

■ STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMIZING THE QUALITY STANDARD IN HIGHER EDUCATION ESP

Starting from the premise that English represents a key factor in enhancing the attractivity, competitiveness and cooperation of Higher Education institutions while ensuring international mobility for future specialists, Dimitrie Cantemir University from Targu Mures organized the first one-day exploratory ESP (English for Specific Purposes) workshop entitled "Strategies for Optimizing the Quality Standard in Higher Education ESP" on May 8th, 2009 (<http://espworkshop.mures.orizont.net>). The workshop addressed methods, strategies and tools which have a potential impact on the quality of English language services in higher education for non-philological specializations, on the quality of ESP research and ESP teacher training.

Rapid changes in the field of IT have a profound impact on EFL/ESP methodologies and strategies, prompting the promotion of strategies such as "blended learning", synchronous (teleconferences, chat) and asynchronous applications (Moodle platforms, wikipedias, blogs, opinion forums, e-mail exchanges), multimedia educational tools, etc. These strategies become desiderata for foreign language instruction in higher educational institutions as they: a) answer the massification trends of higher education; b) comply with the current student's "digital-native" status and enhance learning motivation; c) perform the transition towards communicative teaching/learning and stimulate reflection and critical thinking; d) encourage cooperation and collaboration through team work and networking; e) involve strategy rather than knowledge learning; f) provide systematic feed-back and allow asynchronous monitoring by the teacher; g) enhance learner autonomy.

The organizing of this event reflects the ongoing efforts by Dimitrie Cantemir University to identify the most effective, evidence-based strategies for optimizing the quality standard in ESP education, ESP teacher training and continuous development, as well as ESP scientific research in an international dimension. The main objectives of the workshop were: 1) to identify evidence-based state of the art strategies, models of good and best practices, creative tools that can lead to excellence in ESP teaching in the applying institutions; 2) to support teacher growth and collaboration while building a network of ESP professionals (<http://group.yahoo.com/groups/ESP-RO>); 3) to disseminate the workshop research results through publication in an ISBN volume.

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The papers were presented in four parallel sections (ESP quality standard and research, Curriculum design and CEFR, Material design and strategies, and ICT-based instruction and research) and in two sessions (morning and afternoon). The research paper content reflected issues of: quality assurance, assessment and enhancement of ESP quality; curriculum design for business, judiciary officers, tourism, police, engineering, and horticulture; materials development: worksheet design, video tools, corpus in ESP; compliance with CEFR standards, learner autonomy; blended learning; communicative competence; content-based and syntax-based approaches to ESP; experiential learning; class observation; effective skills in corporate communication; structure of ESP texts; adult learning pedagogy, teacher training and continuous development.

Stronger points of the workshop emerged from the international perspective and interdisciplinary approach towards ESP issues. Attendees included specialists in quality management of language services, quality control, pedagogy, PhD coordinators, CLIL specialists, researchers and ESP practitioners, PhD students, from Czech Republic, Croatia, United Kingdom, Georgia, Latvia, North Cyprus, Turkey, Thailand, as well as from Romanian university centers with long-standing traditions in ESP (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Iasi, Arad, as well as Targu Mures).

The plenary session included presentations by key speakers from Romania (Prof. Laura Muresan, Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies), United Kingdom (James Fenton, Westminster Kingsway College) and Georgia (Lela Abdushelishvili, Caucasus University of Tbilisi). For the first time in our organizational history, the workshop benefitted from two online presentations: 1) Prof. Teresa Almeida D'Eca (Lisbon, Portugal, coordinator of the Webheads Community of Practice) who introduced state-of-the-art Web 2.0 applications to enhance language learning (voice, text, interactive exercises, blogs, wikis); 2) Ivana Simonova, PhD, who presented the ICT and research implications for ESP at Hradec Kralove University, Czech Republic.

Papers reflecting on ESP teacher training and continuous development were also presented in the poster session, either as traditional or computer-based posters. The workshop programme included a round table discussion and a brainstorming session on future research projects and collaboration networks, as well as an ESP Fair/Exhibition of real and virtual applications, advertising materials, coursebooks, and Garnet publications.

The papers from the event were published in the workshop volume: *Strategies for Optimizing the Quality Standard in Higher Education ESP* (Risoprint Publ., Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2009, ISBN: 978-973-53-0069-2, 260 pages, 35 papers) and it was distributed at the event.

The social programme on the second day of the event included a sightseeing tour of Targu Mures and a trip to the Medieval town of Sighsoara (a uniquely inhabited medieval town 50 km away from Targu Mures) as well as a farewell lunch providing further opportunities for networking and consolidating the professional bonds which had been built up over the two days.

The workshop benefitted from the support of an ETS/TOEFL-USA international speaker grant and proved to be a venue for sharing and receiving feedback on professional ideas on ESP methods and strategies, research and teacher training, while providing an opportunity for the development of future ESP collaboration and projects.