

## Innovative Methods in Teaching ESP

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### Abstract

This article aims to discuss the basic concepts of the —English for Specific Purposes| (ESP) approach to language teaching in higher education institutions, its features, impact of methodology and describes the selection of teaching materials based on learners' specific needs, the role of teachers and students in this process and difficulties related to teacher, student, environment and others in teaching English for Specific Purposes.

**Keywords:** basic concepts, ESP; language teaching, methodology, teaching materials, learners 'specific needs.

### INTRODUCTION

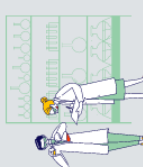
English for specific purposes has been defined by many writers and researchers, such as: Mackay and Mountford indicated that the term ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clear utilitarian purpose. Hutchinson and Waters, they defined it as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner 's reason for learning, they added also that the term ESP implies that, it is English which is somehow peculiar to the range of principles and procedures which define that particular profession. Belcher states that ESP assumes that the problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts and thus must be carefully delineated and addressed with tailored to fit instruction. Strevens' (1988) definition of ESP makes a distinction between four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics are that ESP consists of English Language Teaching which is:

- designed to meet specified needs of the learner;
- related in content (that is in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- centred on language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics and so on, and analysis of the discourse;
- in contrast with \_General English'.

The variable characteristics are that ESP

- may be restricted as to the learning skills to be learned ;
- may not be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

We believe that a definition of ESP should reflect the fact that much ESP teaching, especially where it is specifically linked to a particular profession or discipline, makes use of a methodology that differs from that used in General Purpose English teaching. By methodology here we are referring to the nature of the interaction between the ESP teacher and the learners. In more general ESP classes the interaction may be similar to that in a General Purpose English class; in the more specific ESP classes, however, the teacher sometimes becomes more like a



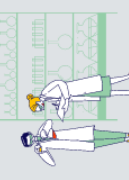
language consultant, enjoying equal status with the learners who have their own expertise in the subject matter.

### Characteristics of ESP

There are many features that stand out in an ESP course. Firstly, ESP is a multidisciplinary activity; therefore, it is necessary to understand how written and spoken text works in a particular discipline or profession and essential to be sensitive to cultural differences both academic and professional world. Secondly, it uses authentic materials which are used as vehicle of information rather than linguistic object. Thirdly, ESP exploits learners' previous and current academic skills and knowledge and professional experience. In the ESP classroom the teacher may not have the knowledge of the content, but learners have. For instance, an ESP teacher may not know how exactly a business run, but they know what language and how it is used in it. Therefore, the ESP practitioner must use the learners' greater knowledge of the content. Furthermore, the practitioner needs to include specific subject content and balance content level and language level to have real content as language learning approaches and subject learning approaches are integrated in an ESP course. Fourthly, distinctive teaching methodology which is different from General English is used in ESP except pre-study or pre-work ESP where learners have not started their academic study and professional activity. For instance role play, case-study, project work and task based teaching are commonly used in ESP classes. Fifthly, ESP is designed for specific discipline or profession for limited duration or longer duration and for learners who are often advanced or intermediate adults with at least some basic knowledge and skill of English.

### Material Development

It is important for ESP teachers to have a great deal of experience both in teaching and material development – providing and writing. According to Jones (1990) —ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time (p. 91). Even though plenty of commercially published ESP textbooks available now, none of them are suitable to meet students' specific needs. Consequently Jones (1990) argues that there is no book to be called as an ESP textbook and suggests having a resource bank with variety of materials for the teachers to choose. It does not mean that every ESP practitioner needs not be a good material designer, but needs to be a provider of suitable material, be creative with the available material, modify according to learners needs and supplement with extra materials. There are certain key issues that ESP practitioners must consider when they develop materials. ESP materials need to be more visually illustrative to help learners showing the processes of relationship, and the language used in the illustration has to be functional. Therefore, ESP material should be visual based in order to improve learners' visual literacy like increasing the power of observation and reporting what they observe. As a result, video clips, sound files are compulsory in ESP material. As ESP follows learner centered approach, it should explore



technology to provide learners varied choices. Furthermore, ESP should use topics, themes, activities and methodology that are specific to subject and the profession.

Adaptation and revision of ESP materials are part of any ESP program whether published or tailor-made material is used. In EAP, ESP teachers consult with the content teachers or work with them as a team to provide and update ESP materials suitable to learners' academic program and EOP teachers include specific language skills and linguistic items required in a particular job.

### Methodology

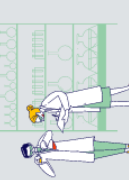
ESP makes use of the methodology of other content subjects. This is the strength of ESP methodology that integrates language learning approaches and subject learning approaches. Widdowson (1983) wrote —ESP (or ought logically to be) integrally linked with areas of activity (academic, vocational, professional) which... represent the learners' aspirations (pp. 108-9). For instance ESP uses case studies, project work and tasks. Furthermore, a typical ESP class uses video discs, CD-ROM, the internet, e-mail and Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL). Role play, real play and simulation play have a key role in an ESP classroom. Content Based Instruction and Task Based Instruction are very useful in ESP classrooms. ESP teachers make use of learners' specific subject knowledge, which makes classroom interaction and methods different from General English. A good ESP teacher will try to minimize the negative effects of the learners' emotional reactions to learning and will instead try to boost the positive emotions by using the following strategies:

- Use pair work and group work to minimize the stress of speaking in front of the class, for example, pyramid discussion;
- Structure the task, i.e. introduce the task, remove hurdles, give clear instruction, concept checking, demonstrating the task, run the activity, close the activity and give feedback;
- Give time to think and do, listen to the learners, ask questions, give enough time to think and answer, allow them to complete;
- Emphasis on the process rather than the product as the correct answer is not the most important issue but getting the answer is important;
- Include fun, variations, varieties;
- Avoid monotonous and mechanical teaching.

### The Role of the Student

The learners come to the ESP class with a specific focus for learning, subject matter knowledge, and well-developed adult learning strategies. They face the task of developing English language skills to reflect their native-language knowledge and skills.

1. Focus for Learning: The ESP student has a particular purpose and focus for learning. People learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting. ESP is a vehicle for such opportunities. Students will acquire English as they work with materials which they find interesting and relevant and which they can use in their professional work or further studies. Successful learners pay attention to the meaning of the language they hear or read and do not focus



primarily on the linguistic input or isolated language structures. The ESP student is particularly well disposed to focus on meaning in the subject-matter field. In ESP, English should be presented not as a subject or body of facts to be learned in isolation from real use, nor as a mechanical skill or habit to be developed. Rather, English should be presented in authentic contexts to acquaint the learners with the particular ways the language is used in functions that they will need to perform in their specialty fields.

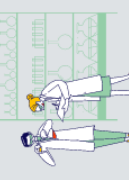
2. Subject-Matter Knowledge: Learners in the ESP classroom are able to make a real contribution to the language learning process. They are generally aware of the purposes for which they will need to use English. Having already oriented their training toward a specific field, they see their English instruction as complementing this orientation. Knowledge of the speciality area enables the students to identify a real context for the vocabulary and structures of the ESP classroom. In this way, the learners can take advantage of what they already know about the subject matter field to learn English.

3. Adult Learning Strategies: Learning as an adult has advantages -- adults must work harder than children to learn a new language, but the learning strategies they bring to the task enable them to learn faster and more efficiently. The skills they have already developed in reading and writing their native languages will make learning English easier. Although the English of the students you will be working with will most likely be quite limited, the language learning abilities of the adult in the ESP classroom are potentially great. Language learning continues naturally throughout our lives. Educated adults are constantly learning new language behavior in their native languages; expanding vocabulary, becoming more articulate in their fields, and modifying their linguistic behavior in new situations or new roles. ESP students can tap these natural competencies in learning English.

The role of the teacher

In teaching ESP the role of the teacher or ESP practitioner is special, as he or she has to perform five important functions:

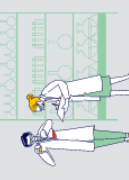
- teaching (didactics);
- designing the course, the choice and/or preparation of teaching materials;
- co-operation with academic teachers and/or employers;
- carrying out analyses of the students' needs, target situation and discourse;
- providing an evaluation of the students' progress and an evaluation of the course. The number of tasks the ESP teachers have to perform also distinguish them from the General English teachers, who usually realize their programme on the basis of a chosen textbook. Dudley Evans and St John describe the role of the ESP teacher as being: 1) Teacher, 2) Collaborator, 3) Course designer and materials provider, 4) Researcher, and 5) Evaluator. The first role as —teacher is the same as that of the General English teacher. It is the necessity for performing of the other four roles by the ESP teacher that makes for the difference between these two types of teaching. In order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and functions of the target discipline, the ESP practitioner has to acquire the knowledge of the particular scientific discipline with which he or she is dealing, and understand the problems faced by the professions connected with that discipline. To achieve these goals, collaboration with field



specialists and with those who are being taught on the course and who may well be more familiar with the specialized content of materials than the teacher, may well prove to be helpful. ESP teachers do not have to possess the specialist knowledge of the subject matter, but noticing that the students have already gained this knowledge, the teacher may ask them for clarification of some terminology and definitions of some concepts, creating, in this way, a real communicative situation. ESP practitioners are often required to design courses and prepare teaching materials. One of the problems the ESP teachers face is the assessment and determination of how specific those materials should be. Hutchinson and Waters state that materials should cover a wide range of fields, arguing that the grammatical structures, functions, discourse structures, skills, and strategies of different disciplines are similar. An analysis of these factors enables the ESP teacher to establish teaching aims, choose an appropriate syllabus, make an appropriate choice of teaching content and employ, suitable teaching methods and materials. Teaching ESP should be based on a functional syllabus, the purpose of which is to develop communicative competence in the area of the target profession. To achieve this, the best solution seems to be team teaching, that is, joint teaching by both the subject specialists and the English teachers. The specialists can be the source of information on matters concerned with the subject discipline, they can provide materials and be guest lecturers, while the language teachers can explain the linguistic problems to their students and train them in the various communicative skills in the foreign language which is being targeted. Teaching ESP is a challenge to the teacher, who should possess the knowledge not only of language teaching methodology, but also of their students' specialist disciplines. Moreover, the ESP teacher should be flexible in undertaking decisions and remain open to the suggestions and opinions from the students.

Three techniques can be recommended to the ESP teacher:

1. Become familiar with the ESP course materials Of course every teacher should always be familiar with the materials to be used in class. But in this instance the familiarity must extend also to understanding exactly the ESP intention of each text and exercise. The course-books will have been written, almost certainly, in a collaboration between a teacher of English and a subject specialist. The course writer will thus have been aware of the main difficulties and unfamiliarities facing the teacher, and will have dealt with most of them in the accompanying teacher's notes.
2. Become familiar with the language of the subject. Remember the experience of the professor's secretary, the hospital almoner, the reader of *Scientific American* or of the *New Scientist* — in short, the educated layman who from interest or necessity accepts and becomes familiar with the language of a subject, though without pretending or seeking to become a specialist in the subject itself
2. Allow students to put you right! Do not be above letting the students correct your solecisms in the subject (not errors in English; the teacher will not normally commit errors of grammar, for example). Then you will be in a stronger position to help the students with their mistakes in the language. The most important requirement is that the teacher should regard success with teaching an ESP course as a professional challenge.





### Challenges in teaching ESP

Difficulties Related to Students Demographic characteristics and demands of learning English for specific purposes of students: according to Suzini et al. (2011), the students' demand for ESP is not met adequately, as follows:

- students are not ready for ESP courses;
- ESP classes are often too large;
- sometimes ESP classes are delayed or canceled for no obvious reason;
- students find that ESP is too different from general English;
- ESP teaching methods are still passive;
- ESP teachers' qualification is inadequate.
- most students are used to the traditional teaching and learning methods.

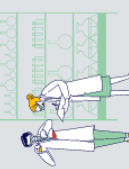
Lack of vocabulary: Maruyama (1996) pointed out the reasons for students' lack of vocabulary: The students believed that they did not need to know words because they were not common, even rarely used in their daily lives; Therefore, they had no motivation to learn the words, and Most English teachers could not teach them these words because the teachers themselves were not well acquainted with these scientific terms. Many students think that ESP terms are rarely used, especially in their daily lives, so they have no motivation to learn and remember them.

Dependence on dictionary and lack of skills in using dictionary: lack of vocabulary, especially ESP terms, makes many students depend on dictionary and get stuck whenever they encounter a new word (Maruyama, 1996). Specifically, when they see an entirely new word, they can not guess its meaning and nor can they ignore it to understand the text. That's because students have no knowledge of English etymology, so they can not understand meaning of a sentence when they do not know meaning of a word or a few words in it. As a result, this dependence limits the flexibility and imagination of learners. Lack of skills in using dictionary is also a worrying problem. When using dictionary, many students only pay attention to the first meaning of a word and do not concern with its other meanings and usages. Besides, teachers do not often teach dictionary using skills to students. Concerning listening and speaking skills, students practiced these two ones very little in class because they spend most of their time learning grammar, vocabulary and reading text documents. Teachers do not pay attention to listening and speaking activities; and often give students two-language lectures (native language and English). Therefore, students only remember individual words and can not express their opinions in English for specific purposes.

### Conclusion

ESP is taught in many universities of the world. Many professional associations of teachers of English (TESOL, IATEFL) have ESP sections. Much attention is devoted to ESP course design. ESP teaching has much in common with English as a Foreign or Second Language and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Quickly developing Business English can be considered as part of a larger concept of English for Specific Purposes.

Future of ESP According to Nunan (2001), the demand for English language education around the world is increasing because it is the language of international business, technology and



science. Therefore, ESP will flourish and grow more in non- native English speaking countries. ESP will use computer based curricula and authentic texts. In other words, ESP will use more sophisticated learner centered curricula. Since ESP is sensitive to the learners' background and the context in which the learners use English, it will be sensitive to cross cultural issues (Connor, 1996). As a result, ESP will research the cross cultural issues related to ESP learning. ESP will still use need analysis, however, the focus of need analysis will be shifted because ESP will be done more in non native English speaking countries.

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