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ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING: STUDENT PERSPECTIVE[1]

ABSTRACT: English as an international language of communication found its application not only in everyday life but also in professional and business contexts since the mid-20ᵗʰ century. Due to the increasing demands of the global market, there arose a need for the education of students of secondary schools of mechanical engineering, who would know how to use English for specific purposes (ESP) in both written and oral communication, thereby being prepared for the demands of their future careers. This paper outlines the difficulties encountered by an English language teacher regarding the implementation of the curriculum and specific instructions. The research was conducted in a secondary school of mechanical engineering in Sopot. The students completed a questionnaire and some of them were interviewed. They expressed their opinions, needs and wants regarding ESP, so that the English teacher could design a tailored teaching approach. This approach would enhance students' language skills that align with the demands of the global market, ensuring better preparation for their future careers in the field of mechanical engineering.

Keywords: English language, ESP, secondary school of mechanical engineering, student perspectives, video games, interactive games, curriculum, English language teacher.

ЕНГЛЕСКИ ЈЕЗИК СТРУКЕ У СРЕДЊОЈ МАШИНСКОЈ ШКОЛИ: ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈЕ УЧЕНИКА

АПСТРАКТ: Енглески језик као међународни језик комуникације нашао је своју примену не само у свакодневном животу већ и у пословном свету још од половине XX века. Због све већих захтева светског тржишта јавила се и потреба за образовањем ученика средње машинске школе који ће знати да користе енглески језик струке у писаној и усменој комуникацији и тако бити спремни за захтеве будуће каријере. У овом раду приказане су потешкоће са којима се суочава наставник енглеског језика по питању примене наставног плана и програма и реализације специфичне наставе. Истраживање је спроведено у средњој машинској школи у Сопоту. Ученици су попуњавали упитник, а неки су били интервјуисани. Они су изнели своја мишљења, потребе и жеље у вези са наставом енглеског језика струке како би била осмишљена да задовољи потребе ученика. Такав приступ допринео би усавршавању њихових

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језичких вештина у складу са захтевима глобалног тржишта, обезбеђујући бољу припрему за будућу каријеру у области машинства.

Кључне речи: енглески језик, енглески језик струке, средња машинска школа, перцепције ученика, видео-игрице, интерактивне игре, наставни план и програм, наставник енглеског језика.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of ESP is linked to the end of World War II. During this period, there was significant growth in the fields of technology, science, and economics on the international scene. Trade and technology became increasingly more important and a common language was necessary for their advancement (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 6). Until a few decades ago, the language of technical professions was traditionally German, but now English has taken precedence (Tasić 2010). Hutchinson and Waters believe that the goal was to create a generation of people who learn the language because of technology and trade exchange, not because of prestige and pleasure, which led to the phenomenon of English for Professional Purposes (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 6). These authors also believe that the development of ESP was not planned but arose as a product of numerous trends. Likewise, they state that the oil crisis of the 1970s led to a massive influx of money and Western expertise in oil-rich countries, which in turn accelerated the development of ESP. English thus became a means of business communication. For this reason, it was necessary to create courses with clearly defined objectives where the language of profession would be learned for market needs.

The goal of teaching ESP is to take into consideration the needs of students, enabling them to acquire knowledge and enhance skills necessary for linguistic behavior in discipline-specific situations (Ignjačević 2008: 153). The professional context is characterised by specialised vocabulary, i.e. each field has its specific terminology and jargon, so the words have different meanings from the meanings of words from everyday life (Ignjačević 2008: 151).

This paper will show the needs, wants and opinions of the secondary school of mechanical engineering students when it comes to learning ESP in their school as part of their curriculum.

2. ESP TEACHING IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

ESP teaching in secondary vocational schools in Serbia began in the second half of the 19th century with the aim of enabling students to learn professional vocabulary and language skills (Ignjačević 2011: 938). At a conference held in 2011 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade entitled "Language of Profession: Challenges and Perspectives", it was concluded that ESP suffered a serious blow with the implementation of school reforms. The number of ESP classes was being reduced or the subject was completely abolished so that classes could be allocated to professional subjects. Likewise, more attention should be paid to preparing language teachers for ESP teaching, since in most cases English is taught as ESP (Ignjačević 2011: 942).

Learning ESP in secondary schools of mechanical engineering represents an important part of foreign language teaching. By acquiring professional terminology in a specific context from the field of mechanical engineering, students have the opportunity to become capable of communicating in ESP, which will be essential in the future in their professional environment. It is essential for ESP to be in constant correlation with professional subjects so that students connect language with subject-specific content and thus acquire the necessary knowledge for their future profession. ESP should be represented in foreign language teaching to the extent necessary "for information transfer and training for simple oral and written communication in a foreign language. It is necessary that the professional topics processed in the foreign language follow the outcomes of individual professional subjects and be in correlation with them. In ESP teaching, the accent is placed on the development of receptive skills, not on the development of productive skills" (Đukić 2016: 77).

In English language classes in the secondary school of mechanical engineering "Kosmaj" in Sopot, where the research was conducted, students use approved general English textbooks from the publishing house "Zavod za udžbenike" from Belgrade. The textbooks are authorised by the Ministry of Education. Currently, there are no professional English textbooks for secondary schools of mechanical engineering on the Serbian market. The textbooks used in school do not contain authentic ESP texts from the field of mechanical engineering. Some pseudo-authentic texts can be found, for which sources are not cited and which are not texts with professional topics, except for one text about 3D printers in the fourth-grade textbook. For ESP to be represented in classes, the English teacher independently designs and collects material that is most often found on the internet.

For ESP teaching to be realised, it is necessary to find appropriate ways to transfer knowledge from the relevant field to students and to perform a needs analysis. In addition, it is necessary to make a specific syllabus, create appropriate materials, or analyse and adapt existing material to meet students' needs, as well as use diverse sources necessary for conducting classes (Hutchinson & Waters 1987).

2.1. Curriculum

According to the data from the Official Gazette from 2013, the number of ESP classes comprised 20% to 40% of the total annual teaching load for three-year vocational programmes during the second and third grades (Службени гласник – Просветни гласник РС, 11/13: 20), and for four-year vocational programmes it was 15% to 20% for the second grade, 20% to 30% for the third grade, and for the fourth grade 25% to 40% depending on the weekly number of classes (Службени гласник – Просветни гласник РС бр. 11/13: 30). These changes were related to the content of topics, not the number of classes. According to this regulation, professional topics should include various texts thematically related to the profession.

The Ministry of Education recommends that the curriculum be clearly defined and in accordance with outcomes related to professional qualifications so that ESP teaching could be conducted with special attention paid to the correlation with professional subjects and following professional literature (Службени гласник – Просветни гласник РС бр. 11/13: 28, 41).

According to the revised Regulation on the curriculum of general education subjects of secondary vocational education in the field of Mechanical Engineering and Metal Processing, which has been applied since the 2023/2024 school year, for the subject English language there is no longer a percentage representation of professional topics in the regulation, but there is a note saying that "professional topics should be distributed by grades so that they are in correlation with the content being processed from professional subjects" (Службени гласник РС – Просветни гласник, бр. 6/14, 11/15, 1/16, 2/16, 10/16, 11/16, 4/17, 5/17, 1/18, 13/18, 13/20, 8/22 и 10/22). English teachers now have more freedom to decide whether and to what extent they should introduce basic professional topics and terminology into their teaching. This also includes topics related to business communication and correspondence. Teachers must also determine how many classes should focus on professional topics, ensuring they align with the content of professional subjects. These decisions are crucial for achieving the annual number of classes, where general topics should also be represented. A difficult task is set before teachers, because the annual number of classes rarely exceeds 70 classes depending on the

educational profile for which students are studying. Within those classes, English teachers should organise teaching in such a way as to cover the entire curriculum specified in the mentioned Regulation, test student knowledge several times during the school year, implement teaching through instruction and consolidation, which leaves very little room for ESP teaching. Key changes in the curriculum are needed, and attention should be paid to ESP so that students receive quality teaching and professional knowledge.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim

The aim of this study was to find out about students' opinions, needs, and wants regarding ESP instruction in a secondary school of mechanical engineering and use the findings to design a tailored teaching approach in the future. This approach would enhance students' language skills and encourage them to get better prepared for their future careers in order to meet the demands of the global market.

3.2. Participants

The research was conducted at the secondary school of mechanical engineering "Kosmaj" in Sopot. The participants were students from two classes of the second and third grades of the educational profile computer-controlled (CNC) machine technicians. Based on the quantitative analysis of the answers students provided when completing the questionnaire, significant results were obtained. The questionnaire was completed by a total of 55 students, of which 51 (92.7%) were male and 4 (7.3%) were female participants. Since these were second and third-grade students, the number of participants under 18 years old was 41 (74.5%), 12 (21.8%) were 18 years old, and 2 participants (3.6%) were from 18 to 20 years old. Most participants are from the town of Sopot - 43 (78.2%), and a smaller number are from Belgrade, Mladenovac, Lazarevac, and Aranđelovac.

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected using the research instruments: a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire was completed by 55 students. Five students from both classes were selected, a total of ten, to be interviewed about learning professional language and their needs for English as ESP. A mixed research method was applied where statistical data from the questionnaire were supported by answers from the

interview. Numerical data from the questionnaire and descriptive data from the interview were used to analyse students' needs and the current situation regarding students' abilities when it comes to learning English, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Based on data from the questionnaire and interview, the researcher was able to analyse students' needs, their wants, positive aspects, and shortcomings when it comes to learning ESP.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections which had 13 questions. In the first section, there were three questions that gathered general information about students' gender, age, and the place of living. The second section was about ESP and it included five questions about students' level of ESP knowledge, which ESP instruction they preferred (traditional or innovative), how many times per week they studied ESP, which parts of English are difficult to study in general (grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, speaking or all), and which activities help them to understand English better (watching films or series in English, reading books, ESP literature, speaking with native speakers, playing video games in English, all or nothing). The third section had five questions about the efficacy of ESP instruction in their school. The results of the first question in this section were obtained using a five-point Likert scale whether they find ESP instruction effective or not, then how much they practise ESP outside of school, which activities they would like to have in their English classroom (watching videos, speaking, role-play, a debate or translating). The last two questions were about students' self-confidence when using ESP in everyday situations and self-evaluation of their progress of ESP learning in the past year.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Questionnaire data analysis

Based on students' attitudes about their level of ESP knowledge, it can be concluded that they are quite satisfied: 7 participants (12.7%) think it is excellent, 31 participants (56.4%) think it is satisfactory, 14 (25.5%) are not sure, 2 (3.6%) think it is poor, and 1 participant (1.8%) thinks their level of English for specific purposes is unsatisfactory.

The majority of students were undecided whether they preferred the traditional approach to ESP teaching (without using modern ICT) or an innovative approach (using ICT), (20 participants – 36.4%) (Diagram 1), which also implies to how much time they dedicate to learning (40 participants – 72.7%) (Diagram 2):
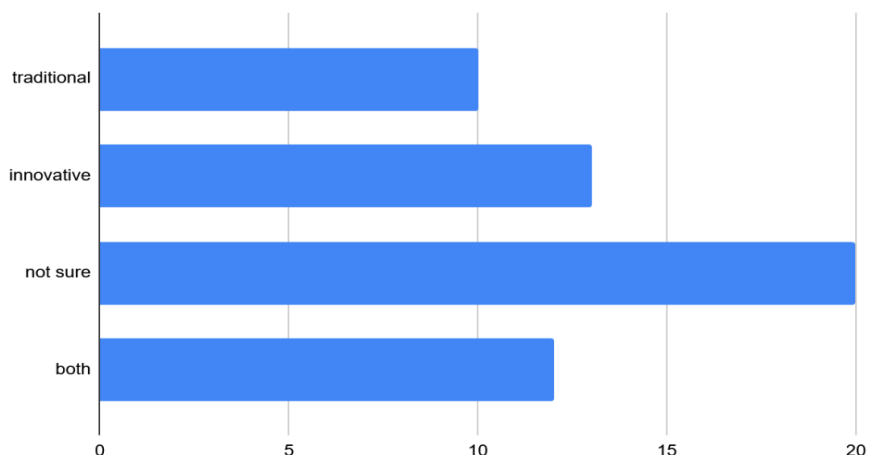
Diagram 1. Students' opinion about traditional and innovative approaches to ESP teaching.
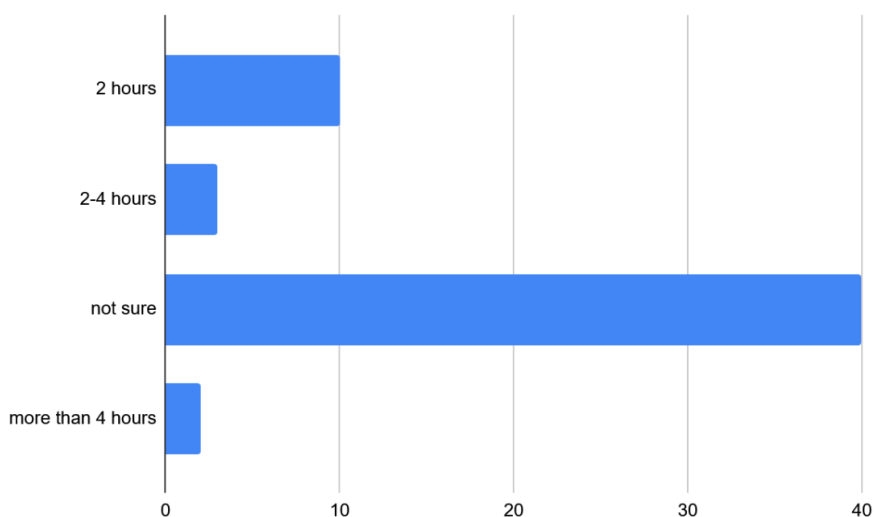

Diagram 2. How much time students dedicate to learning ESP.

The largest portion of students (20 participants – 36.4%) believe that grammar presents the biggest problem when learning English (Diagram 3):
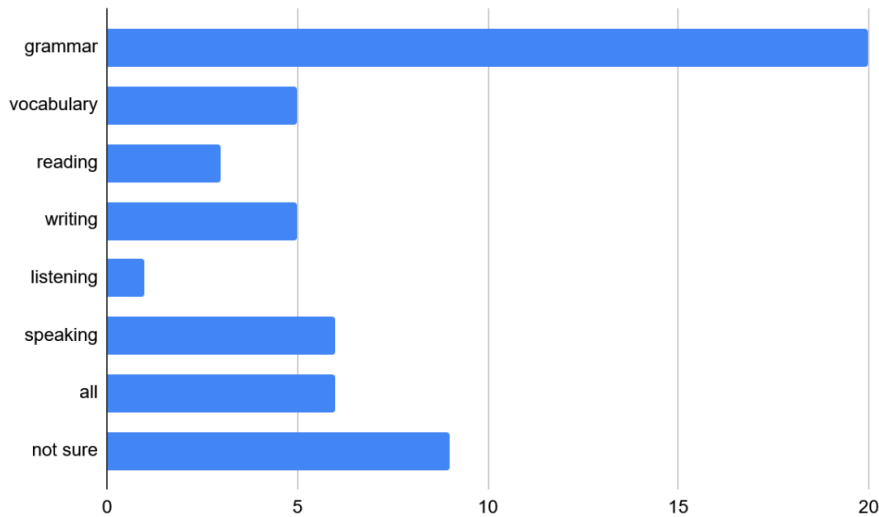
Diagram 3. English skills that students think are difficult to learn.

Most of the students believe that watching films/series in English (19 participants – 34.5%) and playing video games can help them better understand English (18 participants – 32.7%):
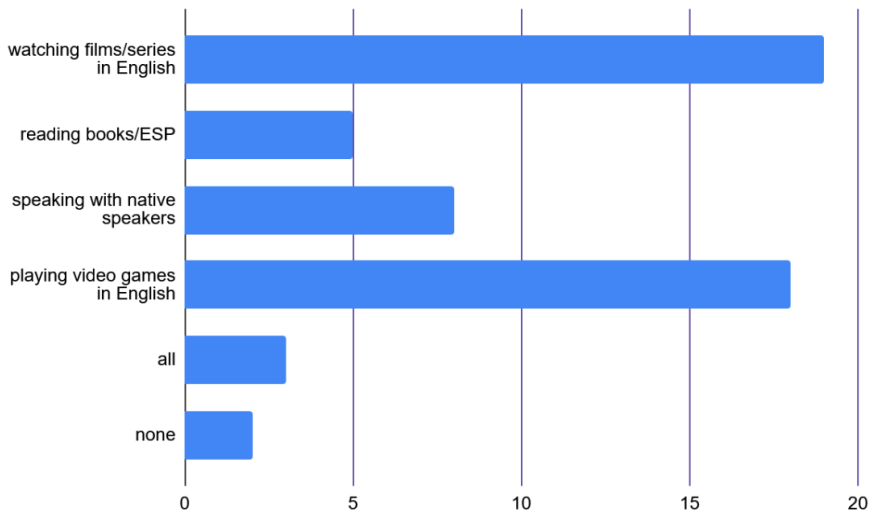

Diagram 4. Activities that help students learn English better.

Regarding the effectiveness of ESP teaching in school (Diagram 5), students are satisfied with teaching and consider it effective. Results were obtained using a five-point Likert scale (1. not effective, 2. sufficient, 3. not bad, could be better, 4. effective, 5. very effective):
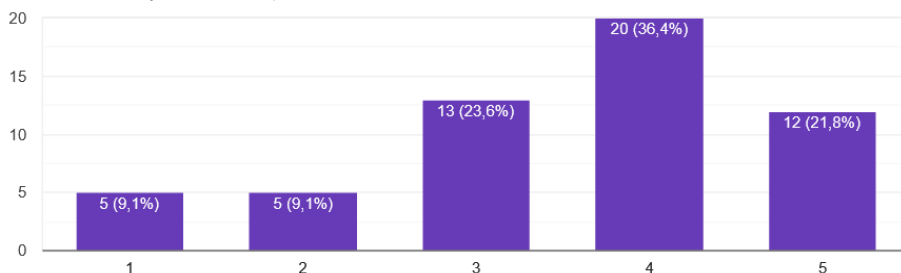

Diagram 5. Students' satisfaction with ESP teaching in their school.

Students believe that their ESP learning outside school is not bad and could be better (1. not satisfactory, 2. satisfactory, 3. not bad, could be better, 4. very good, 5. excellent):
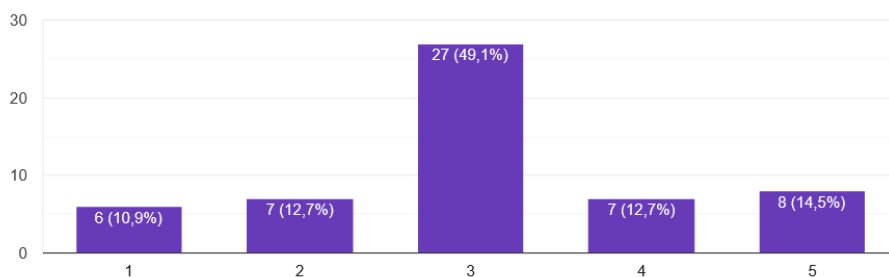

Diagram 6. Students' ESP learning outside of school.

Of the five listed activities, students would most like to see watching videos and role-play simulations in ESP teaching (1. watching videos, 2. conversation, 3. role-play simulation, 4. debate, 5. translation):
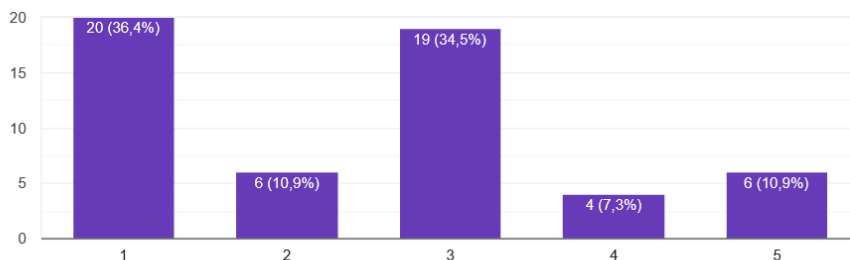
Diagram 7. Activities that students would like to have in ESP teaching.

When asked how they would rate their progress in ESP in the past year (Diagram 8), students (eighteen of them) believe their progress is good (1. unsatisfactory, 2. sufficient, 3. good, 4. very good, 5. excellent):
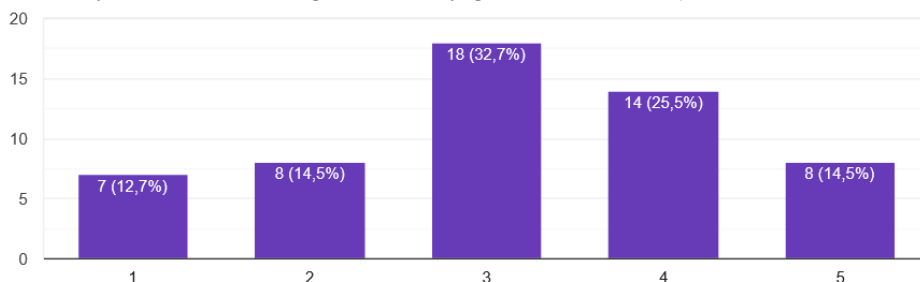

Diagram 8. Students' progress in ESP learning in the past year.

4.2. Interview data analysis

After the questionnaire was conducted, an interview was conducted with students about their needs when learning ESP, which provided significant insights. Ten students were selected for the interview. Students were asked about 10 questions with additional sub-questions to encourage discussion and exchange of opinions among students.

Six interviewed students (60%) believe that their knowledge of English is at a satisfactory level and that they feel confident enough to use English in everyday situations, while the other students, a total of four (40%), are not satisfied with their knowledge but would not do anything to change it.

Some students are determined not to learn this language because they believe it is not necessary. Unlike them, other students, when it comes to learning English outside of class, believe that they can best learn vocabulary by reading various

articles, watching films and series in English, and playing video games where they communicate in English with other players. When acquiring grammar, they state that they do not try to learn it because they believe it is not necessary for communication and that they communicate well even without it. Four students stated that they noticed progress in their English skills in the past year when it comes to acquiring English vocabulary thanks to reading articles, watching films and series in English, playing video games and communicating with others in English.

When asked how their knowledge of professional English could help them understand technical specifications and instructions from the field of mechanical engineering, students stated that almost all literature is in English and is easily understood, and that knowing professional English for their needs greatly facilitates understanding of what they read. They also said that they received most literature in Croatian from teachers who teach technical subjects to them. This is an alleviating circumstance for students who poorly master English but does not help them learn English terminology. Students noticed that all software programmes they use in and outside of class are in English and there is no translation into Serbian, but they have no problems understanding them.

When asked about how their knowledge of professional English affected their ability to find quality information in professional literature, students answered that they generally understood professional texts in English, and if they did not understand some words or expressions, then a dictionary could help them.

Regarding the question of how regular practice of professional English could improve their communication skills in a professional environment, students answered positively. This way of learning contributes to preparing students for the job market where they will need ESP in various business situations.

When asked about the advantages of knowing professional English in terms of international collaboration or going to work abroad, students agreed that those who knew it would manage much more easily than those who did not. Also, they believe that knowing professional English can extremely help them develop their career in the field of mechanical engineering after secondary education because they can enroll in university abroad and further improve in the field that interests them.

Among the interviewed students, four showed resistance and lack of interest in learning English, whether general or professional. They expressed their views that they did not need knowledge of English, not even professional English, because they claimed that online translators made it much easier for them to understand some texts by copying the text from some article and getting a translation that they believed was correct. These students said that when they watched professional tutorials in English

on the YouTube platform, and even though there were no subtitles in Serbian for such tutorials, they managed to translate by converting the voice from the video into text by using certain applications and then translating that text on one of the online translators, most often Google online translator.

Most interviewed participants agreed that English language teaching should be more focused on ESP and less on general language because they are students of a secondary vocational school and they need to have satisfactory knowledge of professional English during their education and later in their careers. They believe that ESP classes are useful and would be more beneficial if there were more than two classes per week, especially if they were taught only ESP and not general English at all.

When asked what additional resources or activities they would like to see in teaching, students provided no responses to this question, which gives room for the teacher to design and suggest them to students. Only two students found the idea of helping their English teacher design an ESP course interesting.

5. DISCUSSION

Adequate approaches, techniques, and interesting content for learning ESP should be applied to meet the students' needs and help them acquire knowledge. It is necessary to adapt educational programmes and activities so that the students can best learn professional terminology in a specific context and be prepared for the job market in the future. In order to bring the materials closer to students and expand knowledge from the field of mechanical engineering, the teacher has an important task, and that is to follow the latest trends. This can be achieved by reading the latest magazines, articles, and papers, exchanging information, and analysing important texts in ESP classes. Gathering valuable information for ESP teaching can motivate students to learn about mechanics, technology, kinestetics, and other essential fields in English. In this way, they will gain sufficient knowledge and practise English skills in ESP classroom.

Based on the questionnaire responses, students do not have a clear idea which teaching approach they prefer (traditional without using ICT or innovative with ICT) and do not keep personal records of how much time they spend weekly learning English. Students believe that learning English grammar presents great difficulties to them (20 participants – 36.4%), and that watching films and series as well as playing video games enhances their English knowledge, so by applying these activities and simplifying grammatical units through videos, students may experience increased interest in both grammar and other activities such as listening,

reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, and conversation. Two students would like to design a course with their English teacher that would meet their needs by focusing on areas of mechanical engineering that interest them most. The rest of the students showed no interest in this idea.

A certain dose of lethargy and lack of interest in knowledge acquisition and progress is noticeable in some students, which puts the teacher in a position where they must deal with the challenge of loss of motivation in these students. A smaller number of students want change and they would like to be engaged in the learning process while others believe they either do not have enough time for such things due to the volume of professional subject material or are not interested in participating, believing that learning ESP will not help them much.

Since there are currently no approved ESP textbooks by the Ministry of Education that could be used in secondary schools of mechanical engineering, the teacher is forced to search for necessary professional materials for classes on the internet. Until now, the English teacher has held ESP classes once or twice a month, independently designing teaching units using resources from the internet. The materials were in correlation with the content that students were acquiring in professional content classes in Serbian and included professional terminology of various machines, tools, devices, and innovations in the field of mechanical engineering. Most of the students are used to this way of teaching and learning. They also pay more attention to learning ESP outside of school (27 participants – 49.1%). Twenty participants (36.4%) consider ESP teaching in their school as effective and 12 participants very effective (21.8%). This showed that 18 participants (32.7%) noticed their own progress when learning ESP in the past year, which they should continue to do in the future, thus affecting their self-confidence.

Knowing that there are students who are very interested in learning ESP and those who show little interest or a complete lack of interest, the teacher faces a difficult task of how to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. This could be managed by differentiated instruction where students would have tasks or projects that could be done in small groups, pairs or individually. More proficient students could help those with lower levels of English proficiency how to learn and enhance their motivation and interest in ESP. Not only will they learn new vocabulary and improve their skills, but they will also study and work together as a team and nurture a team spirit which will be of great importance for their future positions in companies.

Considering the fact that all surveyed students love to play video games and believe that this is the best way to learn English, it is necessary to design game-like

teaching with their favorite characters from video games to make knowledge acquisition easier. It is necessary to know what types of games capture their attention in order to design a way to apply ESP material from specific areas that interest them. The popularity of video games in the classroom is associated with the high level of engagement that students experience when playing them (Dickey 2005). In many classrooms, there is a change from the traditional way of working and constructivism[2] is applied, which gives students greater freedom (Cobern 1993). In addition, it is important to design various interactive activities that will be interesting to students, drama activities, videos from their professional environment, workshops, then certain simulations such as role-play from the real world, and similar activities so that students practise ESP in context. Role-play is a pedagogical method used in a wide range of contexts (Rao & Stupans 2012). Essentially, it involves students taking on specific roles – usually those they are not familiar with – and playing them out in a case-based scenario, with the goal of learning course content or understanding complex or ambiguous concepts (Sogunro 2004: 367). Role-play guidelines are usually based on realistic criteria so that students can be as close as possible to "real-life situations". Research on the effectiveness and best practices of role-play has existed since the 1970s. However, recently, role-play has been promoted as a tool that better meets the needs of today's students than traditional teaching methods (Rosa 2012; Bobbit et al. 2000).

It is very important that learning takes place in different contexts for learning new vocabulary; acquiring vocabulary is effective if the student is actively involved in solving tasks (Hiebert & Kamil 2005: 7). Although interactive games are not unfamiliar to the teacher and the students have been previously introduced to similar activities such as quizzes and online games on specific topics, such as Kahoot, Quizizz, etc., for ESP learning it is necessary to design games that will be interesting to them, and increase their motivation for learning. In order to do this, a simple survey for students with questions about their favourite video games, characters, themes, and educational approaches would assist in thinking about creating ESP games. Asking students to engage themselves into sharing their ideas about creating games for the ESP classroom would also be of great assistance to an English teacher. ESP games are not often seen in English classroom, if seen at all, so gaining

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[2] Constructivism is a theoretical framework in psychotherapy that emphasises the active role of individuals in the process of constructing their own knowledge, perspectives, and experiences of the world. This approach is based on the idea that people are not passive recipients of information but actively construct meaning through interaction with their environment and personal experiences. [Source: https://plkcentar.rs/konstruktivizam/]

knowledge about such games and their importance in education is something to consider in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the given answers and expressed attitudes and opinions of students from the secondary school of mechanical engineering "Kosmaj" in Sopot, it can be concluded that students are largely interested in learning English as ESP, that they pay more attention to it outside of class, and they like it most if such learning takes place through interactive activities, simulations and games, using videos on specific topics, applying video games, and analysing professional material from the internet. Students spend a lot of time in front of their computers and mobile phones, where they play their favorite video games for hours, so traditional teaching in school does not attract their attention to a great extent. The English teacher in this school faces great challenges daily when it comes to teaching their students. To bring the ESP learning closer to students in the best possible way and attract their attention and interest, it is necessary to adopt a suitable approach to achieve this and to incorporate professional topics into the existing curriculum. Based on the interviews, information was obtained about the approaches that would meet students' needs. Students would like their English language teaching to include professional topics in every class because this way they would be able to learn much more and connect the material with the other school subjects, so ESP teaching material must be in correlation with professional subject instruction. In addition, ESP teaching should contain interactive games and activities similar to video games that students play daily. Such teaching should interest students who show less interest in learning and acquiring material. It is assumed that this way of teaching will also interest other students who do not have affinities for learning English. This research opens the way to applying innovative solutions for better and more efficient ESP teaching in secondary schools of mechanical engineering as well as a basis for further research aimed at meeting students' needs.

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https://plkcentar.rs/konstruktivizam/

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ЕНГЛЕСКИ ЈЕЗИК СТРУКЕ У СРЕДЊОЈ МАШИНСКОЈ ШКОЛИ: ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈЕ УЧЕНИКА

Сажетак

Бројни су изазови наставе енглеског за посебне намене у средњој машинској школи и они стављају наставника енглеског језика у незавидан положај јер треба да задовољи потребе свих ученика. Укључивање енглеског за посебне намене у постојећи наставни план и програм представља велики изазов посебно зато што Министарство просвете није одобрило уџбенике за ову област. Наставник мора сам да проналази аутентичне материјале на интернету, у корелацији са стручним предметима у школи. Ученици су показали интересовање за обраду стручних тема на часовима енглеског језика. Заинтересованост ученика била би још већа применом иновативних метода у виду видео-игрица и интерактивних активности са стручним темама, па би креирање игрица са тематиком из области машинства био један значајан корак у учењу енглеског језика за машинске школе. Велики број ученика сматра да им учење граматике енглеског језика није потребно и више воле активности као што су гледање видео-записа, серија и филмова као и играње видео-игрица, верујући да им помажу да боље науче и разумеју енглески језик. Већина би желела да учи само енглески за посебне намене без општег енглеског због будуће каријере као и да се часови држе више од два пута недељно. Волели би да више гледају видео-записе са стручном тематиком и да вежбају симулације реалних ситуација. Балансирање између нових и традиционалних метода представља додатну препреку. Предлагање и имплементирање наставног плана и програма усмереног на енглески за посебне намене често подразумева преговарање са школском администрацијом и усклађивање са националним образовним стандардима. То може бити дуготрајан и мукотрпан процес. Колико год наставници енглеског желели да уведу нове методе у наставу и осмисле курс енглеског за посебне намене према потребама и жељама ученика, превише се аспеката мора узети у обзир да би се створило корисно наставно окружење. Без обзира на све потешкоће, мали корак би сигурно направио благу промену у настави енглеског за посебне намене.

Кључне речи: енглески језик, енглески језик струке, средња машинска школа, перцепције ученика, видео-игрице, интерактивне игре, наставни план и програм, наставник енглеског језика.