

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES SYLLABUS FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION

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*This paper describes the development of the appropriate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabus and course book for first year students of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade. The syllabus was designed with regard to the students' needs, their former knowledge of general English, and the available learning conditions. It focuses on professional vocabulary relevant to all 6 different departments of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade. The grammar practiced corresponds to the B1 level as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, since the entry level of most Special Education first year students is between A2 and B1. The developed syllabus fulfils the main aims of this ESP course – it repeats and practices appropriate general English structures, and familiarizes the students with key professional vocabulary they will need in further education.*

**Key words:** *ESP, needs analysis, special education and rehabilitation, syllabus*

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## INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) developed in the mid-late 1960s as a result of the increased use of English as the international language of science, technology and business (Dudley -Evans and ST John, 1998). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest, the key point in ESP is a simple question: *Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language?* Needs analysis thus represents the central idea in defining ESP. Dudley -Evans and ST John (1998) define ESP by describing absolute and variable characteristics of ESP. Meeting the learner's specific needs, using the methodology, activities, language and skills of specific disciplines are what Dudley -Evans and ST John (1998) consider to be absolute characteristics of ESP. According to them, variable characteristics include the facts that ESP is designed for intermediate or advanced adult learners, and that it uses methodology and teaching methods designed for specific disciplines, different from those used in a general English classroom.

With regard to these characteristics and definitions of ESP, this paper describes the development of the appropriate ESP syllabus and course book for first year students of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade. It reflects the students' needs, their level of general English, teaching situations, methodology and goals of the course.

### **English at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation**

English is an obligatory subject for first year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Belgrade. It is also the only foreign language the students can take during their studies.

Each year the Faculty enrolls the total of 270 first year students at six different Departments. The English language course is designed as an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course, which means it focuses on special vocabulary and topics relevant to the studies of Special Education and Rehabilitation. It also repeats and practices general English structures at the appropriate level. The course lasts for two semesters (I and II semester).

The students take an exam at the end of the second semester which grants them 5 ECTS points. Students from all six departments take English together. Thus, the syllabus has to be suitable for working in very big groups (of more than 100 students), it has to be adapted to different needs of the students, different levels of general English, and has to cover all the topics relevant to both special education in general and each of the special Departments.

The ESP syllabus and course book for first year students of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade were designed with regard to the students' academic needs and their level of general English.

## **Students at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation**

The first thing to do when planning an ESP course is to conduct a needs analysis, i.e. obtain relevant information about the learners, their needs and wants.

There are a few basic questions which should be included in a good needs analysis (Day and Krzanowski, 2011). The first question should always be: *who are the learners in my ESP class?* Most first-year students are secondary school graduates aged 19 (although in each generation there is a number of older students) who come from different backgrounds and have different life experiences and interests. They usually come from many different parts of Serbia and other countries in the Region. They also finished different secondary schools (grammar schools or various specialized secondary schools).

Another relevant question is whether the ESP class is homogenous in their skills. All grammar schools and most specialized secondary schools in Serbia now have English as an obligatory foreign language throughout the four years of secondary education. According to the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the level of general English of the students at the end of secondary school should be between intermediate and upper-intermediate level (B1-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference). However,

most of the first year students at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation are somewhere between elementary (A2) and intermediate (B1) level of general English, and the syllabus was developed with regard to this (although there are students who learnt English apart from school and are much above this level).

According to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2002), B1 level students should understand clear language structures on familiar topics, produce simple texts on topics which are of their personal interest, and be able to describe personal experiences, plans, events, ambitions, etc.

Where and how an ESP course will be delivered is also of great importance. Students of all six different departments take English together, and the lectures are held in the largest lecture hall at the Faculty. There are usually more than 100 students present, which makes it virtually impossible to include all the students in discussions and exercises. It also makes planning lessons and designing the appropriate syllabus extremely difficult.

In a classroom like this one, teacher's task may seem extremely complex, because „We want to satisfy the many different students in front of us, teaching to their individual strengths with activities designed to produce the best results for each of them, yet we also want to address our teaching to the group as a whole” (Harmer, 2001:48). Also, learners differ in how quickly they learn and the level of proficiency they reach. To some extent, these differences can be explained by language aptitude, learning style, personality or even social factors (Ellis, 2003). We should be aware of the fact that not all the students will be happy all the time, and that some lessons will be more useful for some students. However, as Harmer (2001) suggests „if we are aware of this and act accordingly, then there is a good chance that most of the class will be engaged with the learning process most of the time” (Harmer, 2001:50).

Needs analysis should also deal with the professional register the students will need in further education and their career. Target situation analysis is one of the aspects of needs analysis which helps in determining the objectives of an ESP course by specifying what the learners need to be able to do in a particular situation (White 2002). It involves tasks and

activities students will be using English for (Dudley Evans and St John, 1998). First year students of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade mainly need to learn special vocabulary related to their field of study. Most of the students will need English during their studies (and later) for reading different materials, articles and papers, and writing essays, papers or presentations on specific Special Education topics. Thus, the chosen syllabus framework for the students of Special Education and Rehabilitation is first of all lexical, which identifies a target vocabulary to be taught according to the appropriate level (Richards, 2001). A lexical syllabus means that language learning is organized around the vocabulary which is relevant and purposeful for the learner (Breen 2001). The proposed syllabus may also be described as topical - organized around different topics and how to talk about them in English (Richards, 2001).

### **The course book description**

The course book is organized in 17 units and 8 revisions, each covering or repeating a different topic related to Special Education and Rehabilitation in general and the specific Departments at the Faculty:

1. The introductory unit is about cultural diversity and multicultural education, where students become familiar with the terms: *culture, subculture, ethnic groups, exceptionality groups, multicultural education, diversity, etc.*
2. Unit one, is an introduction to the topic of special education, and familiarizes the students with the terms: *ability, disability, inability, handicap, instruction, opportunity, etc.*
3. Unit two explains who *exceptional learners* are and what different types of *exceptionalities* there are. It introduces vocabulary such as: *high incidence disabilities, low incidence disabilities, the least restrictive environment, special services like physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, etc.*
4. Unit three deals with intellectual disability and covers the following expressions: *IQ, adaptive behavior, practical and social intelligence, classification of intellectual disabilities from mild to profound, etc.*

5. Unit four covers the topic related to learning disabilities. Students become familiar with the following terms and expressions: *academic problems, cognitive training, content enhancement, direct instruction, task analysis, and peer tutoring.*
6. Unit five familiarizes the students with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and expressions such as: *inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, substance abuse, neurotransmitters, program modifications, structured routines, etc.*
7. Unit six deals with emotional or behavioral disorders. At the end of this unit the students should be familiar with the following terms: *externalizing and internalizing behavior, comorbidity, misbehavior, social skills, conduct disorder, etc.*
8. Communication disorders are the topic of unit seven. The key vocabulary in this unit covers the following expressions: *speech disorders (phonological, articulation, voice, fluency and motor-speech disorders), language disorders, primary and secondary language disorders, speech-language pathologist, etc.*
9. Unit eight is about learners with hearing impairments, and it introduces the expressions such as: *deaf, hard of hearing, congenitally deaf, adventitiously deaf, prelingual and postlingual deafness, screening tests, pure-tone audiometry, speech audiometry, play audiometry, evoked-response audiometry, sign language, total communication approach.*
10. Visual impairments are dealt with in unit nine. The key vocabulary includes the following: *blindness, low vision, Braille, aural methods, refraction, myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism, CVI, ROP, Strabismus, orientation and mobility, etc.*
11. Unit ten is about autism spectrum disorders, where students become familiar with the following expressions: *autism, Asperger syndrome, repetitive and stereotyped behavior, behavior management, etc.*
12. Unit eleven deals with low-incidence, multiple and severe disabilities and introduces students to expressions such as: *TBI, open head injuries, closed head injuries, deaf-blindness, etc.*
13. Unit twelve covers the topic related to physical disabilities. Students become familiar with the following vocabulary: *mild and transitory,*

*profound and progressive, chronic, episodic, cerebral palsy, seizure disorder (epilepsy), prosthetics, orthotics, adaptive devices, etc.*

14. The title of unit thirteen is *Learners with Special Gifts and Talents*. This topic is not included in Special Education and Rehabilitation studies in Serbia, however, it is a part of Special Education worldwide, and was thus included in the ESP curriculum. The key vocabulary covers the following: *analytic giftedness, synthetic giftedness, practical giftedness, enrichment, acceleration, etc.*
15. Unit fourteen introduces the topic and vocabulary related to *integration, inclusion, transition to adulthood, IDEA provisions, etc.*
16. Unit fifteen deals with job profiles in special education. Students learn about *special education teachers and their responsibilities, Individual Education Plans, other occupations involved in working with students with disabilities – counselors or psychologists, audiologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, assistive technology practitioners, etc.*
17. Parents and sibling of students with special needs are the topic of the final unit. Students learn about their *feelings, ways of dealing with having a child or a sibling with special needs, sibshops, advocacy, etc.*

Each unit consists of a topic-related text (approximately 500 words long) adapted for B1 level of general English proficiency, followed by comprehension and vocabulary exercises. These exercises check whether the students understood the text and teach them the key vocabulary related to that topic through *discovery learning techniques* (where students have to find meanings and definitions themselves) (Harmer, 2001), further practice exercises and translation. Each unit also covers a grammatical unit (again at B1 level of proficiency). The students repeat, practice and further improve their knowledge of the following language structures: *Present Simple and Continuous, Past Simple and Continuous, Present Perfect, Past Perfect, The Future, Modal Verbs, Conditional Clauses, Subjunctive, Passive Voice, Reported Speech, Relative Clauses, Adjectives, Adverbs, Articles, Prepositions, Phrasal and Prepositional Verbs.*

All grammar exercises provide topic related examples and thus further practice and repeat the key professional vocabulary in that unit. This ESP course has clearly defined purposes (acquiring the language and

vocabulary related to the field of Special Education and Rehabilitation), and the selected grammar tasks are based on those purposes „presenting the grammar in a rational, coherent pattern that is not limited to its use just in a particular type of communication” (Byrd, 1997:11).

Eight revision units provide further practice in the above mentioned vocabulary and structures. They also include topic related questions. The aim of these units is to help students prepare for their final exam.

## CONCLUSION

The ESP Syllabus for First Year Students of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade was designed with regard to the students’ needs, their former knowledge of general English, and the available learning conditions. It focuses on professional vocabulary relevant to all 6 different departments of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade. The grammar practiced corresponds to the B1 level as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, since the entry level of most Special Education 1<sup>st</sup> year students is between A2 and B1. The developed syllabus fulfils the main aims of this ESP course – it repeats and practices appropriate general English structures, and familiarizes the students with key professional vocabulary they will need in further education.

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## **KREIRANJE PLANA I PROGRAMA NASTAVE ENGLSKOG KAO JEZIKA STRUKE ZA STUDENTE PRVE GODINE SPECIJALNE EDUKACIJE I REHABILITACIJE**

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### *Sažetak*

Rad prikazuje kreiranje odgovarajućeg silabusa i udžbenika za izvođenje nastave iz engleskog jezika kao jezika struke na prvoj godini osnovnih akademskih studija Fakulteta za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju Univerziteta u Beogradu. U izradi udžbenika vodilo se računa o potrebama studenata, njihovom prethodnom znanju opšteg engleskog jezika, i postojećim uslovima za učenje. Baziran je na stručnom vokabularu iz naučnih oblasti koje se izučavaju na Fakultetu za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju. Gramatička vežbanja odgovaraju srednjem nivou opšteg engleskog jezika (B1 prema Zajedničkom evropskom referentnom okviru za učenje, nastavu i evaluaciju jezika), obzirom da je većina studenata prve godine između početnog i srednjeg nivoa znanja (A2-B1). Predviđen program zadovoljava osnovne ciljeve nastave jezika struke – obnavlja i provežbava odgovarajuće jezičke strukture opšteg engleskog jezika, i upoznaje studente sa stručnim vokabularom koji će im biti potreban u daljem školovanju.

**Ključne reči:** engleski kao jezik struke, analiza potreba, specijalna edukacija i rehabilitacija, silabus

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