

The Basics of Designing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Teaching Materials

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to spot light on the role of ESP practitioner as teaching materials` developer and designer. The study also attempts to investigate whether ESP practitioners are aware of the basics of designing ESP teaching materials for a particular group of learners who have their exclusive specificity. The current research paper is qualitative in which a survey questionnaire targeting ten ESP practitioners from the faculties of Technology, Economics and Management, and Social and Human Sciences of the University of El-Oued, Algeria was used as a data collection tool. The findings of the study revealed that there should be collaboration between ESP practitioners and subject specialists in designing ESP instructional materials. The results also demonstrated the necessity of integrating learners` academic and professional needs in designing, developing, and selecting ESP teaching materials.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), ESP practitioners, ESP teaching materials, Needs analysis.

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1. Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War in 1945, English has become the worldwide language of technology and international commerce. Hence, this has paved the way to the emergence of a new generation of learners who feel that learning English is a top priority need to satisfy the demands of the commercially interconnected modern world. Additionally, the growth of English courses oriented towards specific needs and language demands shifted the focus away from analyzing the formal structures of language to investigating the ways in which language is actually used in real communication. Besides, new insights brought from educational psychology also contributed to the development of ESP. Instead of viewing learners as blank slates to be filled, learners were seen to have different needs and interests. This new dimension gained from educational psychology had a critical influence on their motivation and thereby resulted in the need for different approaches to achieve maximum effectiveness in their learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Within institutions of higher education in Algeria English language is taught as a separate subject matter in almost all university fields. Hence, teachers resort to design the content of language courses by themselves as administrative authorities do not equip them with syllabi to guide them in what to teach and how. The present research work investigates issues ESP instructional materials` design and development. Essentially, it focuses on the question of how to integrate learners' language needs, identified with the aid of a needs survey, into syllabus content. This can be attained through attempting to translate the results of a needs analysis, that investigated the English language needs of students from a given academic discipline into educational content that responds to the consumers` expectations.

The aim of this study is to spot light on the role of ESP practitioner as teaching materials` developer and designer. The study also attempts to investigate whether ESP practitioners are aware of the basics of designing ESP teaching materials for a particular group of learners who have their exclusive specificity.

The current study attempts to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the basics of designing and providing effective ESP teaching materials ?
2. What are the qualities of ESP authentic materials ?
3. Are ESP practitioners aware of their new role as course and materials` designers and fulfill their requirements ?

2. Literature Review

Designing and providing teaching materials is a very helpful means to support students to enhance their English proficiency in the four skills. Essentially, "teaching materials are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then

rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course" (Graves, 1996: 27). ESP teaching materials may take different forms, such as, textbooks, Internet websites, videos, texts, and so forth.

The selection of teaching materials should be based on learners' academic and professional needs, and should be attached to the students' academic branch. Additionally, authenticity and simplicity are two (02) key features of ESP teaching materials. "Authentic material is any kind of material taken from the real world and not specifically created for the purpose of language teaching" (Ellis and Johnson 1994,: 157). Using authentic materials is very helpful to both learners and teachers since they have positive impact on learners' motivation, satisfy learners' needs, and supply authentic cultural information and exposure to real language. But, these authentic materials should not go beyond students' educational level and current abilities. Hence, teachers should use simplified teaching materials that use comprehensible language, provide clear objectives, and focus on specific items of the syllabus content. In turn, Wallace (1992) recommends the following criteria of ESP materials selection:

- Adequacy: the selected materials should contain appropriate language and information about the course.
- Motivation: they should present interesting content in order to help students be active and work hard in order to raise the level of comprehension and make the learners more effective..
- Sequence: it is essential to have materials that are related to the course content. There must be a relation to previous texts, activities, and topics.
- Diversity: the selected materials should lead to a range of classroom activities, be a vehicle for teaching specific language structure and vocabulary, and promote strategies.
- Acceptability: they should contain acceptable cultural customs and language.

In general, ESP teaching materials are either designed by teachers or chosen from a large body of published ESP textbooks that are available in the market. However, most of the readily available ESP books are not written considering specific academic and occupational context, nor they are based on learners' academic and occupational needs.

Hence, in order to successfully choose from what is available, ESP practitioners should track down useful ESP instructional materials. In this framework, Gatehouse (2001: 09) explains:

Familiarizing one' s self with useful instructional materials is part of growing as a teacher, regardless of the nature of purpose of learning. Given that ESP is an approach and not a subject to be taught, curricular materials will unavoidably be pieced together, some borrowed and others designed

specially. Resources will include authentic materials, ESL materials, ESP materials, and teacher-generated materials.

It is important to note that at the University of El-Oued, Algeria, ESP practitioners mostly rely on and implement textbooks and use additional materials from books and online sources. But, the use of non-printed materials as videos, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are totally excluded owing to the unequipped classrooms.

3. Research Method

The current research paper is qualitative in which a survey questionnaire targeting ten ESP practitioners from the faculties of Technology, Economics and Management, and Social and Human Sciences of the University of El-Oued, Algeria was used as a data collection tool.

3.1. Sampling

The participants of the study consist of ten (10) ESP practitioners taught English at the Faculties of Technology, economics and Management, and social and human sciences who answered a structured questionnaire investigating their awareness of the new role of ESP practitioners associated with designing and developing ESP instructional materials. ESP practitioners include four (4) permanent teachers borrowed from the Department of English holding doctorate and magister degree in addition to six (6) temporal teachers holding master degree. The table below gives details of the participants in the field study:

The Sample of the Study

ESP Practitioners	Faculty of Technology	Faculty of Economics and Management	Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
	04	04	02
Total	10		

3.2. Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was used as a data gathering tool targeting ten (10) ESP practitioners to identify their attitudes and views towards the basics of designing ESP teaching materials. The questionnaire comprises ten (10) statements revolve around the axis of ESP practitioners` role as designer and developer of instructional materials and the basics of designing ESP teaching materials. Teachers were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with each item.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

All the participants in this study agreed that designing and providing teaching materials is a very helpful means to support students to enhance their English proficiency in the four language basic skills. The entire sample of the study asserted that designing teaching materials should be based on learners' academic and professional needs, and should be attached to the students' academic branch. Additionally, ESP practitioners stressed the centrality of authenticity and simplicity as two (02) key features of ESP teaching materials. Authentic material is any kind of material taken from the real world and not specifically created for the purpose of language teaching. According to the study participants, using authentic materials is very helpful to both learners and teachers since they have positive impact on learners' motivation, satisfy learners' needs, and supply authentic cultural information and exposure to real language. But, according to them, these authentic materials should not go beyond students' educational level and current abilities. Hence, teachers should use simplified teaching materials that use comprehensible language, provide clear objectives, and focus on specific items of the syllabus content.

5. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

ESP practitioners have a lot in common with teachers of English for general purposes. However, the needs to understand the requirements of other professions and willingness to adapt these requirements is what differentiate ESP practitioners from general English teachers. ESP teaching presumes teaching of English regarding specific subject, profession or purpose.

Through training and professional development, ESP practitioners will be equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools to deal with students specific academic fields. It should be noted that ESP practitioners are not specialists in the field. They provide support for students who know their subject matter than their teachers do, develop important skills in understanding, using, and presenting authentic information in their academic branch.

A qualified and professional ESP practitioner should be able to move smoothly from one academic or professional field to another without being obliged to spend a long time on getting started. She/he should bring the necessary tools, frameworks and principles of course and syllabus design to apply them to a new material.

The research data gathered demonstrated that ESP teachers spend more time teaching students and less time in professional learning opportunities with their peers. Thus, theorists and applied linguists highlight some strategies that are already put into practice elsewhere to remedy this problematic issue.

The cooperation between ESP practitioner and subject specialist is crucial in developing effective ESP materials. This means that ESP programs are highly beneficial if English teachers and subject specialists negotiate with each other.

There have been always many controversial opinions about the most effective methodologies in ESP programs and the role of language and subject teachers. A considerable number of studies indicated that language-teaching programs cannot be separated from other academic programs (Bacha, 2003; Bhatia and Candlin, 2000; Swales, 1990).

Swales (1988) emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary approach to ESP programs. He developed a framework and categorized the interdisciplinary activities into three (03) groups of cooperation, collaboration, and team-teaching based on useful insight from Dudley-Evans and St. John's (2006) frameworks.

6. Conclusion

Developing appropriate language materials for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an essential component of its practice. The paper addresses the issue of designing and developing authentic teaching materials to make them more suitable as well as attractive for a particular type of learners. Firstly, the main problems teachers usually face when designing ESP courses have been discussed. Then, the author gives some suggestions as how to select and evaluate authentic texts highlighting the principles that could be taken into consideration when designing the English language course for a particular group of learners.

7. References

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