

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been a current trend in language teaching for years. The ESP principles take part in the process of designing a syllabus or developing a teaching material for a particular course or study. Traditionally ESP courses were typically designed for intermediate or advanced adult learners. Nowadays many students can start to learn academic or vocational English at an earlier age and at a lower level of proficiency. A needs analysis, which is a part of ESP's principles, is applied in order to find the needs of the course's participants. This paper comprises three parts; the nature of ESP, the needs analysis in ESP, and ESP in EFL context.

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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. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management. The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. ESL and ESP diverge not only in the nature of the learner, but also in the aim of instruction. In fact, as a general rule, while in ESL all four language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are stressed equally, in ESP it is a needs analysis that determines which language skills are most needed by the students, and the syllabus is designed accordingly. An ESP program, might, for example, emphasize the development of reading skills in students who are preparing for graduate work in business administration; or it might promote the development of spoken skills in students who are studying English in order to become tourist guides.

As a matter of fact, 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, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the

vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation. Some linguists, being aware of the world changes, began to focus their studies on the ways in which language is used in real situations. Traditional approach in language study centered the attention on the grammatical rules governing the language usage. However, it was found that discourses vary according to contexts. Then, it was necessary to reorganize the teaching and learning methodologies according to the language specificities of each situation. The English needed by engineers, doctors, linguists or officers “could be identified by analyzing the linguistic characteristics of their specialist area of work or study”. “Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need became the guiding principle of ESP”. In the same period learners motivation towards acquiring a foreign language was the subject study of the educational psychologists, who noticed the use of different learning strategies by learners; they have different attitudes, needs and interests. The idea was based on the statement of tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English you need. It was a natural expansion of this philosophy to plan special courses for each range of specific learners. Strevens notes: “...the existence of a major “tide” in the educational thought, in all countries and affecting all subjects. The movement referred to is the global trend towards “learner-centered education”. Like the world, language study and concepts of education fundamentally changed, the English language teaching changed with it, and knew the birth of teaching English for Specific Purposes which is considered as the direct result of the world evolution. “ESP is not a monolithic universal phenomenon”; it has developed at different speeds in different countries. The approaches that we shall describe can be found operating somewhere in the world at the present time. This concept departed from the principle that English of a specific science differs from each other in terms of its grammatical and lexical features of the registers. Register analyses in ESP was tailored for the pedagogic purpose, i.e. making the ESP course more relevant to learners’ needs, not intended for the purpose to discuss the nature of registers of English per se. The main purpose of an ESP course was to produce a syllabus which gave a high priority to the language forms students would meet in their field and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet. Register analysis revealed that there was very little that was distinctive in the sentence grammar of scientific English beyond a tendency to favor particular forms such as the present simple tense, the passive voice and nominal compound. The aim of target situation analysis is to take the existing knowledge and set it on a more scientific basis, by establishing procedures for relating language analysis more closely to learners’ reasons for learning. There is a purpose of ESP course that support this phase, the purpose is to enable learners to function in situations which the learners will use the language they are learning, then the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the

target situation and then carrying out the right analysis of the linguistic parts of that situation. It will form the syllabus of the ESP course. This process known as “needs analysis”. What had been done previously in piecemeal way become something’s systematized and learner needs was apparently placed at the center of the course design process. Hutchinson and Waters do note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP: “people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job”. Perhaps this explains Carter's rationale for categorizing EAP and EOP under the same type of ESP. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one in the same: employment. However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed. The third and final type of ESP identified by Carter is English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions. However, that this is not a separate type of ESP. Rather it is an integral component of ESP courses or programs which focus on situational language. This situational language has been determined based on the interpretation of results from needs analysis of authentic language used in target workplace settings.

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