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Innovative Role of English Teachers through ESP

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Abstract: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a learner-centered approach in English Language Teaching (ELT). An important trend in the teaching of language has been that the teacher, especially the ESP teacher creates her own materials and devises tasks based on the needs of the learners. The teachers rely on their own materials rather than depending on other resources. It is an arduous task for the teachers as they have to make a thorough need analysis and so have to focus on factors such as the learning objectives, the methodology, the outcomes and most importantly the level of students. This paper focuses on improving the communicative competence of ESP learners.

Keywords: ESP, English, Teacher, and Language.

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INTRODUCTION

Innovative Role of English Teachers through ESP

I keep six honest serving-men.

(They taught me all I knew.)

Their names are what and why and when and How and Where and Who. (Rudyard Kipling)

ESP is an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners. Much of the work done by ESP teachers is concerned with designing appropriate courses for various groups of learners. Thus, whereas course design plays a relatively minor part in the life of the General English teacher- courses here are usually being determined either by tradition, choice of textbook or ministerial decree- for the ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload.

Designing a course is fundamentally a matter of asking questions in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent processes of syllabus design, materials writing, classroom teaching and evaluation.

We need to ask a wide range of questions: general and specific, theoretical and practical. Some of these questions will be answered by research; others will rely more on the intuition and experience of the teacher; yet others will call on theoretical models. We can use Kipling's 'honest serving men' to outline the basic questions. We need to know:

- **Why** does the student need to learn?
- **Who** is going to be involved in the process? This will cover not just the student, but all the people who

may have some effect on the process: teachers, sponsors, inspectors, etc.

- **Where** is the learning to take place? What potential does the place provide? What limitations does it impose?
- **When** is the learning to take place? How much time is available? How will it be distributed?
- **What** does the student need to learn? What aspects of language will be needed and how will they be described? What level of proficiency must be achieved? What topic areas will need to be covered?
- **How** will the learning be achieved? What learning theory will underlie the course? What kind of methodology will be employed?

DEFINITION OF ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1997)

Absolute Characteristics:

- ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
- ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves
- ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable Characteristics:

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English.
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work

situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.

- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

ESP should be seen simple as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. This is a similar conclusion to that made by Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) who state, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning".

From the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham, and Aston University in the UK) and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English speaking countries.

ESP teachers are all too often reluctant dwellers in a strange and uncharted land. Three problems which arise are:

- the lack of an ESP orthodoxy to provide a readymade guide
- the new realm of knowledge the ESP teacher has to cope with
- the change in the status of English Language Teaching

Over and above the aforementioned difficulties, ESP teachers may also have to struggle to master language and subject matter beyond the bounds of their previous experience. Put briefly, does the ESP teacher need to understand the subject matter of ESP materials? Taken in isolation, the answer to this question must be 'yes'. Teachers of social or literary English would not enter the classroom understanding little about the content of the texts to be taught. We need to ask ourselves three questions: a) Does the content of the ESP materials need to be highly specialized? b) Why do so many ESP teachers find it so difficult to comprehend ESP subject matter? c) What kind of knowledge is required of the ESP teacher?

ESP teachers will often have to orient themselves to difficult problems with little or no guidance. There are no easy solutions to this situation, but some methods that might be useful are:

- Surveys of the history and present state of ESP in one's own or neighboring countries
- Formation of groups of ESP teachers, perhaps allied to any existing organization to promote ELT, to further the support and development of ESP
- Establishment of newsletters and other forms of publication, for exchanging information and views about ESP in our country

- provisions of pre- and in-service teacher training focusing on ESP issues, viz. workshops, seminars, short course, etc.

The ESP teacher should not become a teacher of the subject matter, but rather an interested student of the subject matter. One final point to note is that, as with learner needs, teacher knowledge is not a static commodity. Many ESP teachers are surprised at how much knowledge of the subject matter they 'pick up' by teaching the materials and talking to students.

To sum up, if there is to be meaningful communication in the classroom, it is essential that there is a common fund of knowledge and interest between teacher and learner. However, in a learner-centered approach, this is not seen as a one-way movement, with the teacher having to learn highly specialized subject matter. Instead it should involve negotiation, where text subject matter takes account of the teacher's existing knowledge and at the same time efforts are made to help the teacher to acquire some basic knowledge about the subject. Of greatest importance is the need to dispel the mystique of specialist knowledge and build up the ESP teacher's confidence in coming to terms with it.

- a) ESP is not a matter of teaching specialized varieties of English. The fact that language is used for a specific purpose does not imply that it is a special form of the language, different in kind from other forms. Certainly, there are some features which can be defined as typical of a particular context of use and which, therefore, the learner is more likely to meet in the target situation.
- b) ESP is not just a matter of science words and grammar for scientists, hotel words and grammar for hotel staff and so on. There is much more to communication than just the surface features that we read and hear. We need to distinguish, as Chomsky did, between *performance* and *competence* that is between what people actually do with the language and the range of knowledge and abilities which enables them to do it.

c) ESP is not different in any kind from any other form of language teaching, in that it should be based in the first instance on principles of effective and efficient learning. Though the content of learning may vary there is no reason to suppose that the processes of learning should be any different from the ESP learner than for the General English learner. There is, in other words, no such thing as an ESP methodology, merely methodologies that have been applied in ESP classrooms, but could just as well have been used in the learning of any kind of English.

ESP must be seen as an *approach* not as a *product*. It is an approach to language learning which is based on learner needs. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? From this question will flow a host of other questions,

some of which will relate to the learner themselves, some to the nature of the language the learners will need to operate, some to the given learning context. ESP, then, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning.

We can try to work out a strategy for dealing with the problem:

- a) The first step is to try and establish groupings along broad subject lines: commerce and economics, physical sciences, medical and biological sciences etc. This should be within the reach of almost all institutions.
- b) Avoid highly specific materials and try to give everyone's specialism some chance. In this way you may not please everyone all the time, but at least you won't displease anyone all the time.
- c) Look for topics which give access to a number of different specialist areas. Take pumps as a simple example: pumps are found in the body (the heart), in houses (central heating systems), in engines (petrol pumps), in hospitals (peristaltic pumps in heart-lung machines) etc. Using topics like this, learners can apply the ideas and language of a core text to their own specialist field.
- d) Make learners aware of the lack of specificity of their needs. Get them to discover it for themselves by doing their own language analysis. Find texts from different specialism and get the learners to analyze the language to try to find out what makes one subject text different from another. In this way they should be able to see for themselves that the language is not significantly different. You can try a similar technique for skills/strategies.
- e) If people are having fun, they are far less likely to complain. Making the methodology more interactive and enjoyable can be a valuable weapon in countering demands for subject-specific ESP.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, there is little justification for having very specific materials. But learners will still demand them. Coping with this situation will be greatly eased by first of all trying to understand why learners demand such materials, then trying to negotiate a compromise: making learners more aware of their real needs and using an enjoyable methodology to divert attention from areas of possible conflict.

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