

THE URGENT EDUCATIONAL SHIFT FROM GENERAL ELT TO ESP: A FOLLOW-UP REACTION TO GLOBALIZATION DYNAMICS IN ALBANIA

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Abstract. *English has indisputably been accredited as the Lingua Franca of conducting almost every human activity of political, economic, diplomatic, commercial, educational and cultural aspect. It is not in vacuum that English teaching has gained recognition and research interest since successful English language acquisition is directly dependent on the quality of English teaching programs designed by English Departments at Foreign Languages Faculties. Among other post-communist transitional societies, Albania has encountered the immediate need for qualified English teachers to accelerate the efficient teaching–learning process. As a follow-up measure this issue has resulted into critical reconsiderations of English Language departments at public universities as the major responsible actors to prepare qualified English teachers. However, despite reflections and investigations, I argue that the focus of such English university programs is mainly on the Teaching of General English instead of giving an emphatic priority to tailored track of English for Specific Purposes. I believe that the accelerating rhythm of globalization processes in its comprehensive spectrums – economic, political, educational, socio-cultural domains- calls for qualified ESP teachers equipped with the relevant knowledge to design and offer tailored ESP courses at university studies; the latter will be a key factor to helping learners acquire English mastery that better matches the competitive demands of international and global market pressures. The article shall not be limited only to identifying the gap between current university programs in Albania and the expectations stemming from globalization/regional transformational perspectives; instead, it will provide feasible recommendations towards equal accentuation of ESP versus the conventional ELT which by now holds the linguistic supremacy.*

Key words: *Albania, ELT supremacy, ESP Necessity, University Programs Improvement*

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is inspired by the impressive growing importance of foreign language teaching-learning in newly emerging democracies in the framework of regional and international cooperation. In particular, English language has gained the status of a dominant international language to be utilized as the only means to achieving this visionary end. Eagerness and necessity to possess a perfect communicative competence of English has brought up research interest related to the quality of teaching methods, university curricula of Foreign Languages Faculties - English departments, the language materials, and several other sensitive details related to language testing and assessment, teaching

approaches, the role of teacher and that of students. However, this paper will tackle a narrow aspect dealing with the cornerstone issue of the distinct division between university programs aimed at preparing Teachers to offer General English and the new track of offering courses on English for Specific Purposes. It aims to identify the need of emphasizing ESP track in public English departments at university level, apart from the general English comprehensive approach; the latter has been the sole dominant pillar of English departments.

First, the article will describe briefly the scope of English departments in public universities in Albania: the rationale of their original establishments. In here, the descriptive analysis will provide convincing insights on the official teaching approach and the aim of English departments' mission to prepare English teachers for general English teaching. This linguistic mainstream will be contextualized by the social-political explanatory circumstances that determined the designing and content of early university curricula for foreign languages teaching in Albania. It will demonstrate that English was a passive tool for achieving a comprehensive understanding rather than a functional instrument to performing specific tasks, dealing with specific professions to be transmitted by perfect professional command of English as a foreign language.

Then having set the stage with the initial goals of English departments, the research will proceed with the current transformations in the framework of Albania's European integration in economic, political, educational and socio-cultural dimensions. The second part will shed light on the rigid correlation between internal and external socio-economic changes and the role of English in facilitating the globalization process per each life domain. Afterwards, the article will depict adjustments made to English language university program; the re-conceptualization and prioritization of linguistic communicative competence in English alongside identification of the growing need for special attention placed to ESP curricula development. The last section will highlight the feasible improvements of ESP courses to better prepare ESP teachers. Moreover, this added value of ESP pillar will be given in line with indigenous transformations of Albania and other transnational actors' exogenous pressure for global cooperation.

The paper makes the case that despite theoretical statements on ameliorating English teaching programs, despite the national education strategy of setting a special priority to English language acquisition for professional and specific purposes, there is a lack of tailored track of ESP teaching program in the state foreign languages faculties in Albania. Unless such a tailored curricula program has been professionally established, one cannot guarantee of language teaching quality, and learners' centered approach of providing relevant training given that there is no department track of English for Specific Purposes to prepare qualified teachers to perform such teaching. The analysis and findings will be achieved through utilization of textual analysis of theoretical literature on ESP peculiarities, the evolution of ELT and ESP in the country as documented in the university curricula of English departments of public universities in Albania. The linguistic literature will be treated as a living entity being influenced and shaped by discussions on political transformation, economic development at country's level in the view of globalization phenomenon in general.

2. TRACING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS ESTABLISHMENTS

The genesis of present Foreign Language Faculty of Tirana University traces even earlier than year 1957 when Tirana University was first established: its origin dates in 1947 with the Cathedra of Russian Language, then as a Higher Institute to become a part of the Faculty of History and Philology in 1957.¹ Only in September 1991 was established the Foreign Language Faculty consisting respectively of Russian, English, French and Italian departments to be expanded in 1992 with the German Language Department, in 1995 with the Slav-Balkans languages incorporating Russian and Turkish, and finally Greek Language Department in 1998, to be finalized with the establishment of Spanish Language Department in 2008.² At the moment of this research this faculty offers Professional Master and Scientific Master in Teaching didactics, Translation and Communication.

The early 1990s socio-political changes were associated with the new status of previously called Pedagogic Institute of Higher Education into universities of full potentials similar to that of Tirana University. For instance, one of the earliest pedagogic institutes, that of Aleksander Xhuvani, founded in 1971 in Elbasan, was transformed into a university in 1991 among other faculties with the Faculty of Humanities where the Department of English and German languages were soon created.³ In particular, these departments declared as their crucial mission the preparation of general English teachers for primary and secondary education rather than high schools. Therefore, even their study tracks in Master Level deal mainly with teaching and methodology issues for general language teachers for nine-year compulsory education.⁴ Also in line with the higher educational transformations, the Faculty of Education was founded in 1992 – 1993 at Fan NOLI University in Korca district including study programs on Elementary Teaching, Pre-School Teaching, English Language and Professional Master in General English Teaching.⁵ The same higher educational platform and strategy was pursued in other former Higher Education Institutes, for example at Vlora University, the Faculty of Humanities was established on 5 December 2007, offering bachelor study programs of high standards in Pre-schooling, General English Language Teaching and Albanian Language and Literature. Again the scope of this department ever since the beginning has been the preparation of qualified English teachers for elementary or secondary general teaching. Moreover, the only master program offered still is limited to a Professional Master in Education and English Teaching⁶

Having identified the need for English teaching and usage of English as the lingua franca to conduct business and other regional/international projects, in 2005 the Ministry of Education approved the establishment of a brand new university to be founded from the scratch in compliance with the contemporary philosophy of higher education - *the student centered approach*-, “Aleksander Moisiu” university in Durres district.⁷ Even here

¹ Tirana University <http://www.unitir.edu.al/index.php/2014-07-09-10-56-45/fakultetet/fakulteti-i-gjuheve-te-huaja>

² Ibid

³ Universiteti Aleksander Xhuvani, Elbasan <http://www.uniel.edu.al/index.php/al/departamentet-shkencat-humane/345-departamenti-i-gjuheve-angleze-dhe-gjermane>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Universiteti “Fan Noli” Albania Korca - <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/content/faculty-education-and-philology>

⁶ Vlora University, Albania – Faculty of Humanities http://univlora.edu.al/?page_id=5073

⁷ University Aleksander Moisiu- Durres <http://www.uamd.edu.al/new/?p=1364>

the English language department has as the sole mission the qualification of English teachers mainly to teach in elementary and secondary compulsory level of education and a professional master in Education Management and English Teaching.⁸ Interestingly, public University of Durres started with a liberalization philosophy of quotas to better meet the needs of the growing market for the region, and English teaching was the sole foreign language to constitute the core of the Faculty of Education amongst other bachelor programs in Elementary Teaching, Psychology and Sociology, Expert in Progress Formation, and finally Literature Teaching.⁹

It should be mentioned that the ministry of Education placed special attention to English teaching programs due to the growing importance of English language in line with internal dynamics of transformations and globalization dynamics. For instance, a representative of the current government policies, Balili highlights in her study the importance of English programs to future technological advances and scientific research quality. The author reinforces the constructive role of the Ministry of Education and Science towards promotional strategies of deep involvement of English language in education and research.¹⁰ She envisages the decisive role of English for European 2020 strategies and further academic spheres. Obviously, English language has been acknowledged as the language of the future reforms and perspectives of the country is convincingly verified by the above cited data about English departments' programs and their scope: to prepare educators and teachers of comprehensive ELT. However, despite the visionary strategies of the current (as well as previous ones) Ministry of Education to uphold the role of foreign languages and English in particular, the vision has been confined to perfect command and usage of general English rather than English for specific purposes. In the following section, the study draws briefly on the political and economic regional and transnational initiatives that Albania is dealing with, aiming to demonstrate afterwards whether the General English Teaching approach equips learners with the relevant instrumental language to cope with all this transactions and internationalization pace.

3. INTERNAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN LINE WITH REGIONAL GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

Democratization processes in Albania were associated with liberal economic policies by nearly every government despite their political affiliation, free market initiative and attractiveness of Albania to foreign investments. This openness to regional and multinational enterprises aimed at reducing unemployment in the impoverished post-communist Albania. Gerxhani argues that one of the factors that kept down unemployment figures from 36% in 1991 to 13% in 1996 in Albania was the fast growth of new private enterprises in the country's economy.¹¹ For instance, from year 2000 more than 85% of the state owned mobile telecommunication company Albanian Mobile Communications was bought in a consortium

⁸Ibid

⁹ Durres University – Faculty of Education https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksand%C3%ABr_Moisiu_University#Bachelor.27s_degree_full_time_3

¹⁰EninaBalili, “The Future of Higher Education in Albania: How Technology and English will Shape Learning”. Conference Paper presented at the Ministry of Education and Sports, Tirana June 2013

¹¹Gerxhani 1999 cited in ConstantinosAlexiou&Doriana Toro, “FDI Revisited:Empirical Evidence from Transition Economies -Case of Albania” *Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2006, p21

of Norwegian Telenor and Greek Cosmote, and following that, another successful privatization was the purchase of the second largest bank in the country by the Turkish Kentbank.¹² In addition, of great significance to the country's global openness was the membership in World Trade Organization in 2000 aiming to facilitate free movement of goods and favour international companies' investment. It is to be noted that this supportive climate had already been paved by the Law 'On foreign investment' (No. 7764, dated 2.11.1993).¹³

The approved law on foreign investment in 1993 was a preliminary warming up to a significant political initiative by the European Union that of the **Stability Pact for South East Europe** established in 1999. Through this pact, a comprehensive and coordinated strategy was built to facilitate sustainable economic cooperation and long-term security in the South East region and in the Balkans in particular.¹⁴ Furthermore, within the regional initiative of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, in June 2001 Albania signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Trade Liberalisation and Facilitation with other SEE countries. Through this memo countries of the region could negotiate free trade agreements between themselves aiming the elimination of major part of export and import duties by end-2002.¹⁵ To illustrate such cases of application of this memo, The Athens Memorandum-2002 was signed between South Eastern countries committed to creating an integrating regional electricity market and compatible cohesion between national electricity market models and the regional ones.¹⁶

Other cases of regional joint efforts towards accomplishments of Western standards are demonstrated by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Development of the South East Europe Core Regional Transport Network on June 11, 2004 between Western Balkans and European Commission. Transport infrastructure was rightly identified by the EU as another key impetus to enhancing economic development and overall political, cultural, social and educational integration of South Eastern European countries with the EU members.¹⁷ By 2006 the Southeast Stability Pact was replaced by the political initiative of Regional Cooperation Council to pave the way for more specific projects directly influencing competitiveness in the region, speeding up and approaching closer the EU integration process.¹⁸ In more precise terms, the SEE Investment Committee in Sarajevo comprised a high-level coordination body to back up implementation of policies that enhance and boost foreign and domestic investments. In line with ameliorating the investment climate in the region, in 2011 the management of the SEE was conferred upon the Regional Cooperation

¹² Ibid. p 19

¹³ Ibid. pp 19-20

¹⁴ Regional Cooperation Council (former Stability Pact for South East Europe) http://www.esteri.it/mae/en/politica_estera/aree_geografiche/europa/ooii/patto_di_stabilit_dei_balcani.html

¹⁵ <https://www.energy-community.org/pls/portal/docs/36296.PDF>

¹⁶ Memorandum of Understanding on the Regional Electricity Market in South East Europe and its Integration into the European Union Internal Electricity Market ("The Athens Memorandum - 2002")

<https://www.energy-community.org/pls/portal/docs/36296.PDF>

¹⁷ Transport in South East Europe <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/seerecon/infrastructure/sectors/transport/>

¹⁸ SEE Investment Committee (SEEIC) – Sarajevo <http://www.rcc.int/pages/16/rcc-and-regional-initiatives-and-task-forces-in-south-east-europe>

Council Secretariat to better coordinate governmental structures of each member falling into this politico-economic entity.¹⁹

Alongside regional and international initiatives of economic profile, security was another sensitive domain where Albanian governments had to make adjustments, reform and reconstruction towards meeting the NATO accession criteria.²⁰ The latter happened in June 2009 after a series of negotiations, bilateral and multilateral meetings between military teams aiming to satisfy political, legal and military commitments deriving from NATO accession. This accession process was accompanied with a series of follow-up alterations of legal and political contextual significance like ratification of military agreements and legislative body. Moreover, in practical terms a major contribution to the Alliance was to maintain peace and security in international conflicts thus participating in joints trainings of NATO troops and Albanian ones.

The democratic transition and integration processes confronted Albanians with the need to communicate in foreign languages, to conduct international trade, diplomatic negotiations, cultural exchange programs and higher educational experiences in international universities. To tackle them separately, Albanian entrepreneurs were given for the first time in their lives the opportunity to establish businesses and collaborate with multinational companies dealing with fuel, food, textile, heavy industry, telecommunication and many others. For instance, the worldwide mobile telecommunication companies like Vodafone extended their network into Albanian market by mid 1990s facing a total lack of English linguistic competence tailored to their professional terminology. They were among the first to identify the need for professional English courses by adding to their company's budget a considerable percentage into language training. However, they had to rely on teachers whose linguistic knowledge was limited to General English exposition, thus showing that English department had not anticipated the need for functional contextualized English courses for English learners to perform tangible tasks.

Similarly, the conduct of diplomacy, European Union *acquis communautaire* adaptation to Albanian language, major transnational financial transactions between Albanian local entrepreneurs and multinational companies' headquarters, the higher educational research projects of regional and global dimensions had all to be handled through usage of English, which in itself was mainly taught through a conventional general approach on grammar, sentence structure and comprehensive vocabulary. In the meantime, the urgent demands stemming from the accelerating rhythm of the multifaceted internationalization processes in Albania call for specific tailored English compatible with the professional jargon inquired by the disciplinary sector.

4. THE ADDED VALUE OF ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ESP TRACK OF STUDIES AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS

The Teaching of English for Specific Purposes originates back in the late 1960s standing as a separate and colourful branch of the overall English Language Teaching. Dudley-Evans highlights that the main purpose of ESP is learning English for a specific purpose rather just learn the language system' and therefore, the interest focus is mainly

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Albania in NATO. Ministry of Foreign Affairs <http://www.puneteshatme.gov.al/en/mission/albania-in-nato>

on ESP approaches and procedural developments to achieve such an objective differing from the ELT general language system scope.²¹ Similarly, Helen Basturkmen in her book on *Developing English for Specific Purposes* makes a smooth and minute distinction between English for General Purposes and English for Specific Purposes.²² She uses citations and definitions from Evans and St. John in showing that ESP main concerns are needs analysis, text analysis and preparation of learners for effective communication.²³ Holmes as cited by Basturkmen, describes the General English Course syllabus as based on ‘a conception of the kind of the reality that students have to deal with in English’.²⁴ By contrast, ESP deals with the very narrow aspect of learners’ needs analysis for English usage.

Brunton in his *Account on ESP* explains that major causal factors to ESP growth are due to ‘market forces and a greater awareness amongst the academic and business community that learners’ needs and wants should be met wherever possible’.²⁵ He also contributes with categorization of the particular characteristics of ESP as follows²⁶:

1. Learners’ specific needs to be met;
2. Usage of the underlying methodology and activities to the relevant field;
3. ESP courses are based on language appropriate to the disciplines activities with regard to semantics; grammatical, discourse and genre issues.

Furthermore, he mentions even some of the ‘Variable Characteristics’ such as the Designation of ESP for specific disciplines by utilizing specific teaching situations and special methodology differing from General. Basturkmen in her book on *Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes* (2008) makes a twofold research related to ideas that influence contemporary practice in ESP teaching and research and secondly, related to the range of options that exist in ESP at present.²⁷

While discussing from a theoretical point of view the types of knowledge as *practical consciousness* and *discursive consciousness*, Hellen explains the determining factor of a genre-based approach to be pursued in ESP²⁸. Moreover, she highlights the goal of ESP in preparing students to enter target discourse communities be it of academic, professional, and workplace nature. Issues concerned with ESP Course Design are elaborated by her in the importance of needs analysis to determine the content of university curriculum and course syllabi. Her examination goes even further into making a distinction between wide-angled ESP courses aimed at learners less specialized versus narrow-angled ESP courses targeted to students who are highly specialized and sophisticated.²⁹

Inspired by Hutchison and Waters’ research in 1987, Ahmed devotes attention to the very initial causal factors leading to the birth of ESP as an emerging yet, enormous subdivision from the big umbrella of General English Teaching. His research elaborates in details the close relationship between economic, technological development of regional and global

²¹ Tony Dudley-Evans, “Genre analysis: a key to a theory of ESP?” 4 *IBÉRICA*, 2000, N° 2, p2

²² Helen Basturkmen, *Developing English for Specific Purposes*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p2-5

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ Holme 1996 cited in Basturkmen 2010, p 2-3

²⁵ Mike Brunton. “An account of ESP – with possible future directions”, *English for Specific Purposes* Issue 3 (24), Volume 8, 2009 (<http://www.esp-world.info>), p 2

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Hellen Basturkmen, *Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes*, ESL and Applied Linguistics Professional Series, New Jersey, 2008, p 3-6

²⁸ *Ibid*, p11

²⁹ HellenBasturkmen, p 15

dimensions and the need to communicate in English tailored for that relevant domain.³⁰ Among some of the original causal factors top-listed by Ahmed were the Cold War scientific and trade competition between the American supreme camp and the Russian block; the political supremacy of the US and their need to communicate English for scientific progress and information dissemination increased significantly. Another causal factor of economic importance was the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s urging for Western expertise attached to western funds to be transferred to the rich-oil countries; the fulfillment of this mission relied on communication of specific English for that purpose.³¹

Ahmed's cause and effect retrospective chronicle sounds very current for the Albanian domestic and external developmental context. Albania, as an emerging economy shifting from the extreme of a very centralized economy to the free market one, is being confronted with the urgent need for linguistic skills to communicate effectively in English as the only foreign language to conduct economic, business, diplomatic, educational activities. Albanian academics Hyso and Alimena have tackled in their research the momentum gained by ESP and particularly English for Business Studies at the undergraduate programs of economics and business. They highlight the better job opportunities Business English communicative competence may offer to students of these domains. However, a major drawback demonstrated by them is the gap between university programs on ESP curricula and the tailored needs such as technical business writing, report writing, verbal communication norms of doing cross-cultural business.³² Moreover, they discuss another much neglected theme of scholarly linguistic debate that directly influences effective ESP teaching and learning - the need for intercultural communicative competence by the teachers to be utilized in their ESP tasks.³³ Therefore, in their concluding remarks they suggest that intercultural and communicative competences be applied in Business English Curriculum. Related to that, they highlight the need for more professional training of the lecturers in order to better acquire and develop intercultural competencies.³⁴

5. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

This article attempted to shed light on the current developments in English teaching at university level in Albania. Through a descriptive analysis on the curriculum programs offered by English departments at public universities alongside the economic and socio-political transformations the Albanian society is going through, the article exhibited that there is a discrepancy between the accelerating socio-economic dynamics and the English communicative competence stemming from such internal and external changes. Despite the growing importance placed upon English teaching by the central governmental institutions, the multinational businesses and other regional and international projects, what has been offered today relies mainly on General English Teaching Approach, otherwise by sporadic attempts of certain English teachers teaching ESP courses in business, polytechnic

³⁰ Mohamed Kaosar Ahmed, "The ESP Teacher: Issues, Tasks and Challenges", *English for Specific Purposes World*, Issue 42, Vol. 15, 2014, p 4

³¹ Ibid, p4

³² Kozeta Hyso & Zamira Alimena, "The Priorities of English for Business in Albania and the Intercultural Communicative Competences", *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.6, No. 12, 2015, p 4

³³ Ibid, p2

³⁴ Ibid, p 5

or other professional domains to design ESP courses in vacuum since such teachers have not had themselves any university master program or other academic track tailored solely to ESP designing, teaching and other ESP tasks. Consequently, I provide the following recommendations to ESP perspectives in Albanian higher Education

- Foreign Language Faculties and English Departments should ultimately place a special master track to ESP encompassing every sophisticated challenge, endeavor, difference between other ELT concerns and specialties.
- The internal and external challenges of Albanian society call for an urgent shift and more attention given to the ESP rather than relying merely on the very time-consuming General English competence.
- The stand-alone English for Business Studies, English for Engineering, English for Medical Purposes, English for Technology and Environment, that are currently being offered by the relevant faculties in Albania demand more professional and theoretically trained ESP teachers. These courses are sporadic academic imitations which need a well-built academic platform to rely on. Moreover, the responsibility and the burden to convey such a sustainable platform falls on the English Departments of public universities as the most experienced and qualified in human capacities.

In order to build up graduate master programs in the separate track of ESP, English academics should professionally cooperate in course designing, textbooks publication and other class management issues with the respective staff of other tailored disciplines such as Finance, Banking, Economics, Engineering, Architecture, Medicine and other specific majors. Only the collaboration of an interdisciplinary staff in building up the program, sharing theoretical knowledge and professional expertise will guarantee fast and successful English language acquisition in line with the contemporary globalization processes and Albania's challenges.

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