

BEYOND TERMINOLOGY: ESP AND META-PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN
DIPLOMATIC, MEDIA, AND LEGAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

In an era of global interconnectedness, mastery of English for diplomatic, media, and legal communication has become essential for professionals engaged in international relations. This research explores how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) supports students' development of linguistic, analytical, and communicative competencies necessary for global diplomacy, legal discourse, and media engagement. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach conducted at the European University of Armenia. Data were collected through document analysis, participant observation of ESP classes, semi-structured interviews with instructors and students, and analysis of instructors' reflective journals. The collected data were examined through thematic analysis to identify patterns related to the development of cognitive, interpersonal, intercultural, and strategic competencies in ESP instruction. The study examines curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and discourse-based learning approaches implemented at the European University of Armenia, highlighting the role of authentic materials, task-based methodologies, and intercultural sensitivity in ESP teaching.

The research emphasizes the integration of authentic materials, such as diplomatic speeches, press releases, political interviews, and legal instruments, to develop students' critical discourse awareness and pragmatic competence. It also discusses task-based methodologies, including simulated press conferences, negotiation role-plays, and legal discourse analysis, fostering practical communication skills. Given the importance of legal discourse in international treaties and diplomatic agreements, the study underscores the necessity of Legal English training as a bridge between these domains.

Additionally, the research addresses the challenge of balancing linguistic precision with cultural sensitivity in international communication, as well as the growing role of AI-driven discourse analysis in ESP instruction. By bridging academia and professional practice, the findings contribute to the development of a dynamic ESP curriculum, equipping students with essential communicative and

strategic skills for diplomacy, legal reasoning, and media engagement in a rapidly evolving global context.

Keywords: ESP, diplomatic discourse, communication, legal discourse analysis, international relations, language teaching, meta-professional competencies.

Introduction

Language is more than just a tool of communication; it is a powerful instrument that bridges cultures, facilitates negotiations, and ensures clarity in international interactions. Diplomacy, media, and law, as three powerful arenas of influence, shape the global discourse that defines our world. In today's global classroom, success is defined not merely by linguistic fluency, but also by communicative flexibility. By teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), we equip our learners not only to speak, but to shape the global tête-à-têtes that will define our future world. Today, students need more than mastery of a foreign language or mere terminology—they require **meta-professional competencies** [Aguilar]. Domain-specific expertise is essential, but it is not enough anymore. We need professionals who are culturally agile, empathetic, and capable of communicating effectively in intercultural settings. This paper aims to investigate how ESP can foster meta-professional competencies in students pursuing careers in diplomacy, media, and law, focusing on the integration of intercultural communication and real-world practice in an EMI context. Specifically, it explores how ESP syllabi at the **European University of Armenia** have been designed to teach diplomatic, media, and legal discourse, bridging academia and international communication. Intercultural communication, a cornerstone of ESP, is illustrated through case-based examples that span legal, diplomatic, and healthcare settings. The findings contribute to the evolving pedagogical discourse on ESP in EMI (English-Medium Instruction) universities.

Scientific novelty of the study lies in the conceptualization of meta-professional competencies as an integrative framework for ESP instruction in diplomatic, media, and legal communication within an EMI higher education context. While previous ESP studies have examined domain-specific language acquisition and intercultural competence separately, the present research demonstrates how cognitive, interpersonal, intercultural, and strategic competencies can be systematically embedded into ESP curricula through authentic materials, simulation-based learning, and AI-supported pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the study contributes an empirically informed case analysis from the European University of Armenia, illustrating how interdisciplinary ESP programs can bridge academic instruction and professional communication demands in international settings.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the integration of meta-professional competencies into ESP instruction at the European University of Armenia. The research was conducted over an eight-month period during the 2025–2026 academic year. In total, 30 ESP instructors were observed, and nearly 500 students participated in the instructional activities analyzed in this study.

Data were collected through four complementary methods

First, document analysis was conducted on ESP curricula, course syllabi, assessment materials, and instructional resources used in courses including *ESP in Information Technology and Cybersecurity, Economics, Finance and Banking, Management, Marketing, Law, International Relations and Diplomacy, Tourism and Hospitality, Psychology, Cultural Studies, Architecture, and Graphic Design*. This diversity of disciplines allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how ESP pedagogical practices and meta-professional competencies are integrated across different professional contexts. While observations were conducted across these disciplines, the present analysis focuses specifically on ESP instruction related to diplomatic, media, and legal communication, particularly within the courses “*Professional English: ESP in International Relations and Diplomacy*” and “*Professional English: ESP in Law*.”

The purpose was to identify how intercultural, communicative, and professional competencies were reflected in learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment practices.

Second, participant observation was carried out in 30 ESP classes taught by 30 instructors across multiple disciplinary programs. Particular attention was paid to simulation-based activities, role plays, mock negotiations, courtroom simulations, discourse analysis tasks, and collaborative projects. Observation notes focused on instructional strategies, student engagement, and manifestations of meta-professional competencies during classroom interaction.

Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ESP instructors and students. Interview questions explored perceptions of the effectiveness of authentic materials, task-based learning activities, intercultural communication training, and professional skill development. Interview responses were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and perceptions.

Fourth, reflective journals maintained by instructors were analyzed to examine how intercultural communication, critical thinking, and professional communication skills were incorporated into classroom practice. These reflections provided additional insights into pedagogical decision-making and perceived learning outcomes.

Data from all four sources were analyzed through thematic analysis. Emerging themes were identified, compared across data sources, and subsequently organized into broader categories associated with cognitive, interpersonal, intercultural, and strategic competencies. Triangulation of

findings enhanced the credibility of the analysis by allowing patterns identified in one data source to be verified through evidence from the others.

Theoretical Framework: Meta-Professional Competencies

In the past, we focused heavily on linguistic accuracy and subject-matter knowledge. We taught our students to use technical terms with precision. And that was good, because it gave them the tools they needed to succeed in their respective fields. Today, in our interconnected world, it is no longer enough. The real challenge is to communicate effectively not just within a single discipline, but across globalized and culturally complex contexts. And this shift is where we see the need for meta-professional competencies-skills that transcend domain expertise and allow professionals to communicate across borders.

What are meta-professional competencies? Meta-professional competencies extend beyond discipline-specific knowledge and encompass transferable skills that enable professionals to operate effectively in complex, intercultural, and multidisciplinary environments. These competencies include critical thinking, intercultural awareness, communication skills, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving [Deardorff]. They are about being in demand in the global, multicultural, and interdisciplinary workplace with confidence. These include cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, critical thinking (analyzing texts, evaluating sources, formulating arguments in their field), digital communication skills, negotiation and diplomacy (cross-cultural interpersonal communication skills, the ability to present complex information clearly to international audiences, etc.), ethical reasoning, and collaboration (working effectively in multicultural teams on global projects). Meta-professional competencies can be categorized into four main areas:

- 1) *Cognitive competencies*: Critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills;
- 2) *Interpersonal competencies*: Empathy, active listening, teamwork;
- 3) *Intercultural competencies*: Cultural awareness and sensitivity;
- 4) *Strategic competencies*: Adaptive communication and decision-making.

The framework presented in *Figure 1* was developed by the author based on an analysis of the literature on intercultural competence, ESP pedagogy, and meta-professional skills, particularly drawing on the works of Deardorff (2006), Aguilar (2018), Bennett (2013), and Tran (2013). The framework was further refined through thematic analysis of the empirical data collected in this study, including classroom observations, interviews, document analysis, and reflective journals. Four overarching categories-cognitive, interpersonal, intercultural, and strategic competencies-emerged as recurring themes across the data sources and were subsequently organized into the conceptual mind map presented below.

Figure 1



Author-Developed Mind Map of the Framework of Meta-Professional Competencies Synthesized from Literature Review and Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Additionally, key soft skills include:

- *Intercultural sensitivity*: Understanding the subtle differences in how communication happens across cultures.
- *Pragmatic competence*: Knowing when to say something, how, and why.
- *Professional humility*: Recognizing that your way is not the only way.
- *Adaptability*: Adjusting to diverse discourse communities and professional settings.

Having discussed the importance of meta-professional competencies, we now turn our attention to how these skills are integrated into ESP curricula for diplomacy, media, and law. The following sections will explore each domain in detail.

Domain-Specific Instructional Approaches: Meta-Professional Competencies in ESP and EMI Contexts

As mentioned above, meta-professional competencies are not just “nice to have”; they are critical for success in EMI classrooms and ESP courses. Overall, these competencies are essential for *global communicators* who need to engage with diverse cultural perspectives and professional expectations. It is important to raise students’ awareness that we live in an era where *a single phrase can defuse a geopolitical conflict-or ignite one*. A single headline can shape international opinion, and the wording of a treaty can determine the fate of nations. In this context, English is not simply a language of communication. It is a language of *power, of persuasion, and of policy*. This is precisely where ESP becomes essential-not merely as a textbook subject, but as a bridge between the classroom and the world stage.

However, linguistic competence alone is insufficient. We must also cultivate cultural *sensitivity*. In diplomacy, directness can be seen as aggression. In media, euphemisms can mask the truth. In law, the same term may carry different interpretations across systems. Thus, we teach students how to *balance clarity with tact*, precision with empathy. How to master silences, metaphors, face-saving strategies, and culturally loaded terms. ESP, in this context, becomes not just a linguistic repertoire-but an instrument of *cultural intelligence*.

Domain-Specific Applications: Cultural Sensitivity as a Core Component of ESP

In Legal English, an international contract is not only about legal accuracy. It is about respecting differing cultural approaches to law, hierarchy, and negotiation. For example, the difference in **communication styles** - the Armenian focus on **clarity** and **directness** versus the Indian preference for **politeness** and **diplomatic language** - can cause tension, misunderstanding, and even stalled negotiations if not addressed properly. When an Armenian lawyer negotiates a contract in English with an Indian counterpart, it is not only about clauses - it is about **cultures**. What is considered professional and respectful in Armenia may be perceived as harsh or abrupt in India, and vice versa. The same contract language can have entirely different cultural meanings and implications. The need for **intercultural sensitivity** in ESP contexts must therefore be emphasized, as understanding how to balance **professional authority** with **cultural norms** is essential for successful communication [Bennett], [Tran]. It is not only about understanding the words; it is about understanding how those words **are perceived** in a different cultural framework.

Similarly, this challenge becomes evident when applying Medical or Psychological English in authentic role-play settings during university-level ESP classes. When an Armenian doctor or psychologist explains a diagnosis in English to an Indian or Arab patient, effective communication depends not only on medical terminology but also on how that information is conveyed. The same diagnosis may need to be communicated differently to ensure cultural appropriateness and understanding [Kourkouta & Papathanasiou]. In such contexts, healthcare professionals may need to adapt their communication style so that patients feel respected and understood within their cultural framework. For instance, in India, family involvement and respect for elders often play a significant role in healthcare decision-making, particularly in traditional settings. Consequently, a communication style that assumes individual autonomy may be perceived as inappropriate or insensitive. In Arab cultures, patients frequently expect a more personalized and empathetic approach, while the doctor-patient relationship often reflects a strong respect for professional authority. As a result, communication that appears overly clinical or impersonal may be less effective unless technical explanations are balanced with warmth and compassion.

The linguistic challenge, therefore, extends beyond accurate medical terminology to the selection of an appropriate tone and communicative approach. Ensuring that patients feel heard,

respected, and understood requires cultural sensitivity, which remains an essential component of effective healthcare communication.

Of the three domains, Legal English deserves special attention because legal language is the *infrastructure* of diplomacy and governance. International treaties, commercial contracts, political resolutions – all are written in legal terms. Legal English is a field where ambiguity can lead to serious consequences. A famous case illustrating this is the comma dispute in the US dairy industry (“the ‘Oxford comma’ case”). In a contract regarding overtime pay for truck drivers, the absence of an Oxford comma led to a multimillion-dollar lawsuit.¹ This case underscores the critical importance of precise punctuation in legal documents, as even a single missing comma can lead to significant financial and legal consequences. This example is an excellent way to show students that even minor linguistic details can have enormous legal implications.

Students should be aware of the fact that misinterpreting a clause, they will risk not just legal confusion, but diplomatic fallout. We emphasize legal terminology, clause structure, and contractual nuance—not to create lawyers, but to create professionals who understand the language that underpins international cooperation. So, ESP instruction for legal professionals should include case-based analysis, contract drafting, and courtroom terminology, ensuring clarity and legal certainty.

Intercultural Pragmatics in Diplomatic Communication and Media Discourse

Diplomatic communication requires precision, tact, and cultural awareness. Words are not merely vehicles of information; they shape perceptions, influence negotiations, and affect political outcomes. Scholars of diplomacy [Pehar, 13-29], [Eisenberg] have long observed that negotiators sometimes employ strategic or constructive ambiguity—the deliberate use of language that permits multiple interpretations—in order to facilitate agreement between parties holding divergent positions. Such linguistic flexibility can help preserve diplomatic maneuverability, reduce the risk of deadlock, and enable consensus on contentious issues. In teaching ESP for diplomacy, students must learn the nuances of *hedging*, *mitigating- expressions*, and *constructive ambiguity*, which are crucial for *ensuring precision strategic communication*, conflict resolution and efficient negotiation. A contemporary example of understanding legal instruments and interpreting clauses precisely is the example of “Paris Agreement on Climate Change”, where carefully crafted legal and diplomatic language ensures that commitments remain flexible yet binding. Teaching future diplomats the

¹ “the ‘Oxford comma’ case” refers to the legal dispute O'Connor v. Oakhurst Dairy, where the absence of a serial comma in Maine's labor law led to ambiguity regarding overtime exemptions. The law listed exempt activities as "canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution of" certain foods. The lack of a comma before "or distribution" made it unclear whether "distribution" was a separate exempt activity or part of "packing for shipment or. distribution." The court sided with the drivers, interpreting the ambiguity in their favor, resulting in a \$5 million settlement. Retrieved from <https://www.abajournal.com/news>.

difference between "shall" and "should" in international treaties is not merely grammatical categories of futurity and modality, it is essential, as “shall” implies obligation while “should” suggests recommendation.

Key skills for mastering media discourse include: clear, concise, and objective journalistic writing skills, effective strategies for audiences in case of public relations and responding with empathy in case of crisis management. An example is the COVID-19 pandemic, where the media’s choice of words shaped public perception. The difference between “quarantine” and “lockdown,” or “vaccine hesitancy” versus “anti-vaccine movement,” influences how the public reacts to health crises. ESP for media students must emphasize the responsibility of journalists to report facts accurately, avoiding biased or misleading expressions. Teaching ESP for media professionals should focus on *fact-checking*, *ethical reporting*, and *avoiding misleading language*. Hence, we anchor our instruction in authentic materials. Students analyze United Nations speeches, EU regulations, televised political interviews, and court transcripts. This is not just about language acquisition - it is about discourse awareness, understanding tone, power, implication, and intent. We ask: *Why did this spokesperson choose “firmly condemn” instead of “disagree”?* What happens when a legal clause lacks a modal verb? How does a journalist signal bias, subtly or overtly? These are the questions that shape global communication - and our students learn to recognize and respond to them.

Pedagogical Implementation; From Pedagogical Principles to Curriculum Design

As ESP educators, we are not solely teaching a language; we are shaping global communicators. The world of professional English is constantly evolving. Domain expertise is essential, but we must also prepare our students to operate effectively in a globalized, culturally diverse professional world. If we rethink our role as *global skills architects*, we will act as facilitators of future-ready professionals—those who can handle the complexities of international and intercultural communication with ease. Hence, it is beyond reasonable doubt that ESP teachers should emphasize the importance of not just linguistic accuracy, but also the ability to communicate compassionately and culturally appropriately, which is crucial in case of teaching Medical English in EMI contexts as students now and doctors in future must bridge the technical and cultural divides to provide holistic care.

Diplomacy, media, and law: these three spheres often intersect. And at their core lies the *strategic use of language*. Diplomats choose their words not only for clarity, but for nuance. Journalists shape narratives that influence public discourse. Lawyers rely on linguistic precision to uphold justice—or, at times, to manipulate it. This raises an important pedagogical question: how can students be prepared for this communicative reality? How do we ensure that they become linguistically competent and contextually intelligent? Firstly, the importance of specialized language skills should be emphasized. Specifically, given the demands of increasing globalization, students should be taught not only domain-specific terminology. To face effective cross-cultural communication challenges, they

should be taught to master the skills of overcoming those challenges linked to nuances of the foreign language, cultural sensitivity, and avoid miscommunication in case of diplomatic incidents, legal disputes, when reputational damage can be unavoidable.

Over the past years, the Chair of International Languages at the European University of Armenia has designed *interdisciplinary ESP programs* that reflect the communicative demands of real-world professions. We do not teach English in isolation when we teach English to students majoring in Jurisprudence and International Relations. We teach English as used in legal drafting, in international press briefings, and in diplomatic negotiations. Our courses draw from political science, law, media studies—and more importantly, from lived experience. Because in ESP, content is not supplementary. It *is* the context.

Pedagogical Strategies

At the European University of Armenia, ESP instruction incorporates authentic materials such as diplomatic speeches, legal contracts, and political interviews. Beyond theory, our classrooms become simulation spaces. Students become diplomats conducting mock negotiations, EU simulations (model European Union (MEU)) and Model United Nations (MUN) educational-academic simulations² as role-playing activities where students and professionals act as EU policymakers, diplomats, or politicians to negotiate and pass legislation. Participants practice diplomacy, public speaking, and debate by taking on the roles of Member State Ministers, European Commissioners, or Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). As well, the University students hold simulated press conferences, issue press releases, and defend legal arguments in mock trials. They learn to switch roles—to speak as both journalist and official, client and counsel—because empathy, adaptability, and perspective-taking are core components of 21st-century communication. These simulations are not just language exercises. They are professional rehearsals. Overall, task-based learning activities in ESP classes include *simulated press conferences, legal discourse analysis, negotiation role-plays, courtroom simulations and model UN and moot court scenarios*.

² Evidence of the educational simulations conducted by the European University of Armenia is available at the given official social media sites of EUA [EU simulations].

Figure 2



Skill-Oriented Pedagogical Strategies

These practices enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical and professional contexts.

Integrating Technology and AI in ESP

The future is already here - and we must teach our students to embrace it. **We are living in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution**, also referred to as the Digital Technological Age, where representatives of the chalkboard and textbook Generations, namely Generation X and Y are teaching Generation Z (born: 1997 – 2012) representatives who are called: *Digital Natives, AI-Native Learners, Mobile Learners, Tech-Savvy Students, Social Media Generation, Global Learners, Global Citizens, E-Learners, Gamified Learners, Blended Learners, Change Makers, Diversity Embracers, Self-Directed Learners, Entrepreneurial*. Indeed, we are witnessing an unprecedented collaboration among Generation X, Y, and Z in the digital age of AI reality. At the European University of Armenia, AI tools are integrated into ESP classrooms—not to replace human interpretation, but to enhance linguistic insight.

Recent research on AI-driven discourse analysis [Boeru], [Waly, Zakiyyah], [Tang, 2023], [Hooda et al] has demonstrated its potential in enhancing language learning, particularly for diplomatic and legal communication. By incorporating AI tools, we can better equip students to navigate the complexities of international discourse. By combining technology with critical thinking, we can create digitally literate, critically aware communicators—ready for the global arena. AI tools can be used to bridge academia and international communication assisting to generating realistic international scenarios for training future diplomats through model UN simulations, or equip law students with persuasive argumentation skills generating moot court competition scenarios, or refine reporting skills through real-world news events compiled by AI-driven tools. ESP serves as a vital bridge between

academic training and professional realities. Universities and training institutions must incorporate task-based learning, case studies, and simulations in their ESP curricula. By exposing students to authentic materials—real treaties, legal contracts, and media reports—they gain practical skills that prepare them for their careers. For instance, model UN simulations are an effective way to train future diplomats, while moot court competitions equip law students with the ability to argue cases persuasively. Media students benefit from analyzing live news reports and writing articles based on real events to refine their reporting skills.

Bridging Academia and Professional Practice

Collaboration with professionals is another means to bridge gaps. For instance, to invite well-known guest speakers, e.g. diplomats, journalists, and lawyers who are willing to share insights; create opportunities of short and long-term internships for students to gain practical, first-hand experience, and analyze successful strategies through authentic case studies instead of long and tedious lecturing. In our ESP program, we utilize task-based methodologies, such as mock negotiations, simulated press conferences, and legal discourse analysis, to foster critical thinking and practical communication skills. These activities allow students to apply their linguistic knowledge in real-world contexts.

Key Findings

Analysis of the collected data revealed four recurring themes. First, authentic professional materials significantly enhanced students' awareness of disciplinary discourse conventions and communicative expectations. Second, simulation-based activities such as mock negotiations, moot courts, and press conferences promoted the development of strategic communication and problem-solving skills. Third, intercultural case discussions increased students' sensitivity to cultural differences and improved their ability to adapt communication strategies to diverse professional contexts. Finally, both instructors and students reported that AI-supported activities facilitated discourse analysis and encouraged critical reflection on language use in professional settings.

These findings suggest that effective ESP instruction requires the systematic integration of authentic discourse, experiential learning, intercultural communication training, and reflective practice. The recommendations presented below derive directly from these observed pedagogical patterns.

Recommendations for ESP Program Enhancement

As to the smooth integration of meta-professional skills in ESP courses, these strategies are recommended for application:

- *Critical Incidents:* Analyze intercultural misunderstandings to reflect on how communication can break down across cultures.

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- *Role Plays*: Simulate negotiations or medical consultations across cultural settings.
- *Intercultural Case Studies*: Examine real-world examples where cultural differences led to success or failure in professional settings.

With respect to the assessment strategies for measuring our students' competence, these criteria are considered:

- Evaluate their skills in scenarios through Performance-based tasks/assignments,
- Give them opportunities to showcase their progress via submission of their portfolios, and
- Assess their fluency and argumentation skills during mid-term and final oral presentations.

Successful and conscientious completion of these steps can bring us to our central mission: bridging academia and professional practice. Our ESP classrooms must become training grounds for global citizenship. Our students must leave not only with certificates, diplomas, but with the confidence to negotiate, report, interpret, and persuade - on international platforms.

Conclusion

ESP teaching in diplomacy, media, and law must move beyond terminology to include intercultural intelligence and pragmatic competence. It is no longer enough to teach “about” language. We must teach language not merely as content, but as action - language that performs, persuades, and impacts the world. Undoubtedly, the stakes are high. Words today travel faster and farther than ever before. And their consequences - diplomatic, legal, and social - can be profound. The role of ESP in diplomatic, legal, and media discourse is indispensable; consequently, globalization has significantly increased the demand for ESP education. It is not efficient and reasonable to just teach terminology. We must teach what terminology does in context - and how it changes across contexts. To do this, we must integrate meta-professional competencies into our ESP curricula. As educators, our responsibility is to equip students with linguistic skills that empower them to master high-stakes communication confidently, by continuously innovating ESP curriculum. We, as educators, should proudly realize and admit that we shape the communicators of tomorrow - the lawyers, the journalists, the diplomats who will negotiate the future we all share. Through real-world applications, we can bridge academia and international communication, fostering a new generation of professionals who can engage effectively in global affairs. At the intersection of language, culture, and power, ESP is not merely a teaching tool—it is a strategic asset for future professionals. Because when we teach students how to communicate with purpose, we are not just teaching English - we are teaching global impact.

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