

ESP: A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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Abstract: *in this present age of rapidly developing international scientific collaboration and business, courses of foreign language for specialist purposes are becoming more and more popular. These courses are conducted on the basis of the approach called English for specific purposes (ESP). This approach assumes that the language teaching will be adjusted to the specific linguistic and communicative needs of the particular learners with special attention being paid to the context in which they use, or will use, English language.*

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Hutchinson define ESP as “an approach to language learning which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: why does the learner need to learn a foreign language? ... ESP, then, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.” Dudley Evans define ESP in terms of “absolute” and “variable” characteristics.

Absolute characteristics are as follows:

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners;
2. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
3. ESP is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, Study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable characteristics include the following:

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;
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system [1,97].

That ESP “is in contrast with general English” was removed and some variable characteristics were added. The characteristic features of this approach as underlined by these authors are as follows: a learner needs analysis, a target situation analysis, which includes the identification of the features of the chosen discipline or occupation in which the students will use the foreign language, and discourse analysis, which entails the analysis of the language used in situations which occur within the discipline. The use of these procedures aim at designing an ESP course that will prepare the learners for effective communication in situations which occur, or will occur, in their professional work and/or studies.

The preparation of an ESP course should also include an analysis of the students’ linguistic situation and communicative skills at the beginning of the course (present situation analysis) and an analysis of their current needs which are related to their language learning process (learning needs analysis). The analysis of learning needs during the course may result in a changing of the teaching materials and a modification of the methods and techniques used by the teacher.

Having conducted the above mentioned analyses, the teacher must decide on:

- the teaching content, the texts and the various linguistic elements to be studied during the course;
- the syllabus;
- the teaching methods;
- the teaching materials;
- the extent to which particular skills should be acquired[2,161].

If the ESP community hopes to grow and flourish in the future, it is vital that the community as a whole understands what ESP actually represents. Only then, can new members join with confidence, and existing members carry on the practices which have brought ESP to the position it has in EFL teaching today. In Japan in particular, ESP is still in its infancy and so now is the ideal time to form such a consensus. Perhaps this can stem from the Dudley-Evans' definition given in this article but I suspect a more rigorous version will be coming soon, in his book on ESP to be published in 1998. Of course, interested parties are also strongly urged to attend the next Japan Conference on ESP, which is certain to focus again on this topic[3,120].

References

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