

# THE RIGHT MIX OF APPROACHES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: ACHIEVING DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

**Oleh Topuzov**

Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine

**Oleksandr Malykhin**

Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine

**Nataliia Aristova**

Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine

**Abstract.** *The proposed study is focused on solving research questions concerning a common understanding of methodology in teaching English for Specific Purposes and language teaching approaches application in instruction process. The novelty of the paper lies in the theoretical substantiation of the necessity to apply the combination of competence-based, action-oriented and blended-learning approaches in the ESP classroom for improving ESP students' languages competence regarded in our study as desired learning outcomes. The research is theoretical in nature and comprises the theoretical review of scientific literature aimed at understanding how methodology is conceived by scientists and ESP practitioners. The theoretical review contains the analysis of scientific publications and methodological materials on teaching English for Specific Purposes at higher education institutions. The authors also analyze the most trusted language teaching approaches, principles they are based on, learning outcomes they are aimed at in the ESP classroom, the advantages and disadvantages of their use in instruction process. The analysis of the most trusted language teaching approaches makes it possible to declare that the combination of competence-based, action-oriented and blended-learning approaches plays a crucial role in providing ESP students with improved languages competence.*

**Keywords:** *action-oriented approach, blended-learning approach, competence-based approach, ESP classroom, higher education institutions, languages competence, learning outcomes, methodology.*

## Introduction

Throughout human history people have always been interested in learning foreign languages. Moreover, such interest exists today and will continue to exist due to globalization processes and greater opportunities to move freely worldwide. As a result, one of the most pressing requirements of our time is to

be able to speak at least one foreign language to communicate effectively with people from different countries or ethnic communities. Experience shows that nowadays the English language is not a matter of choice but of vital importance to personal and career development in a contemporary global human society. A closer look at the scientific literature enables to differentiate between English as a foreign language or English as an international language (Thornbury, 2006). Thus, S. Thornbury (2006) strongly believes that English can be regarded as a foreign language in case it is not the usual language of community people live in. In case people use English as a global means of communication there is every reason to define it as an international language or so called lingua franca (Scrivener, 2011; Thornbury, 2006). In this regard, one more term such as English for Specific Purposes deserves to be mentioned here on account of its prevalence in academic writings. According to Collins English Dictionary (2019), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the practice and theory of learning and teaching English for specific uses in given fields, such as a science, nursing, tourism, etc. T. Hutchinson and A. Waters define English for Specific Purposes as an “approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19). P.C. Robinson (1980) considers English for Specific Purposes as teaching of English to learners whose primary goals are connected with different spheres of human activity. The definitions given demonstrate that ESP appears to respond to the adult learners’ occupational or academic needs. And in this regard several logical questions arise: how to teach English for Specific Purposes effectively, what influences the choice of one approach or another and whether to apply one single approach or a combination of approaches for improving ESP students’ languages competence.

### **Aim and Methods**

The main objective of the research is to provide a descriptive insight into the most trusted language teaching approaches used in the ESP classrooms. For reaching the main objective of the research three sub-objectives were formulated:

1. To carry out a theoretical review of scientific literature aimed at understanding how methodology is conceived in teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes and providing a consolidated list of trusted language teaching approaches.
2. To analyze language teaching approaches, principles they are based on, learning outcomes they are aimed at, the advantages and disadvantages of their use in instruction process.

3. To understand what influences the choice of one approach or another and whether to apply one single approach or a combination of approaches for improving ESP students' languages competence.

### **Theoretical Review of Scientific Literature and Discussion**

The methodology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is undergoing significant changes concerning the provision of qualitative functional outcomes in the higher education system. It happens because nowadays neither of methodological approaches can be regarded as the only and solid foundation for full-fledged training of future specialists which, unfortunately, is confirmed by the practices of organizing and running the educational process in higher school. This also applies to the language education.

Although all foreign language learners have one common goal which is to get a high level of language proficiency, in the scientific literature there is still no shared understanding of what methodology is and no universal methodological approach whose application in instruction process helps respond to all challenges connected with the development of learners' language skills. In most cases the concept of "methodology" is used "to describe classroom practices, such as classroom management, irrespective of the particular method that a teacher is using" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 131). It must be said that there are no right or wrong approaches, each language teaching approach having its advantages and disadvantages aims at achieving a definite goal. All of them have not lost their validity and are still relevant in the ESP classrooms. In choosing the right approach or method teachers have to take into account that when students start learning English for Specific Purposes, they, at first, show different levels of aptitudes towards language learning, at second, are distinguished by different learning styles (Malykhin & Aristova, 2019), and, at third, they can have different levels of language proficiency. Moreover, much depends on the aim of the ESP course, learning outcomes students have to achieve at the end of the course and the number of contact hours given to teachers and students for face-to-face instruction. To provide a descriptive summary of trusted language teaching approaches used for teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes scientific literature on the relevant methodology and normative documents were analyzed (Table 1).

**Table 1 The consolidated list of trusted language teaching approaches**

Approach (Method)	Type of instruction	Learning outcomes
Grammar-translation method	Teacher-centred instruction	<i>Foreign language accuracy:</i> - the ability to use grammar correctly - the ability to use vocabulary correctly - the ability to use punctuation correctly
Direct method	Teacher-centred instruction	<i>Foreign language fluency:</i> - the ability to read texts with good comprehension - the ability to communicate simple and complex ideas clearly and accurately in speech - the ability to pronounce words and word-combinations correctly
Audio-lingual method	Teacher-centred instruction	<i>Speaking skills</i> <i>Listening skills</i>
Communicative approach	Student-centred instruction	<i>Overall communicative language ability:</i> - linguistic competences - sociolinguistic competences - pragmatic competences
Blended-learning approach	Student-centred instruction	<i>A languages competence:</i> -language knowledge - language skills - positive attitude toward learning a foreign language
Action-oriented approach	Student-centred instruction	<i>General competences:</i> - declarative knowledge (knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge, intercultural awareness) -skills and know-how (practical skills and know-how, intercultural skills and know-how) - existential competence - ability to learn (language and communication awareness, general phonetic awareness and skills, study skills, heuristic skills) <i>A languages competence:</i> - linguistic competences - sociolinguistic competences - pragmatic competences
Competence-based approach	Student-centred instruction	<i>A languages competence:</i> <i>Language knowledge:</i> - vocabulary - functional grammar - register types - verbal interaction types - variability of languages

		<p><i>Language skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the ability to learn languages throughout life</li> <li>- the ability to understand and summarize information with different levels of proficiency from various spoken and written sources</li> <li>- the ability to hold discussions conversation on different personal, professional and social topics</li> </ul> <p><i>Positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strong willingness to learn languages</li> <li>- due recognition of the importance and richness of ethnic, language and cultural diversity</li> </ul>
--	--	---

Sources: Aristova, 2016; CEFR, 2001; Malykhin, 2015; Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences, 2006; Scrivener, 2011; Thornbury, 2006.

A descriptive summary tailored to the origin, main principles, learning outcomes, activities, advantages and disadvantages of reviewed approaches and methods appears below:

**Grammar-translation method.** The grammar-translation method originated from the so-called classical method which was used to teach the Latin and Greek languages in the medieval period. At those days religion was very important and church being extremely powerful was the primary source of education. Many families tried to place their children in church or monastery schools understanding that it was the only way to provide them with good quality education. Those who were lucky to attend church or monastery schools were expected to read Greek and Latin classics in the original, to copy scientific and religious text and to maintain correspondence. It happened because Latin was the dominant lingua franca in almost all European countries at that time (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008) and Greek was the language of religious literature and ancient treatises on history, literature, medicine etc. As the appearance of the classical method was attributable to the need to teach pupils to read classical literature and maintain correspondence in Latin and Greek, it was mainly focused on the development of reading and writing skills.

The idea to develop language learners' reading and writing skills also became the fundamental pillar of the grammar-translation method which was widespread from the 1840s to the 1940s. Its main aim was to give foreign language learners a sound knowledge of the grammatical basis of the language being taught and to develop learners' foreign languages accuracy through grammar and translation exercises, mechanical practice, error-correction exercises. Accuracy is regarded as "the extent to which a learner's use of a second language conforms to the rules of the language" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 2). Although nowadays the grammar-translation method fails to attract teachers and students attention because of doing monotonous exercises, it is still used by

some ESP practitioners who firmly believe in the paramount importance of language accuracy and consider it as a precondition of fluency.

The main principles of the grammar-translation method are as follows: the use of language learners' mother tongue as the main language of instruction for avoiding any misunderstanding in the ESP classroom; the main focus is on the development of language learners' reading and writing skills; learning various grammatical structures and lexical items (chunks) through translating them from the learners' mother tongue into the English language and vice versa; little attention is given to the development of language learners' speaking and listening skills.

ESP practitioners who uphold the principles of the grammar-translation method in their classrooms use different accuracy-focused activities which include various grammar and vocabulary building exercises, controlled practice, drills etc.

The main disadvantages of the grammar-translation method include the inability to make learners proficient in all four language skills, orientation towards development of writing and reading skills, low interaction among learners in the ESP classroom, a great waste of time on alike-type activities. What is more, it takes a long time to reach planned learning outcomes. At the same time, we cannot fail to recognize that the grammar-translation method has some undeniable advantages. Thus, it can be used in the ESP classrooms with a large number of learners, with limited teaching and learning resources or among learners with different levels of language proficiency.

**Direct method.** Industrialization which took place in the 18th-19th centuries made a substantial difference in the lives of many people in the world. It influenced greatly the development of travel and leisure industry, the construction of new plants and factories and the growth in imports. Thus, the development of travel and leisure industry enabled many people from industrialized countries to travel and interact with each other. The construction of plants and factories all over the world forced numerous qualified workers pulled up their roots in search for a better life. The strong growth in imports required experts who were able to promote it all over the world. That was exactly the time when people started paying much time to learning foreign languages in general and English in particular as it started gaining its popularity as a lingua franca among people from different countries. It happened because immigrants who turned over a new leaf didn't understand the official language of the country they came to. Tourists who in most cases couldn't speak any foreign language found it difficult to communicate with other people. And experts who dealt with imports had to communicate with their counterparts all over the world and they had to use one common language. These factors lead to the appearance of a new methodological approach – the direct method – which

was popular in France and Germany at the end of the 19th century and in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century (Richards & Rodgers, 1999). We concur with S. Thornbury's view that "the direct method was a response to the growing demand for learning languages for the purposes of international commerce and tourism" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 66).

In the ESP classroom the direct method is aimed at developing language fluency through teachers' demonstrations, pictures, explanations, rehearsal and repetition tasks. It should be noted that language fluency is considered as "the capacity to be communicative in real-time conditions" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 2).

The main principles of the direct method are as follows: to use the target language as the medium of instruction; to practice reading out loud on various topics; to practice oral fluency by speaking about different things.

Like any other methodological approach the direct method has its advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages of using the direct method in the ESP classroom include total immersion of learners in an English-speaking environment and the development of speaking and listening skills. The complexity of using the direct method among low English proficiency learners and the inability to use it in the ESP classrooms with a large number of learners are among its main disadvantages.

***Audio-lingual method.*** The main aim of the audio-lingual method which was introduced in the 1940s is to develop learners' foreign languages speaking and listening skills through rehearsal and repetition tasks, controlled pattern practice drills. As J. Scrivener (Scrivener, 2011, p. 31) states, it is usually done "through students listening to model dialogues with repetition and drilling but with little or no teacher explanation".

Even though audio-lingual method has a lot of advantages and is still used by some ESP practitioners, its main disadvantage is that language learners play a passive role in the classroom. It happens because all language material is taught through rote memorization which based on the constant repetition of particular grammatical structures does not allow language learners to communicate freely with each other.

***Communicative approach.*** It is considered that the development of the communicative approach was directly influenced by rising demand for ESP courses at the end of the 20th century (Scrivener, 2011). For J. Scrivener, the communicative approach is "a broad description of current language teaching in which the need to use language in successful communication is seen as more important than having a purely theoretical knowledge of how language works" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 397). Its main aim is to promote the development of communicative language competences through communicative free-production activities including games, role-plays, surveys, discussions etc (Aristova, 2014).

In the ESP classroom communicative approach is used in order to develop language learners' overall communicative language ability which comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Malykhin & Karpiuk, 2018).

**Competence-based approach.** Global and European education policy emphasizes the need to orient young generations for acquiring key competences which enable them to reach their full individual and professional potential. The Annex to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning emphasizes the need to develop eight key competences among all working people in the world, namely, “literacy competence; languages competence; mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering; digital competence; personal, social and learning competence; civic competence; entrepreneurship competence; cultural awareness and expression competence” (European Commission, 2018, p. 2). It is expected that the combination of these key competences enables new generations of university graduates to become active agents of change in all spheres of society, to become more competitive in the labour market and to realize their full potential. But despite their alleged equality we, however, believe that the languages competence is of paramount importance as it helps people not only to communicate freely with each other and share their opinions, but to protect and foster global cultural heritage and therefore feel full members of the world community. But what the languages competence is and what knowledge and skills it has to equip the language learners with are the questions that concern scholars, educators and foreign languages teachers all over the world. Although the necessity to develop key competences among different groups of working people and future university graduates is one of the most debated issues, a universally accepted definition which explains the meaning of competence is still lacking. Thus, according to Terminology of European Education and Training Policy (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education, 2014), a competence is defined in two ways. On the one hand, it is the “ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development)” (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education, 2014, p. 47), and, on the other hand, it is the “ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development” (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education, 2014, p. 47).

The main aim of the competence-based approach is to provide language learners with a languages competence at a level that will boost their foreign language performance in real work and life situations (Aristova, 2016; Malykhin, 2015).



**Blended-learning approach.** The main aim of the blended-learning approach is to develop a languages competence among foreign languages learners through combining face-to-face and online learning activities, site-base learning, group activities and simulations. The main advantage of applying blended-learning approach in instruction process is that it allows ESP practitioners to fulfil the individual needs of every language learner according to his or her learning styles and level of language proficiency.

The application of blended-learning approach in the process of developing learners' language knowledge, skills and positive attitude toward learning a foreign language has to be based on the following principles: to help ESP practitioners to tailor instruction process to language learners' learning styles and proficiency levels; to give language learners greater autonomy in developing their language knowledge and skills; to provide language learners with various authentic materials; to develop language learners' self-management skills.

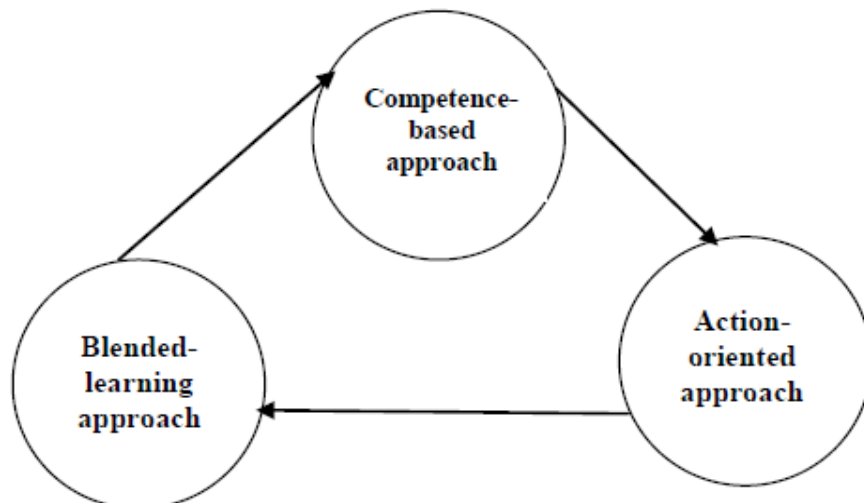
But it should be noted that the biggest challenge to applying blended-learning approach in instruction process is, however, ESP practitioners' digital illiteracy.

**Action-oriented approach.** The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) which is recognized by educational systems in many countries around the world clearly defines the action-oriented approach as the fundamental determining one in modern language teaching. The action-oriented approach views language learners as "members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action" (CEFR, 2001, p. 9). Its main aim is to promote the development of learners' overall communicative language ability through communicative free-production activities, problem-solving challenges, teacher-students and students-students communication. Developers of the CEFR are convinced that implementation of its main principles in foreign language instruction enables to develop the overall communicative language ability which covers all four language skills. The overall communicative language ability can be defined as a set of general and communicative language competences necessary for the personal and professional use of language learners in various social, professional and occupational situations. Thus, general competences are regarded as non-specific language knowledge, skills and characteristics which are needed for all kinds of tasks, including various language activities (CEFR, 2001). Communicative language competences enable foreign language learners to demonstrate the ability to use different languages for successful communication with all participants of a communicative process (CEFR, 2001).

The main principles of the action-oriented approach are as follows: the development of language learners' general and languages competence for

facilitating communication in social and professional spheres; the use of various authentic materials in instruction process; language learners are at the centre of instruction process; the use of active learning methods and techniques for developing language learners' general and languages competences.

Taking into account the fact that competence-based, action-oriented and blended-learning approaches differ remarkable from each other and have their own functions in instruction process, their combination presents a triad that allows ESP practitioners and language learners to achieve desired results more quickly. Thus, the competence-based approach is focused mainly on the outcomes language learners have to achieve at the end of the course. The action-oriented approach which incorporates the main principles of the communicative approach is concentrated on the process of achieving the desired learning outcomes while blended-learning approach provides ESP practitioners and language learners with necessary learning tools (Figure 1).



*Figure 1 The combination of language teaching approaches used by ESP practitioners in the present-day classrooms*

## **Conclusion**

The main objective of the research was to provide a descriptive insight into the most trusted language teaching approaches used in the ESP classrooms. In order to reach the main objective of the research we carried out a theoretical review of scientific literature aimed at understanding how methodology was conceived in teaching and learning English for specific purposes and providing a consolidated list of trusted language teaching approaches, analyzed their principles, learning outcomes, advantages and disadvantages, explained what influences the choice of one approach or another and whether to apply one single approach or a combination of approaches for achieving desired learning

outcomes in the ESP classroom. Having analyzed a significant amount of theoretical material we have come to the conclusion that the decision of any ESP practitioner on choosing what language teaching approach to apply in instruction process depends on such factors as his/her knowledge of language teaching methodology, the main aim of the ESP course, the desired learning outcomes, students' language proficiency levels and their learning styles. What is more, the analysis of the most trusted language teaching approaches, principles they are based on, learning outcomes they are aimed at, the advantages and disadvantages of their use in instruction process makes it possible to declare that having accumulated ideas and principles best for their time competence-based, action-oriented and blended-learning approaches play a crucial role in providing ESP students with improved languages competence.

Regarding the theoretical analysis and comparison of English teaching approaches and methods given in the paper, the materials presented could be a theoretical background for a further practical research aimed at proving experimentally the accuracy of the ideas concerning the importance of combining competence-based, action-oriented and blended-learning approaches for improving ESP students' languages competence.

### References

- Aristova, N. (2016). A general outline of methodological approaches in contemporary scientific literature. *Nowoczesna edukacja: filozofia, innowacja, doświadczenie*, 4(8), 26-30.
- Aristova, N. (2014). Innovatsiyini metody formuvannya inshomovnoii komunikatyvnoii kompetentnosti u vishchii shkoli Ukrainy. *Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu „Ostrozka akademiya”*, 42, 183-185.
- Collins English Dictionary* (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/english-for-special-purposes>
- Council of Europe. (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>
- Encyclopedia Britannica*. (2008). Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com>
- European Commission. (2018). *Annex to the proposal for a council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning* (2018). [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-24-F1-EN-ANNEX-1-PART-1.PDF>
- European Commission. (2017). European Master's in Translation Competence Framework. [Data file]. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/emt\\_competence\\_fw\\_2017\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/emt_competence_fw_2017_en_web.pdf)
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malykhin, O. & Aristova, N. (2019). Learning-style based activities in boosting undergraduate students' translation skills: Agrarian sphere translators' training. *The*

- Journal of teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 7(1), 105-114. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22190/JTESAP1901105M>
- Malykhin, O. (2015). Kompetentnisnyi pidkhd u navchanni inozemnoii movy studentiv filolohichnykh spetsialnostey. *Molodyi vchenyi*, 2.1(40), 462-465.
- Malykhin, O. & Karpiuk, V. (2018). Metodyka zastosuvannia IKT u protsesi formuvannia linhvokrainoznavchoi kompetentnosti studentiv-filolohiv. *Informatsiini tekhnolohii i zasoby navchannia*, 68(6), 112-124. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33407/itlt.v68i6.2171>
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences. (2006). [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>
- Richards, J. & Rodgers, T. (1999). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, P. C. (1980). *ESP (English for Specific Purposes)*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Scrivener, J. (2011). *The Learning Teaching: The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education. (2014). *Terminology of European Education and Training Policy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Thornbury, S. (2006). *An A-Z of ELT: A Dictionary of Terms and Concepts*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.