Chapter XXVIII
Project–Based Instruction for ESP in Higher Education

Irene Mamakou
University of Peloponnese, Greece
University of Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

Interest in the integration of language learning with knowledge/content construction is growing around the world. In this line, an instructional innovation to be applied in language for specific purposes (LSP) undergraduate courses is introduced. Project-based learning has been enhanced by an electronic platform; namely, e-Class, a learning management system, to amplify its impact. A threefold research into current theories on (a) key issues in LSP framework, (b) adult education, and (c) foreign language learning and pedagogical orientations leads us to this model. The result is an e-methodology, pedagogically rather than technology driven, for teaching/learning LSP in the framework of discipline-related, content-based instruction (CBI) and project work that will eventually enhance and modernize teaching and learning LSP and develop new study habits for learners by promoting self-directed, autonomous, active, and out-of-classroom learning, and by encouraging student engagement and academic socialization in the higher educational institution (HEI) to which they belong.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of this chapter is to present and discuss an integrative pedagogical innovation that can be applied in the context of language courses; namely, languages for specific purposes (LSP) and languages for academic purposes (LAP) that operate in higher educational institutions (HEIs), and thus address adult language learners. The introduction and application of the new pedagogical framework will establish new modes of learning for university students abandoning the traditional lecture-only (face-to-face) course delivery form, which is usually the case so far at a practical level.

We move from instructor-dependent learning or coursebook-dependent learning (a coursebook that unfortunately students only resort to a few days before the formal written examination) to students' active, responsible learning. Namely, we will focus here on the integration of an electronic mode—e-Class—in a program designed to support LSP acquisition, adult learning theory, and constructivist pedagogy. Eventually, the structure of the course will move from conventional class instruction to a scheme comprising class instruction and suitable self-study through information and communication technology (ICT) according to the principles of "social constructivism" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Roschelle, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978) or "social constructionism" (Burr, 1995, 2003) and adult language learning.

Obviously, this model will enhance and modernize teaching and learning purpose-specific languages, and develop new study habits for learners by promoting self-directed, autonomous, active learning, out-of-classroom learning, and by encouraging student engagement and academic socialization in the context of the higher education institution (HEI) to which they belong.

BACKGROUND

Before attempting to describe the merging and harmonization of the aforementioned three constituents—LSP, adult teaching and learning, and social-constructivist pedagogy under an electronic methodology—at this point, we will be focusing on each one of them separately and present an overview of opinions concerning good practices and effective applications.

Content of LSP

First, let us define the terms and content of language for specific purposes (LSP), which becomes ESP when applying to the English language. Various views have been expressed about the content of LSP. Antony (1997) notes that although ESP is an approach that has been widely used over the last three decades, there has been considerable recent debate about what ESP entails.

Jordan (1997) shows diagrammatically the generally accepted purposes for which ESP is needed (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Jordan's model for the categories of ESP (© copyright 1997, Jordan, R.R., used with permission)
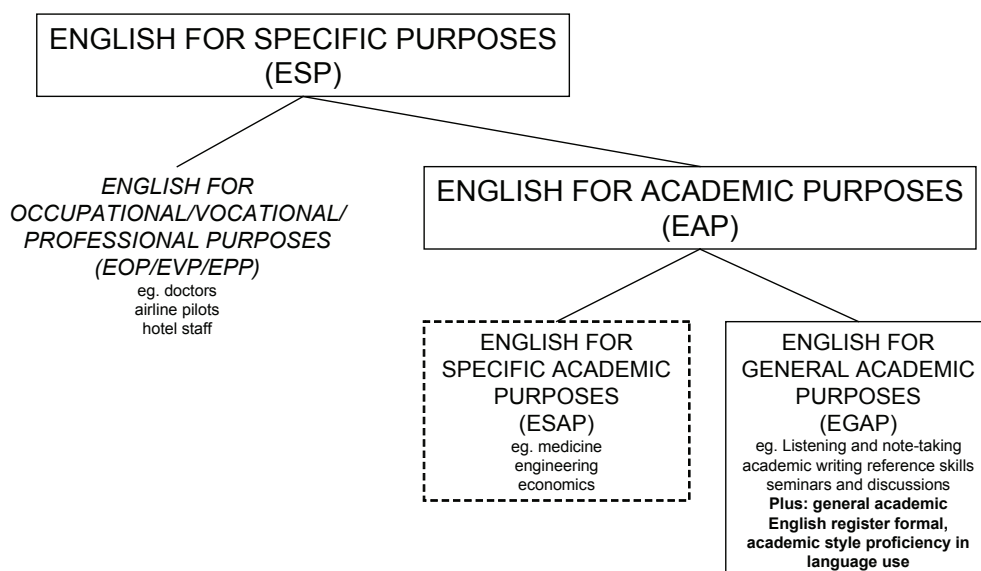
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