

## COMMUNICATIVE ESP TEACHING IN ARMENIA AND LEARNER NEEDS IN CONTEXT

### ABSTRACT

The paper examines communicative and experiential teaching practices in the ESP context at two universities in Armenia. It highlights both the advantages of this methodology and the cultural peculiarities that pose challenges to achieving the desired learning outcomes, as well as proposes practical strategies for addressing these challenges. Analysing prior studies in ESP, constructivism, and experiential learning and drawing on classroom-based evidence, the paper explores the practical implementation of these theoretical models in real teaching contexts. To help reconsider the existing ESP practices, the study also conducts a student needs analysis.

The study focuses on three major questions: 1) How do ESP students benefit from communicative and experiential learning? 2) What insights does the needs survey offer? 3) How can identified learner needs be translated into communicative and experiential ESP classroom practices in the Armenian context?

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Overall, the survey results support classroom observations and academic discussions, pointing to topical issues and areas of concern in ESP teaching in the Armenian higher education context.

**Key words:** ESP, communicative language teaching, experiential learning, needs analysis, assessment.

## ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

### ESP-Ի ԴԱՍԱՎԱՆԴՄԱՆ ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑԱԿԱՆ ՄՈՏԵՑՈՒՄԸ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԲՈՒՀԵՐՈՒՄ՝ ՍՈՎՈՐՈՂՆԵՐԻ ԿԱՐԻՔԱԶԵՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԴԻՏԱՆԿՑՈՒՆԻՑ

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են ուսուցման՝ հաղորդակցական և փորձառական մեթոդների կիրառման եղանակները՝ «Անգլերենը մասնագիտական նպատակների համար» (ESP) առարկայի դասավանդման համատեքստում: Հետազոտության համար հիմք է ծառայել Հայաստանի երկու բուհերում կատարված ուսումնասիրությունը: Հեղինակը ներկայացնում է ինչպես տվյալ ուսումնական մեթոդների կիրառության առավելությունները, այնպես էլ այն մշակութային գործոնները, որոնք հայալեզու ESP լսարանում խոչընդոտ են ստեղծում ուսումնական ցանկալի վերջնարդյունքի ձեռքբերման ճանապարհին: Հոդվածում քննարկվում են նաև նշված խոչընդոտների հաղթահարմանն ուղղված մի շարք գործնական ռազմավարություններ:

Հետազոտությունն իրականացվել է ESP-ի ուսուցման առկա մոտեցումների ուսումնասիրությունների հիման վրա, ինչպես նաև կոնստրուկտիվիզմի և փորձառական մեթոդների վերլուծության միջոցով: Հիմք ընդունելով լսարանային ուսուցման ընթացքում ստացված տվյալները՝ հեղինակն ուսումնասիրում է քննարկվող տեսական մոդելների գործնական կիրառությունը՝ իրական ուսումնական իրավիճակներում: Ներկայումս կիրառվող ESP ուսուցման մոտեցումները վերանայելու և վերամշակելու

նպատակով՝ սույն հետազոտության մեջ ներառվել է նաև ուսանողների կարիքների վերլուծություն:

Հետազոտությունը կենտրոնանում է երեք հիմնահարցերի վրա. 1) Որքա՞ն օգտակար է հաղորդակցական և փորձառական ուսուցումը ESP ուսանողների համար: 2) Ի՞նչ արդյունքների է հանգեցնում ուսանողների կարիքների հարցումը: 3) Ինչպե՞ս կարելի է բացահայտված կարիքները վերածել հաղորդակցական և փորձառական մոտեցումների՝ ESP ուսումնասիրող հայալեզու լսարաններում:

Ընդհանուր առմամբ, հարցման արդյունքները արտացոլում են լսարանային դիտարկումները և հաստատում են ակադեմիական քննարկումները՝ վեր հանելով Հայաստանի բարձրագույն կրթության համակարգում առկա այն արդիական խնդիրներն ու միտումները, որոնք առնչվում են ESP դասավանդմանը:

***Բանալի բառեր***՝ ESP (անգլերենը մասնագիտական նպատակների համար), հաղորդակցական ուսուցում, փորձառական ուսուցում, կարիքների վերլուծություն, գնահատում:

## **РЕЗЮМЕ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ ESP В АРМЕНИИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПОТРЕБНОСТЕЙ СТУДЕНТОВ**

В статье рассматриваются коммуникативные и экспериментальные методы обучения в контексте преподавания английского для специальных целей (ESP) на примере двух университетов Армении. Автор выделяет преимущества внедрения данных подходов в аудитории ESP, также отражая культурно-специфические особенности, создающие трудности в достижении желаемых результатов обучения и предлагая практические стратегии по их преодолению.

Работа опирается на анализ предыдущих исследований в области ESP, конструктивизма и экспериментального обучения. Используя

данные, полученные в ходе аудиторных занятий, автор описывает практическое применение теоретических моделей в реальных учебных ситуациях. С целью пересмотра и усовершенствования существующих методов преподавания ESP также проводится анализ потребностей обучающихся.

Исследование базируется на трех основных вопросах: 1) Какую пользу студенты ESP извлекают из коммуникативного и экспериментального обучения? 2) К каким выводам приводит опрос потребностей студентов? 3) Каким образом выявленные потребности могут быть реализованы в коммуникативных и экспериментальных практиках преподавания ESP в армянском контексте?

В целом результаты опроса подтверждают данные аудиторных наблюдений и академических дискуссий, указывая на актуальные проблемы и тенденции в преподавании ESP в вузах Армении.

**Ключевые слова:** ESP (английский язык для специальных целей), коммуникативное обучение, экспериментальное обучение, анализ потребностей, оценка.

## **Introduction**

In today's interconnected world, the ability to interact in English across all work environments has become a key skill for qualified and dedicated professionals. This makes it increasingly important not only to develop university students' foreign language proficiency but also to equip them with transferable skills they will rely on throughout their future careers. Traditional ESP courses have long focused on expanding learners' technical vocabulary, reinforcing grammar, and engaging them through occupation-specific listening, reading, speaking and writing materials. Yet, these practices alone have proven insufficient for building the confidence to communicate effectively within the respective domains. One reason for this is that form is often prioritized over content, which leads learners to target

accuracy and fluency instead of enacting genuine professional scenarios. In light of the above, ESP teaching should rely on experiential, communicative frameworks, including content-, task- and performance-based activities. This approach offers a number of educational benefits. In particular, it:

- 1) enhances student motivation and encourages creativity;
- 2) fosters students' cognitive development;
- 3) increases linguistic competence and soft skills in the respective areas of specialization;
- 4) promotes learning through continuous formative feedback and self-evaluation;
- 5) addresses students' linguistic development alongside their critical thinking, analytical and problem-solving skills;
- 6) prepares students for future occupational situations.

While communicative and experiential teaching methodologies have been extensively discussed by the global research community, including in the ESP settings, this research presents a fresh perspective because Armenian communicative ESP practices remain an under-researched area. Reflecting on certain peculiarities of Armenian higher education and drawing on classroom-based evidence, this paper proposes a culture-specific model for integration of communicative and experiential approaches into ESP classrooms.

ESP instruction in Armenia is distinguished by a number of constraints, including predominantly teacher-centred practices, large and mixed-ability classes, and a reduced number of English language classroom hours across university programmes. Against this backdrop, the growing demand for multilingual professionals in the labour market further heightens the need for more efficient and needs-driven ESP instruction.

To address these issues, the study employs a variety of research methods. First, it draws on existing studies in ESP, constructivism and experiential learning; second, it is based on an empirical observation of classroom performance across various ESP groups in Armenian universities; third, it conducts a student needs analysis through an independent survey – the first in a planned series of surveys. Armenian learners’ needs have not been explored systematically, while a needs analysis must be viewed as a decisive step in designing or enhancing ESP courses.

These methods provided both a theoretical foundation and practical insights into Armenian students’ needs, learning styles, engagement motivations, modes of performance improvement and the effectiveness of communicative ESP activities in language and professional skill development.

Thus the study concentrates on three major questions:

- 1) How do ESP students benefit from communicative and experiential learning?
- 2) What does the student needs survey reveal?
- 3) How can the identified learner needs be translated into communicative and experiential ESP classroom practices in the Armenian context?

Overall, these considerations highlight the importance of tailoring ESP instruction to learners’ real communicative needs within specific professional contexts. By combining classroom-based observation with an initial analysis of student needs, this study seeks to contribute to a more grounded understanding of how communicative and experiential ESP practices can be meaningfully used in Armenian higher education. It also indicates the need to

reconsider assessment methods and criteria in ESP courses so as to reflect learners' communicative competence in their relevant professional fields.

### **Literature Review**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) are both well-established approaches in the field of foreign language education, each supported by a substantial body of research. Gradually, CLT – which emerged as a response to the monotonous, form-focused grammar-translation method – began to contribute methodological ‘substance’ to ESP, originally conceived as a narrowly focused linguistic course tailored to specific professional contexts. In the 21st century, the combination of these approaches has gained increasing popularity, as it allows for greater interactivity, creativity and learner participation. The scholarly literature offers comprehensive accounts of contemporary teaching practices for enriching ESP courses through the incorporation of communicative tasks. These tasks often take experiential forms – such as simulations, role-plays, and scenario-based problem solving – as all of them share core constructivist principles: meaningful communication, learner engagement, and the use of language as a tool for achieving real-life goals, through which learners “construct and internalize new concepts, ideas and knowledge based on their own present and past knowledge and experiences” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2004: 167, cited in Yaman, 2017: 1350). Allen (2022: 4) identifies key characteristics of the constructivist approach, including interactive learning built on students' preliminary knowledge and the teacher-student dialogue that facilitates the construction of new knowledge. Similarly, Marlowe and Page (2005: 7-9, cited in Yaman, 2017: 1354) clearly highlight the distinctions between constructivist and traditional

approaches – namely, knowledge construction as opposed to reception, thinking and analysis as opposed to memorization, understanding and application as opposed to repetition, and active engagement as opposed to passive attendance. As described by Yaman (2017: 1351), it is the learners who “take on an active role and get the responsibility of their own learning”. Within ESP contexts, these constructivist principles are most effectively applied through communicative and experiential classroom activities.

There is broad agreement among researchers regarding the effectiveness and long-term impact of combining ESP courses with communicative methods: such a combination converts the learning process into active, learner-centred and skill-oriented training, not only developing language skills but also equipping learners with hard and soft skills, which are essential for employability. From Gvelesiani’s perspective (2023: 28), ESP courses should be designed to train learners “to communicate effectively in tasks prescribed by their field of study or work situation”. As stated by John Dewey (a key figure in experiential and learner-centred education), “the classroom should reflect society outside the classroom” (cited in Yaman, 2017: 1351). Lavrysh (2016: 519) supports the rationale for communicative teaching by noting that students are often unable to present ideas confidently in public and that they need to develop creative and critical thinking skills, as well as the ability to analyze, solve problems and make decisions. Berglund and Heintz (2014, cited in Lavrysh 2016: 519) find it vital for graduates of technical universities “to achieve mastery of foreign languages, cultural cognition, have skills of rhetoric and team-building”. As a result, ESP courses become part of vocational training, where soft skills can be taught across the curriculum, i.e., students “can master soft skills through variety of learning activities which are suggested while the course: discussions,

questioning, presentations, simulations and role plays, project creation, web quests, etc. The learning objectives of these courses include the soft skills outcomes as an integral part of the whole course program” (Lavrysh, 2016: 521). According to Stan (2013: 217), the ultimate outcomes of an ESP course should include students’ ability to “communicate with foreign peers; read professional literature, academic journals; write technical and academic articles; attend lectures, conferences, symposia; perform technical or business negotiations in English; read and write instructions; visit and receive foreign peers” – all skills that contribute to their future professional practice.

As regards the assessment of communicative tasks, many studies arrive at the conclusion that it should be guided by clear criteria so that formative evaluation throughout the course meaningfully contributes to the final result. For instance, Allen (2022: 4) argues that assessment should be based on “student works, observations and points of view, as well as tests,” emphasizing that the learning process is “as important as product”. Lewis, Moss, & Van Duzer (1998, cited in Knutson, 2003: 61) suggest that project-based student activities should be evaluated using rubrics that include components such as employability skills and language skills, with particular emphasis on oral proficiency. From the perspective of Lavrysh (2016: 521), “the assessment of students’ progress should incorporate criteria of soft skills evaluation as well as knowledge of the core discipline”. In other words, receiving constructive (formative) teacher- and peer feedback throughout the course, students should demonstrate progress in communicative competence in their respective fields of study, while the final exam can adopt the same criteria.

In the present study, the multi-dimensional framework of soft skills proposed by Lavrysh (2016: 523-524) provided the conceptual basis for

organizing ESP activities. While the original classification distinguishes six categories, our research focuses on three core categories – *Oral Communication*, *Written Communication*, and *Collaboration, Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking* – to structure the skills- and tasks-based component presented in Table 1. The framework was further expanded to include additional major-related skills and activities, resulting in a more comprehensive classification within the ESP context.

The experiential nature of communicative activities demonstrates the importance of learning through direct experience, particularly in the development of career-related language skills. The experiential learning methodology is grounded in the research of distinguished scholars, such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and David Kolb (Kolb et al., 2014: 212), who regarded experience as a key element in the learning process. The learner becomes completely involved in the learning event, “in both his feeling and cognitive aspects” (Rogers, 1969: 5, cited in Knutson, 2003: 54). As Rogers notes, “even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within” (Ibid). Through such experiences, students ‘live through’ the subject matter rather than merely learn about it. In this learner-centred environment, the teacher serves as a facilitator “by creating a hospitable safe space for learners to reflect on and make meaning from their experiences” (Kolb et al., 2014: 207).

Communicative and experiential approaches to language teaching contribute significantly to the effectiveness of ESP education. In particular, they ensure the involvement of nearly all students, enhance their understanding of the specialized material, and reduce the sense of alienation among lower-performing learners, among other benefits. Meanwhile, the

social nature of language learning enables and necessitates “learner collaboration with other learners [...] through taking risks, testing hypotheses, making plans and decisions, and making judgements about one’s own progress” (Wilhelm, 1999, cited in Knutson, 2003: 56). In addition, these experiences spark learners’ curiosity about their major. As a result, students boost their self-esteem (Spruck-Wrigley, 1998; Parks, 2000, cited in Knutson, 2003: 59) and acquire multiple practical competences, including future career-related skills, as well as generic ones, such as teamwork and organizational skills (Knutson, 2003: 60). Finally, through communicative and experiential activities, students receive constructive feedback throughout the study period, which stimulates continuous and steady improvement in collaborative, peer- and teacher-supported environments.

At the same time, Knutson (2003: 55) cites several obstacles that hinder the broad acceptance of the aforesaid methodologies. Among these are limited classroom time, the focus on test preparation, the risk of not meeting prescribed syllabus outcomes, and the current uncertainty in assessment criteria. Another major challenge is the lack of linguistic skills, which often impedes natural language production. For example, language limitations often make simulated communication sound artificial (Stern, 1990, cited in Knutson, 2003: 60). The same challenge leads students to resort to their native language, especially in one-to-one peer interactions, when the teacher monitors another group.

Another consideration that makes the suggested methodology less attractive to some language instructors is the shift from grammatical correctness to communicative effectiveness. While this may be acceptable in some professional contexts, in others it can seriously interfere with the working process. After all, as Knutson (2003: 61) justly notes, some job

applicants may be required to take an English proficiency test, in which case inaccurate grammar and limited lexical resources could create a major barrier to employment.

Despite the aforementioned challenges, our long-term observation of student performance and the evaluation of different teaching approaches are consistent with prior research, confirming that in foreign language education, learners achieve better results when they are actively and intellectually engaged in an activity without being forced. Based on these findings, the following chapter explores the practical implementation of communicative and experiential activities in our ESP classroom.

### **Classroom Implementation**

A considerable body of foundational literature on experiential language teaching emphasizes the importance of reflection in the learning cycle (Nunan, 1995; Rogers, 1969; Kolb, 1984, cited in Knutson, 2003; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). While we do not underestimate the function of reflection in experiential learning, in ESP we prioritize bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional communicative performance. In the Armenian educational environment, the learner-centred instruction does not assume fully autonomous learners who can manage their own learning process, reflecting on every step. Rather, students crave guidance and feedback from the teacher and their peers. This aligns with social interpretations of Kolb's reflective observation stage (Kolb & Kolb, 2014: 214; Kolb & Kolb, 2017: 12-13).

Based on these ideas, our methodology combines communicative and content-based approaches with guided reflection, helping students apply what they learn in class to realistic professional situations. In this way, experiential

learning principles are put into practice in the ESP classroom. We use a range of contextualized communicative activities to promote students' critical thinking and engagement in their prospective professional roles. Activities such as debates, research projects, and policy brief writing provide a temporary escape from the 'study' reality into a more appealing 'work' context, encouraging students to contribute their creativity, relevant theoretical knowledge and genuine enthusiasm. Through these tasks, learners gradually build the skills and confidence they need for authentic professional situations.

Let us consider the classroom procedure in more detail. The minimum (classic) set of activities for each subject matter involves brainstorming, professional vocabulary building, reading and listening comprehension, oral discussions and written responses. Comprehension is checked not only through traditional comprehension questions but also through critical judgement tasks aimed at developing students' ability to make inferences and draw conclusions about main points, as well as to make projections about realistic situations. For example, immediately after viewing a video material, students are asked to reflect on their impressions – why or why not they found the content impactful, what factors make it trustworthy or unreliable, and how biased or impartial it appears, among other aspects.

However, what truly motivates students to engage in the course is the opportunity to apply what they have learned in direct experiences, even when these experiences are replicated under classroom conditions. We employ discipline-specific communicative activities for ESP across multiple majors, some of which are presented further in this article. The objective of each activity is to simulate tasks from genuine occupational cases, where students use their language skills collaboratively to handle realistic issues. Thus they

develop practical know-how in their prospective fields along with soft skills, which are highly valued by contemporary employers (Lavrysh, 2016: 518). The communicative, experiential and collaborative format of these activities helps capture students' passive attention, i.e. students engage in the activities naturally, without forcing themselves to concentrate. In contrast, more traditional tasks require considerable effort to keep attention for a long time. Additionally, teamwork improves students' productivity, enhancing internal communication and resulting in more effective problem-solving. It is also true that struggling students feel safer and more encouraged to participate in small-group projects than in individual tasks.

The following table outlines a selection of contextualized communicative activities that illustrate how traditional ESP instruction is enhanced to address challenges learners are likely to encounter in their future careers. For greater clarity, the tasks are grouped into three main categories, reflecting the adapted skills classification framework discussed in the previous chapter.

**Table 1.** Extended Classification of ESP Activities

*(Adapted from Lavrysh, 2016: 523-524).*

SKILL FOCUS	GENERIC ACTIVITY TYPES	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES BY MAJOR
<b>Oral communication skills</b>	Discussions & debates; Role plays & simulations; Peer interpreting; Presentations & public speeches; Press conferences; Briefings; Interviews; Case analyses; Problem-solving meetings; Grammar-based	<b>Political Science, International Relations and Oriental Studies:</b> press conference simulations; talks or negotiation simulations; election campaign speeches; diplomatic puzzle or spy game; mock UN session; conflict resolution role play or case study; simulated diplomatic reception.

	<p>professional scenarios (e.g. “What if?”).</p>	<p><b>Public Administration:</b> Town hall discussion role-play; Presentation of an administrative reform proposal; Crisis management meeting (executing the crisis response plan). <b>Public Policy:</b> advocacy speeches; round-table discussions on policy impact. <b>Economics &amp; Management:</b> job interview; business negotiation; crisis management meeting; funding request presentation; graph/ chart/ diagram description. <b>Journalism:</b> news announcement; live interview; news broadcast role-play.</p>
<p><b>Written communication skills</b></p>	<p>Project proposals; Reports; Policy briefs; Position papers; Case analyses; Press releases; Letters to government; Authentic text translation; Professional correspondence; Professional blogs.</p>	<p><b>Political Science, IR and Oriental Studies:</b> diplomatic memo; conflict resolution report; analysis of an international agreement; press statements; simulated embassy communications. <b>Public Administration:</b> Writing an administrative report; Drafting a public service announcement; Writing official responses to citizens; Drawing up instructions or guidelines for a public agency. <b>Public Policy:</b> policy brief or position paper; policy proposal; community action plan; public opinion poll report;</p>

		<p>policy poster design; policy campaign materials.</p> <p><b>Journalism:</b> press release; press statement; SWOT analysis; feature article; investigative report.</p> <p><b>Economics &amp; Management:</b> funding request letter; product launch proposal; business report; business plan; market analysis; SWOT analysis; business letters, emails, and memos; executive summary.</p>
<p><b>Collaborative, problem-solving, &amp; critical-thinking skills</b></p>	<p>Individual &amp; group projects; Small-scale research; Surveys and data analysis; Creative assignments (visual charts, posters, adverts; role-played scenarios); Problem-solving &amp; decision-making activities; Field trips; Peer evaluations; Short video projects (scenario writing and filming); Peer interpreting.</p>	<p><b>Political Science, IR and Oriental Studies:</b> identifying diplomatic instruments; group research on international crises; conflict-management role-play/simulation.</p> <p><b>Public Administration:</b> Conducting a mini field study on citizen satisfaction; designing an anti-corruption campaign.</p> <p><b>Public Policy:</b> designing community action plan; advocacy campaign plan; interest group formation.</p> <p><b>Journalism:</b> producing a short documentary or a video report.</p> <p><b>Economics &amp; Management:</b> field study of a local business; product or advertisement design; market research; conflict-management role-play/simulation.</p>

Although classified according to their primary focus, most activities integrate communicative, analytical and problem-solving skills, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of real-world professional practice. For instance, a project assignment may necessitate small-scale research and culminate in an oral presentation, while a discussion task may involve preparatory writing and group collaboration. Many of the tasks are also transferable across different majors. Yet, the list is not exhaustive.

To demonstrate how these activities function in practice, several examples are detailed below, along with a discussion of the challenges identified in the Literature Review that still need to be addressed.

Let us consider the case of an interview simulation performed by first-year Yerevan State University Public Policy students with a mixed A2-B2 level of English. They were instructed to choose an NGO, study its activities, and act out an interview with one of its representatives. However, despite the creative intent of the task, some students relied on ready-made interviews from Google and memorized them to perform in class. Others adopted a combined approach by using AI to generate questions and answers, checking the accuracy of the information through Google, and ending up memorizing their roles. A third group formulated their own questions and had them edited by AI. However, only two of the fourteen students in the class worked almost independently, authoring both questions and answers based on their prior knowledge of the chosen organization and using Google Translate to express their ideas in English more accurately.

When asked to reflect on what they had learnt while preparing for this activity, most students noted an increased awareness of the organizations they studied (their role in society, international standing, scope of activity, etc.). Many also mentioned vocabulary expansion, while only three students

reported benefiting from AI's assistance in word choice and grammar. From the teacher's perspective, the activity outcomes revealed both positive implications and areas for improvement:

- 1) The entire class took a genuine interest in preparing for the task, and all students attended the session.
- 2) The students preferred to select partners on their own, rather than follow the teacher-proposed role distribution.
- 3) Although the activity was performed zealously, none of the students really *acted out* the interview; instead, they followed a scripted question-answer format without building on what their interlocutor said. Thus, the interaction lacked spontaneity and failed to develop into a genuine dialogue.

As mentioned before, in Armenian ESP classrooms it is not uncommon to encounter lower-proficiency learners. It is clear that students struggling with the language are less likely to imitate real-life interaction successfully, and so, preparation for 'communication' turns into mere cramming, in which genuine communicative needs are not met.

To address this issue, explicit guidance on improvisation should be provided, using relevant prompts and sentence starters. A useful follow-up activity involves spontaneous mini-dialogues to encourage natural responses to unexpected answers instead of memorized ones. Such measures, however, require considerable classroom time, which university teachers often lack. Therefore, it is not surprising that similar issues often remain unsettled.

Another illustrative activity is public speaking. Presentations have long been used by ESP teachers in Armenia as a final task to conclude a semester. Each student (or a small group) selects a professional topic of interest to explore and presents the findings to the class. The expected benefits of this

task include deepening the knowledge of a professional topic in English, making necessary adjustments to the text to fit the allotted time, expanding thematic vocabulary, and enhancing technological ability and creativity.

In practice, regrettably, presentations often result in students reading aloud from slides overloaded with large chunks of text. Currently, more of our ESP colleagues are addressing this issue by instructing students on how to approach presentations more effectively. In our classes, for instance, we watch examples of high-quality presentations and public speeches and analyze speakers' delivery, structure and use of language. As a result, an increasing number of students begin to behave more like orators and improve their rhetorical skills.

Nevertheless, several problems persist, including limited visual contact and rapport with the audience, inappropriate or abrupt transitions between subtopics, excessive reliance on memorized texts, uncreative and unnatural turn-taking in group presentations, and insufficient adaptation of speech to the audience's language level, which further reduces the communicative effectiveness of the task.

It is worth noting that students tend to maintain eye contact primarily with the teacher rather than with their classmates. This probably stems from two factors: first, students still perceive presentations as a form of answering a lesson rather than as a public speaking event, and second, their peers often fail to demonstrate visible signs of interest, which discourages presenters. It is common to see students absorbed in revising their own speeches instead of engaging as attentive listeners. Yet listening to peers is essential, as it fosters a supportive classroom environment and helps reproduce real-world scenarios, where individuals gather to discuss and exchange opinions on issues of professional concern. Active peer listening allows students to learn

from one another's successes and mistakes and to provide constructive feedback. In order to encourage the audience's concentration, presentations should be conducted on a regular basis (not only at the end of a semester), turning them into a purposeful routine activity. Meanwhile, as we have previously demonstrated, listeners should be assigned an active role through peer questioning, peer evaluation, or follow-up discussion (Karapetyan, 2020: 82). In turn, presenters should reflect on their peers' contributions as well.

The remaining issues can be addressed through explicit teaching of presentation skills, particularly with video examples; however, factors such as students' shyness and a limited sense of communicative freedom arising from local educational traditions, as well as insufficient language proficiency need to be taken into account, making supportive teacher and peer feedback most important for ensuring confident delivery.

Among our set of activities, student-led lessons focused on a professional theme hold a special place, especially for B1+ learners. We allow students to work in pairs. This project task can be carried out by students of any major, provided that they conduct preliminary research on the topic, prepare relevant materials, and design interactive tasks that engage their peers. The outcomes are favourable for both the student-teachers and their classmates.

For student-teachers, the benefits include: 1) mastering the topic both in terms of content and vocabulary; 2) exploring additional details not covered in the textbook; 3) assuming shared responsibility and learning to work effectively as a team; 4) using intellectual creativity to earn the approval of the teacher and classmates, with the latter's opinion often being particularly motivating; 5) boosting self-esteem and confidence in public speaking; and 6) developing problem-solving, leadership and organizational skills. For recipients, the benefits include: 1) experiencing a comfortable, lively and

interactive classroom atmosphere; 2) full engagement in interactive tasks; 3) learning from peers, which feels closer to their own perspective; 4) strengthening collaborative skills by responding to peer-led discussions; and 5) being exposed to diverse teaching styles.

The most frequent problem with this assignment is that student-teachers often turn a practical lesson into a mini-lecture, with questions and answers at the end. However, some succeed in leading the class through short interactive activities, discussions and quizzes, promoting active participation and, hopefully, inspiring greater creativity for future student-led classes.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, other classroom tasks can also be adapted to promote student collaboration and experiential learning. Thus, Peer Interpreting is an excellent alternative to a commonplace translation assignment. Students are asked to read aloud to their peers, who must perceive the sentences by ear, retain them and interpret for the class. For greater ease, the sentences can be divided into shorter parts. More advanced students can do the translation spontaneously. Working in groups of three, they act out a formal interpreting scenario. One student reads a sentence in Armenian or Russian, the second interprets it into English, and the third responds in English for the ‘interpreter’ to translate back to the first student.

At the Yerevan Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University, International Relations students are additionally engaged in an authentic written text translation practice, where they translate excerpts from academic papers and textbooks. In this way, they actively apply their language skills to authentic materials, learning both to comprehend complex ideas expressed in authentic professional literature and to grasp academic English with all its intricacies.

Finally, we would like to clarify the placement of the Field Trips activity under the category of collaborative, problem-solving and critical-thinking tasks. Although field trips per se (including visits to the RA Foreign Ministry or the National Assembly) are primarily observational rather than experiential, they require subsequent analysis and reflection. This reflection can be structured through a variety of pair or group project tasks, such as preparing a mini diplomatic briefing, designing a poster based on original student-shot photographs and trip-based content, simulating a professional activity (for example, handling a delegation), or presenting an observation report. Thus, the educational value of field trips is transformed into an active and meaningful learning process of collaboration and professional engagement.

### **Understanding ESP Learners' Needs and Preferences**

A distinctive feature of ESP is its focus on teaching language components that are specifically relevant to the activities in a particular discipline. Today, the ultimate goals and curricula of most ESP courses are pre-determined by the great variety of readily available textbooks. The content typically reflects the skill requirements of the target professions. What these materials fail to take into account is the transitory and dynamic nature of professional fields, as well as the cultural peculiarities and individual abilities, needs, preferences and perceptions of the learners – the key players in the educational process.

In the Armenian higher education context, foreign language instruction remains largely teacher-centred and grade-oriented. This often limits opportunities for meaningful communicative practice. Additional constraints include large class sizes and mixed proficiency levels among students. Furthermore, despite a growing demand for multilingual employees in the

Armenian labour market, as demonstrated by Karapetyan and Kharatyan (2024), the number of English language class hours allocated to non-language majors has been steadily declining. Therefore, it becomes imperative to use the available class time more efficiently by prioritizing communicative practices that directly support students' future professional needs.

Given the constantly evolving social and educational environments, changing job market demands and the rapid advancement of high technologies that reshape the ways we live, learn, interact and communicate, it becomes crucial for ESP teachers to revise and update course content on a regular basis. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of students' English proficiency levels within the same group, which creates additional challenges to teaching, requires constructive strategies to make instruction more appealing to lower-performing learners without compromising the goals of higher-achieving ones.

To respond to the identified challenges, an informal student survey was conducted among bachelor programme students from two universities in Yerevan. This survey represents the initial stage of a planned series of studies aimed at refining ESP instruction through continuous feedback. Regular needs analyses across different ESP groups can serve as a valuable feedback tool (though inevitably subjective), providing insight into learners' genuine perceptions of their study programmes. The key objectives of such analyses are:

- To identify the language areas students are struggling with;
- To determine the language skills they wish to improve or master;
- To reveal the communicative competences they seek to develop for future professional situations.

We designed a brief questionnaire consisting of 14 multiple-choice questions, some of which allowed more than one selection. Data for the survey were collected from 243 first- and second-year students from two universities – YSU and MSU Yerevan Branch – with participants drawn from ESP courses taught by the author and colleagues at both universities. The majors included Journalism, Economics and Management, Political Science, International Relations, Public Policy and Governance, Public Administration, and Oriental Studies. The inclusion of these disciplines reflects both the scope of the author's teaching activity and the fact that the chosen ESP courses share overlapping content and communicative goals.

To provide a more detailed picture of the sample, the composition of the participating ESP groups is summarized further. Eleven ESP groups took part in the survey, comprising students from seven previously mentioned majors. The largest group (around 17%) consisted of first-year students of Economics and Management, followed closely by first- and second-year International Relations students, who accounted for exactly 16% and just over 15% of respondents, respectively. Approximately 10 % were first-year students of Public Administration, making it the third largest group. First-year students of Public Policy and Governance and Oriental Studies each represented 8.6% of the sample. The remaining disciplines and years of study were represented by smaller numbers of respondents.

Almost an equal proportion of participants (39.5 and 39.1 %) described their current English level as upper-intermediate and intermediate, respectively. Only 6% rated themselves as advanced, while beginners outnumbered them by nearly 5%.

Most respondents expected to use English in their future careers often, every day, or sometimes (about 53%, 28% and 15%, respectively). Only 1% anticipated that English would never be required at work.

Regarding indispensable future career skills, an overwhelming proportion of respondents (74%) identified participation in meetings as essential, followed by active listening and clarifying information (approximately 63.5%) and negotiation skills (51%). Reading professional texts, delivering presentations and writing emails were selected by smaller proportions – just under 40%, 30% and 25%, respectively.

However, among work-related tasks expected to be fulfilled in English, negotiating/mediating and attending conferences top the list, with each mentioned by more than half of respondents. Reading policy documents and networking rank next, selected by just under half of respondents. The remaining two tasks (writing reports and analyzing data) were chosen by barely 40%.

An impressive number of participants (almost 80%) named studying professional vocabulary as the most frequently performed classroom activity at present. Other activities (including reading articles and textbooks, translating from and into English, listening to audio lectures and watching videos, giving short presentations and public speeches, writing essays and reports, debates, discussions, project-based, creative, or small-scale research tasks), although trailing behind in numbers, were also frequently selected, each by more than two-fifths of respondents. Remarkably, role-plays or simulations and descriptions of graphs, charts, and tables occupy only a minor part of classroom time, being reported by just 13.6% and 7.8%, respectively.

Not surprisingly, studying professional vocabulary also topped the list of most useful activities for professional English, accounting for roughly 71% of respondents. Less preferred but still considered effective were audio lectures and videos (58.4%), short presentations and speeches (51%), text reading (50.2%), translation (47.3%), and debates, discussions, or problem-solving activities (39.5%). Project-based, creative and research tasks made up a noticeably smaller portion (31.7%), while negotiation role-plays and simulations were chosen by only 28% of students.

This logically leads us to the next chart, where grammar and vocabulary exercises were ranked as the activities most conducive to learning, selected by 66.3% of respondents. Other highly stimulating activities were video analysis (52%) and discussions, debates, or interaction with peers and the teacher (49%). Fewer students recognized the value of individual tasks, group projects and essay writing with teacher feedback, all selected by over one third of participants. Surprisingly, not many students chose AI interaction (26.3%) or online interactive exercises on playful learning platforms, such as Quizlet and Kahoot (15.2%). While the latter is unexpected because of the entertaining and engaging nature of the tools, the low use of AI-based activities is remarkable given the widespread belief that students may already be largely dependent on AI for language learning. An encouraging fact, though, is that only 18% relied on text memorization.

Nevertheless, the participants did acknowledge the usefulness of certain digital tools for learning English. In particular, YouTube videos topped the list, accounting for almost 90% of mentions, followed – at a considerable distance – by AI writing assistants such as Chat GPT, Gemini, and Grammarly (63.4%) and language-learning apps including Duolingo, Memrise, and Talkpal (53.5%). Once again, playful learning platforms

attracted only 37% of respondents, while video conferencing tools, online translators and other digital resources received a marginal number of mentions.

As for the purposes of using these platforms, 74.5% of respondents preferred watching subtitled videos to facilitate listening comprehension. Fewer than half used digital tools to check their vocabulary knowledge through quizzes (45%), gain additional practice in English (32.5%), simplify original texts (30%), or get help with essay writing (26.7%).

An overwhelming number of students (just under 85%) indicated they would welcome the opportunity to use online tools and platforms in their ESP courses, with varying degrees of certainty. The remaining participants gave preference to traditional classroom lessons.

Regarding the biggest challenges in learning English, the findings revealed several key areas of difficulty. Nearly 53% of students reported struggling to speak fluently in discussions. Understanding spoken English and writing academic or professional texts emerged as the next two common challenges, with virtually equal mentions (just over 41% in each case). A smaller proportion of students pointed to problems related to limited professional vocabulary and insufficient practice outside the classroom. Fewer than 30% indicated lack of motivation, a limited general vocabulary, poor grammar and difficulties remembering new words.

The findings also demonstrated a strong preference for immediate in-class feedback (63.4%), followed by one-to-one consultations with the teacher (51%). Written corrections on assignments were likewise valued by a substantial proportion of students (47.7%). However, despite the global shift toward student-centred approaches and peer learning, as well as the growing

use of AI tools in teaching and assessment, only 26% expressed a preference for peer comments, while just over 17% opted for automated feedback.

The final question of the survey revealed the motivations underlying students' efforts to improve their English. Interestingly, nearly 70% reported that they simply enjoyed learning languages. Another 58.5% expected their language skills to enhance their employability. A third frequently mentioned objective was to publish or present internationally (almost 53%), closely followed by the intention to study abroad (approximately 50%). On the positive side, only 23.5% indicated that they were taking English courses solely because of a university requirement.

Overall, the survey results confirmed the vital role of English in the future professional activities of students in the surveyed majors. Students' perceptions and expectations regarding career requirements guide them toward the development of communicative skills, with particular emphasis on participating in meetings, listening, negotiating, mediating and clarifying information. These priorities, in turn, determine their classroom preferences for broadening professional vocabulary through extensive reading and translation, improving listening comprehension, and enhancing debating, problem-solving, speechmaking and presentation skills. Encouragingly, the activities most frequently practised in class at present support the development of these communicative skills.

At the same time, a growing interest in digital resources for learning English can be observed. Although YouTube videos remain the undisputed leader among them, generative AI tools are attracting an increasing number of users, which is a positive development, provided that learners are taught to use them responsibly. Combined with students' reported enjoyment of learning English, these tools offer a promising avenue for teachers to design

more communicative and professionally oriented ESP courses that also address gaps in speaking, writing and interactive skills.

The findings also highlighted several areas of concern. First, ESP groups in Armenian universities are often composed of mixed-ability students (from Beginner to Advanced), which creates an unfavourable environment for the educational process and presents considerable challenges for teachers. Moreover, such heterogeneity complicates unified course planning and classroom organization and may slow down the effective introduction of specific professional content.

Second, though most respondents recognized the importance of oral and written communication tasks for their future careers, speaking and writing remain their biggest challenges in learning and using English. At the same time, the majority of students tend to rely on more traditional learning approaches and feedback modes, placing strong emphasis on grammar and vocabulary drills and counting on the teacher's support.

Finally, ESP classes are still perceived primarily as a means of studying professional vocabulary, while communicative and task-based activities occupy a considerably smaller portion of classroom time. Greater emphasis on interactive and creative tasks, including role-plays, simulations, and project-based work, would help adapt classroom practices to students' needs and foster the development of their professional skills.

While conducting the survey, we encountered some organizational limitations. To start with, due to poor knowledge of English – the language of the questionnaire – not all students completed it. In addition, because of disparities in language proficiency, certain questions may have been interpreted differently. It should also be noted that the responses relied on students' self-assessment. Although self-assessment is a common element in

this type of study, students often lack a clear understanding of the tasks they will be expected to perform in their future workplaces and of which aspects of a foreign language are most relevant for their professional development. Last but not least, some participants required additional reminders and prompting, which could have affected the seriousness of their engagement with the survey.

Despite these organizational challenges, the survey appears to have been a success. The results obtained largely confirm the author's long-term empirical observations of classroom contexts, along with the conclusions drawn from ongoing discussions with colleagues. This suggests that the survey findings reflect real aspects of the educational process as well as topical issues and alarming tendencies in the field.

Notably, the evidence from the survey can contribute to understanding Armenian ESP learners' needs, preferences and challenges, thus serving as a basis for teachers to adjust course content to each group and enhance learners' motivation and engagement. Furthermore, the findings can offer valuable insights into optimizing ESP courses given the limited classroom time under the curriculum.

### **Final Implications**

In view of the highlighted benefits and challenges, our approach integrates communicative and experiential activities with more traditional language teaching methods, allowing students to develop both their communicative competence and specialized terminology. This approach represents a departure from monotonous drill-based practices and aims to stimulate more active and constructive learner engagement while preparing students to meet future career requirements.

While the study shows clear benefits, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, which also open opportunities for future work. The study draws on a selected body of ESP and CLT literature, and the observational data are derived from two institutional contexts, suggesting the need for broader, multi-institutional research in the future. In addition, the survey sample includes seven majors, more than half of which are politics-related, offering a focused perspective but limiting the transferability of the findings. Altogether, these limitations reflect the complexity of ESP instruction and demonstrate the need for continued research into major-related teaching techniques.

To support effective ESP instruction, it is highly desirable that education authorities integrate the development of profession-related practical skills into higher education learning standards, ensuring that their acquisition becomes a mandatory learning outcome within ESP curricula. Such a step would facilitate a consistent implementation of communicative and experiential approaches across all higher education institutions in the country.

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