

THE ROLES OF THE ESP PRACTITIONER

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Abstract:

English for Specific Purposes(ESP) can be defined as teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language for the purpose of using it in a particular domain. Since 1960s ESP has become a distinctive part of Teaching English as a Foreign Language(TEFL) its importance being due to the fact that English has become the contemporary lingua franca. According to Dudley Evans, there are five different roles to be performed by the ESP practitioner: teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher and evaluator.(1998).In our view each of these roles are extremely important for the ESP teacher , contribute to his/her success and cannot be replaced by anything else.

Key Words: ESP, teacher, collaborator, course designer, researcher, evaluator

JEL Classification : M40, M41

1.Introduction and context of the study :The origin of the ESP concept

English for Specific Purposes(ESP) can be defined as teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language for the purpose of using it in a particular domain. Since 1960s ESP has become a distinctive part of Teaching English as a Foreign Language(TEFL) its importance being due to the fact that English has become the contemporary lingua franca. As a branch of ELT, ESP can be defined as the developing of teaching materials and methods appropriate for the English language learners whose main goal is learning English for a purpose other than just learning the language system [Maleki, 2008]. Brown (2001), on the other hand, sees ESP teaching as an integrated skills approach where the integration of the four skills is the only possible approach within a communicative framework.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) distinguishes from other approaches to language teaching by “a commitment to the goal of providing language instruction that addresses students ‘own specific purposes such as profession or education”[Belcher,D., 2009:2]

As Bozena Gorska-Porecka writes in her *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* “It should be noted that the teacher dependence of ESP is not environmental but purely ontological in nature, because it derives from the general conceptualization of specific purpose language instruction as a complex process, which starts with preparation for planning and designing a course to be taught, involving the teacher as the principal actor in all stages”. [2013:28]

2.ESP-definition

Most of such major scholars like Robinson (1991) or Dudley-Evans and St. John(1998) agree that the ESP process consists of five key stages: needs analysis, course design, teaching and learning, assessment and evaluation.

There are several definitions of ESP in the literature:

Thus, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an approach rather than a product and it does not involve a particular language , methodology or teaching material.

In 1988, Strevens’ definition of ESP distinguishes between absolute and variable characteristics . He considers to be absolute the characteristics of the needs of the learner of ESP which are related to particular disciplines, occupations and activities and are focused on a language which is appropriate in syntax, text, discourse, semantics and analysis of the discourse.

The variable characteristics he mentions refer to the fact that ESP may be restricted to particular language skills(e.g. reading) and it may not be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

Robinson’s [1991:3]definition of ESP is based on the fact that ESP is normally “goal-directed” and ESP courses are based on a needs analysis and also on the existences of a number of other characteristics: (a limited time, period, teaching to adults in homogenous classes etc.)

In 1988 ,Dudley-Evans and St. John gave an ampler definition of ESP which reminds us of Strevens’ absolute and variable characteristics. They consider to be absolute characteristics the following:

1. ESP has to meet specific needs of the learner
2. ESP uses the specific methodology required by the discipline it serves
3. ESP focuses on appropriate language (grammar, lexis, register, skills, discourse and genre)

In their view the variable characteristics are:

1. ESP may be designed for specific disciplines
2. ESP may use a different methodology from that of general English
3. ESP is designed for adult learners (students at tertiary level or professionals) or students at secondary school level.
4. ESP generally addresses to intermediate or advanced learners
5. Most ESP require basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners

3. The Birth of ESP

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) presented the factors which led to the birth of ESP:

- the huge and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and activity world wide. Progress in the fields of technology and commerce triggered a demand for English as an international language owing to the economic power of postwar U.S.A.

- the emerging of the new mass of people who wanted to learn English as a result of these developments in technology and commerce.

- the Oil Crises of the early 1970s that generated a massive flow of funds and western expertise into oil-rich countries, commercial pressures exerting a great influence in acquiring this language.

According to the same authors, English for specific purposes or 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” [1987:19].

Paltridge and Starfield, (2013) observe that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learner is to use English in a particular domain.

As a conclusion, in these early days the process of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes was motivated by the need to communicate across languages in these areas of commerce and technology.

Nowadays ESP includes a wide range of areas that have become its sub-branches: English for academic purposes (EAP), English for vocational purposes (EVP), English for occupational purposes (EOP), English for medical purposes (EMP), English for business purposes (EBP), English for sociocultural purposes (ESCP) and the list may go on.

4. The Roles of the ESP teacher

According to Dudley Evans, there are five different roles to be performed by the ESP practitioner: teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher and evaluator. (1998)

1. As a teacher, the ESP practitioner has to create opportunities of learning, to generate authentic communication and to choose the appropriate teaching methods to suit the students’ needs.

2. As a collaborator, the ESP practitioner should collaborate with other ESP practitioners and subject specialists since he/she lacks the knowledge of the content.

3. As a course designer and material provider the ESP should create his own materials and/or adjust the authentic materials used in workplace and benefit from a huge amount of educational resources and teaching materials.

4. As a researcher, the ESP teacher should be preoccupied with the students’ target needs, goals and interests, upgrade his knowledge on the subject matter he is teaching and look for authentic materials.

5. As an evaluator, the ESP teacher should consider the different stages in the evaluation process. For instance, before the course he/she should evaluate the effectiveness of his students’ response to the teaching methods and at the end of the course, he/she should evaluate the students’ learning outcomes.

The definition made by Abdul Hakim in his article Designing an ESP Course in a Bangladeshi Context: a Timely Need, [2013:1] was based on Dudley-Evans & St. John [1998: 4-5] and seems to capture the complexity of these courses: “ESP means the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language which meets specific needs of the learners, makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines and use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English.”

ESP may 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 as well. Generally, ESP is designed for intermediate or advanced students and most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

5. Conclusions:

Since teaching and learning a second or foreign language for workplace or study purposes requires not only linguistic proficiency but also knowledge of work-related concepts, the roles of ESP practitioners are varied and complex.

As Teacher his/her most important objective is that of helping students to learn.

As Course Designer and Material Provider, he/she has to select published material, adapt material or write it.

As Researcher, he/she needs to be capable of incorporating the findings of latest research.

As Collaborator, he/she has to collaborate with subject specialists in order to find out about about the subject syllabus in an academic context.

As Evaluator, he/she may be involved in various types of evaluation-testing of students, evaluation of courses and teaching materials.

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