

ESP in European Higher Education. Integrating Language and Content

Inmaculada Fortanet-Gómez & Christine A. Räisänen (eds).

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This book represents a significant contribution to the study of language-related policies and practices emerging after the Bologna Declaration (CRE, 1999), where a unified system of higher education in Europe was postulated. As far as languages are concerned, the pursuit of this multi-faceted aspiration has had a major impact on the theory and practice of ESP studies. This is evident in the development of a large number of didactic frameworks structured around the notions of competence and activity, in the growing use of English both as the medium of instruction and communication, and in the various initiatives to integrate teaching language and content in the university classroom.

At the beginning of the book, the editors state: “The question that this book seeks to answer is: what has this concentration on language learning implied for the teaching and learning of English for Special Purposes” (page 11). In order to answer such a question, the book is structured around four broad themes or parts. The first part, “ESP/EAP in Western Europe post-Bologna”, consists of only one chapter, written by the editors, C.A. RÄISÄNEN AND I. FORTANET-GÓMEZ, and entitled “The state of ESP teaching and learning in Western European higher education after Bologna”. This chapter establishes the setting of the whole book from the general perspective of the situation of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) studies in Western Europe as a consequence of the Bologna reform. After a historical overview of ESP and an account of the antecedents and implementation of the Bologna process, the chapter reports the results of a recent survey on ESP studies, carried out on a group of teachers from most Western European countries. The findings reveal a considerable disparity in their current level of application of Bologna’s policies and the need to strengthen the profession of ESP instructors, which is argued to have generally suffered a quantitative reduction (in terms of instruction hours) and a paradoxical qualitative loss in the perception of the relevance of their role.

The second part, “Theoretical and educational approaches to the teaching and learning of ESP/EAP”, comprises four chapters which deal with the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of pre- and post-Bologna ESP instruction. “Locating the ESP space in problem-based learning: English-medium degree programmes from a post-Bologna perspective” by R. WILKINSON describes empirical experiences of the use of PBL (Problem-Based Learning) for content-based English instruction in a pre-Bologna and a post-Bologna bachelor ESP courses in The Netherlands. Regarding the latter, there is an overt criticism about the shift of focus away from language and rather on content, and arguments are placed in favour of more balanced studies and tighter collaboration between the respective teachers by means of modified versions of the PBL approach. In the next chapter, “Aligning EAP writing pedagogies across European universities: A case study from France”, D. DRESSEN-HAMMOUDA concentrates on EAP (English for Academic Purposes) writing instruction and the need to adapt a process-genre approach to the local culture, including how to balance the teaching of structure and process in order to enhance the students’ culturally-bound learning processes. Specifically, the author accounts for an experience within a professional university degree program in France, where students showed a marked preference for explicit models, strategies, feedback and corrections, and the unsettling implications this may have in cross-cultural contexts. “Curriculum change as a result of the introduction of the masters program: Designing and implementing a European online thesis-training course” by R.E. LANKAMP presents the implementation of an on-line course designed for Dutch Master students, whose culturally and educationally heterogeneous backgrounds are precisely a consequence of the Bologna declaration. The project described in detail shows that despite the effectiveness of such courses, they are very demanding, particularly for teachers, and problems arise also as a result of unfamiliarity with them. Finally, suggestions are offered to bring closer language and content teachers. The chapter “Tackling transfer and transferability: ESP/EAP design for learning beyond templates”, by A.M. ERIKSSON and M. GUSTAFSSON, closes the second part dealing with the concepts of transfer and transferability both of methodologies and ways of learning across countries and of learning environments to working contexts. To this end, the authors experiment with ESP/EAP writing-to-learn activities for Swedish students, which are pedagogically organised in a collaborative way to promote transformative learning.

The third and most extensive part of the book, “Integrating content and language (national adaptations)”, consists of six chapters which present further national experiences with CLIL in higher education, the first three of which deal with the business domain and the rest with the domains of political science, maritime science and environmental science. “Content learning in business communication: A teaching experience within the new European framework” by M.F. RUIZ GARRIDO and J.C. PALMER-SILVEIRA presents a joint Spanish project between industry and academia to create an ESP Master’s programme which seeks to train students to improve their employment options through a CLIL approach based on situated, genre-specific learning, trainee periods and joint supervision from the academic and the working spheres. The next chapter, “Business English and the Bologna declaration in the Netherlands: Integrating business communication practice, content and research” by B. PLANKEN and C. NICKERSON, also provides a number of Dutch examples of courses for learning language proficiency, business communication, and investigating this specialized discourse respectively. The common approach is integrative, intercultural and technological, using language-based, content-based and research-based strategies. In contrast with the other chapters in this book, “Business is booming: Rethinking business presentations in response to Bologna Reforms” by C. GATTONI deals with oral competence and focuses on a Finnish project to re-structure a business course following the reference levels and types of content structuring proposed by the Council of Europe’s CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment) in which two undergraduate courses, one oral and one written, were merged and reoriented into an integrated course which was more work-driven and worked all four skills through creative activities that simulated those in the business world. “Implementing the Bologna process in Italy: A distinctive approach to language learning in domain-specific contexts” by M. SOLLY deals with the more unexplored domain of Political Science. After a reflection on how pre-Bologna underpinnings for ESP have conditioned the local approaches, the project described adopts a case study methodology and develops several innovative genre-specific strategies for the classroom. “Learning to learn in ESP: Fostering lifelong learning in European higher education under Bologna requirements” by A. BOCANEGRA-VALLE addresses interrelated crucial issues in higher education which are the core of the Bologna Declaration: lifelong learning, metacognitive awareness, and autonomous learning. The author’s project focuses on a Spanish course on maritime English and involves

reading and writing tasks based on authentic materials both as a complement of course work and an attempt to elicit the abovementioned aspects in the students. A detailed account is provided of both the implementation and the evaluation undertaken from the point of view of the protagonists of the learning process: the students, but also the teachers, whose role is inevitably transformed. In the last chapter of this part, “On the role of student research in the ESP classroom: A call for sustainable language skills”, S. KRAUSSE also brings out the topic of learner autonomy. Her corpus-based methodology aims at helping German students of environmental science with the learning of terminology and collocations and she argues for corpus-literacy as one of the new literacies that must be incorporated to the language learning scenario.

The fourth part, “English as the medium of teaching and communication: Courses for staff”, comprises the last two chapters of the book and calls the reader’s attention to an issue that has been present throughout the book; namely, that of the support needed by teaching staff to face the changes introduced by the Bologna Declaration, and in particular the adoption of English as the language of instruction. Hence, “Tuning ESP/EAP for mobility, employability and expertise: A pedagogical process of change in focus, insight, and practice” by A. RÄISÄNEN accounts for the changes in ESP and EAP in Finland in the last decade, and describes the projects gradually undertaken during this period. The chapter provides an analysis of the increasing need for language- and culture-related competences in our internationalised technology-conditioned professional lives, and hence new instructional perspectives. It also raises some interesting dilemmas such as the generalised use of English for education and research, European mobility, etc. versus the right and promotion of plurilinguism. Finally, “Preparing for international masters degrees at Stockholm University and the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm” by C. BENSON, S. BRUNSBURG, R. DUHS, D. MINUGH and P. SHAW emphasizes the importance of English in the workplace and describes the progress in certain Swedish institutions to support teaching and administrative staff enough to be able to carry out their daily communicative work in English.

In any edited volume of chapters dealing with a particular topic, background conceptualisations and contextualizations almost inevitably produce a certain degree of reiteration, while other aspects may remain untouched. However, this book manages to provide a comprehensive reflection of the global, national and institutional ESP reform policies post-Bologna in

European higher education. The varying degrees of implementation so far are also discussed, together with the cascade of implications that they entail in conventional teaching scenarios and particularly in the respective roles of both teachers and students, which have suffered considerable modifications in the face of the new demands. An outstanding aspect of this book is that, parallel to the high level theoretical considerations which are of utmost significance in the context of up-to-date ESP instruction, it provides a selection of insightful examples of effective classroom practices initiated in the last decade to respond to the challenges of the educational internationalisation promoted by the Bologna Declaration. Certain marginal aspects of these practices are inevitably not applicable beyond the corresponding local domains and contexts. However, the breadth and depth of the authors' accounts of their own experiences to integrate content teaching and English and the universality of the linguistic, educational and political issues raised, make this book unique in the literature and essential reading for teachers, researchers and legislators working in ESP instruction at university level within and beyond the European borders.

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