

SUSPENDED BETWEEN GTM AND CLT - STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ESP COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Nevena **Vučen Papić**, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Banja Luka, nevena.vucen@pmf.unibl.org

Milica **Bogdanović**, Faculty of Economics, University of Banja Luka, milica.bogdanovic@ef.unibl.org

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Abstract: This paper presents the findings of a study aimed at assessing student perception of grammar within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. A questionnaire specifically tailored to the study's objectives was distributed to respondents. The study divided respondents into two groups, one from the Faculty of Economics and the other from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Banja Luka. The results suggest that, on average, respondents expressed satisfaction with ESP classes and held a positive perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP. The study concluded that ESP teachers' adaptability to students' needs can lead to overall satisfaction with ESP classes, irrespective of the field of study. However, students' field of study and their specific needs can influence their perception of grammar within ESP. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring ESP courses to address students' unique linguistic requirements within their academic discipline.

Keywords: ESP, GMT, CLT, grammar, students' perception

1. Introduction

ESP (English for Special Purposes) has been a part of curricula at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina for several decades. Until recently, courses have centered on the idea that teaching a plethora of grammatical rules with occasional use of professional vocabulary would enable students to use English productively in their respective field upon graduation. The trend largely continues even nowadays, as the ESP curricula remain only partly revised to comply with the recent developments in ESP studies.

One of the ways to improve ESP classes is to pay careful attention to students' perception and needs. While it is not necessary to incorporate all student suggestions in the curricula, acknowledging their perspectives provides a good starting point. In line with Riley who criticized teachers and linguists for disregarding the pertinence of students' beliefs (1997: 127), we argue that students' beliefs are as important to the learning system as the teachers' role. Furthermore, students must reflect critically on their use of resources in order to develop more effective learning strategies. Students' perceptions of ESP classes are relevant for several reasons, including their motivation, learning outcomes, attitudes towards learning English, class atmosphere, teacher-students relation, and, finally, the curriculum design. By taking into account students' perceptions, the curricula we design might be more responsive and effective in meeting the learners' needs and course objectives. For ESP teachers, understanding students' perspectives is crucial in fostering an effective learning environment and maximizing course outcomes. Based on previous experiences of ESP instructors and the courses observed in this study, it could be assumed that if students' perception suggests an appreciation for explicit instructions, ESP courses might benefit from placing greater emphasis on grammar explanations and exercises. Conversely, if students tend to prefer practical applications of language over theoretical exercises, it may be more effective to prioritize activities that allow them to use language in real-life situations.

Teaching grammar in ESP classes presents a significant challenge due to the fact that students enroll these classes with different levels of language proficiency and grammar skills. Furthermore, students tend to have their own individual learning techniques and paces. It is the teacher's responsibility to select the most effective methodology and adjust it to learners' needs. The classroom focus is greatly determined by students' needs and learning objectives, but, all ESP courses incorporate a combination of communicative skills, grammar knowledge, and specialized vocabulary. Extensive experience in ESP teaching provides a strong foundation for selecting an appropriate methodology.

The problem that this paper sets out to explore is students' perception of ESP classes in terms of different grammar teaching methodologies. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the challenges students encounter in ESP classes, compare their perception of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and take these into account while designing curriculum. Our first hypothesis is that ESP teachers' willingness to adapt

to students' needs fosters a better classroom atmosphere and finally results in improved learning outcomes. Our second hypothesis is that the field of studying and students' needs may have an influence on their perception of grammar, as a specific aspect of ESP. It would be rather naive to think that appealing well-designed ESP course should merely consist of numerous subject-specific texts aimed at enhancing students' vocabulary. On the other hand, excessive focus on grammar rules at the expense of subject-specific vocabulary training can result in disengagement and a lack of motivation among students.

2. Literature review

Halliday (1993:78) observed that "technical terms are not, in themselves, difficult to master; and students are not particularly dismayed by them. It is usually the teacher who puts technical terms in the center of the picture, because vocabulary is much more obvious and easier to talk about, than grammar". We may want to challenge his idea because ESP teachers often design their curricula in collaboration with subject-matter experts who may think that ESP classes should be centered on students' fields of study. Despite teachers' autonomy in course design, university departments prioritize their own ideas of ESP courses. As a result, ESP teachers are advised by other teaching staff that the students should learn as much professional vocabulary as possible, sometimes at the expense of grammar.

Words in isolation mean little so we suggest that learning grammar must not be neglected regardless of the chosen teaching methodology. When it comes to teaching grammar, two types of ESP courses discussed in this paper apply either a deductive or inductive approach to language teaching, which is why we wanted to see whether the outcomes are equal from the students' perspective solely. Richard et al. (2000: 146) define deductive learning (explicit) as "an approach to language teaching in which learners are taught rules and given specific information about a language. They then apply these rules when they use the language." One such method, associated with GTM, is used in one of the ESP courses, making use of the principles of deductive learning. On the other hand, Richard et al. (2000: 146) describe inductive learning (implicit) or learning by induction, as a process where learners are not taught grammatical or other types of rules directly but are left to discover or induce rules from their experience of language use. This approach, characteristic of CLT, is adopted in the second ESP course discussed here.

3. Why is students' perspective pertinent to begin with?

In order to answer this question, we shall agree with Servet et al. who note that "in spite of the high level of importance placed on English language learning, not all students have internalized the connection between English ability and success in their future careers" (2018: 245). The truth is that during their early academic years students still have difficulty in recognizing the relevance of English proficiency in the labor market. What they fail to recognize is how crucial it is to acquire language skills in order to advance in their respective fields.

The relevance of students' perception has been widely recognized as a pertinent part of curriculum design. Syvak examined students' perceptions of grammar in ESP courses and suggested that correct grammar usage was a prerequisite for effective communication (2018: 52). We should agree with the author, adding that curriculum designers must also take into account students' varying proficiency levels which influence the necessary level of assistance in terms of grammar. Arnó-Macià et al. (2020: 72) investigated students' perceptions of the role of ESP courses and found that "ESP teachers can base their course design decisions on empirical evidence gained from tailored needs analyses instead of teacher intuition." They make a good point but teacher intuition, or better to say pedagogical experience in ESP classes, may be regarded as valuable addendum in curriculum design. Another interesting finding was reached by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010:207) who examined ESP perceptions of Business English as Lingua Franca (BELF) users only to discover that their informants thought that "knowledge of grammar was clearly less important than knowledge of particular genres of their own business area". What is interesting is that students focused on vocabulary, believing it would be sufficient to meet their communication needs. This is noteworthy because traditional foreign language instruction, even from the earliest levels, emphasizes grammar and the mastery of its rules as essential for accurate expression. Their preference suggests that, in certain professional contexts, communicative effectiveness and domain-specific terminology may take precedence over strict grammatical accuracy.

In addition, other studies on students' perception focusing on learning grammar and using different methodologies have reached contradictory findings. Despite the bulk of ESP studies on different grammar teaching methods, there seem to be a disagreement over whether one method surpasses another or they should be combined in order to meet students' needs. According to Chia et al., the widely used Grammar Translation Method fails in some aspects of ESP teaching such as oral skills (1999:116). In another study, Ismail examined students'

perception of the “CCCC” grammar model (confrontation, clarification, confirmation and consolidation) and found that the attitudes after the exposure to the model were positive (2010: 153). Fereidoni et al. (2018: 312) investigated students’ attitudes towards GTM (Grammar Translation Method) and CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) among medical students in Iran and their study suggested that students did not have any positive attitudes toward CLT method in university context. Vannestål and Lindquist (2007: 344) found that “most students are so used to reading about grammar rules before they see examples that it can take a lot of time and practice for them to understand how they should think when faced with a concordance list of authentic examples, from which they are supposed to extract rules of language usage”. One of the reasons why informants in these studies preferred the Grammar Translation Method could lie in the fact that they were already accustomed to it. Namely, teachers who are accustomed to applying one grammar teaching method may encounter difficulties when attempting to implement another method in their classes. In addition, students from our study also learned grammar through GMT which has traditionally been taught at schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nowadays, it is a teacher’s choice whether they will combine GTM and CLT in their classes. Another explanation may be found in Chen’s study (2016:617) in which he inferred that “when learners cannot understand the meaning of a complicated sentence, they need to analyze the sentence structure, the functions and interrelation of sentence components in order to comprehend the sentence”. In other words, students may need explicit grammar clarifications regardless of the method used, as they may fail to elicit their own conclusions. Another study supporting GTM was conducted by Weisi who found that “explicit teaching of grammar improved the comprehension of reading ESP text” (2012:156). Still, the author exercised caution, stating that:

The effect may be short term rather than long term; that is, in the long run the effect of explicit teaching of grammar may be diminished and students no longer take resort from knowledge of grammar achieved via explicit teaching of grammar. (ibid)

An interesting conclusion was reached by Pazaver and Wang (2009: 34) whose informants stated that “grammar instructions were helpful in the past, but once they reached certain level of language proficiency they no longer needed explicit grammar instructions”. This is precisely

one of the reasons why GMT and CLT might work best when combined or at least taught depending on the students' proficiency.

4. Methodology

The study included 21 students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (14 from Mathematics and 7 from the Chemistry), as well as 18 students from the Faculty of Economics, all enrolled in the Business Economics study program. All students had varying levels of English proficiency. However, no diagnostic test was conducted at the beginning of the course; instead, their proficiency levels were inferred from prior semester grades. The ESP course for students in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics consisted of three hours per week, while students from the Faculty of Economics had five hours per week.

All students had completed one semester of compulsory English for Special Purposes course. The participants were divided into two groups based on the ESP teaching methods employed. The first group comprised of students who were taught using GTM, while the second group consisted of students taught using CLT. A questionnaire was distributed to respondents, designed specifically to assess their general satisfaction with ESP courses and their perceptions of grammar instruction. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistical measures (arithmetic mean and standard deviation) to evaluate students' responses. However, the limitation of the study is the number of questioned respondents.

4.1. Instrument

A questionnaire was distributed to the respondents, specifically designed to address the study's objectives. The questionnaire was structured into two sections, comprising a total of 24 questions, and utilized the 5-point Likert scale. The first section referred to the respondents' general satisfaction with ESP courses, while the second aimed at gaining insight into their perceptions of a specific aspect of ESP—grammar. As a starting point, the widely recognized Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM) questionnaire, designed by Roff (2005), was used. Originally developed to assess students' perceptions of educational environments in health professions curricula, DREEM has been widely adapted for various educational contexts, including ESP research (Ahmad Montasser & Sultan Althaqafi, 2023). Given the specific focus of this study, the questionnaire was modified based on the authors' extensive pedagogical experience and adapted to the research context. These modifications allowed for a more precise exploration of students' attitudes towards grammar in ESP

courses, as well as their perspectives on the role of grammatical accuracy in professional communication. The questionnaire was adapted by focusing more specifically on the students' perceptions of grammar instruction within ESP courses, reflecting the context of language learning for professional purposes. While the original DREEM assesses a broad range of educational environment factors, this modified version retained questions related to course quality, student satisfaction, and motivation, which were tailored to better suit the goals of ESP courses. The adaptation process ensured the questionnaire's relevance to the target group and the study's objectives.

4.2 Results and discussion

The collected data were processed using the statistical software SPSS. In order to analyze the average level of general satisfaction among respondents with ESP classes and their perception of grammar, as a specific aspect of ESP, as well as to evaluate the observed groups of questions, it was necessary to calculate the average level of general satisfaction for each group. The first group of questions pertains to general satisfaction with ESP classes, while the second group concerns respondents' perceptions of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP. Descriptive measures, including arithmetic the mean and standard deviation for both groups of questions from the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis of respondents' general satisfaction with ESP classes and their perception of grammar

	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Average for the first group	39	3.00	5.00	4.4308	.51933
Average for the second group	39	2.94	4.39	3.6964	.40142
Average	39	2.96	4.54	3.8808	.39629
Valid N (listwise)	39				

Source: Authors' calculation

The previous table presents the average graded level of general satisfaction of respondents with ESP classes and their perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP. Based on the obtained results it can be observed that respondents, on average, are satisfied with ESP classes

and hold a positive perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP (as the rated levels of satisfaction and perception of grammar exceed the neutral mean). The collected data also indicate that respondents' average level of satisfaction of is higher for the first group of questions, which pertain to the general satisfaction with ESP classes, whereas the average rated level of satisfaction is lower for the second group of questions, which relate to the respondents' perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP.

In order to determine whether the average rated level of general satisfaction with ESP classes and respondents' perceptions of grammar vary based on specific questions (arithmetic mean and standard deviation), Table 2 presents the average rated levels of respondents' satisfaction and perception of grammar according to the questionnaire items.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics according to questions

	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mea n	Std. Deviation
VAR00002	39	1	5	4.54	.854
VAR00003	39	3	5	4.54	.600
VAR00004	39	2	5	4.15	.745
VAR00005	39	2	5	4.38	.782
VAR00006	39	2	5	4.64	.628
VAR00007	39	2	5	4.33	.806
VAR00008	39	2	5	3.92	.957
VAR00009	39	1	5	3.23	1.038
VAR00010	39	1	4	3.10	.968
VAR00011	39	2	5	3.90	.788
VAR00012	39	2	5	3.85	.844
VAR00013	39	2	5	3.85	.904
VAR00014	39	1	5	2.56	1.021
VAR00015	39	1	5	3.82	1.023
VAR00016	39	1	4	2.49	.914
VAR00017	39	2	4	2.92	.839
VAR00018	39	3	5	4.31	.614
VAR00019	39	2	5	4.08	.774
VAR00020	39	2	5	4.46	.643
VAR00021	39	2	5	4.44	.641
VAR00022	39	3	5	4.46	.643
VAR00023	39	2	5	3.90	.882
VAR00024	39	1	5	3.13	1.080

VAR00025		39	2	5	4.13	.833
Valid	N	39				
(listwise)						

Source: Authors' calculation

The results from the previous table indicate that respondents are generally satisfied with ESP classes and hold a positive perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP, as the rated level of satisfaction for almost every question exceeds the neutral mean. By ranking the questions according to the rated level of satisfaction, it is evident that the respondents most strongly agree with the statement "The ESP content is adjusted to my field of study", followed by the statement related to general satisfaction with ESP classes "I am satisfied with my ESP class" and with the statement concerning the quality of ESP classes "My ESP class is of a high quality". On the other hand, respondents, on average, least agree with the statement concerning the relationship between learning grammar and reading professional literature, "I cannot understand texts in my own field of studying without learning grammar". This statement received an average grading below the neutral mean and exhibited considerable deviation of the respondents' answers from the arithmetic mean. In addition, respondents least agree with the statement regarding the importance of grammar, "Grammar is more important for me than reading texts in my field of studying", which displayed an even greater deviation from the arithmetic mean. They also demonstrated lower agreement with the statement linking grammar knowledge to communicative ability "I don't need vast grammar knowledge to communicate in my own subject matter". On average, the smallest deviations were recorded for the statement related to the quality of ESP classes, "My ESP class is of a high quality", whereas the largest deviations were observed in responses to the statement regarding grammar learning preferences, "I prefer learning grammar through rules and exercises".

Based on the previous tables it is evident that the respondents evaluated their satisfaction with ESP classes differently and held varying perceptions of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP. In order to determine whether the average rated level of respondents' general satisfaction with ESP classes and their perception of grammar differ among groups of respondents that were formed on the basis of their professional field and the type of ESP they study, with the first group of respondents consisting of students from the Faculty of Economics, while the second group of respondents includes students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Tables 3 and 4 present the mean

rated values and statistical significance for both groups across all questions. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test was applied to calculate the statistical significance of the differences between the two groups of students.

Table 3 Ranks for all questions

	VAR00001	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Average	1	18	24.83	447.00
	2	21	15.86	333.00
	Total	39		

Source: Authors' calculation

Table 4 Test Statistics^a

	Average
Mann-Whitney U	102.000
Wilcoxon W	333.000
Z	-2.456
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.014
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.014 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: VAR00001

b. Not corrected for ties.

Source: Authors' calculation

Based on the previous two tables it can be concluded, at a significance level of 0.05, that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups of respondents in the overall assessed level of respondents' general satisfaction with ESP classes and their perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP. In order to confirm our assumptions regarding the existence of a statistically significant difference in satisfaction and perception of grammar among ESP students, depending on their respective groups, we applied the non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test, the results of which are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Ranks for the first group of questions

	VAR00001	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Average for the first group	1	18	22.75	409.50
	2	21	17.64	370.50
	Total	39		

Source: Authors' calculation

Table 6 Test Statistics^a

	Average for the first group
Mann-Whitney U	139.500
Wilcoxon W	370.500
Z	-1.409
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.159
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.165 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: VAR00001

b. Not corrected for ties.

Source: Authors' calculation

The test results from Tables 5 and 6 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in general satisfaction with ESP classes between the two groups of students, where one group consists of students from the Faculty of Economics, while the other group consists of students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. However, the results from Tables 6 and 7 reveal a statistically significant difference in the perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP between these two groups.

Table 7 Ranks for the second group of questions

	VAR00001	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Average for the second group	1	18	24.81	446.50
	2	21	15.88	333.50
	Total	39		

Source: Authors' calculation

Table 8 Test Statistics^a

	Average for the second group
Mann-Whitney U	102.500
Wilcoxon W	333.500
Z	-2.444
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.015
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.014 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: VAR00001

b. Not corrected for ties.

Source: Authors' calculation

The test results from Tables 7 and 8 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP between students from the Faculty of Economics and those from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that, overall, for both groups of questions there is a statistically significant difference between the group of students from the Faculty of Economics and the group of students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, regarding their perception of grammar, while no significant difference was observed in their general satisfaction with ESP classes.

The group of students from the Faculty of Economics was taught using the Grammar Teaching Method (GTM), whereas the group from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics was taught using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. Therefore, it can be inferred that an ESP teacher's ability to adapt to students' needs may result in general satisfaction with ESP classes, regardless of the field of study, thereby confirming the first hypothesis. Conversely, students' field of study and their varying needs may affect their perception of grammar as a specific aspect of ESP, thus confirming the second hypothesis.

5. Conclusion

The study provides valuable insights into how students perceive grammar within ESP courses by employing a tailored questionnaire and statistical analysis. The findings highlight key factors influencing students' attitudes towards grammar, an essential component of their language learning experience. Notably, students expressed the highest level of agreement with statements related to the relevance of ESP

content to their field of study, overall satisfaction with ESP classes, and the quality of ESP instruction. Conversely, they were less inclined to agree with statements connecting grammar to reading subject-specific texts and prioritizing grammar over content knowledge. Additionally, they demonstrated uncertainty about the relationship between grammar proficiency and communication skills.

A detailed analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in general satisfaction with ESP classes between the two student groups. However, a clear discrepancy was observed in the perception of grammar, with students from the Faculty of Economics exhibiting a more positive attitude than their counterparts from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. These findings suggest that ESP teacher's ability to adapt instruction to students' needs plays a crucial role in overall satisfaction with ESP classes, confirming the first hypothesis. At the same time, differences in students' fields of study and learning needs significantly influence their perception of grammar supporting the second hypothesis.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of aligning ESP courses with students' linguistics requirements within their respective academic disciplines. ESP instructors should adopt a flexible approach that accommodates diverse learning preferences, ensuring a balance between grammatical accuracy and practical application. Further research should explore additional variables that may influence students' engagement with ESP courses, such as prior language learning experiences and disciplinary expectations. A more comprehensive understanding of these factors will contribute to refining ESP course design and instructional strategies, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes for students across various fields.

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IZMEĐU GTM I CLT – STUDENTSKA PERCEPCIJA PREDMETA ESP NA UNIVERZITETU

U ovom radu su predstavljeni rezultati studije koja je imala za cilj procjenu percepcije studenata o gramatici koja se izučava u okviru kurseva engleskog jezika za posebne namjene (ESP). Ispitanicima je podijeljen upitnik, posebno prilagođen ciljevima studije. Ispitanici su podijeljeni u dvije grupe, od kojih jedna obuhvata studente sa Ekonomskog fakulteta, a druga sa Prirodno-matematičkog fakulteta Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci. Rezultati su pokazali da su ispitanici u prosjeku izrazili zadovoljstvo časovima ESP-a i imali pozitivnu percepciju gramatike kao specifičnog aspekta ESP-a. Studija je zaključila da prilagodljivost nastavnika ESP-a potrebama studenata može dovesti do ukupnog zadovoljstva časovima ESP-a, bez obzira na oblast studija. Međutim, oblast studija i specifične potrebe studenata mogu uticati na njihovu percepciju gramatike u okviru ESP-a. Ovi rezultati naglašavaju važnost prilagođavanja ESP kurseva kako bi se odgovorilo na jedinstvene jezičke zahtjeve studenata u okviru njihove akademske discipline.

Ključne riječi: ESP, GTM, CLT, gramatika, percepcija studenata