

CHALLENGES IN ESP: TEACHING MILLENNIALS

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Introduction

The growth of English teaching is inevitable as it encourages greater mobility of people who seek employment. Moreover, it arises from the current importance of communication in English in academic research and publications (Coleman, 2006). The well known fact is that studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a considerable challenge for undergraduates worldwide. The aspects of academic communicative competence, such as reading, listening, writing and speaking skills, are crucial to students' successful progress through the ESP syllabus.

Four distinct generations of learners have been identified since the 1950s (Reilly, 2012): the Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y (1981-1999), and Generation Z (2000-present). Generation Y (Gen Y), born in the mid-1980s or later, and is also known as the Millennials, the Internet generation. This generation grew up with technology, prefers to communicate through e-mail and text messaging rather than face-to-face contact (What is gen Y? online reference), and it is identified as confident and technologically advanced (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).

Educators have discussed the challenges that Gen Y brought to the classroom. The research by P. Reilly (2012) revealed that in Mexico only 25% of English teachers include Internet-based activities and 71% of students describe their English classes as “very boring”.

Sanders and Morrison (2007) questioned 277 1st year students and discovered that this generation prefers IT to a textbook. Gen Y individuals are kinesthetic and visual learners and they read less. In other words, Gen Y has different values and needs than previous generations. According to Reilly (2012), the examination of Gen Y is on the rise at universities. However there is a gap in the English language teaching literature although currently most English language learners are students of Gen Y.

Recently the language-related difficulties encountered by a group of 28 undergraduates during the first term at university have been analyzed by Evans and Morrison (2011). Their data were from two sources: a large-scale questionnaire survey and an interview-based longitudinal study. The findings reveal that statistically the students' principal sources of difficulty were understanding and using specialist vocabulary (the Mean value is 2.48), speaking accurately (the Mean value is 2.41) and academic writing (the Mean value is 2.64). Reading skills were slightly better (the Mean value is 2.83), while following a discussion scored 3.06 on Likert's scale. It is important to emphasize that negative responses are equal to 1 and 2, while positive responses are equal to 4 and 5. The point 3 is the intermediate value, i.e. neither positive nor negative. Therefore, undergraduate students under investigation failed to demonstrate proficient language skills.

Earlier Berman and Cheng (2001) examined difficulties that 53 undergraduate students encountered in English learning. Statistically significant negative correlations were found

between 3 items (PPPs, vocabulary and reading) and Grade Point Average. The most difficult language skills were the speaking, followed by writing and listening.

This article aims at examining the challenges that today's youth encounters in the ESP studies.

Respondents

The participants in this research are 68 full-time 1st year students (2 samples, 34 students in each sample), who studied English for Psychology at Mykolas Romeris University in spring 2012. The students are mother-tongue speakers of Lithuanian and entered the university after having studied general English at secondary schools. The design of the ESP course reflects the students' needs in professional language. The course is adjusted to the requirements for a Bachelor of Social Science degree. The level of students' proficiency is B2 or C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Research methodology

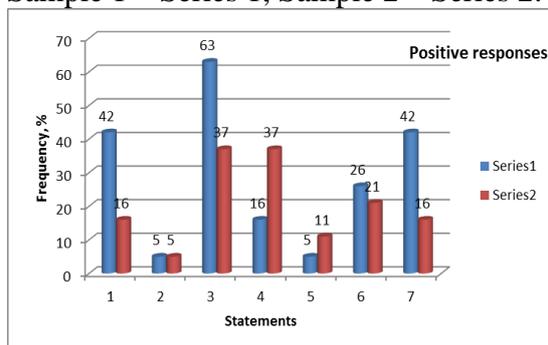
The findings presented below were obtained from two sources: 1) a questionnaire survey completed by two samples of respondents (34 students in each), and 2) students' self-assessment of their performance in ESP skills. The questionnaire was designed in accordance with accepted standards of constructing surveys (Dornyei, 2003) and contained statements about students' perceived strengths and weaknesses in ESP after Evans and Morrison (2011). The relevant part of the questionnaire consists of 7 statements, to which students responded on a 5-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). Statistical processing of the findings by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-18) included the following computations: frequencies of responses, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of reliability, the Means and Standard Deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients *rho* and significance levels Sig. *p* to determine whether there are any correlations between the studied samples.

Self-assessment has been employed as a way of encouraging participants to reflect on their learning experience, achievements or failures. Students' weblogs contain their reflections – self-assessment of performance in various activities such as making Power Point Presentations, tests on specialist vocabulary definitions, participating in discussions on professional issues and communicating ideas clearly and fluently, listening to professional recordings.

Results and discussion

This section reports the findings of the questionnaire survey and analyzes the key points that emerged. The respondents were asked to indicate the degree of difficulty they had with the ESP language skills on the Likert's scale ranging from "very difficult" (1) to "very easy" (5). For the sake of clarity in visual displays of the data, the negative responses (very difficult and difficult) and positive responses (very easy and easy) have been added up. Naturally, the neutral responses have also been accounted for in the statistical treatment. The frequencies of positive responses in percentage are shown in Chart 1 and of negative responses – in Chart 2. The 1st columns in both Charts represent the responses by the 1st sample, the 2nd – by the 2nd sample. The numbers of the survey statements from 1 to 7 are displayed on X axis in accordance with the descriptions, which are being reproduced below.

Chart 1 Positive responses to the survey statements by the participants.
Sample 1 – Series 1, Sample 2 – Series 2.



- 1) Reading ESP texts quickly to find information: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 2) Making definitions of ESP terms: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 3) Listening comprehension of professional materials (either to cassettes or online): 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 4) Taking part in discussions: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 5) Speaking impromptu in front of the audience: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 6) Presenting the ideas accurately and fluently: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.
- 7) Using appropriate (formal or informal) writing style: 1) very difficult, 2) rather difficult, 3) intermediate, 4) quite easy, 5) very easy.

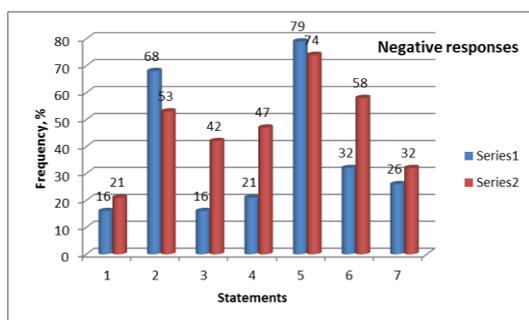


Chart 2 Negative responses to the survey statements by the participants.
Sample 1 – Series 1, Sample 2 – Series 2.

As it is seen from Chart 1 and Chart 2, there is a significant scatter of frequencies between two samples except the statements 2 for positive responses. Such discrepancies between the responses are hard to explain without having processed the data statistically.

Statistical processing by a means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-18) allows ascertaining how comparable and reliable the data are. Internal consistency reliability is usually estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to Brown and Rodgers (2002), results are reliable if the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is at least .70, which is considered acceptable in most Social Science research situations. The second step in correlational analysis is to compute Pearson's correlation coefficients ρ , which are useful for understanding the degree of relationships between the data. In order to determine whether a correlation coefficient shows a real relationship, it is necessary to determine the probability of its being significant, i.e. the value of Sig p . Statistical significance with p values of .01 or .05 indicates that there is either 99% or 95% probability that an observed correlation coefficient is NOT a chance finding, in other words, it is meaningful. Once

statistical significance has been established, the meaningfulness of the correlation coefficient depends on its magnitude. Generally a correlation coefficient can range between negative one (-1.00) and positive one (+1.00). Positive coefficients indicate direct relationships, while negative coefficients indicate inverse relationships. The larger the coefficient, positive or negative, the stronger the relationship, so that a correlation that is close to one, either positive or negative, indicates a very strong relationship, while coefficients that are near zero indicate very weak relationships.

In accordance with the above mentioned, the responses in Charts 1 and 2 have been processed statistically. In our case, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is equal to 0.987 for positive and 0.846 for negative responses, which is considered acceptable in most Social Science research settings. Therefore, the obtained results are reliable. The normality of responses has been checked by computing Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests for both samples. As data distributions proved to be normal, the computation of Pearson's correlation coefficients ρ makes sense. The results in Table 1 show Pearson's coefficients ρ , respectively, for two studied samples of respondents and Significance levels Sig. p .

Table. Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson's ρ and Sig. p (positive responses). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (probability 95%). ** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level *(probability 99%).

| Statements | Means | Standard Deviations | Pearson's ρ | Sig. p (2-tailed) | Responses |
|--|-------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1 Reading ESP texts quickly to find info | 3.26 | 0.73 | .552* | .014 | positive |
| | 2.95 | 0.62 | .504* | .028 | negative |
| 2 Making definitions of ESP terms | 2.11 | 0.88 | .995** | .001 | positive |
| | 2.53 | 0.77 | .684* | .001 | negative |
| 3 Listening online or traditional | 3.47 | 0.77 | .758** | .000 | positive |
| | 3.84 | 1.21 | .758** | .001 | negative |
| 4 Taking part in discussions | 3.05 | 1.08 | .811** | .000 | positive |
| | 2.89 | 1.37 | .617** | .005 | negative |
| 5 Speaking impromptu in front of the audience | 2.26 | 0.93 | .508* | .026 | positive |
| | 2.05 | 1.13 | .805** | .002 | negative |
| 6 Presenting the ideas accurately and fluently | 2.79 | 1.03 | .530* | .020 | positive |
| | 2.58 | 1.07 | .530* | .020 | negative |
| 7 Using appropriate writing style | 3.16 | 0.83 | .504* | .030 | positive |
| | 2.84 | 0.69 | .530* | .026 | negative |

Table displays the statements (the 1st column), the Means for both samples (the 2nd column), the Standard Deviations for both samples (the 3rd column), Pearson's correlation coefficients ρ for both samples (the 4th column) and the Significance levels Sig p for both samples (the 5th column). The lowest values of the Means are obtained for the statement 2 – definitions of ESP vocabulary. The second problematic area is the statement 5 – speaking impromptu. Neither reading (the statement 1) nor writing (the statement 7) caused problems to the respondents. Online / traditional listening skills scored the highest in Table – the Means are between 3.47 and 3.84.

It can also be seen in Table that, depending on the survey statement, there are significant correlations between two samples at the probabilities 95% (Sig $p = 0.05$) or 99% (Sig $p = 0.01$). However the values of correlation coefficients vary between the lowest .504 (7

statement) and the highest .995 (2 statement). It means that although correlations between samples exist, for small values of *rho* correlations are rather weak. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the results are not due to chance and may be extended beyond the studied samples.

Students' self-assessment excerpts

Here are a few passages from students' weblogs to exemplify how they self-assess and feel about important activities in ESP classes (Kavaliauskienė, 2012). Some excerpts are taken from the Sample 1, and some – from the Sample 2. It should be mentioned that students' language in the following passages has not been corrected for the sake of authenticity.

Excerpts from Sample 1.

<http://iadamonyte.blogspot.com/>

ESP definitions tests

There are lots of ESP definitions, and sometimes it is difficult to remember all of the meanings. Some tests were easy to do but some were not. Despite the difficulties I think my performance on these tasks was quite good, even though I might have done better.

Moodle tests

In my point of view Moodle tests were sometimes confusing but quite easy and my performance was really good. I think it's a good idea to solidify students' knowledge by doing these tests after each module.

Online listening practice and traditional listening

Online listening tasks were much easier than traditional listening. I think my online listening skills are quite good and I don't face serious difficulties while listening, deciding true or false statement is, matching synonyms and filling gaps. But I still need to improve my traditional listening skills, because for me it's quite difficult to understand.

Online exercises from Feldman's course book

Online exercises from Feldman's course book were almost the same as Moodle tests. The main difference was that online exercises were a team work. I think my performance was quite good, but when I was working on my own, my performance was better.

Power Point Presentations

For me it was the most interesting task. I have made two presentations and one was team work with my course mate. Despite a few mistakes I can evaluate myself really well because I enjoy doing this task and I think everyone else also enjoyed watching my presentations.

Short talks

My performance was good and I am really happy about it. It was a good idea to give not just one topic for all students but several topics so that students can choose the topic that is most interesting for them to talk about.

Speaking impromptu

Speaking impromptu probably was the most difficult task for me. Sometimes it was difficult to express myself and recollect the material I had read before. I found it difficult to remember some definitions. I think speaking impromptu is the task in which I still have to improve my skills a lot.

<http://eaidukaite.blogspot.com/>

ESP definitions tests. Definitions were the part that frightened me most. I have written just one of three and I was surprised with the results. Now I regret a little bit that I haven't written other two.

Moodle tests. The most interesting thing about Moodle tests was that after doing one by one of them, you can improve your reading skills. Sure, there were a few moments when you can't do the more one because it was too tiring and exhausting. But I think I coped with them quite well and made as many efforts as I could.

Online listening practice. Online listening practice was sometimes quite difficult because of the quality of sound. Sometimes I listened to the text and tried to hear what it was about, but it seemed impossible to do that. However, it helped me a lot. Now I can listen to the text fluently and now I make fewer mistakes in exercises.

Traditional listening is an easier one. We listened to cassettes at school, so this way of listening is more convenient. On the other hand, there was one recording that I couldn't even understand what a person is talking about because of the specificity of his talk. Moreover, sometimes it became a little bit boring to listen to long lecture through the tape. But it also helped me to improve my listening skills.

PPP. The first time when I made my presentation I was quite upset because it was called as unprofessional presentation and performance. But when I made my next presentation I was very satisfied because I have already understood the specifics of doing them. So it was meaningful to me.

Short talks. Preparing for short talks was the most exciting part. I liked it very much because preparation did not take so long. Moreover, we had to talk about many topics that were not included in the course book, so I got more knowledge. I think I have improved my speaking skills, although it's still sometimes hard to talk without any preparation.

Speaking impromptu. Speaking impromptu without at least two minutes of preparation would be difficult. But it is quite easy to speak if you have some minutes to prepare. Telling opinion and making discussions is very interesting and I have also improved my skills.

<http://rbendoraityte.blogspot.com/>

ESP definitions test were the hardest challenge of all - Feldman's Psychology textbook provides hundreds of definitions which are really hard to learn. There were many new concepts, however, they will certainly service me while studying English literature. Finally, I did quite badly in these tests because they caused me much stress.

Moodle tests were very helpful and motivated to read a course book much deeper. My grade could have been better – it was my own fault.

Listening practice is my "Achilles' heel" - I have never been really good at it. However, I feel that I improved listening skills a little bit.

PPP was the saddest part in this course. I have failed miserably. However, I was given another chance and I think that even this task is really hard but it is interesting because it helps improve the knowledge of chosen topic.

Short talks helped a lot not only for a verbal aspect but also reared some courage in speaking English. Topics were really interesting and this task was nothing but a great pleasure. I think that I actualized myself fully while performing short talks.

Speaking impromptu

In my opinion, this task is very also very helpful. It improves verbal skills and encourages contemplation while speaking. It also motivated to prepare for every seminar because if I did not prepare I could have done much worse in speaking.

<http://vaidagabe.blogspot.com/>

The most difficult task for me was the *ESP definitions* tests. Despite the fact that all themes were familiar from the Introduction to psychology course we had first semester, notions and definitions in English were not so easy to understand and remember. I was not very happy about my performance in definitions tests and I think I could have done better.

Moodle tests and online exercises from Feldman's course book helped a lot to remember definitions, pay attention to most important points and were useful for the revision of the different topics.

Online listening practice and traditional listening themes were interesting and relevant to our profession but always presenting some different or unusual approach. These tasks were not difficult to me and always useful for extending vocabulary.

Power point presentation and *short talks* were the tasks which required not only knowledge and understanding of the subject but some creativity as well. It was a challenge to present information in the way it would be interesting for others too. I enjoyed doing both tasks and I guess my presentation and short talks were interesting for classmates.

Speaking impromptu was my favorite practice as I really like to speak English. It was always very interesting to discuss with classmates about different issues and hear opinion of the others. And I think this task was very useful as trying to express your own opinion and thoughts helps to feel language and find the way to use all your verbal resources and abilities.

Excerpts from Sample 2.

<http://gpjanuskevicius.blogspot.com/>

The ESP subject was the most time and work consuming subject in the whole semester. It contained a lot of tasks, which were different in many ways.

The hardest thing for me to do was the *ESP definitions* tests. It was really hard to learn and recollect the definitions. I tried not to learn by heart, I tried to reorganize the definition in my own way, but it was quite hard too, so I just learnt the definitions a lot before the ESP definitions tests. I had been learning a lot, so I performed in tests quite good. But I hope I will not forget the definitions, or at least I will be able to create my own definitions in the exam.

The other time consuming, but, in contrast not so hard task was *Moodle tests*. I can say that this task was really boring to do; I had almost died in front of my computer completing all those tests. Also it was turning me negatively, especially then typing errors appeared... I cannot say I have learnt a lot, because all I was doing was searching the information in my book without thinking. Many times all that I had to do was to finish sentences which contained even not essential information. All this made me do the task quite good, but not perfect, because it was not interesting for me, sometimes all I wanted to do was to finish the test fast and go away from my computer.

Luckily, I have really enjoyed doing *online listening*. It was so, because the themes of listenings were really interesting, related to general Psychology. Also the fact that it was not very difficult made me like it. However, the *traditional listening* (to cassettes, CD's) was quite harder. But I couldn't say I didn't enjoy it: the recordings were also about Psychology. Other thing: *online vocabulary exercises* from Feldman's course book were interesting and enjoyable in the beginning of the course. Although it was a team work, I participated in it a lot in the beginning of the course, because it was interesting for me. But in the end of the course, I was bored with those exercises (also because I had been doing a lot of similar ones at Moodle), so I didn't perform very well. But the good thing is that those exercises were effective to revise the material which I had been reading at home.

PPP. Making PPP was not a very hard or a lot time consuming thing to do. I didn't feel stress presenting it, so it was an easy task for me. The positive thing is that doing such presentation and listening to others presenting theirs was an interesting way to learn the required material.

Short talks were also not a very hard and interesting thing for me to do: I performed very well, because the themes about which I was speaking were thrilling for me. And I presume the tasks were really beneficial: I have learnt about some common issues in Psychology, which may be unforgettable.

I also enjoyed *speaking impromptu*. This really boosted my organization of thoughts, my English language skills. It was also exciting to discuss the issues, to express my opinion. I performed well in these tasks because I liked the issues I was talking about.

<http://ejokubaitis.blogspot.com/>

ESP definitions tests were one of the hardest tasks. It's quite difficult to remember that many psychological terms during one semester and learn them by heart. That's why I think that my performance in these tests was poor.

Listening

I really enjoyed doing listening tasks because I believe that it's one of the best ways to learn the language and increase your knowledge. I was happy about my performance so I hope that I will be successful in the future.

Speaking impromptu task was difficult for me because it's difficult for me to focus when I don't know words or the theme that I'm speaking about by heart. But I truly believe that it's a great task and everybody should learn to speak impromptu.

<http://rmockute.blogspot.com/>

ESP definitions tests

Performance in this task was very good. I have got good grades for all these tests because I prepare a lot for them. Sometimes preparation for tests was quite hard because it is not easy to remember a lot of specific words.

Moodletests

There were too many tests and it was difficult to find time to do all of them. But it is a good way to revise all modules and most important information of them.

Listening online

In my opinion I did not have big problems with it and my listening skills have improved. Moreover, sometimes it was not easy to hear clearly when text was quick but I think I cope with it. Tasks like T/F, synonym matching and gap filling mostly were not very difficult to me.

Traditional listening

There were very interesting topics that were useful for us. Difficulty of listening often depended on topic.

PPP

I have chosen an interesting topic so it was not difficult to me to prepare for it. Of course, I felt fear to speak in front of the audience but I think I have coped with it very well. What is more, it was interesting to me to listen to my peer's presentations.

Short talks

This task was one of my favorite tasks because I could prepare for it at home. Topics were very interesting and I liked to search for information. I feel that my speaking skills have improved.

Speaking impromptu

At first it was really difficult to me because I felt fear to speak without long preparation. But later it became one of my favorite tasks because I understood that it is very useful to talk about all modules and it is not difficult to speak without long preparation if modules were read before. I know that I made mistakes but I think it is better to talk and make mistakes than not to talk at all.

<http://goficerovaite.blogspot.com/>

Moodle tests were very useful. It was like a rehearsal of what I have read in the course book. Some modules I have made perfect, in other I have made some mistakes. Moreover, this exercises helped me to prepare for ESP definitions tests.

Online listening practice - I liked it. There were many interesting topics, so I could learn something new. At school I wasn't very good at listening exercises, but in my ESP course I think I had made a progress. True/false, synonym matching and gap filling exercises were great opportunity to check my grammar knowledge.

Traditional listening (to cassettes or CD) – for me, traditional listening was a little bit harder than online listening. Some questions weren't easy as I have expected. This practice was very useful for better understanding.

PPP

Making PPPs was interesting task for me. My PPP wasn't perfect - I have made some mistakes, and my pronunciation was wrong, but I was satisfied with my work.

Short talks

Preparation for short talks was interesting to me, because all themes were very exciting and I liked looking for information. These tasks were easier than speaking impromptu, because I had time to think, to check spelling and to write my speech. When I know that I have notes, I feel more relaxed and can speak much more better then speaking impromptu.

Speaking impromptu is the hardest part of all ESP course for me. All my life I had difficulty to speak impromptu in other language. I couldn't beat this fear. When I need to talk in English impromptu my heart rate increases, I have a pain in my stomach and that prevents me from thinking and speaking impromptu. What is more, I have problems with pronunciation and a poverty of English vocabulary and that doesn't help me to speak impromptu too. So I am afraid, that during my speaking exam I can have problems.

Summing up the students' written self-assessments that are copied from their online weblogs, it is obvious that ESP vocabulary, PPPs, short talks and impromptu speaking have been challenging and stress causing areas. Neither reading nor writing seem to have caused any difficulties. In other words, students' responses to the survey questions and their self-assessment notes coincide.

Conclusions

Comparing students' self-assessment notes with the statistical analysis of their responses allows to conclude that students' main sources of difficulty are ESP vocabulary: the Means are 2.11 for the 1st sample and 2.53 for the 2nd sample. The second difficulty is speaking on professional issues without preparation (impromptu): the Means are 2.26 and 2.05, respectively. Similar findings were reported by Evans and Morrison (2011). Participation in discussions proved to be intermediate: it scored 3.05 and 2.89, respectively. Listening (either online or traditional) skills scored the highest – the Means are 3.47 and 3.84. It is essential to keep in mind that scores of 1 and 2 have a negative meaning (very difficult and difficult), while scores of 4 and 5 have a positive meaning, i.e. easy and very easy. However, neither reading nor writing caused any problems to our undergraduates – opposite to what was reported by Evans and Morrison (2011).

In spite of some similarities in language learning attitudes between the Millennials in Canada (Berman and Cheng, 2001), Hong Kong (Evans and Morrison, 2011) and Eastern Europeans (current research), some differences should be emphasized. They basically

concern the personalities of learners. Learners of Gen Y in Canada, Mexico (Reilly, 2012) and Hong Kong are confident and achievement-oriented while East European generation Y is not confident, needs feedback and guidance.

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