



ESP at the Tertiary Level: Current Situation, Application and Expectation

Dr. AbdulMahmoud Idrees Ibrahim

English Language Department, Faculty of Education

Alza'eem Alazhari University

E-mail: amdid@maktoob.com

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes is an obligatory subject for the first two levels at the Sudanese Universities. It is taught as a university requirement. Accordingly, the students obsess is how to pass the examination not achieve any development in the language field. Even the teachers concentrate on the content rather than the skills, which the students ought to gain.

This paper addresses the issue of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It defines ESP with brief glimpse of its history and it attempts to highlight the line of demarcation of ESP and AEP. Moreover, it will endeavor the objectives of core course of ESP at the tertiary level in Sudanese Universities.

Furthermore, how we should mobilize all the efforts to overcome the difficulties to promote the students competency in English language in their very field of specialization. As technology has created change in all aspects of society, it is also changing our expectations of what students must learn in order to function effectively.

We should exploit the modern technologies effectively to radically change from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach in teaching ESP. Consequently, the availability of computer and its utilization in different fields of specialization will be very facilitative and motivating for at least the contemporary generation.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (AEP), Sudanese Universities

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes, so far, is probing its way in our Sudanese universities. It is taught as a university requirement. Unfortunately, our students are disappointed when they graduate confronting the real situation in the workplace to use their ESP background. Most of the students feel they discontent with the syllabus which had been taught, because it doesn't meet their needs. Furthermore, the EFL teachers concentrate on teaching general English rather than ESP. This situation evokes the question whether we teach English for Academic purposes or English for Specific Purposes at the tertiary level. Whatsoever the case ESP or EAP is an obligatory subject for the first two levels at the Sudanese Universities. Accordingly, we should investigate the topic to characterize the term first, and then discuss the relevant issues. We have to find out what kind of language acquisition is actually required by the learner.

According to my personal experience with many universities, we follow a traditional approach of teaching and examination. As matter of fact, the students' obsession is how to pass the examination rather than to achieve any development in the language field; on the other hand, the teachers themselves concentrate on the content rather than the language skills, which the students have to gain. Optimistically, this situation is gradually changing and the teachers are getting aware of need analysis in designing their material to meet the goals of his learners.

This article addresses the issue of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It defines ESP with attentively attempts to highlight the line of demarcation of ESP and EAP. Moreover, it will endeavor the objectives of the core course of ESP at the tertiary level. Furthermore, how we should mobilize all the efforts to overcome the difficulties to promote the students communicative competency in English language in their very field of their specialization.

The Current Situation of ESP

There is an obvious confusion between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and (EAP) English for Academic Purposes. For this reason we should attempt to distinguish the line of demarcation between the terms.

What is EAP?

Let us first attempt to define English for Academic Purposes to be acquainted with the topic. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a kind of courses designed to help the overseas students to cope with their intended college courses; accordingly, such students of EAP must have some background in English language. The classes which are given for

EAP students focus on the four skills as well as grammar using everyday English, so as to be more effective in their everyday lives. Orr (1998) states that:

“English for General Purposes (EGP) is essentially the English language education in junior and senior high schools. Students are introduced to the sounds and symbols of English, as well as to the lexical/grammatical/rhetorical elements that compose spoken and written discourse ... University instruction that introduces students to common features of academic discourse in the sciences or humanities, frequently called English for Academic Purposes (EAP), is equally ESP.”

Consequently, it can be said that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) are one. In fact, what is taught in the general education or private institutions is typically English for general purposes and to some extent what is taught now in our universities under the term ESP is typical general English.

What is ESP?

English for Specific Purposes or English for Special Purposes (ESP) has developed gradually to be an important area of interest for all who are concerned with the activities of the discipline it serves. There are many fields of interest with various activities which require special linguistic competency such as technical English, scientific English, medical English, English for business, English for political affairs, and English for tourism. Wright (1992) defines the concept of English for Specific Purposes, “ESP is, basically, language learning which has its focus on all aspects of language pertaining to a particular field of human activity, while taking into account the time constraints imposed by learners”. Orr (1998) goes further on clarifying the line of demarcation between ESP and EAP stating that:

“English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is research and instruction that builds on EGP and is designed to prepare students or working adults for the English used in specific disciplines, vocations, or professions to accomplish specific purposes”

It is obvious that ESP context must be preceded by a sizeable background of general English. As it has been argued, ESP is associated with mature learners by and large, because it has a strong relationship with specialization in different fields of concern.

Although ESP is a controversial issue, consequently, there is much misinterpretation concerning the exact definition of ESP. Moreover there is a hot debate whether or not English for Academic Purposes (EAP) could be considered part of ESP in general. Some scholars described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified.

Mackay and Mountford (1978: 2) defined ESP as the teaching of English for a “clearly utilitarian purpose”. The purpose they refer to is defined by the needs of the learners, which could be academic, occupational, or scientific. These needs in turn determine the content of the ESP curriculum to be taught and learned. Mackay and Mountford also defined ESP and the “special language” that takes place in specific settings by certain participants. They claimed that those participants are usually matures. They focused on adults because adults are usually “highly conscious” of the reasons to achieve English proficiency in the very field of their specialization. Inevitably, adults make use of the specialized language in authentic situations, because the activities of their specialization compelled to use the appropriate ESP.

Fortunately, Dudley – Evans, Coeditor of the ESP Journal did a good job by defining ESP in terms of ‘absolute’ and ‘variable’ characteristics.

Definition of ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1998):

2.3.1. Absolute Characteristics

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

2.3.2. Variable Characteristics

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English
3. 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
4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems

Apparently, Dudley-Evans' benefitted from Stevens' (1988) definition in his characterizations for the term. However, he has improved ESP significantly by including more variable characteristics "in contrast with 'General English'" (Johns et al., 1991: 298). The division of ESP into total and variable distinctiveness and makes the matter more clear. However, the distinction between General English and ESP is very thin, but it is tangible as Hutchinson et.al. (1987:53) claims, "in theory nothing, in practical a great deal."

Most of ESP definitions distinguish three themes: the nature of language to be taught and used, the learners, and the settings in which the other two would occur. These three aspects of ESP are very much connected together. ESP is the teaching of specific English (specialized discourse) to learners (adults), who will use it, in a particular setting (business, engineering, medical field, science, etc.) in order to realize a practical purpose.

Bearing in mind all the definitions mentioned, we admit that ESP is broader than what we apparently bounded to, in our universities. Hence, ESP may be considered as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. The likewise (Hutchinson et al. 1987:19) state that, "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".

Accordingly, ESP teachers should be aware for the matter and should not concentrate on teaching general English, but they have to satisfy their students' needs for the language in the different fields of specialization in order to use the language linguistically correct verbally or on paper.

Application of ESP

ESP is considered as a goal directed kind of language; therefore, the students are not learning the English language for its own sake, but because there is a need for its exploitation in the workplace and they are enforced by a certain motivation. ESP is considered as a major field of EFL teaching at present. It begins to emerge from the EFL field since the 1960s. EFL teachers nowadays are more aware of the role of ESP in the different modern fields of specialization.

As a matter of fact, ESP development is obvious in the growing number of universities offering an MA in ESP and in the number of ESP courses offered in Great Britain and America. That indicates ESP is determined by specific learning needs of the language learner. Therefore the teacher's role should not be restricted to mere teaching, but should extend to be a course designer, researcher, evaluators, and an active participator in all of aspects of the teaching/learning process.

Needs analysis

EFL teachers have to be aware of the need analyses importance in the field of ESP. Needs analysis helps us to collect information about our students' learning needs and wants to help us draw the objectives of the targeted core courses and determined the appropriate content. It is very important to start your needs analysis for the targeted group of students before you determine the exact content, which you are going to subscribe them. Consequently, needs analysis has been given a significant consideration in making a particular course serve a particular group's interests (Graves K., 1996; Harrison R., 1996; Hutchison T. & A. Waters, 1987; Vorobieva N., 1996).

Course Design

You have to ask whether your students will use English to pass the exam as a university requirement or in workforce after graduation. Absolutely, in this case our intention is to prepare learners for the future not for passing exams, because we rely on the results of the need analysis, which we have to execute before designing the ESP course. ESP needs analysis positions a solid foundation for a stable ESP syllabus. Since needs analysis have been run for the targeted group to collect data about their learning needs then the process of core courses designation will take place. Designing a course for any ESP system need a considerable amount of general English along with an integrated functional terminological language matted in the targeted ESP course which is based on the needs analysis. Moreover, the objective of the course must be authentic to meet the needs of students to grantee motivation and better achievement.

On the area under discussion of an ESP course for Greek student, Xenodohidis, (2002) confirms that: "the goals should be realistic; otherwise the students would be de-motivated." Concerning, another ESP course for employees at the American University of Beirut, Shaaban (2005) explains that the core course development and its content focus on a common core for the learners from various workplaces. This content contains basic social English communication, following directions, giving instructions, along with specialized terminologies and expressions. Developing a course for health science, Gatehouse (2001) also integrates General English language content and acquisition skills for language.

Referring to the mentioned cases of ESP, it can be concluded that General English language content, grammar, functions and skills acquisition are the dominant aspects in any core course plan, while terminologies and specific functions of a particular content are integrated in the course to meet the learners' specific needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) compare ESP to the leaves and branches of a tree to a language tree. Without any roots to absorb water, leaves or branches would not grow up; so do the leaves and branches ESP language will not flourish, if they lack the essential

language support such as general English grammar, lexis and functions. Gilmour and Marshal (1993) argue that the ESP learners' difficulties are not attributed to the lack of technical terminology but mostly due to the shortage of general English vocabulary. These essential items must be matted in the prescribed course for the ESP learners with relevancy to the field of specialization. Moreover, in designing any ESP course, attention should be paid to the four learning styles, using a range of combinations of knowledge, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Different experiential elements should be used in the classroom, such as sound, music, visuals, movement, experience, and even talking.

Prospect of ESP

The Future

Nowadays English is the dominant language of communication worldwide, even among non-native speakers. This situation has a great influence on the type of ESP syllabus we provide and the type of research required to be emphasized. Although, ESP in Sudanese universities is in its infancy, it has a promising future. No doubt, EFL teachers who teach the ESP courses are more aware of the new progress of the theory and methodology in the field of ESP and its role in the community it serves. This progress in theory and methodology covered three aspects of ESP: genre analysis, corpus analysis and systemic functional linguistics. EFL teachers who teach ESP courses have to distinguish between ESP and EAP in order to grantee its steady progress of areas of concern. There should be much more researches in this vital field to explore the needs and draw clear objectives of each discipline. ESP teachers have to shoulder the responsibility of assessing the needs of their students, setting the learning objectives, organizing the courses, creating a vivid learning environment in the classroom, evaluating his students' development and assuring the quality continuously.

Nowadays, there is an immense breakthrough of the modern information and communication technologies (ICT). Computer is the corner stone of these technologies; via this smart machine we listen, speak, read, write and even communicate at distance. Therefore, it is applicable to invest these facilities in the teaching and learning process. Now, we can change our traditional classes to more modern styles of instructing either utilizing the multimedia or even online learning via the web. ESP materials or classes can be approachable in a very apt techniques to meet the different needs and the advance method of instructional designing does let the learner feels the loneliness or remoteness. Open and distance learning would be a very suitable mode instruction for ESP adult learners in the future.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Teachers should concentrate on the learner's interaction (student-centered) rather than lecturing and overwhelming the course with exhaustive list of words and boring grammar exercises. Meaningful interaction with others speakers in the target language enhances the opportunity for competency. Therefore, we have to create opportunities for the learners to create effective communication skills in the classroom.

Many researchers have revealed that especially adult learners differ very much in the ways they learn a foreign language. Therefore EFL teachers should be aware of r learning styles of their students. Moreover, teachers should employ a variety of assessment techniques, focusing on the development of "whole brain" capacity and each of the different learning styles.

We have large ESP classes full of learners with different learning strategies and learning styles. Consequently, we have to make use of modern technologies in our classes or otherwise the traditional audio visual aids to meet our learners' needs and to motivate them. In addition, there should be a variety of activities such as presentation, problem solving, role-play, practical hand-on activities field visits and interviews with experts using the target language exclusively.

We should make use of the worldwide web for different activities to expose ESP learners to different experiences and different activities with various techniques.

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