



TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

The most important difference lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English. ESP students are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions. An ESP program is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required. ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures.

Keywords: specific, teacher, opportunity, methodology, purpose.

English for a specific purpose was developed to meet the needs of individual learners and their specific needs, and is designed for specific disciplines. It makes some, but not exclusive use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, namely Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). It is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre (Anthony 2005) ESP is designed for adult learners in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at a secondary school level, but is generally with intermediate or advanced students (Steinhausen, 1993). However, it seems that more and more secondary schools are trying to meet the needs of their students' future professions these days. Also, a lot of effort has been made to build a bridge between secondary and higher education. Despite many failures, this link has sometimes proved productive, meaning that those involved in the link changed the exam purpose of GE to the more challenging and particular purpose of ESP. It may be argued though that in some cases the idea has been to pass a particular exam; then we would have to consider whether the exam itself has really been a 'specific purpose English exam.

ESP is a style of teaching, as they all are, that has positive and negative aspects. Coming from a background unrelated to the discipline in which they are asked to teach, ESP teachers are usually unable to rely on personal experiences when evaluating materials and considering course goals. They are also unable to rely on the views of learners who tend not to know what English abilities are required by the profession they hope to enter. The result is that many ESP teachers become





slaves to the published textbooks available, even when the textbook they are using aren't perfectly suited for the needs of the student. There are many resources available on the net and websites that offer information but how much background reading does the ESP teacher need? In order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and activities of the target discipline, the ESP Practitioner must first work closely with field specialists (Korotkina, 2005). An ESP teacher should remember that they are not specialists in the field, but in teaching English. Every time that person enters the classroom they should understand that our subject is English for the profession, and not the profession in English. They should help the students, who generally know their subject much better, develop the skills which are essential for them in understanding, using, and/or presenting authentic information in their profession. A professional ESP teacher must be able to easily switch from one professional field to another without being obliged to spend months on getting started.

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been seen as a separate activity within English language teaching (ELT). It is believed that for some of its teaching ESP has developed its own methodology and its research draws on research from various disciplines in addition to applied linguistics – this is the key distinguishing characteristic of ESP. ESP, if sometimes moved away from the established trends in general ELT, has always been with needs analysis and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their field of study or work situation. The emphasis of ELT is always on practical outcomes. The theory of ESP could be outlined based on specific nature of the texts that learners need knowledge of or need

related nature of teaching 1) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) involving pre-experience, simultaneous/in-service and post-experience courses, and 2) English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) for study in a specific discipline (pre-study, in-study, and post-study) or as a school subject (independent or integrated). Pre-experience or pre-study course will omit any specific work related to the actual discipline or work as students will not yet have the needed familiarity with the content; the opportunity for specific or integrated work will be provided during in-service or in-study courses [1, p. 42]. Another division of ESP divides EAP and EOP according to discipline or professional area in the following way: 1) EAP involves English for (Academic) Science and Technology (EST), English for (Academic) Medical Purposes (EMP), English for (Academic) Legal Purposes (ELP), and English for Management, Finance and Economics; 2) EOP includes English for Professional Purposes (English for Medical Purposes, English for Business



Purposes – EBP) and English for Vocational Purposes (Pre-vocational English and Vocational English); in EAP, EST has been the main area, but EMP and ELP have always had their place.

The classification of ESP courses creates numerous problems by failing to capture fluid nature of the various types of ESP teaching and the degree of overlap between “common-core” EAP and EBP and General English - e.g. Business English can be seen as mediating language between the technicalities of particular business and the language of the general public, which puts it in a position between English for General Purposes (EGP) and specialist English. Therefore, some authors suggest (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) the presentation of the whole of ELT should be on a continuum that runs from General English courses to very specific ESP courses as illustrated in Table 1. Regarding positions 2 and 3, it is only the overall context of the program that decides whether a particular course is classified as ESP or not. At position 4, the work is specified in terms of the skills (it is important to choose appropriate skills to focus on - e.g., some doctors will need to read some medical journal, others will need oral skills to talk with their patients) taught, but the groups are not homogenous from one discipline or profession (scientists, engineers, lawyers, doctors), so the individual members can need texts dealing with their specific profession [2, p. 127]. Teaching materials prepared need contexts acceptable and understandable to all branches. At position 5 the course becomes really specific – the key feature of such courses is that teaching is flexible and tailored to individual or group needs. Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language. The complexity of this training which constitutes the core of most teacher training courses can be made simpler if the distinction is to be made between three aspects of it. They are: 1) The skills component which includes three different skills required by the teacher: a) command of the language the teacher is teaching – this component must ensure that teacher’s command of foreign language is at least adequate for class purposes; b) teaching techniques and classroom activities – the major part of teacher training is to assimilate a great body of effective techniques; c) the management of learning – it is a crucial part of teacher’s classroom skills to learn how to assess from moment to moment the progress of each individual in the class and how to manage the classroom activities so that most able learners are not frustrated by being held back, while the slowest are not depressed by being left behind. The skills component requires practical training in performing the skills themselves. Using skills as a framework of ESP, ESP teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge and tools to deal with their own students’ specializations. It should be remembered - ESP teachers are not



specialists in the field, but in teaching English, their subject is English for the profession but not the profession in English. A professional ESP teacher must be able to switch from one professional field to another without being obliged to spend months on getting started. The material should be provided by the professors or experts in the subject. It should always be authentic (the main purpose of teaching skills is to enable students to deal with authentic information despite their level of English), up-to-date (the informational exchange is growing more intense), and relevant for the students' specializations (they ought to be given the information representative for their target language use situation) [3, p. 147-160].

References

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