

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: ITS MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

English for specific purposes (ESP) refers to language research and instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular social groups. ESP has developed rapidly in the past forty years to become a major force in English language teaching and research.

The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. The ESP approach provides opportunities to the learners to acquire English naturally, which means that, by working with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting.

ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation.

If we focus on the origin of ESP and its development it is closely linked with learners' interest in various specific disciplines e.g. 'Law English', 'English for Hotel Industry' or 'English for Tourist Management', English for business, English for medicine etc. Students learn English for a specific purpose, represented by studying subject matter, to gain and develop appropriate knowledge and skills through English. Students study ESP not only they are interested in English language but because they have to perform a task in English. Their command of the English language must be such that they can reach a satisfactory level in their specialist subject studies.

In other words, students who have studied English for Specific Purposes during their universities years, would be easy for them to adapt to their work conditions and would be easily employed in their fields.

The fact that "learners know specifically why they are learning a language" is a great advantage on both sides of the process [4, p. 6]. The group of ESP learners is going to achieve the same goal in the field of studying branch, so learners' motivation, in a form of the same aim, enables teacher to meet learners' needs and expectations easier.

Learner and the way of learning ('acquiring language') are considered to be the main factors in the whole process. Hutchinson and Waters emphasize ESP to be an approach not product that means language learning not language use is highlighted. They draw the attention to a 'learning-centered approach' "in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" [4, p.19].

There are two main types of ESP according to the motivation, position, and status of the learners which become reasons of learning English: English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) add more type of ESP according to the need of scientists and technologists. This type is called English for Science and Technology (EST).

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is taught in such a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work or profession [5, p. 4].

There will be differences in such courses depending on whether the learners are learning English before; during or after the time they are being trained in their job or profession.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is taught generally within educational institutions to students requiring English in their studies. The language taught is based on particular disciplines at higher levels of education when the student is specializing (in study) or intends to specialize (pre-study) in a particular subject.

The teaching of English for Science and Technology (EST) is generally regarded as one of the most significant developments in English language pedagogy in recent years. EST is concerned with meeting the specific language needs of learners in various scientific and technological fields. These needs should be taken into consideration when planning and implementing English language courses or specialized courses to students of science and technology.

Although English for Science and Technology (EST) is assumed to be a major subdivision of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), EST courses are obviously distinct since they put great emphasis on scientific English and the selection of the appropriate communicative situations that are specifically related to science and technology [2]. So in order to cope with knowledge and communication requirements in scientific and technological fields, learners need to develop their communication skills in general and reading comprehension skills in particular to increase their EST competence and obtain up-to-date information from different written and non-written sources.

Considering the characteristics of ESP courses, Carver (1983) states that there are three characteristics common to ESP courses:

1) authentic materials – the use of authentic learning materials is possible if we accept the claim that ESP courses should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level. The use of such materials is common in ESP, especially in self-directed studies or research tasks. The students are usually encouraged to conduct research using a variety of different resources including the Internet;

2) purpose-related orientation – refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required by the target situation. The teacher can give students different tasks - to simulate the conference preparation, involving the preparation of papers, reading, note-taking and writing;

3) self-direction – means that ESP is concerned with turning learners into users. For self-direction, it is necessary that teacher encourage students to have a certain degree of autonomy – freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study [1, p. 131 – 137].

Since ESP courses are of various types, depending on specific scientific field or profession, and have specific features, teachers (practitioners) teaching such courses need to play different roles and acquire certain knowledge.

The ESP practitioner as a teacher may be responsible for organizing courses, for setting learning objectives, for establishing a positive learning environment in the classroom, and for evaluating student progress.

1. Organizing Programs: You will set goals for the students and then translate those goals into an instructional program with hourly, daily, and weekly activities. One of your primary tasks will be management; selecting and organizing course materials, supporting the students in their efforts, and providing them with feedback on their progress.

2. Setting Goals and Objectives: You arrange the conditions for learning in the classroom and set long-term goals and short-term objectives for student achievement.

3. Establishing a Learning Environment: Your communication skills establish the classroom atmosphere. Language is acquired by students when they have opportunities to use the language in interaction with other speakers. As their teacher, you may be the only native speaker of English available to students, and although your time with any one

student will be limited, you can model good communication skills in the classroom.

4. Evaluating Students: Finally, you are a resource person who helps students identify their language-learning problems and find solutions to them. You identify the skills that students need to focus on, and take responsibility for making choices which determine what and how the students learn [3].

A teacher that already has experience in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) can exploit her background in language teaching. She should recognize the ways in which her teaching skills can be adapted for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. Moreover, she will need to look for content specialists for help in designing appropriate lessons in the subject matter field she is teaching.

Using skills 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. They help students, who know their subject better than the teachers do, develop the essential skills in understanding, using, and/or presenting authentic information in their profession.

To sum up, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is now well established as an important and distinctive part of English Language. Teaching English for Specific Purposes offers the teacher a new perspective on this important field. The main concern is effective learning and how this can best be achieved in ESP courses.

References

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