoretical frameworks of Byram, Morgan et al. (1994), constructivist perspectives (Hughes & Sears, 2004), intercultural competence (Fantini, 1997), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), multicultural education (Parker, 2019), and cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003). By delving into these pedagogical models and theories, the paper aims to demonstrate that cultural competence is not just an additive element but a core component of ESP curricula, essential for fostering professional, communicative competence among learners.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP); cultural competence; linguistic proficiency; intercultural communication; cultural education.*

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Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of English language education that focuses on teaching English to students with specific goals, career paths, or professional fields in mind. Unlike General English courses, which provide a broad understanding of the language for everyday use, ESP courses are tailored to the specific linguistic needs of learners in areas such as business, law, medicine, aviation, tourism, and other technical or vocational sectors. It is a dynamic field of education that adapts to the evolving needs of learners in various sectors. It continues to innovate in pedagogy, materials development, and assessment methods to serve its target population effectively.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs are designed to equip learners with the linguistic tools necessary for their chosen fields. However, teaching English is not merely about language acquisition but also about understanding the cultural contexts in which the language operates. In the globalised world of the 21st century, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries is essential (Velásquez et al., 2023), particularly in professional contexts.

The intersection of cultural competence and linguistic proficiency is crucial for effective intercultural communication. Language is deeply rooted in culture; words and phrases can carry specific cultural meanings, and cultural norms can dictate communication styles. For example, the level of directness or formal vs. informal language can vary widely across cultures. Therefore, language learners must be culturally competent to use language appropriately and avoid misunderstandings.

In professional and academic settings, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), more is needed to know the technical vocabulary; one must also be aware of the cultural norms that guide how, when, and to whom that vocabulary is used. Similarly, a deep understanding of linguistic nuances and cultural contexts is essential for accurately conveying meaning in fields like translation and interpretation. This is particularly true in business, healthcare, and tourism industries, where interactions often occur between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In English for Specific Purposes (ESP), cultural education is not merely an add-on but a vital component that enriches the curriculum and enhances the learner's professional communicative competence. Integrating cultural

education into ESP curricula has been the topic of extensive research since the previous century, such as Bower (1992), Byram, Morgan et al. (1994), López Torres and Perea Barberá (2002), Kavalir (2010), etc.

This paper argues that cultural aspects are essential for proper professional communication and explores methods for integrating cultural education into ESP curricula.

1. Theoretical Framework

Teaching culture in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is multidimensional and draws upon various pedagogical models and theories.

Thus, Byram, Morgan et al. (1994: 43-44) assert that more than simple assimilation or attaching new information to existing frameworks is needed to fully grasp the true essence of another culture, including its values and significance. They argue that it is essential for learners to acknowledge that others possess distinct cognitive frameworks that shape their perception of the physical and social environment. This understanding should then be intellectually connected to the learner's own culturally shaped interpretations of what may appear to be the same reality. Their Contrastive-Comparative Approach facilitates learners' understanding of cultural differences and similarities between their own culture and the target culture, emphasising the importance of cultural information as a necessary component of any ESP course. (Kavalir, 2013: 118)

From a constructivist viewpoint, the learner is an engaged individual who brings their pre-existing knowledge and experiences. These factors influence how new information is taken in or adjusted to fit their understanding (Hughes & Sears, 2004). In teaching culture in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this perspective emphasises that learners should actively engage with cultural materials and experiences to build their understanding of the language within its cultural context. From a constructivist standpoint, when learners are exposed to authentic cultural content — such as real-life scenarios, case studies, discussions on cultural practices, or analysis of cultural artefacts — they are prompted to reflect on their own experiences, compare them with the target culture, and assimilate new information in a meaningful way.

In addition, the sources mention the notion of Intercultural Competence, explained by Fantini (1997: 13) as:

A concern with cross-cultural effectiveness and appropriateness – coupled with second or foreign language development – will hopefully lead beyond tolerance and understanding to a genuine appreciation of others. For this to happen, we need to develop the awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that will make us better participants on a local and global level, able to understand and empathise with others in new ways. Exposure to multiple languages, cultures, and worldviews in a positive context offers such a promise.

More than twenty years ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" to define a teaching approach that aims to involve students whose backgrounds and cultural experiences are often overlooked in conventional educational environments. Drawing from her study on successful educators of African American pupils, Ladson-Billings identified three foundational objectives of their teaching methods:

Education should lead to academic achievement.

It should foster the development of a strong ethnic and cultural identity in students while helping them excel academically.

It should enhance students' skills to identify, comprehend, and critically analyse societal and economic disparities.

By prioritising these aims, educators who practice culturally relevant pedagogy equip students to thrive intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. (Ladson-Billings, 1995: 476)

Building on the previous research, Parker (2019: 26) describes the notion of Multicultural Education (MCE). According to him, it represents a forward-thinking approach that enhances curriculum, teaching methods, evaluation, the perception of knowledge, and the cultivation of a constructive educational atmosphere. Stemming from the mid-20th century Intergroup Education movement, championed by Hilda Taba and her peers, MCE is rooted in the belief that education should acknowledge and celebrate students' cultural backgrounds while demonstrating that all students have the potential to excel academically (Banks, 2019; Nieto, 2017). MCE initiatives are present in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States, with each adaptation tailored to meet the unique needs of the diverse student populations within these nations (Nieto, 2017).

Moreover, Ng et al. (2012: 32) discuss a framework for cultural intelligence, which assesses internal and interpersonal competencies in cross-cultural contexts, developed by Earley and Ang (2003). This framework is defined as the capacity of an individual to navigate and manage in settings characterised by cultural diversity effectively.

The structure of this framework takes inspiration from a general intelligence model proposed by Sternberg in 1986. Sternberg pioneered the concept of intelligence beyond conventional metrics like verbal understanding, memory, and logical thinking towards a perspective that considers sociocultural and situational factors. He described intelligence as the mental processes aimed at purposeful adaptation, selection, and moulding of real-world environments that are significant in one's life (Wagner and Sternberg, eds., 1986: 45). To fully encompass the sociocultural dimensions of intelligence, Sternberg identified multiple critical areas of intelligence.

Similarly, Early and Ang based their Cultural Intelligence framework on four key areas that gauge mental processes (including metacognition, cognition, and motivation). A fourth area focused on social behaviour (behaviour). Mohammadi and Izadpanah (2019) and Ng et al. (2020) highlighted its uniqueness, noting that the framework attempts to quantify individuals' self-perceived capabilities to think through cross-cultural scenarios and tackle practical problems.

Within the ESP context, these theoretical perspectives provide a solid foundation for designing curricula that impart the necessary language skills and foster an understanding of the cultural nuances that inform professional communication in specific domains. By integrating these frameworks, ESP educators can create robust learning environments that equip learners with the linguistic proficiency and cultural competence required for success in their respective fields.

2. Methods for integrating cultural education into ESP curricula

2.1. Needs Analysis and Cultural Objectives

In ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching, conducting a Needs Analysis is a vital step to ensure the language course is tailored to the specific

requirements of the learners. The process involves understanding the linguistic proficiency of the learners, their specific goals and reasons for learning English, the tasks they will perform using English and analysing the discourse of their field to identify language features and gaps in skills. This targeted approach is based on the principle that ESP courses should be designed based on the needs of the learners, making the instruction relevant and practical (Axmedovna et al., 2019: 205-206)

Key steps in a needs analysis might include:
1. Identifying the stakeholders and their needs
2. Establishing the goals of the analysis
3. Collecting data through various methods such as surveys, interviews, or observations
4. Analysing the data to determine the gaps between the current state and the desired state
5. Recommending solutions to meet the identified needs.

Cultural Objectives in ESP teaching go beyond mere language proficiency to include the cultural knowledge and competencies needed for effective communication within professional or academic cultures. This aspect of ESP teaching emphasises the importance of cultural norms, practices, and expectations in language use. Cultural competence in the ESP curriculum is fundamental for teaching and learning, as it equips learners with the necessary skills to navigate and communicate effectively within specific cultural contexts (Jacob, 1987: 203-204).

Integrating cultural content and addressing intercultural communication skills are crucial for preparing learners for interactions in a globalised professional environment (Nechifor & Dimulescu, 2021: 83).

On the other hand, cultural objectives relate to an organisation's goals regarding the culture within the workplace or, in a broader sense, objectives set to achieve specific cultural outcomes within a society or community. In a business environment, cultural objectives include promoting diversity and inclusion, fostering collaboration and innovation, or establishing a culture of continuous improvement.

To achieve cultural objectives, an organisation might:
1. Define the desired cultural attributes
2. Communicate the importance of these cultural attributes to all members of the organisation

3. Implement policies and practices that support the desired culture
4. Train employees on cultural competencies and behaviours
5. Monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the cultural objectives are met.

Both needs analysis and cultural objectives are essential for aligning the resources and strategies of an organisation with its overall goals and ensuring that it can operate effectively in its social and cultural context.

2.2. Authentic Materials and Contextual Learning

In teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), using Authentic Materials and Contextual Learning are two methods that enhance the learning experience by bringing real-world relevance and situational context to the language instruction.

Authentic Materials in ESP teaching are not produced explicitly for language teaching but are taken from real-life sources that professionals in specific fields would encounter. Authentic materials are highly valued because they reflect the language and situations that learners will face in their specific professional or academic contexts. These materials can include industry-specific reports, business correspondence, technical manuals, and other documents that expose learners to the language as native speakers use it within the field. Authentic materials are frequently updated and in demand in ESP, as they offer a sense of realia in the classroom, which is considered beneficial for learners (Torregrosa et al., 2011: 89-94). Additionally, integrating authentic materials into the ESP classroom aims to communicate authentically between the text and the learners, enhancing reading comprehension and overall language competence (Borucinsky et al., 2020: 31-44).

Contextual Learning in ESP teaching focuses on the idea that learning occurs most effectively when students can associate the language they are learning with specific contexts and situations they will encounter in their field of work or study. Contextual learning involves designing class activities, instructional materials, and learning experiences directly related to applying language skills in real-world situations. Research has shown that applying contextualised text and concepts in ESP classes can improve the effectiveness of learning, as students can draw connections between the language skills they acquire and their practical use in professional settings. ESP teachers have

found that contextualised text can enhance the learners' perception of the relevance of the language instruction they receive (Saqlain et al., 2020: 274-296). Incorporating contextual expressions and real-life scenarios into ESP teaching can lead to more effective vocabulary recall and retention, a crucial aspect of language for acquiring specific purposes.

Authentic Materials and Contextual Learning create a more engaging and effective ESP curriculum by aligning language instruction with the actual communicative needs and cultural practices of the learners' intended professional or academic fields.

Incorporating authentic materials such as videos, case studies, and real-world scenarios can expose learners to the cultural aspects of language use in their field of study. Contextual learning activities help students understand linguistic forms and the cultural meanings they convey.

2.3. Cross-Cultural Training and Simulations

Cross-cultural training sessions and simulations can prepare ESP learners for real-life professional encounters. Through role-plays and interactive activities students can practice culturally appropriate language use and become aware of potential cultural misunderstandings.

Cross-cultural training and simulations are valuable methods for preparing ESP learners for real-world professional interactions. These training sessions can enhance learners' cultural adaptability, an essential skill for employment in international settings, such as cruise enterprises (Zhao et al., 2020: 218-221).

Conversely, simulations allow learners to engage in role-plays and interactive activities that emulate professional scenarios. This method allows students to practice language use in a culturally appropriate manner and become aware of potential cultural misunderstandings, which is crucial for ESP teaching (Castillejos et al., 2003).

By combining cross-cultural training with simulations, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that helps students develop the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary for effective communication in their professional fields.

2.4. Collaborative Learning and Cultural Exchange

Collaborative learning strategies like group projects and discussions can foster cultural exchange among learners from different backgrounds. Peer-to-peer interactions encourage students to share their cultural perspectives and learn from one another.

In the context of ESP collaborative learning strategies, such as wikis, have been used to promote collaborative writing among learners, enabling them to benefit from joint efforts in language tasks (Wang, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that encouraging collaborative learning in ESP courses can significantly strengthen students' oral communication skills, which is crucial for professional development (Agustina, 2022).

When it comes to cultural exchange in language learning, collaborative learning has been recognised for its role as a catalyst, engaging students in various cultural exchange activities (Wang, 2013). Online intercultural exchanges offer a systematic approach to foreign language learning, allowing learners to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, thereby enriching their educational experience (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016).

These collaborative practices highlight the importance of peer-to-peer interaction in ESP learning environments. In these environments cultural perspectives are shared, and intercultural communication skills are developed, contributing to a more global and inclusive approach to language education.

2.5. Expert Guest Speakers and Workshops

Inviting expert guest speakers and conducting workshops focused on cultural aspects of professional communication can provide learners with valuable insights. These opportunities allow students to engage directly with professionals who have experience navigating cultural complexities in their fields.

For instance, in listening comprehension in ESP classes, TED TALKS and guest speakers with expertise in specific fields can expose students to real-world language use and professional insights (Humeniuk et al., 2021). This type of interaction not only aids in language learning but also in understanding the cultural nuances and expectations of different professional domains.

Workshops that focus on cultural aspects of professional communication can also enhance language learning. For example, cultural mismatch in pedagogy workshops can provide training for non-native teachers in

communicative language teaching, highlighting the importance of cultural considerations in language education (Spicer-Ecalante et al., 2014). Similarly, student-led culture workshops have increased awareness of how culture influences communication within the professions, thus enriching the learning experience and outcomes (King de Ramírez, 2015).

Through these practical and interactive learning experiences students can better understand the cultural context in which they will use their language skills, preparing them for successful communication in their future professional endeavours.

2.6. Reflective Practices and Critical Thinking

Encouraging reflection on cultural experiences and promoting critical thinking about the role of culture in professional communication can deepen learners' understanding. Reflective journals, essays, and discussions can help students analyse and synthesise their cultural learning.

Reflective practices in language learning, such as reflective journals and essays, enable learners to develop self-directed learning competencies and gain deeper insights into their educational experiences. For example, studies have explored students' perceptions of reflective practices in second language learning environments, highlighting the importance of reflection in understanding the learning process (Lee & Mori, 2021). Reflective practice has also been shown to help language teachers understand their teaching processes, which in turn can make language education more effective (Kömür & Gün, 2016).

Critical thinking is equally important in professional communication, as it helps professionals engage in deliberative communication and make ethical decisions (Solbrekke et al., 2016). Moreover, critical thinking ability is related to professional competence, including problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and professional development (Maynard, 1996). Pedagogy that integrates ethics and critical thinking can enhance technical communication skills, preparing students for the complexities of professional interaction (Kienzler, 2001).

Incorporating these reflective practices and critical thinking skills into language learning can deepen students' understanding of cultural nuances in professional communication, leading to more effective and ethical practitioners.

3. Conclusive remarks

The paramount goal of integrating cultural education into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is to develop learners who are linguistically adept and culturally competent, enabling them to navigate the intricacies of global professional environments. The theoretical frameworks discussed in this paper underscore the multifaceted nature of culture's role in language education and the necessity of its inclusion in ESP curricula.

Byram, Morgan et al.'s Contrastive-Comparative Approach, constructivist theories, and the concept of intercultural competence all advocate for a reflective and comparative understanding of cultural differences and the development of skills beyond mere language acquisition. These approaches emphasise the importance of considering learners' pre-existing cultural knowledge and the need for active engagement with new cultural contexts to foster genuine understanding and meaningful learning experiences.

Culturally relevant pedagogy, as conceptualised by Ladson-Billings, and multicultural education, as described by Parker, reinforce the value of acknowledging and valuing learners' cultural diversity. These pedagogies aim to cultivate a strong sense of cultural identity and the ability to analyse societal structures critically. Educators can prepare learners to contribute positively to a diverse society by fostering academic success and social consciousness.

Furthermore, Earley and Ang's framework of cultural intelligence provides a model for assessing and enhancing the intercultural competencies necessary for successful professional communication. This intelligence framework reinforces the notion that effective intercultural interaction requires more than knowledge; it requires developing cognitive, motivational, and behavioural skills that enable individuals to adapt and thrive in multicultural settings.

Given this theoretical backdrop, ESP programs must prioritise cultural education to equip learners with the necessary tools to perform effectively in their professional roles. This involves expanding learners' specialised vocabulary and understanding of language structures and deepening their appreciation for the cultural contexts in which these linguistic elements are used.

As we move forward in an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures becomes a fundamental component of professional success. By embracing a comprehensive approach to cultural education in ESP, educators can ensure that learners are prepared to meet

the challenges of their respective fields, fostering competence, empathy, and adaptability that define the truly global professional.

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VAŽNOST POUČAVANJA KULTURE U ENGLESKOME JEZIKU STRUKE (EJS)

Sažetak

Važnost poučavanja kulture u okviru programa Engleskog jezika struke (EJS) naglašena je potrebom za kulturalnim kompetencijama i poznavanjem jezika, osobito u poslovnoj komunikaciji. EJS razlikuje se od općeg engleskog jezika po svojoj prilagođenosti specifičnim jezičnim potrebama unutar različitih profesionalnih i tehničkih područja. Kako globalizirani poslovni svijet sve više zahtijeva učinkovitu interkulturalnu komunikaciju, programi EJS-a trebaju sadržavati kulturološku komponentu kako bi pripremili polaznike za interkulturalnu poslovnu komunikaciju.

U ovome radu ispituje se važnost kulturalnih aspekata poslovne komunikacije i integracije kulturalnog obrazovanja u nastavne planove i programe EJS-a, sukladno različitim teoretskim perspektivama: Byram, Morgan i sur. (1994), konstruktivistička perspektiva (Hughes & Sears, 2004), interkulturalna kompetencija (Fantini, 1997), kulturno relevantna pedagogija (Ladson-Billings, 1995), multikulturalno obrazovanje (Parker, 2019) i kulturna inteligencija (Earley & Ang, 2003).).

Ulazeći u meritum navedenih pedagoških modela i teorija, cilj je rada pokazati da kulturalna kompetencija nije samo dodatni element, nego i bitna sastavnica kurikuluma EJS-a, ključna za razvoj poslovne komunikacijske kompetencije polaznika.

Ključne riječi: *engleski jezik struke (EJS); kulturalna kompetencija; lingvističko znanje; interkulturalna komunikacija; kulturalno obrazovanje.*