



Assessment of ESP Study Materials in Similar Tertiary-Level Study Programmes

ABSTRACT

The poster presentation deals with the process of choosing ESP study materials by the Language Centre of the University of Latvia in various management-related study programmes. The authors offer SWOT analysis of the materials used for similar parts of ESP courses and summarize the reasons and hesitation behind choosing certain study materials.

The aim of the poster presentation – to identify the reasons of teachers behind selecting specific study materials for their ESP courses.

The **ESP courses** examined – general business English courses.

Course lengths vary – 32 or 64 hours per semester.

Students' level of English – B2-C1

Study year – mostly year 1 (after the secondary school), with some year 2 (part-time, working)

There is a huge diversity in students' general knowledge of the world, knowledge of English, academic inclination and skills, psychological and critical thinking skills, mostly they learn ESP before they have attended the respective professional courses which means that the ESP lecturers should provide a brief introduction in the respective area of management and explain the realities of the respective professional area.

2. Teachers

Experienced ESP lecturers, non-native speakers of English with varying (from substantial to rather average) knowledge of the content area, native speakers of Latvian and Russian.

3. Programme

The course programmes examined strive to provide students with the key vocabulary of various relevant content areas (recruitment, enterprise structures and legal types, cross-cultural awareness, marketing, finance) in combination with selected aspects of business communication (writing CV, letters of application, e-mails and presentation skills) and as a result to equip students with professionally and academically relevant skills and knowledge. Due to the limited course length no course book can be used fully, even more so other course book extensions.

To start the review of the materials we will analyze a self-made course as the university staff are expected to design their own study materials and in certain ways it brings benefit to students.



Self-compiled English for Business e-course in Moodle e-learning software platform:

Strengths

1. The course is pre-made with specific study programme and students in mind.
2. Contains a certain amount of materials of locally relevant context.
3. The course can be changed on the way so there is more flexibility.
4. A greater diversity of sources as well as treatment of the same issue by different authors is available.
5. Individual attendance of the course by students can be checked.

Weaknesses

1. It is more difficult to achieve consistency and gradualness of the course linguistically.
2. As the author is not a native speaker, relevant texts and listening materials must be found in the Internet. Many of the valuable materials are copyright protected so only links can be provided and students get distracted from the course.
3. As far as our technical skills reach, there are severe technical limitations for using Moodle communicatively.
4. Less control over what the students have understood and done; detailed attention so essential in a foreign language instruction is more time consuming than in the traditional study environment.

Opportunities

1. Ability to grow technically by learning how to design the course electronically and use it to the utmost benefit for students (and the teacher herself)
2. Possibility to get acquainted with a wide range of professional electronically available materials both from ESP and general business sources and use the e-community support.
3. Students' inclination to use electronic rather than printed materials.
4. University interest and facilitation of e-learning.
5. Opportunity to offer the course for distance learning to other universities.

Threats

1. Colleagues are not prepared to work with the e-course in general or get involved in designing it or use the one made individually by one teacher.
2. No provision for the time and resources necessary for designing the course.
3. Seemingly disappearing role of the teacher – less face-to-face contact with students and consequently the lack of supervision which is relevant for a part of students, however could be an advantage to others.

Paul Emmerson **"Business English Handbook"** Macmillan

Despite the author's recommendation to use it as a supplement to a regular English language textbook we have quite successfully used it as the main textbook therefore we have included it among the books to be reviewed here.

Strengths

1. Comprehensive vocabulary presented in the possibly most friendly way for such volume of information.
2. Competent, precise and lastingly up-to-date contents.
3. The selected material addresses all levels of needs – from the basic professional staff up to the top management.
4. References to relevant websites provided.
5. The best possible combination of "theory" and vocabulary acquisition exercises which provide some insights in the practices of the respective area as well as hints to relevant linguistic issues.
6. Some of the discussion topics are sufficiently "down-to-earth" to motivate discussion among students.
7. Authentic interviews with professionals for listening practice provide interesting insider information. Effective listening tasks.
8. Highly appreciated by experienced, hard-working and study-minded students.

Weaknesses

1. Too concentrated for intensive study (Each unit could have a supplementary unit with vocabulary drills).
2. Discussion topics and tasks happen to be too distant from students' interests and competence.
3. Difficult to adapt to weaker students as a result they tend to skip dealing with the "theory" and complete the tasks as they are discussed in the classroom.
4. Listening passages too long to be listened to twice, however there is a need for repetition, and students for the same reason wouldn't do it independently either. A set of smaller authentic listening passages with tasks around the big interview could be added.

Opportunities

1. Teaching staff looking for intellectual growth opportunities by learning the contents and understanding the way the author has treated the contents;
2. Teaching staff looking for methodological growth opportunities by finding the best ways of introducing the challenging material to the class and learning from the author the ways of combining the contents with the language acquisition purposes.
3. System and detail-oriented students with preference for hard work over creativity.
4. Students with work experience and subject knowledge as well as specific needs will appreciate the approach as it meets their needs.

Threats

1. Lack of maturity and specific professional interest among students. Failure to understand and use mind maps.
2. Availability of visually more attractive materials.
3. Teacher's failure to communicate on the provided material and translate the specific terminology due to the lack of the subject knowledge.

English for Business Studies. A course for Business Studies and Economics Students by Ian MacKenzie

Strengths

1. Synthetic (vs. authentic) texts provide a sufficiently detailed overview of a particular topic which is particularly important for pre-service 1st year students.
2. Excerpts from authentic sources such as newspapers, business literature and interviews present a challenge and motivate determined students (e.g. M&S shop manager interview)
3. The author has designed original ways to address and remind students of their creativity (the analysis of radio commercials is our favourite that can be very well extended, however many case studies also provide ample space for student creativity as well as decision-making and are understandable enough for pre-service students).
4. The language reference section in the student's book helps the teacher specify the meanings they expect students to know; the multi-lingual dictionary provides a bridge between the teacher and international students.
5. Units are relatively short and concentrated.

Weaknesses

1. Some topics are too culture-specific (trade unions) or economy-specific (takeovers of large enterprises) and are too distant for students.
2. The synthetic texts are too academic for weaker and too boring for more creatively-oriented students. Revising of the contents of some of the texts with students in mind would be necessary. The same concerns the tasks where the knowledge is required that students do not possess.
3. Listening tasks sometimes seem disproportionately advanced. Authentic, however, either more processed or less complicated listening tasks could be added.

Opportunities

1. The teachers who prefer the academic presentation style with a strictly set material to be presented and required from students afterwards will find the book very supportive.
2. If additional tasks/guidelines for the creatively-minded students for dealing with the synthetic texts are devised they can benefit in combination of the related cartoons and other illustrations.
3. The style of the course book makes it a "safe" option for universities.
4. The case studies enhance students' self-confidence and the ability to make decisions.

Threats

1. Domination of creatively-minded students' in the group.
2. Students with weaker language and academic skills might face comprehension and participation difficulties.



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New Business Matters. Business English with a lexical approach by Mark Powell, Ron Martinez, Rosi Jillet

Strengths

1. The very-well elaborated personally addressing introductions to all units get students involved and discussing even before asked to do so (however, sometimes discussions are too heated to stick just to the English language)
2. The carefully designed texts are very captivating. On the one hand they lure students ahead by a diversity of real life facts and recognizable names; on the other hand, however, the context for mentioning them is sophisticated enough in terms of contents and language.
3. The tasks, although definitely lexically based, simultaneously present an intellectual and communicative challenge and can't be done after superficial reading of the text.
4. The listening tasks are stylistically coherent with the texts.
5. Collocations glossary – ready-made revision facility that makes it easier for teachers to illustrate the way of learning the vocabulary and to specify items to be acquired.

Weaknesses

1. There could be more listening tasks related to the texts.
2. A part of the vocabulary tasks and case studies require experience in high managing positions which is not present in pre-service students and is seldom present in those with work experience.
3. Term (apart from the collocations glossary) glossary is too short and the term selection principles are unclear.

Opportunities

1. Alternative tracks might be designed for students in the sections where the high-ranking management experience is required.
2. Mature students looking for more practical examples than the theoretical lectures in other course provide will find the course book appealing.
3. The teachers willing to grow intellectually and professionally will appreciate the course book as the texts and lexis present a challenge for detailed understanding and reflection by the teachers themselves before they can discuss it with their class.

Threats

1. Students' lack of maturity or willingness to face the intellectual challenge and study the texts in detail.
2. Teachers and students' fright of discussing their prejudices and failure to see the communicative benefit of the deeply daring approach of the course book.

Intelligent Business by Tonya Trappe and Graham Tullis

Strengths

1. *The Economist* texts allow for the development and recognition of the formal language and style used by the magazine.
2. The contents of the texts facilitate students' awareness about current global issues and require them to immerse in the realities of global business.
3. Well-developed case studies – structured step-by-step and providing the actual solution which students quite often ask for.
4. Writing tasks within case studies as well as outside them provide samples (in the style guide) and guidelines to be followed thus making the task approachable for students.
5. The attempt to match the communicative functions with the respective lexical units.
6. Unit-by-unit glossary helps students focus on the relevant vocabulary.

Weaknesses

1. The global topics are too distant from the students. Even if they have understood the text linguistically, they cannot discuss the issues because the context is too elevated. The same refers to some communicative tasks and case studies which require the experience from high management positions.
2. Missing introductions to the units leave introducing the topic fully to the teacher's interpretation.
3. The texts in many of the grammar tasks could have more effectively been used for some other purpose as they are lexically rich and interesting and hardly keep the focus on grammar. The same concerns the review sections, although here the grammar focus is more successful. The list of the grammar themes reviewed could be shorter as it is not the concentration in the course anyway.
4. More focused vocabulary practice would be necessary as vocabulary enrichment is very relevant for successful communication.

Opportunities

1. Successful with ambitious, globally oriented students eager to follow current trends.
2. Several units of the course book might work well in a group with international or internationally experienced students.
3. The course book could be chosen by the teachers who follow topicalities and take "the latest".

Threats

1. Teachers, although appreciating *The Economist*, might opt for other course books which are more related to their own and the students' experience.
2. The students might fail to find sufficient motivation in dealing with the text and fail to read the text in detail.
3. Teachers might have insufficient personal experience and knowledge for presenting the carefully adapted materials.
4. The class dominated by creative minds might easily get bored unless units are started from the end.

New Insights into Business by Graham Tullis and Tonya Trappe

Strengths

1. The text content in those units that can and should be covered in within the course programme is either close to students' own experience or easily comprehensible and at the same time contains challenges for the text comprehension.
2. In its topic selection and contents the course book creates the impression of topicality which students enjoy. For example, the brand names mentioned are relevant to students.
3. Due to the topicality many units are easier to introduce to students and deliver them communicatively. Consequently the lexical units present more relevance for the students.
4. Skills focus covers various business and communication skills in an exciting way.
5. The attempt to make students aware of the differences of the English and American language variations is welcome and could be made even more visible.
6. The style and approach creates the impression of enjoyment and lightness (which sometimes is deceptive though). As a result, those with creative attitudes find the course book more motivating.

Weaknesses

1. The book needs updating to look persuasive.
2. Case studies are needed as teachers and students have got used to them and they very well fit with the creative spirit of the book.
3. The vocabulary tasks could be more detailed and topic-focused. Sometimes we have observed that relevant, to our mind, terms and collocations from the texts are left without attention in the tasks.

Opportunities

1. A wide range of students as the book seems to be rather universally applicable both among the youth and adults.

Threats

Teachers who look for a fully-covered presentation of terminology will not choose the course book.

Last but not least

Insights into Business by Michael Lannon, Graham Tullis and Tonya Trappe

It is not anymore considered as a course book, however, we would particularly point out the unit on advertising in this course book which we still dare to use. There are two particularly strong points in it:

- the step-by-step guidelines for comparing and analysing advertisements which students and teachers enjoy as it provides space for students' creativity and imagination, simultaneously allowing them to have a critical look at the realities of advertising and finally it expands the notion of "language" in students' minds.
- the Harley Davidson story – there is a legend that captivates students' minds.

The reasons behind selecting a specific course book:

1. The relevance of the course book to the provisions of the course programme;
2. The relevance of the language and contents for the teachers' own knowledge and experience;
3. The relevance of the language and contents for the students' experience, maturity and ability to develop; meeting of the needs of the creative and perfection-oriented students to an equal extent;

It is important to change course books to re-find and appreciate the undeniable professionalism and diversity of approaches provided by all the authors of the above-mentioned textbooks. Besides the teachers need the change to remain flexible.

There is value in all texts some more than others. Familiarizing oneself with useful instructional materials is part of growing as a teacher, regardless of the nature of purpose for learning. Given that ESP is an approach and not a subject to be taught, curricular materials will unavoidably be pieced together, some borrowed and others designed specially:

<http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/english/te/ESP-EAP.pdf>
(visited 10 March, 2010)

As all of the reviewed approaches and course books are good the choice of course books is more the matter of personalities among the teaching staff and their likings – all choices can be motivated very well.

Sometimes course books are selected or not selected just guided by the general first impression – there are always things that strike your eye.

It is important that the book fits the teacher, this is the most relevant pre-condition for the confidence in teaching and consequently – enjoyment and guided challenge in learning therefore when choosing the course book the maximum possible flexibility must be allowed for the teachers despite all calls for standardization.

