



## An ESP Workshop Syllabus for Seniors at “50 and Up” Puebla, México

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### Abstract

The present paper is a case study focused on identifying the main communicative needs of participants enrolled in the program called “50 and up” (50 y más) in the Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP) in Mexico, specifically in English courses. This work intended to create a proper syllabus especially for this group of people. Data were collected through a questionnaire of 11 questions taking into account a sample of 8 participants, inquiring in their emotions, skills, experiences, and topics course’s opinions to obtain accurate information which helped to create a syllabus with activities for the skills they considered most important; speaking and listening. This, in order to achieve their own purposes. By analyzing the answers, it is been possible to define the contextual topics and specific situations used to develop the activities which aim to cover the goals of the participants when learning the English language in each specific skill. Considering that most student’s main goal is to communicate when traveling out of the country, it is been concluded that the resulted syllabus can be applied to implement additional workshops aside from the main lessons. Having, as a result, a skill-based syllabus that functions as an extra tool that can help professors, social service students and administration people involved in this

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program to get the participants to reach their purpose; communication when traveling.

**Keywords:** ESP, seniors, skill, communicate, travel.

## Resumen

La presente investigación es un estudio de caso que se centró en identificar las principales necesidades comunicativas de los participantes inscritos en el programa denominado “50 y más” en la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) en México, específicamente en cursos de inglés. Este trabajo fue creado con la intención de desarrollar un programa de estudios adecuado especialmente para este grupo de personas. Los datos se recopilaron a través de un cuestionario de 11 preguntas entre una muestra de 8 participantes, éstas se enfocaron en las emociones, habilidades, experiencias, evaluaciones y opiniones del curso para obtener información precisa que ayudó a crear un programa con actividades para las habilidades que consideraron más importantes para lograr sus propios propósitos: hablar y escuchar. Al analizar las respuestas, fue posible definir los temas contextuales y las situaciones específicas utilizadas para desarrollar las actividades que tienen como propósito cubrir los objetivos de los participantes al aprender el idioma en cada habilidad. Teniendo en cuenta que el objetivo principal de la mayoría de los estudiantes es comunicarse cuando viajan fuera del país, se concluyó que el programa de estudios resultante se puede aplicar como un medio para implementar talleres adicionales que acompañen a las lecciones principales. Teniendo como resultado un programa de estudios basado en habilidades que funciona como una herramienta adicional que puede ayudar a los profesores, estudiantes de servicio social y administradores involucrados en este programa a lograr que los participantes alcancen su propósito; comunicación al viajar.

**Palabras clave:** ESP (inglés para propósitos específicos), adultos mayores, comunicar, viajar

## An ESP Workshop syllabus for seniors at “50 And Up” Puebla, Mexico

Among languages, English is the most learned around the world. This is caused by many reasons. Among some, In the first place, the advance in technology that makes more important to acquire it. Consequently, people need to understand it and produce it as a requirement to be updated in the current life. Second, the contact of people from different parts of the world which in most cases do not speak the same language in this case English takes its significant role as a Lingua Franca. For these reasons, among others, through the time people who have deeply studied the field of learning-teaching languages have developed several branches and subdivisions for a better and easier understanding. One of the newest is English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

ESP is a special area of English learning-teaching which is focused on improving certain skills or skill in a group of students or student. Different from the traditional perspective, ESP is centered in the student. Thus, in ESP “rather than fitting students to the courses, courses should be designed to fit students” (Nunan ,1999, p. 148) this with the goal to help students to reach their real intentions when learning a new language. Thus, “instead of teaching languages according to what the teachers and administrators think their students’ needs are, it is important to include the students into the process of decision making, taking their preferences and wants into account” (Gözüyeşil, 2013, par. 3). “ESP is a branch of language education that studies and teaches subsets of English to assist learners in successfully carry out specific tasks for specific purposes” (Thomas Orr, 2002, par. 2). So, this field of English seeks; first to improve the performance of the student in a specific context, field of study and skill/s. Second, it points to develop certain skill/s of the language, depending on the intentions of the learner.

In order to succeed in ESP teaching, a good organization is required. The following are important concepts concerned to the parts involved in the skeleton of the learning-teaching process; curriculum, course, syllabus. Nunan, (2000) defines “curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which

contribute to the planning of an educational program” (p. 6). From this comes “Course” which Hutchinson & Waters (1996) defined as “an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge” (p. 65). Then, “syllabus” Dubin & Olshtain (1997) defined as “a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translate the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level” (p. 28). This last concept is directly linked to lessons and activities because they are the parts which shape it in a very specific way.

All the above is important to the teaching-learning process, they are necessary to organize knowledge and to obtain the wanted results. In an ESP syllabus, as it is been mentioned before, the material is which defines the results of the participants in the course. Lest the material is not authentic, results will not be as pretended.

The material used in ESP courses must be authentic:

“When people first think of authentic materials, they usually assume that we are talking about newspapers and magazine articles. However, the term can also encompass such things as songs, web pages, radio & TV broadcasts, films, leaflets, flyers, posters, indeed anything written in the target language and used unedited in the classroom” (Shepherd, 2004).

This type of activities has not been created for the process of learning-teaching languages. As Widdowson (1983) said ESP and materials are focused on the practice, they pretend to be used in special situations, so it makes it easier to select proper content. Also, Smoak (2003) mentions “ESP is not teaching lists of technical vocabulary. materials should be appropriate and authentic” (p.27). Consequently, it is paramount the proper selection of the material to have quality syllabuses to achieve the objectives and goals of participants at any course. Even though, it could be difficult because the selection depends on the level of the students. “The trick, regardless of the text used, is not to edit and grade the text, but to grade the task according to your students' abilities” (Shepherd, 2004). So,

the facilitator must be prepared to adapt the materials to the students and themselves to the materials to finally succeed in ESP.

Equally important to the process of this project are the participants, who are professors and students. In the specific case of facilitators, they must fulfill some requirements and challenges in order to succeed in teaching ESP. First the specification of the field they pretend to teach, second the proper design of the syllabus they are working with; to get as much material related to the area as possible in order to plan specific activities as well as a sequence to follow in order to achieve the objectives.

Robinson (1991) stated that being flexible is the top characteristic of a facilitator of languages, specifically an ESP professor. This quality carries the change of General to Specific English instructor. Thus, Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) confirm that ESP instructors have not a unique role when teaching, besides teaching they must be course designer, researchers, and evaluators, etc. In addition, McDonough & Shaw (1993) consider that the design of material is hard task but enriches the people involved. It can be said that ESP is an enriching field of study which helps students and practitioners to highly improve their abilities in the language.

On the other hand, students, which are the central piece in the design of any ESP syllabus are better to fit some requirements to easy perform this job. Dudley-Evans & St. John, A. M (1998) consider that one of the features of ESP is more focused on adults who have at least a basic knowledge of the language, this with to objective to get good results. Because ESP seeks to develop certain skills in a certain area, the previous knowledge of the students is important as well as the consciousness of the learning process, which can be covered by adult students as well. Knowles (1948) defined an adult in four ways; the biological, the legal, the social, and the psychological. These concepts are the base of the andrological model of the author which clarifies the characteristics of adult learners and their reasons and processes to learn.

Continuing with adult processes of learning Brookfield (1985) describe it as an activity worried to help adults in their pursuit for control in their lives, within their social relationships, and to the social constructions they face in their everyday lives. Considering this, it is important to mention that teaching adults a second language implies many challenges because students at this stage of life ask



about every aspect of whatever they are learning. To support this, Knowles (1948) remarks in his andragogical model based on six assumptions that: “. Adults should be made aware of how a learning situation can be applied toward real-world experiences which in turn make learning more meaningful” (p. 55). Hence, the learning process cannot be done as when the students do not know that is happening, for example, children.

Oppositely to young students who learn with almost no questions about the new information received, adults need to know the how and why, and the transcendence that this new information will have in their real life. However, teaching adults is a great activity that enriches both parts, teachers, and students, and additionally, it allows us as professors to be always updated.

There are different types of adult stages which makes us even more interesting the work, for example, young adults and senior ones. Senior people have several benefits from studying, for example, increased self-confidence, increased feelings of health and well-being, reduced feelings of isolation, and increased engagement in the community (Donaghy, 2015). Additionally, he also mentioned that population are excellent languages students for a number of reasons for example they do not need any certification or diploma, they argue they have an intrinsic motivation or liking for what they do.

Given these points, studying a second language in an elder age and teaching senior people can bring positive aspects to both sides, students and professors because not only students learn something new but also young professors involved are damped for the vast knowledge of these people. They can enrich each other, learning back and forth, granted that facilitators can take advantage of the wide knowledge of people at this stage of life using it to the benefit of the entire society, for example, by passing this knowledge to their younger students thus creating a circle of learning. Thereupon, both parts can be equally benefited if facilitators manage the situation correctly.

Due to the changes in the society concerned to thoughts, education, moral, values, ways to live, life expectancy among others, population around the world is projected to be bigger every year, including senior population. In 2050 United Nations (2017) estimates world population will reach 9.8 billion. Being specific in Mexico, life expectancy was reported by INEGI as follows: in 2001, 74.09

years, in 2006 73.97 years and in 2011, 74.09 years (Bistrain, 2015). In addition, these senior people are looking forward to having a better quality of life, looking for different activities. This information leads us to realize the importance of having new and different activities for this area of our society. Nevertheless, some of the available activities are not focused on the true necessities of this type of students. This is because most of the programs are focused on a younger public with purposes in most cases related to academic or employment. Hence, when trying to fit the existent programs to seniors' students, necessities are not completely covered, leaving a lack of satisfaction or frustration in both parts. Consequently, in order to facilitate the enjoyment of this stage of life options started to be created globally.

This study is remarkable due to in order to offer quality and efficient learning to senior students is necessary; first of all to identify where they want to apply the knowledge, secondly, to guide it in a correct way so they can feel comfortable studying and finally, to have a proper syllabus that both parts can take advantage from. Brookfield (1985) stated that “adults like their learning activities to be problem-centered and to be meaningful to their life situation, and they want the learning outcomes to have some immediacy of application” (p.48). As a result, this research will improve the learning process and results of senior students at the specific context described.

Since this senior adult student population was not the most common when learning languages, few academic programs had been designed completely for them. However, the present and the future projected increase in this sector of the global population, as mentioned before, has led to turning the attention to this public.

Institutions and universities around the world, with the purpose of improving the quality life of the community in which they are immersed, have been creating new options of activities objected to enrich these people's life. The “Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla” (BUAP), in Mexico, in the urgency to expand and improve the programs specifically for this citizenry has released, in 2016, a program to elder people called “50 and up” (50 y más). This program is been aimed to teach adult learners at 50 years old and up. There, different types of instructions are offered, among them English. Since the beginning of this program, the language has been taught with the help of a

“National Geographic” method book called “Word English”. With a total of eleven levels, and having as a base the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (English, 2019) the structured course is as follows:

Chart No.1 Levels of %0 and up program

Program Level	CEFR Level
Introductory 1	A1
Introductory 2	A1
Basic 1	A1
Basic 2	A1+
Pre Intermediate 1	A2
Pre Intermediate 2	A2+
Intermediate 1	B1
Intermediate 2	B1+
High intermediate 1	B2
High intermediate 2	B2+
Advanced	C1

Source: Common European Framework

However, through the pass of the time, professors working at this program have been asked by the students to study specific situations of the language, which were not completely part of the syllabus of the book. Then, it was noticed that students’ goals went further than learning general English skills. In most cases they wanted to learn how to use the language in a specific context, traveling.

The present paper looks for designing a syllabus that fits the linguistic necessities of this special group of people: seniors, at “50 and up” BUAP. Firstly, it is intended to cover the linguistic needs of this group of students. Granted that at the end of the courses they can apply the knowledge in a real-life situation. Secondly, it aims at developing an appropriate syllabus that might be applied even in other courses of languages addressed to the same group of people in the same program. To achieve these objectives the next questions have been established in order to get the student’s goals.



- a) What are the linguistic needs of seniors at 50 and up learning English in Puebla city to perform the intended goal?
- b) What is an appropriate syllabus for seniors taking English courses at the “50 y más” program?

## Methods

This study is been placed into ESP since it is the field in which specific contextual topics can be analyzed to develop syllabuses. It fits perfectly to the elaboration of this paper. Having as a main purpose to respond to the urgency of seniors for having a specific program designed to cover their needs. This is a qualitative case study because it analyses the feelings, skills, experiences, and topics courses opinions, all these to clarify what are their real final goals when learning English. Thus, to implement a new syllabus that helps them to achieve their wanted results. Taking the outcomes from the questionnaires not in terms of numbers but in terms of reflection. The answers have been analyzed for the previous design of the syllabus.

## Participants

The participants of this case study are seniors from 50 years old and up, taking the first and second level of the series of courses, introductory 1 and 2. Most of them retired from different professions. A group of 8 people among women and men were taken to answer the survey that guides the results of the present paper. The participation was voluntary, anonymous and informing the participants of the academic researching purposes of it. They were all enrolled in the program called “50 and up”, in some cases not only in English but in other instruction courses offered by the program.

## Instrument

The instrument was a survey of 11 questions (see appendix 1). These questions have been divided into four main groups which reflected the emotions,

skills, experiences, and opinions about the topics that the participants had had until the date of the application. Analyzing them properly, it is been possible to have the results and conclusions which were the base to the design of the syllabus model. The questions were written as follows: First, motivation; objectives, and benefits; a group of three questions pointing to the emotions the participant had toward the lessons. Second, skills; a three-question part that interrogates their opinions about their weakest and strongest skills in the language. Third, experience; two questions related to previous, present and likely future real contact in which the language might be involved. Fourth, course: three questions related to the themes they considered should be implemented from their perspective to facilitate their acquisition of English.

## Data

The data were collected through a sample of 11 questions. The queries were aimed to answer the two research questions. All of them were focused on the true intentions of the students to learn the language. Previously, it was possible to know what the main skills for them are to practice in order to get the wanted results. After asking them to write down their opinions, the answers were analyzed and organized into four categories: emotion, skills, experience, course' opinions. As a result, an ESP syllabus it is been developed.

## Results

The results have been analyzed and, in this section, there is a brief description of that. In the first part of the survey, participants were asked to mention their three main motivations, objectives, and benefits of learning English all these three related to emotions. The answers were:

*“I frequently travel, and I lose a lot of the experience because I cannot speak the language. It is a necessity to be updated”.*

*“To be able to travel to other countries and not to have problems with the communication. My family lives abroad and it would be helpful to speak well”.*

*“I want to communicate with my grandchildren. They live abroad”.*

*“To listen and to understand what people say, once there was a strike in “Lufthansa” my airplane had a 6 hours connection but and the end it was only 20 minutes waiting, I was the last one to get in it”.*

*“When traveling, directions are in English and I want to be able to understand”.*

*“To travel more frequently, to negotiate with clients”*

*“Understand and express myself when I travel, I feel really comfortable when I communicate in a different language. I will continue traveling and I want to learn well this language.”*

*“To travel, to keep my mind active, to understand the music I like”.*

Generally, it has been noticed the interest of the participants to communicate when traveling, rather to English speaker countries or not they know how necessary the language is when traveling. Some of them reported the urge to be with their families or for tourism. With this, the topic of the syllabus has been concluded as “traveling”

In the second part of the questionnaire, they were asked to report their perceptions about the skills they needed to settle their objectives, also what were in their perception the most difficult and easiest ones. Below the answers:

*“Speaking and listening, speaking is difficult because it is not pronounced as it is written”*

*“Speaking because I feel embarrassed to seem ridiculous for not pronounce correctly”.*

*“Speaking because of the accent”*

*“Listening is harder to me because of the pronunciation of each person”.*

*“Listening for me is very difficult to understand”*

*“Speaking and comprehension of the topic”*

*“Writing because I get confused with the spelling”*

*“Speaking I would like to have real talks”+*

As it can be observed in seven out of eight answers the skills listening and speaking have been mentioned. Pointing out that these skills are the most important for the participants to progress in, leaving the other two, reading and writing, as the easiest for them to practice.

The third part of the instrument went over the previous and future possible experiences to the participants with the English language, this with the intention to know the likely use they pretend to give to the knowledge.

*“When going to the cinema in another country”*

*“I travel a lot to California, and I cannot communicate with my nephews who do not speak Spanish”*

*“When there are problems when traveling be aware of them and to know what to do”*

*“In China, I was lost. Can you help me? Can you tell me where the exit door is?”*

*“When I travel, at customs I feel bad because I don’t know why they are asking me. I communicate with signs”*

*“I have not had the opportunity to speak by myself, I always ask for a translator”*

*“Go on vacations”*

*“Always someone else translates for me”*

*“In the airports, I have to write phrases before traveling to communicate”*

By analyzing this part of the survey, it is been noted that the context in which they have had problems using the language when traveling was the process of passing borders and documenting; customs. Additionally, they long to communicate with their families. Therefore, it is been established these topics as the main situations for the activities: process when traveling.

Finally, in the last part of the sampling, their preferences about the course’ activities are been asked through three questions. This with the purpose to

develop exercises that can entirely catch their attention and consequently to get them advance in the language.

*“Dialogues in common situations like in the airport or in the restaurant”*

*“Games and presentations”*

*“Conversations to survive abroad”*

*“More speaking exercises”*

*“Speaking and structure activities”*

*“Singing, role plays to simulate being other people”*

By analyzing this last part of the questions, the materials and activities have been adapted from authentic material to topics all related to the process of traveling from the beginning to the end.

Thanks to the analysis of the answers, it was possible to design a 10-week syllabus thought to be applied once per week, considering that the complete course has a length of 12 weeks. It is based on two skills, listening and speaking. It was adapted an activity of each skill per week. The activities are planned to be applied together, in the same session. Taking as a starting point a video, from this information the facilitator will set questions to the students and from where he/she will have them to talk. The material selected it is authentic. The facilitator will be in charge and will mediate and control the session taking into consideration the skills he/she observes in the participants measuring the difficulty of the questions. Also, the resulted syllabus is intended to be applied to students to the basic levels because they already have more practice in the language and can speak on a basic level. Below, there is an example of the first week of the syllabus (check appendix 2):

Chart No.2 Content syllabus

Week	Skill			Video Link
	Contextual Topic	Listening	Speaking	
1	Where do I want to go?	Listening comprehension about English speaker countries around the world.	Discussion about English speaker countries and preferences to travel.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6guMDO3mNcg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6guMDO3mNcg</a>

Source: researcher



## Conclusions and limitations

At the beginning of the project, the main idea was to develop a new syllabus based on the needs of this special group of people. After applying the instrument, it can be concluded that most of the students have the intention to travel in the future or have traveled in the past. However, getting advanced in the analysis, it was noticed that traveling is an aspect which could not cover the whole course topics. Therefore, the developed syllabus can only be used as an additional tool in workshops. It will complement the regular lessons; consequently, students will reinforce that part of the language and will reach their objectives. At the same time professors, social service students and administrators will be benefited due to the enrichment of the materials used for these courses.

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## **Appendix 1: The questionnaire has been applied in Spanish to easier answering Questionnaire for detection of needs**

We appreciate that you take a few minutes to answer this questionnaire to know your needs in learning the English language.

1. - Mention your three main motivations to study English.
2. - Mention your three main objectives when learning English.
3. - Name three personal and three professional benefits obtained when learning English.
4. - What skill do you consider easier to develop in English (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and why?
5. - What skill do you consider most difficult to develop in English (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and why?
6. - What skill do you most want to develop when studying English (reading, writing, speaking, and listening)?
7. - Name three possible personal situations and three professional ones where English could be used by you.
8. - Have you had the opportunity to use English in a real context? Describe it.
9. - Mention three specific topics that you would like to study in this course.
10. - Make a brief description of how you would like English lessons in this course.
11. - What kind of activities would you like to do in class?

This information will be used for research purposes. The information of the participants will be anonymous. Any information related to this research communication to 22 27 44 89 60 Norma Huerta. ofehuerta@hotmail.com

## Appendix 2: Content syllabus

Skill				
Week	Contextual Topic	Listening	Speaking	Video Link
1	<b>Where do I want to go?</b>	Listening comprehension about English speaker countries around the world.	Discussion about English speaker countries and preferences to travel.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6guMDO3mNcg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6guMDO3mNcg</a> (Neoxide, 2018)
2	<b>Getting ready.</b>	Listening comprehension about the process of getting a VISA for Mexican people in the United States.	Discussion about the steps and process.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCft0XrCBg8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCft0XrCBg8</a> (Juarez, 2010)
3	<b>Travel planning/ Booking</b>	Listening comprehension about airb&b application.	A debate about the advantages and disadvantages of using this type of applications.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evqnIKVX8RM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evqnIKVX8RM</a> (Techboomers, 2017)
4	<b>Customs</b>	Listening comprehension about the most common question at the customs.	Relate the experiences related to the topic.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fONXiug0I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fONXiug0I</a> (English C. , 2018)
5	<b>Directions airport/train</b>	Listening comprehension about directions.	Identify what really happened in the video.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ikl_1f-aYQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ikl_1f-aYQ</a> (Geographic, 2014)
6	<b>Arriving at my host place.</b>	Listening comprehension about front desk situation at a hotel.	Talk about the situation, possible questions, and answers.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKhHGF rVQek">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKhHGF rVQek</a> (TheServiceChannel, 2013)
7	<b>England</b>	Listening comprehension about the do's and don'ts in England.	Compare to Mexico.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v714NqaK_Fw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v714NqaK_Fw</a> (World, 2018)
8	<b>The United States.</b>	Listening comprehension about	Compare to England.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w6ephOxnTY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w6ephOxnTY</a>

		the do's and don'ts in the United States.		(World, Visit America - The DON'Ts of Visiting The USA, 2017)
9	<b>Eating out</b>	Listening comprehension about cheap and expensive places to eat around the world.	Comparison of the two.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPv_1tCk8P0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPv_1tCk8P0</a> (Alux.com, 2017) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PU2XJa-7HTg&amp;t=136s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PU2XJa-7HTg&amp;t=136s</a> (WatchMojo.com, 2018)
10	<b>Shopping souvenirs</b>	Listening comprehension about advice when buying souvenirs.	Talk about previous experiences.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X28vy8CAcjs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X28vy8CAcjs</a> (World, What NOT to Buy When You Travel, 2015)

Source: researcher