

# TEACHING ENGLISH TO ESP (English For Specific Purposes)

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## **Abstract**

Generally the Students study English “not because they are interested in the English Language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes”<sup>1</sup>. In ESP, “language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments”<sup>2</sup>. This denotes that, the role of ESP is to help language learners to build up the needed abilities in order to use them in a specific field of inquiry, occupation, or workplace. These definitions were stated according to ESP evolution through time, this latter is viewed in more details in the following sections.

**Keyword:** *teaching english, english for ESP*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The prevalent use of the English language as an international means of communication is in constant expansion. This fact is reflected in different fields and in various domains where English is considered as a working tool. In order to reach specific objectives, world countries, including Algeria, introduced English courses at all the levels of the educational system especially at the university through ESP. The latter is the common and well established teaching methodology that the language teachers actually use to achieve the specific learners’ needs, and meet the social requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Teaching ESP for Students University. (1991: Buston Press. page.2)

<sup>2</sup> Basturkmen, H. (2006). Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes.

London and New jersey: ESL and Applied Linguistic Professional Series: Eli Hinkel, Edition.

## DISCUSSION

### English for Specific Purposes

Since the 1960's ESP has become one of the most active branches of Applied Linguistics in general, and of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in particular. Among the factors that could explain its vitality and its expansion is, as previously mentioned, the emergence of English as a world language, for this reason the necessity to cope with the different teaching situations and needs that such a position brings about. Such necessity implies an understanding of its development, types and the different teaching concepts of ESP. However, it is of great importance to start with the main definitions stated by the linguists concerning ESP. Apparent variations in the interpretation of ESP definitions can be observed. Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes.

Anthony (1997: 9-10). "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose."<sup>3</sup> Mackay and Mountford (1978: 2). That is to say that English should be taught to achieve specific language skills using real situations, in a manner that allows them to use English in their future profession, or to comprehend English discourse related to their area of speciality.<sup>4</sup>

Generally the Students study English "not because they are interested in the English Language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes" (Robinson, 1991: 2). In ESP, "language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environment

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony, L. (1997). "Preaching to Cannibals: A look at Academic Writing in Engineering". In The Japan Conference on English for Specific Purposes Proceedings. January 31st, 1998.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, hlm. 3

nts”<sup>5</sup> Basturkmen (2006: 18). This denotes that, the role of ESP is to help language learners to build up the needed abilities in order to use them in a specific field of inquiry, occupation, or workplace. These definitions were stated according to ESP evolution through time, this latter is viewed in more details in the following section.

### ESP Genesis

The origins of teaching Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) can be traced as far back as the Greek and Roman empires (Dudley-Evans and ST Johns, 1998:1) In the same vein, Strevens (1977) stated that the history of LSP goes back to “at least half a century”. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6) “ESP was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends”. The latter have functioned and operated in diverse ways around the world, “but we can identify three main reasons common to the emergence of all ESP.” the demands of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics and a new focus on the learner.<sup>6</sup>

After 1945, the New World knew an age of massive and unprecedented growth in all the activities especially the economic, technical and scientific ones dominated by two divergent forces, inexorably it engenders a demand for an international language, this responsibility was accredited to English for various reasons. Consequently “... it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language...”(Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6)aiming at fulfilling the daily needs which consisted in the comprehension of the simplest brochure or manuals to most complicated genres of discourses as law texts and scientific articles .<sup>7</sup>

Some linguists, being aware of the world changes, began to focus their studie on the ways in which language is used in real situations. Traditional approach in la

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<sup>5</sup> Basturkmen, H. (2006). Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes. London and New Jersey : ESL and Applied Linguistic Professional Series: Eli Hinkel, Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Hutchison, T. & Waters, A. (1987). English for Specific Purposes: a learner-centred approach. England: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

language study centred the attention on the grammatical rules governing the language usage, though it was found that the discourses varies according to the contexts, it was necessary to reorganise the teaching and learning methodologies and make the specific features of each situation the basis of learner's courses. The English used by doctors, linguists or officers is not based on the same terminological terms consequently, the teaching and learning process was directed on the basis of the use of specific corpora for each field.

In the same period learner's 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 (1977:152) 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. However, ESP is seen differently by the scholars in terms of its characteristics and functionality.

### **ESP Characteristics**

ESP is a recognizable activity of English Language Teaching (ELT) with some specific characteristics. Dudley-Evans and St. Johns" tried (1998) to apply a series of characteristics, some absolute and some variable, to outline the major features of ESP. 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 (grammar, lexis, register), skills, disc

course and genre appropriate to these activities.<sup>8</sup>

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. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems, but it can be used with beginners. (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998:4) It is obvious that the absolute characteristics are specific to ESP because learners' needs are of central importance when designing language activities.

Concerning the variable features, ESP courses can be designed for a specific group using definite teaching methodology, nevertheless, all learners' categories and disciplines can be concerned with ESP. For that reason ESP should be seen simply as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans and St. John illustrate as an 'attitude of mind'. Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987:19) stated that, "ESP should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning".<sup>9</sup> In the course of the statements suggested below great similitude is noticed between ESP and General English Purposes (EGP) as teaching approaches knowing that each methodology is set up to fulfill specific social requirements, So in what terms are they different?

## Types of ESP

The maturity of ESP through time knew multiple views concerning its subdivision. Different types are proposed by the linguists; the present study relies on Hutc

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<sup>8</sup>Dudley, E. and St Johns (1998) *Developments in ESP a Multi-Disciplinary Approach* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Hutchison, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: a learner-centred approach*. England: Cambridge University Press.

hinson and Waters" subdivision. In 1987, they rooted one of the most well known and useful theories regarding English language teaching branches with the „Tree of ELT" (see Appendix 6), in which they divided ESP into three types: a) English for Science and Technology (EST), b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and c) English for Social Studies (ESS) Each type is concerned with specific field of scientific knowledge as technology, business and economy or the social fields in general; with its various and large amount of human sciences studies. Additionally, each of these is divided into further sub-branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). An example of EOP for the ESS branch is 'English for Psychology' whereas an example of EAP for the ESS branch is 'English for Teaching'. Yet Hutchinson and Water's classification of EAP and EOP is rather unclear; that is why further clarification is needed in order to distinguish between them.

### **Objectives in Teaching ESP**

The main aims of the teaching and learning process is to enable the learners to acquire information in its general sense. Concerning ESP Basturkmen (2006: 133) states the existence of five broad objectives, which are also applied to ELP, on which specific teaching process is based and should be reached:

- To reveal subject-specific language use.
- To develop target performance competencies.
- To teach underlying knowledge.
- To develop strategic competence
- To foster critical awareness.<sup>10</sup>

The researcher shall examine these objectives one after the other. A Reveal s subject-specific language use: this objective aims to demonstrate to the learners how the language is used in the target setting. b- Develop target performance competencies: this objective is concerned with what learners do with language and the neede

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<sup>10</sup> Basturkmen, H. (2006). Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes. London and New Jersey: ESL and Applied Linguistic Professional Series: Eli Hinkel, Edition.

d skills to be competent. “This orientation can be categorized as a proficiency objective, according to Stern’s classification (1992)” (Basturkmen, 2006: 135). c-Teach underlying knowledge: the aim is to focus on developing students’ knowledge of fields of study or work in addition to their language skills.<sup>11</sup> “The objective of teaching underlying knowledge can be classified as a cultural knowledge objective, according to Stern’s categorization (1992)” (Basturkmen, 2006: 137).

d-Develop strategic competence. “Strategic competence is the link between context of situation and language knowledge” (Basturkmen, 2006: 139) and enables successful and efficient communication. e- Foster critical awareness: “This objective can be linked to the cultural knowledge and affective objectives in Stern’s (1992) classification” (Basturkmen, 2006: 143) and aims at making students conscious and culturally aware of the target situation. It is evident that great similarity exists between the objectives established by Stern (1992) for language education and the ones stated by Basturkmen for ESP context. The teaching /learning process associated to appropriate methodology may result in mastery of language by correctly using it in the context.<sup>12</sup>

### **ESP Teaching and Learning Processes**

The methodologies of ESP teaching conform to the same model of the language teaching process as does any other form of language teaching. That is to say, the basic teaching activities are these; Shaping the input; Encouraging the learners’ intention to learn; Managing the learning strategies and Promoting practice and use. (Stevens, 1988: 44) In ESP teaching, some basic elements have to be taken into consideration, the most important of which are the learner needs, goals and motivation. Furthermore learners’ attitudes towards learning and learning strategies are emphasized and seen as fundamental to the ESP process.

The ESP teacher in the classroom is " a knowledge provider and a facilitator of students’ learning and no more as a resourceful authority.”(Kashani et al 2007: 85

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

). However, he/she is more concerned with designing suitable syllabi and courses for different learners with various needs and fields.<sup>13</sup> “Thus, whereas course design plays a relatively minor part in the life of General English teacher, courses here usually being determined either by tradition, choice of textbook or ministerial decree, for the ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 21).<sup>14</sup> As the students are sited in the core of the learning process they have to be dynamic contributors in their learning either in the classroom or out of it. Students use the adequate and favourite learning strategies and put a rapid and durable learning rhythm to achieve the stated objectives. They are more intrinsically than extrinsically oriented. “Learning is more individualized than standardized and students are more open to new ideas. They take responsibility for their own actions and accept related consequences”. (Kashani et al 2007: 87). ESP teaching/ learning processes necessarily go through different stages.

### **Stages in the ESP Teaching Process**

Dudley-Evans and Johns (1998:121) maintain that “The key stages in ESP are needs analysis, course (and syllabus) design, materials selection (and production), teaching and learning, and evaluation.” ESP course design is the product of a dynamic interaction between these elements which “... are not separated, linearly-related activities, rather, they represent phases which overlap and are interdependent”.<sup>15</sup>

### **ESP Syllabus**

Designing an ESP syllabus is not an easy task to perform because of its significant and complex role. However, it obviously satisfies a lot of needs since it has a multi-functional purpose. Thus, syllabus designers need to be aware of the different functions the syllabus fulfils so that it can be designed and used most appropriately

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<sup>13</sup> Kashani, S. (2007) “Freire’s Bottom-up Bridges Student Centeredness” in Asian ESP Journal. Vol 15. Issue 1. Article n°6.

<sup>14</sup> Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). English for Specific Purposes: a learner-centred approach. England: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Dudley, E. and St Johns (1998) Developments in ESP a Multi-Disciplinary Approach Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

. For that reason, Munby (1978) introduced Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) as an approach to investigate specific communication needs of a particular group, according to socio-cultural and stylistic variables which act together to find out a profile of such needs. That is to say that the target needs and target level performance are established by investigating the target situation. In the CNP, descriptions are taken from “the variables that affect communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other” (Munby, 1978: 32).

This process will engender the nature of the content that will be selected and set up for ESP learners” programmed. In ESP, the nature of the content is extracted from real life situations in which the syllabus designers have to select the most relevant language discourses that will supply for learners target requirements. However, “it is necessary to introduce what is known as common-core language (Miliani, 1994) selected according to students own needs” (Benyelles, 2009:64) in order to provide basics of language knowledge.

Accordingly, “one might begin with grammar and pronunciation only, as one does in a structural approach, but introduce work in the language functions, and in discourse skills fairly early, and in time increase the component of the course” (Yalden, 1987:94). ESP rejects „synthetic“ approaches to course design (Basturkmen 2006:103); so, it is important to present the language using an eclectic method by combining the required features of the language systematically and gradually according to the target objectives.<sup>16</sup> The syllabus is also an essential document in the teaching/learning process since it provides a set of principles for materials production, teaching, and testing; this is why, it should be flexible, open-ended, and subject to regular adjustment.

### **Material Production**

Do ESP textbooks really exist? This is a fundamental question Johns (1990) a

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<sup>16</sup> Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes*. London and New Jersey: ESL and Applied Linguistic Professional Series: Eli Hinkel, Edition.

addresses. One of the core problems he presents is that "ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Johns, 1990, p. 91).<sup>17</sup> "In the real world, ESP developers are not provided with sufficient time for needs analysis, materials research and materials development" (Kristen Gatehouse, 1999). The notion of time in the teaching process is of paramount importance especially in ESP, because the analysis of the target situation and the research of the appropriate materials need adequate time.

Suitable materials in ESP are not generally easy to get "It is likely that a course tailored to the needs of specific group of learners will not be available," (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 106). For that reason, the ESP teacher has to develop materials which present as clearly as possible useful area of the language so that learners can perceive the relation between the content of the course and their requirements. The production of such materials and suitable activities is not a simple task because the ESP teacher is neither a materials designer nor a subject specialist; besides, "few teachers have had any training in the skills and techniques of materials writing". (Hutchinson & Waters", 1987: 106). In order to assist and guide ESP teachers in producing adequate materials, Hutchinson & Waters (1987:106-108) identify some defining principles that should be stated as purposeful objectives in designing pedagogical materials: good materials give a stimulus to learning; in other words, they do not teach but, encourage learners to learn, they will, therefore, contain:

- -Interesting texts;
- -Enjoyable activities which stimulate the learners' thinking capacities;
- -Opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills;
- -A content which both learner and teacher can cope with.

b- Adequate materials provide a comprehensible and rational unit structure which

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<sup>17</sup> Johns, A. M. (1991). "English for specific purposes (ESP): Its history and contributions". In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*.

will conduct both the teacher and the learner through a range of activities in such a way as to maximise the chances of learning. Accordingly, “a materials model must be clear and systematic, but flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety”.

c-Materials should represent a vision of the nature of language and learning, and reflect the teacher considerations and feelings about the learning process.

d-Materials should reveal the nature of learning tasks and should “create a balance outlook which both reflects the complexity of the task, yet makes it appear manageable.” (Ibid, 1987:108).

e-Materials should introduce the teachers to the use of new and updated teaching techniques.

f-Materials should supply appropriate and correct representation of language use.

In ESP, the analysis of the target situation provides the basic data that leads the material designer to establish the process through which the course will be presented. By the combination of the different outcomes related to the learners needs, the learning environment and the pedagogical approach, it will be possible to produce the needed ESP course with an appropriate content. The ESP learners aim to handle the communicative acts related to their field of interests and to acquire the linguistic repertoire associated to that matter. For that reason, they make use of authentic materials which is, generally, seen as indispensable in an ESP teaching situation, as maintained by Robinson (1991: 54) : ” A key concept ...felt to be particularly relevant for ESP, is that of authenticity.

“It has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays, there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic.” (Widdowson 1990:67) “Materials writing is one of the most characteristic features of ESP in practice” (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 106).

In reality script materials are the major tool mainly used by almost all ESP teachers; however, with the availability of technological supports in academic settings “a great number of teachers, nowadays, use many types of language learning vide

os accompanied by course books or workbooks solely for instructional purposes” ( Baleghizadeh&Oladrostan, 2010) targeting at providing authentic simulated situations, interesting and pleasant activities to the learners.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, and if videos are considered as technological materials it is recommended, “as one of the main types of authentic materials, be constantly used in order to contextualize language for students” (Baleghizadeh&Oladrostan, 2010). According to Harmer (2001,2007), there are a number of reasons why videos should be used:

- Seeing language-in-use;
- Cross-cultural awareness;
- The power of creation;
- Motivation.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, video production can lead to creative and communicative uses of language to the extent that students may remember those exciting moments for relatively extended period of time. Also Brown (2007) argued, that the “students who are right brain dominant rely on images to remember and think, by which one of the sources he surely meant were videos”. In a sum the role of ESP teachers is to produce and present the language content and the course activities in a various ways to help and motivate the students to learn the target language needed to update their academic or occupational knowledge.

## Teaching

The final aim of designing materials is the performance of the task; hence, with the help of the teacher, the students need to be given activities to achieve this aim. In an ESP situation, the roles of the teacher would be “instructor, facilitator, role-advisor, monitor, co-communicator, classroom manager and consultant”. (Benyelles, 2009:42). However, in almost all cases, the ESP teachers are in front of various

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<sup>18</sup> Boston: Heinle&Heinle. Johns A.M and Dudley, E. (1991) “English for Specific Purposes: International in Scope Specific in Purpose”. TESOL Quarterly Vol. 25. n° 2: pp 297-314.

<sup>19</sup> Harmer, J. (2001). The practice of English Language Teaching. (Third edition). Essex: Pearson Education.

problems of different nature. The main one occurs from the fact that they are called upon to carry out new assignment and perhaps with no specific training. In this respect, Strevens (1988: 41) describes the ESP teacher as "...a teacher of General English who has, unexpectedly, found him/herself required to teach students with special needs." Explicitly, the ESP teachers have to adapt and adjust themselves in order to deal with a new situation and environment for which they are not generally well trained and equipped.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 157) states that the ESP teacher's role is one of many parts. "Swales (1985) prefers... to use the term „ESP practitioner“ ... It is likely that in addition to the normal functions of a classroom teacher, the ESP teacher will have to deal with needs analysis, syllabus design, materials writing or adaptation and evaluation." That is to say that the ESP teachers are involved in designing, setting up and administering the ESP course, and teaching.

A further difficulty is facing ESP teachers when dealing with specific situations; it is that of knowledge specialist. In this respect, Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 163) state that "ESP teachers do not need to learn specialist knowledge. They require three things only: a positive attitude towards the ESP content; knowledge of fundamental principles of the subject area; an awareness of how much they probably already know." In other words, the teachers should have the "ability to ask intelligent questions". Accordingly, Robinson (1991) states that flexibility is a key value needed by the ESP teacher, in order to change from being a general language teacher to being a specific purpose teacher, to cope with different groups of learners, and to perform different tasks.<sup>20</sup>

The principle of flexibility implies an eclectic approach to the teaching methods. In this vein, Miliani (1994) stated that "...eclecticism ...leaves the door open for any stratagem or technique which could fit in a given situation. It all depends on t

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<sup>20</sup> Long, M.H & Crookes, G. (1993). Units of Analysis in Syllabus Design: The Case for The Task. In Crookes and S.M Grass (Ed). *Tasks in a pedagogical Context*. Cleveland, UK: Multilingual Matters 9-44. L

he teachers' know-how and his approach to language teaching". As a conclusion the ESP teachers should implement different teaching methods, techniques and materials in order to reach the learners required competence.

### **Assessment /Evaluation**

Assessment and course evaluation are two important stages in ESP teaching process. Hypothetically, an ESP course is supposed to be successful; it is set up to fulfil particular learners' needs and enable them perform specific things with language. Normally, ESP course has specified objectives, which have to be assessed and measured in terms of how well these objectives have been provided and served. Targeting at helping the ESP practitioners and achieving these stages Hutchinson & Waters (1987) propose a complementary procedure based on two levels.

### **Learner Assessment**

This procedure main task is to measure the learners' performance and level of proficiency, in other words what they actually know in terms of language knowledge at this level of the course achievement. Assessment, also elicits learners' linguistic problems and difficulties, and sets other views for pedagogical solutions in the next courses.

### **Course Evaluation**

ESP course itself needs to be evaluated, whether the sets of objectives designed were achieved or not, to reach the course aims. Both learner assessment and course evaluation facilitate and help providing the teacher with feedback on the efficiency of the course, the teaching methods and materials, and the improvement of the necessary revisions in the ESP course design.

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