

How to Adapt Your ESP Course to E-Learning Resources and Tools

Ionițiu Ionela
Ovidius University of Constanța

The goal of this paper is to present a range of e-learning resources and tools and give proposals, ideas, or tips for their application in designing your ESP course. With the sudden uprise of applications (apps) available that encourage teaching and learning English, I have thought of adapting my ESP courses to these online resources to arouse my students' interests and needs. Since traditional face to face interactions are no longer possible today due to COVID-19, I have started adjusting my ESP course by using some interactive tools such as digital images, discussion boards, document sharing, electronic portfolios, social networking, and news feeds to improve my students' language skills. The teaching and learning proposals are provided to encourage an introspective, deliberate approach to the use of each technology tool within your ESP context.

Keywords: ESP (English for Specific Purpose), digital images, discussion boards, document sharing, electronic portfolio, social networking, and news feed.

INTRODUCTION

Even before COVID-19, there was already high progress and acceptance of education technology. With this unexpected conversion from the classroom in so many parts of the world, people are speculating whether the assimilation of online learning will continue to linger post-pandemic, and how such a conversion would influence the worldwide education market. I do not pretend to be an expert on online teaching, but I am a practitioner and I strongly believe that the blending of information technology in education will be further encouraged and that online education will in due course be designated and promoted as an indispensable part of school education.

After 17 years of working as an ESP teacher, I came to realize that teaching/ learning English for a specific purpose (ESP) is most compelling when you teach/ learn in a multi-sensory manner. Moreover, when your students are mainly digital natives¹ who communicate and learn via computers, SNS², and texting, online teaching will not be a problem for them. Just consider that it is another more appealing way of delivering your lesson, as it is worldwide acknowledged that e-learning can lead to better retention of information, better understanding, and learning. Therefore, you need to take advantage of content-based texts that are both appropriate to your context and to a difficulty degree that you/ your students can grasp. The desired outcome is that your students will learn how to master their ESP vocabulary and how to speak English fluently.

I do think that subjecting your ESP students to linguistic diversity early on is a really useful, pragmatic, and productive thing.

When adjusting my English courses for Civil and Mechanical Engineering students to the e-learning tools and resources, I took into consideration the following 3 basic principles:

1. Teaching/ Learning ESP is best when you offer content that is best suited for my students' interest.
2. When teaching/ learning ESP, multiple senses such as sight, sound, speech would be engaged concurrently.
3. Last, but not least, repeated exposure to ESP vocabulary enhances my students' learning outcomes.

In other words, I focussed on multi-sensory teaching/ learning, eager to transmit an infinite variety of information simultaneously and interactively, which helped my ESP students boost their specific vocabulary, refining their comprehension, and cultivating their spoken English skills. Moreover, the e-learning tools and resources used, focus on texts that displayed correctly constructed sentences which meant an improvement of English grammar as well.

Digital Images

Since it is quite difficult to imagine an ESP course without digital images (whether we are talking about photographs, paintings, cartoons, graphics, flashcards, or even videos), you need to pay attention to their role, that is to say: are they going to be used as merely aid and support or as a noteworthy constituent of communicating in English, and as a method of cultivating and improving students' communicative skills and creativity.

Whether included in an ESP course, given as hand-outs, or posted on social networking, the most essential contribution of digital images is to “add interest to instructional materials and engage learners with meaningful, relevant, and context-appropriate images to support learning”⁴³.

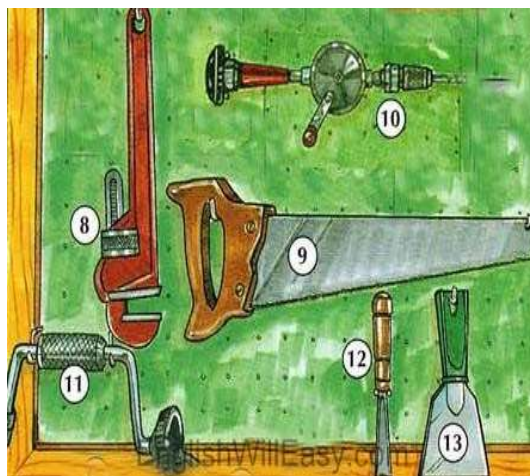
Therefore, I have started every unit/ chapter of my ESP courses with “ large high-impact non-stock images that are being used as a springboard to help establish the topic, activate schemata, and get students talking” (Donaghy, et.al., 2017 p. 3). After all, using images is almost always helpful for both teachers and students: teachers achieve the intended purpose through a more enjoyable activity, whereas students become more open and confident to perform and fulfill the task given.

Teaching/ Learning Proposals Engaging Digital Images

Chapter: Standard Operating Procedures of Hand Tools. You can start your online lesson by displaying pictures (or sound pictures) like the ones below and you can generate further interactivity by simply asking: What do you think about these?

FIGURE 1





Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?source=univ&tbm=isch&q=hand+tool+pictures&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjNpsCQ887rAhWJohQKHaneCnUQ7A16BAgKEFw&biw=1366&bih=657#imgrc=F2AmydyoNtra2M&imgdi=i=twupp6CUUBzvJM>

For a more appealing, interesting lesson, you can spice your teaching method by designing other supplementary picture-related, acting out, or speaking exercises/ activities such as these:

Pair work activity and brainstorming.

- a. **Ask your students to try to identify/ list as many hand tools as possible.**
- b. **Compare your lists and then check your answers using the following online glossaries:**
<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/general-hand-tools> or
<https://www.eslbuzz.com/tools-and-equipment-vocabulary-150-items-illustrated/>
- c. **Acting out: Ask them to think of a hand tool. Tell your partner about it and ask him to guess it. You can assign pairs and ask them to act out in front of the camera or even record the dialogue.**

For the reading and vocabulary activities and as an in-depth digitalize assessment you can upload and share documents on your online platform and ask them to:

- a. **Recognize and identify some of the basic hand tools and their proper uses in the construction trade and fill in the blanks with the missing words.**

“A (1.....) is a heavy paper with abrasive material attached to its surface. (1.....) is part of the "coated abrasives" family of abrasive products. It is used to remove small amounts of material from surfaces, either to make them smoother (for example, in painting and wood finishing), to remove a layer of material (such as old paint), or sometimes to make the surface **rougher** (for example, as a preparation to gluing).

A traditional (2.....) looks like a short plank of wood and often has a wide-body to ensure stability, and that the surface is measured correctly. In the middle of the spirit level is a small window where the bubble and the tube is **mounted**. Two notches (or rings) designate where the bubble should be if the surface is level. Often an indicator for a 45° inclination is included.

A (3.....) is a hand-tool for turning (driving) screws (and sometimes bolts or other machine elements with a mating drive system). A (3.....) will be easy to identify by its tip, which is shaped to fit, or mate with, a screw the head of which has a particular contour, or surface shape. A (3.....) is, thus, a mechanism to apply torque to a screw.

(4.....) are both cutting and holding pliers. They are often used by electricians and other tradespersons to bend, re-position and cut wire. Their namesake long gripping nose provides excellent control and reaches for fine work in small or crowded electrical while cutting edges nearer the pliers' joint provides "one-tool" convenience. Given their long shape, they are useful for reaching into cavities where cables (or other materials) have become stuck or unreachable to fingers or other means.“

(Adapted from <https://www.tangischools.org/cms/lib/LA01001731/Centricity/Domain/5179/Mod3HandTools.pdf>)

b. Write a word that has a similar meaning to the underlined part:

- “1. This tool combination allows you to turn a nut or a bolt without repositioning the tool on the fastener — as it happens with a wrench when there isn't enough room to turn it in a full circle. = s _ _ _ _ t w _ _ _ _ h
2. A tool used to tighten or loosen screws that have a straight, linear notch in their heads. = f _ _ _ e _ d s _ _ e _ _ _ _ e r.
3. A tool with a fine-toothed saw, originally and mainly made for cutting metal. = ha _ _ _ a w
4. A tool used to drive nails into a wooden surface, to shape metal, or to crush/ smash something. = h _ _ _ _ r
5. This tool is used whenever you need to cut tape, cord, cardboard, or other packaging material. = u _ _ _ _ y k _ _ _ e“ (Ionițiu, 2020, p. 14).

Since video meetings, live chats, and video tutorials posted on YouTube can be used for a wide range of purposes, you can share appealing, relevant videos with your ESP learners. For instance, ask them to watch the video and try to fulfill the tasks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4o0tqF0jDdo>

a. Mark the following statements as true (T) or false (F):

- “1. You can use a hammer and a punch to strike with and make a dimple.
2. A ratchet is a driver.
3. A Philips screwdriver has a flat tip.
4. A ball-pin hammer is used for sawing wood.
5. There are three different standard drills.

b. Answer the following questions:

1. How many tool families are mentioned in the video?
2. What is a double-opening wrench?
3. What is the difference between a socket wrench and a ratchet?
4. What is the difference between a ball-pin hammer and a carpenter’s hammer?“ (Ionițiu, 2020, p9. 15-16).

Discussion Boards in ESP Teaching

Discussion boards for online classes offer your ESP students the chance to tackle various course topics, to exchange ideas, and share information with the professor, as they would have done if they were involved in a traditional face to face interaction. Since discussion boards are associated with asynchronous learning, students are provided with better conditions to learn at their own space and pace, which means they are

given more time to think about the topic, the language or vocabulary choices they make, and the ideas before replying. Moreover, as discussion boards are regarded as a synchronous means of class interaction in online teaching as well, to enlarge student achievement or create greater student satisfaction or confidence booster during the online course, you need to consider several factors:

- Remember that you as a teacher are there to answer their question and to provide feedback, thus encouraging students to gain their knowledge by interacting, online communicating with each other.
- Pay attention to the length of your posts, because students tend to get bored and frustrated altogether if your posts are too long because reading through threaded discussion can get time-consuming.

Teaching/ Learning Proposals Engaging Discussion Boards

Via WebEx, Discord, Skype, Zoom you name it, you can upload your ESP slides and encourage communication in real-time among e-students by on-screen chats during a session.

To generate your ESP students' interest in the topic **Standard operating procedures of hand tools**, to re-activate their vocabulary and as an icebreaker for the reading/ document-sharing activities, you can display on your screen the questions/ subtopics below and ask them to share information from their personal experience or background:

- “What common hand tools do you know?**
- Which hand tools would construction workers use to build a house?**
- What tools would be used for cutting metal and sawing wood?”** (Ionițiu, 2020, p. 10).

For more efficient, productive communication you can divide them into groups and allocate them a certain question/ subtopic/ thread or even ask one of them to act as a moderator. Apart from engaging them with the topic or the course content, you can observe and watch their online discussions as well as stimulate “their critical and reflective thinking and knowledge building in an instructor moderated asynchronous environment.”⁴

Electronic Portfolios in ESP Teaching

The electronic portfolios are the direct result of the booming interest in technology and online teaching resources, which are conveniently used today during the pandemic since they are highly motivating for ESP students who are urged to display their work using electronic technologies (Microsoft Office - Word, Excel, PowerPoint -, SNS – Facebook, Discord, Skype -, digital and analog video, and WWW pages).

The most significant characteristic of electronic portfolios is to foster and enhance reflective learning, using topic-specific such as guided-speaking, listening, or guided-writing activities, in which learner self-assessment has a fundamental role. Since ESP is a student-centered approach as well as a tool for lifelong language learning⁵, self-assessment plays a vital role in the evaluation processes, by encouraging students to take full responsibility for their learning.

Regarded as a way to sharpen your ESP students' skills (oral and written communication, listening skills, critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving, negotiating skills to name just a few), electronic portfolios regularly consist of extensive diversity of materials such as students' written work (essays, descriptions, summaries, dialogues, presentations, e-mails and reflections on their progress), as well as recordings of student discussions, conversations and so on. Differently stated, electronic portfolios are collections of students' work that may be uploaded via e-mail or posted online on other SNS (called ‘web folios’) as a way of sharing their work to a larger audience.

Teaching/ Learning Proposals Engaging Electronic Portfolios

Students can include in their e-portfolio the following experiential, elicitive, and exploratory activities such as:

Writing activities

- d. *Write a short paragraph (no more than 70 words) describing a hand tool you frequently use.*
- e. *Comment on the following statement: There are some basic tools that every homeowner should own, whatever their skill level. (200 words) (Ionițiu, 2020, p. 16).*

Or ESP students attending Civil Engineering can improve their creativity, by including a three-dimensional building into their e-portfolio while simultaneously writing an essay such as:

- f. *Imagine you are a historical architect. Talk to your team project manager/ partner about ways of refurbishing a building. (200 words) (Ionițiu, 2020, p. 176).*

Social Networking and Newsfeed in ESP Teaching

People and digital natives in general love technology. And who can blame them? In the last couple of years, social networking websites have played an indispensable role in our daily life. We live in a world where people are more likely to connect with their electronic devices than with other people. And it makes sense. You can check your phone or laptop at any time of the day or night you want, but you cannot do the same things with your friends as they may be busy with their own activities. In the same way, you can always check for the latest news online instead of sitting tight and waiting for them to be broadcasted. In a way, this online technology offers us an immediacy that other people or things do not.

The global phenomenon of Facebook is a good example of this human-machine relationship. The fact that it offers you multiple possibilities of connecting and being informed has made it one of the most famous social networks in the world.

Social networks seem to have an answer for almost everything you are looking for today. Facebook does a particularly good job when it comes to that. It has this unique feature that is called News Feed which shows the user news about people and things they are interested in. The News Feed has become the place where anyone, American and Romanian users alike, can find news about friends, current and upcoming events, latest trends, and even advertisements. In other words, one of the most essential features of Facebook News Feed is the ability to release an unlimited diversity of information simultaneously and interactively.

“The goal of News Feed”, Varun Kacholia and Minwen Ji explained, “is to show the right content to the right people at the right time whether it’s from a close friend or a news source halfway across the world.”⁶

Teaching/ Learning Proposals Engaging Social Networking and Newsfeed

Today’s social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn and so) do not only allow you to keep in touch with your friends on a daily basis but also to get the latest news from the fields you are interested in. There are, however, certain boundaries to consider when incorporating social networks into ESP teaching. You need to set a clear cut distinction between professional and personal posts. You can initiate group pages for your entire ESP class and ask them to join, thus creating a network of professional contacts. You can post photos, announcements, advertisements, reminders of upcoming events. To enlarge their personal and professional work-oriented profile, you can ask them to investigate and share information related to a certain ESP topic, to promote and support a cause. For instance:

- g. **Ask students to monitor their Facebook pages during a 24-hour period and count how many posts were related to their area of interest, namely English for Civil Engineering.**
- h. **Ask them to divide the posts into two simply-recognizable categories: professional and promotional posts.**
- i. **To cultivate and improve their professional work-oriented profile, ask them to post their resume on various group-related pages, and see the impact on the labour market.**

CONCLUSION

It is a well-known reality that nowadays we live in a world governed by technology in perpetual development, a world in which today's amazing new development can become tomorrow's old news. The hasty development of technology is arising at a global level and it is influencing all of us, whether we want it or not.

Online teaching will not change you as a teacher, eventually, you will have to use the same teaching qualities, you will have to be as creative as possible and you will have to bear in mind that the student is again the focus of your lesson. Since it is our job to adjust and to find a better way to deliver our lesson, we should think of online teaching/ learning ESP in a positive mindset, as an opportunity because nowadays online teaching is a must as it is becoming a more active part of our professional life.

The e-learning resources and tools presented and assessed in this paper describe the latest tendencies and developments in technology. Needless to say that the tools used for learning, working, and socializing are starting to mingle. Even though many of these tools were not basically conceived for English language teaching and/ or learning, teachers and learners/ students have accepted their successful potential. Encompassing specific e-learning tools and resources is entirely your choice as an English language teacher because you will have to minutely assess and sort out those tools and resources that best satisfy the demands of your program's particular objectives and learning outcomes, and those that foremost fulfill the interests, and needs of your ESP students.

ENDNOTES

1. Digital natives is a term introduced in 2001 by Mark Prensky and is referring to a generation who was born and grew up in the era of global technology, including computers and the internet.
2. SNS stands for Social Networking Service and describes all the online vehicles used for bonding with other people.
3. <https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/elearningtoolkit/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ELearningToolsAndResourcesInESL.pdf>
4. <https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/elearningtoolkit/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ELearningToolsAndResourcesInESL.pdf>, p. 9.
5. Little D. The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio: Involving Learners and Their Judgments in the Assessment Process/ D. Little.–*Language Testing*, 2005.–22 (2).–pp. 321-336. <http://ltj.sagepub.com>.
6. Kacholia, Varun, Ji, Minwen., 2013 *News Feed FYI: Helping You Find More News to Talk About*. Facebook Newsroom, December 2, 2013. Web. 10 April 2015: online at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2013/12/news-feed-fyi-helping-you-find-more-news-to-talk-about/>.

REFERENCES

- Chambers, W. (n.d.). *E-learning tools and resources in ESL: Putting principles into practice*. Retrieved from <https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/elearningtoolkit/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ELearningToolsAndResourcesInESL.pdf>
- Donaghy, K., & Xerri, D. (2017). *The Image in English Language Teaching*. ELT Council, Malta. ISBN 978-99957-1-151-1
- Ionițiu, I. (2020). *English for Civil engineering, Part II*. Editura Universitară, București. ISBN 978-606-28-0064-2
- Little, D. (2005). The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio: Involving Learners and Their Judgments in the Assessment Process/D. Little. *Language Testing*, 22(2), 321-336. Retrieved from <http://ltj.sagepub.com>
- Mitchem, K., Fitzgerald, G., Hollingshead, C., Koury, K., Miller, K., & Tsai, H. (2008). Enhancing case-based learning in teacher education through online discussions: Structure and facilitation. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 19(2), 331-349.

- Pena-Shaff, J., Altman, W., & Stephenson, H. (2005). Asynchronous online discussions as a tool for learning: Students' attitudes, expectations, and perception. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 16(4), 409-430.
- Soliman, N. (2014). Using E-Learning to Develop EFL Students' Language Skills and Activate Their Independent Learning. *Creative Education*, 5(10), 752-757. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272655319_Using_E-Learning_to_Develop_EFL_Students'_Language_Skills_and_Activate_Their_Independent_Learning
- Turkle, S. (2011, December 2). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic.
- Varun, K., & Minwen, J. (2013). News Feed FYI: Helping You Find More News to Talk About. *Facebook Newsroom*. Retrieved April 10 2015, from <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2013/12/news-feed-fyi-helping-you-find-more-news-to-talk-about/>