ESP Practitioners: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Education

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Abstract: *Central to the entire discipline of ESP is the process of needs analysis and identification. In this sense, whatever the learners' requirements and their target discourse community, ESP practitioners go beyond teaching to providing and designing suitable ESP courses that better meet the demands of their global age. However, being trained for general language teaching, ESP practitioners are teaching with limited knowledge in the students' field of study. This article sheds light on this challenging task that requires sharing roles and responsibilities between language, subject teachers, learners, and institutions to bridge the existing gap between research and education.*
Keywords: *ESP, NAI, Practitioners, Research, Education.*

I. Introduction

With the advent of a global marketplace and the globalization process, major developments have been identified in several disciplines notably business, science and education. Ongoing evolutions have been also established shifting from the national economy and local competition to the emergence of a global marketplace as well as the introduction of digital ages to facilitate interaction between people. In the view of this sequence of proceedings, no one can deny the prerequisite to learning an international language to carry out educational and professional tasks either at the national or internal spheres. There is an increasing interest in education that recognizes the importance of matching the language course objectives to the learners' requirements. This new tendency in education calls for an urgent need to offer and devise appropriate language courses to likely correspond the challenges and demands faced in our global discourse setting. As a result, a variety of courses have been implemented to meet particular learning environments.

II. Esp Teaching Methodology

It is widely believed that teaching methodology in an ESP context is similar to that of General Language Teaching. This latter covers 'what goes on in the classroom, to what students have to do' (Robinson, 1991:46). The context of learning, the students' field of study and the appropriate teaching methods to meet the course objectives are those key -elements that determine the selection of an ESP teaching methodology (Robinson, 1991). Scholars have reported that drawing on only one specific approach cannot be always adequate to the various needs and expectations of the ESP participants at different contexts including, for examples, EST, EBE, ESS as stated by Nunan (1991:228) 'there never was and probably never will be a method for all' Nowadays, there is an increasing tendency in education to accept the different approaches and methodologies in an ESP classroom (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and John, 1998; Javid, 2015). An eclectic approach or what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) label 'an integrated methodology' is highly recommended.

This could be due to its potential characteristics:
➢ relying on a set of disciplines,
➢ focusing on various skills,
➢ addressing the specific needs of the learners.

These are the principal factors for the selection and determination of any approach.
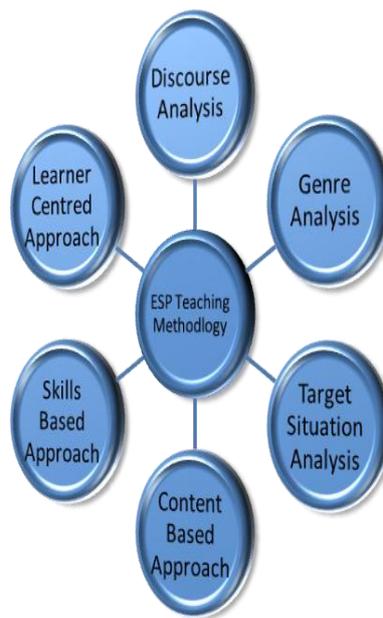
Figure 1. ESP Teaching Methodology

As a matter of fact, ESP teachers as decision -makers need 'to leave consideration of appropriate methodology out of account' Widdowson (1983). Their focus should be placed on the following three parameters

➤ processing considerable understanding of the nature of language;
➤ the different theories of learning;
➤ the associated strategies and skills.

They should also undertake target and learning situations analysis, predict what makes learning successful, and create an effective atmosphere that may enable the learners to engage in meaningful tasks. In addition to the prominent role of the ESP teachers as decision- makers in the selection of suitable teaching methodology to a specific group of learners, they are also concerned with other responsibilities and assigned to perform other duties.

III. Demands On The Esp Teacher
To meet learners' various needs, their different styles and strategies, the types of the specialised language course, the time restriction, and the changes have taken place in an ESP setting; an urgent need for new roles and responsibilities of the ESP teacher have emerged.

IV. ESP Teacher's Responsibility
Besides those traditional roles of the general language instructor notably the presenter of information, controller of activities, assessor of correctness, manager, counsellor and social worker (Prodromou, 1991), in any ESP context, the role of a language teacher is considered as a challenging task; it should go beyond teaching and facilitating language learning, or to what Dudley-Evans and John (1998:13) name a practitioner. This includes various pivotal roles, namely:

➤ Teacher
➤ Course designer and materials provider
➤ Collaborator
➤ Researcher
➤ Evaluator

As for the first teaching responsibility, the ESP instructor needs to play the role of the transmitter of knowledge and the facilitator of the learning process, his main concern should be placed on helping his learners to:

➤ learn effectively;
➤ develop their required skills;

➤ enhance their language strategies and abilities;
➤ generate communication in the ESP classroom.

To respond positively to the learners' needs, language teacher should act as one- to- one adviser, he needs to be more flexible, take a risk in teaching with limited specialised knowledge and up- date his carrier content. He should also develop his positive attitudes towards the students' field of study, and set clear goals and objectives for a successful organisation and distribution of the course (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998). The responsibility of the ESP practitioner is not only restricted to teaching, but should extend to other fundamental roles including course devising and materials providing. The decision upon the language course content and the teaching materials are determined by the learners' needs and expectations. In any ESP situation, the practitioner should first undertake the process of Needs Analysis and Identification as recommended by Javid (2015:24) 'Identification and analysis of present and target situation is the first and foremost responsibility of an ESP practitioner…' This may provide him with, more or less, a clear idea of how to frame the course. In other words, is the course intensive or extensive; General or specific; which approach should be adopted, which syllabus is more suitable.

An ESP teacher as a provider of materials, according to Dudley- Evans and John (1998) should also perform the following tasks:
➤ Selecting ready -made materials;
➤ Adapting the already existing materials to the current needs of the learners;
➤ Writing his own teaching materials.
➤ Assessing the effectiveness of the materials.

Another key role is the ESP practitioner as a collaborator. In ESP context, the language teacher is not expected to be the source of knowledge and the primary knower of information of the students' field of study, yet, a call for engaging with the discipline should be made to ensure best practices, reduce instructional obstacles and make teaching and learning process more successful and valuable. This can be achieved by sharing roles and responsibilities with the subject -specialist and the learners as well, through cooperation, collaboration and team -teaching (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998) depending on whether English is used as a language of instruction, the awareness of ESP learners, and the subject specialists' willingness to provide pedagogical support.

Three possible cooperative ways the language teacher may be concerned with in his classroom:
➤ Simple cooperation
➤ Specific cooperation
➤ Full team teaching

The former or what Robinson (1991) labels 'Smaller scale cooperation' is about the idea of analysing both the learners' needs and their target situation, its central concern is to gather knowledge about the content syllabus and the learners' professional responsibilities. The second type of cooperation includes inviting the subject -specialists to provide a framework of discipline -based themes, reading materials and activities to be drawn on in the ESP Course design. The fullest cooperation is likely to take place when the course is taught either by the presence of both the language and subject lecturers to enhance, for instance, content comprehension and prepare them for test examination answers, or by the presence of only one teacher with a stress on content and language integrated learning, CLIL for short (Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans and John, 1998). Moreover, the ESP practitioner needs to act as a teacher- researcher who should have an interest in various studies conducted on several aspects including, for example, needs analysis, course design, materials development, genre and discourse analysis, to reach a thorough understanding of the different types of research and integrate those results and conclusions in his own ESP teaching situation. In this respect, he needs to draw on a three ways approach namely:
➤ his theoretical knowledge of the different theories of teaching and learning;
➤ the available studies made for the same purpose;
➤ his ability to reformulate his own ideas and feedback.

The diagram below from Kennedy (1985) helps to highlight the role of research to improve ESP teaching practice:
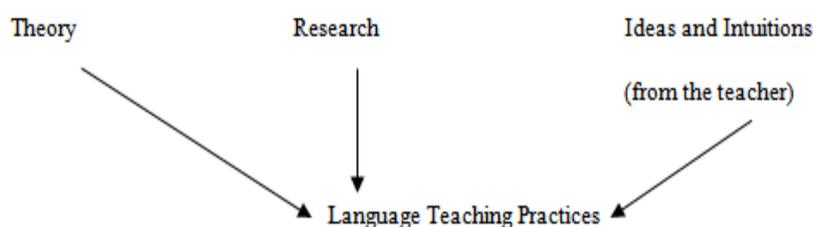
Figure 2. ESP Teacher as a Researcher (adopted from Kennedy, 1985)

Additionally, an urgent call is also made by numerous scholars (Kennedy, 1985; Robinson, 1991; Dudley- Evans and John, 1998 Hyland, 2006) who encourage ESP teachers to undertake their own investigations in their classrooms as suggested by Hyland (2006:386) '…teachers have not only become researchers of the genres and communicative practices of target situations, but also of their classrooms.' Several research designs are recommended for an ESP research to better practice self-reflection. This can be achieved through action research and experimental research with a special focus on the use of qualitative research tools such as interviews and classroom observations to gather data related to the learners' achievements and the ways they learn (Hyland, 2006; Nunan, 1990; Javid, 2015).

At a final step, the teacher needs to act as an evaluator. This latter entails assessing students' learning and evaluating the course objectives through the use of a different range of elicitation techniques which may be grouped into the following types:
➢ Placement test
➢ Diagnostic test
➢ Proficiency test
➢ Achievement test

This ongoing process should take place at various stages of the ESP course to have an outlook on the learners' state of knowledge, their learning gaps and skills developments. Yet, it is regarded as a challenging task for the majority of the ESP practitioners as it requires considerable time and expertise to devise suitable tests, analyse and interpret data, evaluate the course objectives, the teaching materials, and the syllabus, as well.

V. ESP Teachers' Professional Development
ESP teachers, in general, face a number of obstacles including mainly: the absence of training to teach specialised language course, the lack of available and suitable teaching materials, large size of classes, etc. These issues turn teaching to be a challenging task. To meet the urgent demand of our modern society, teachers need to be trained and improve their professional competence. Throughout the history of ESP teaching, scholars call for teachers' effectiveness as an important ingredient in the teaching/ learning process to improve their quality of teaching, which may respond positively to the learners' achievements. Teachers' effectiveness is believed to be an umbrella term that covers a number of aspects, some of them can be achieved but others are out of the scope. According to Caena (2011) teachers' effectiveness:
➢ May include enhancing personal characteristics notably the teachers' positive attitude, motivation and competence.
➢ May refer to the idea of developing a set of instructional techniques and strategies;
➢ School effectiveness: refers to the cooperation and collaboration between teaching staff for the purpose of materials development and training;
➢ National policies: it refers to teachers' evaluation of the effectiveness of the course and the educational system if it is possible.

Figure 3. Teacher Effectiveness (Caena, 2011: 03)

VI. Conclusion

To sum up, the importance of teachers' professional development in any ESP context calls for a shift in responsibility from ESP lecturers to lifelong learners. This can be achieved through both self- development and training. As a matter of fact, ESP teachers need to read journals and articles, attend conferences either on specialized language education or on their learners' field of study and participate in workshops to extend their knowledge and discuss their findings. They also need to cooperate with other colleagues. Formal preparation of ESP teachers entails undertaking pre- service and in- service training courses. The former takes place before being appointed in ESP teaching, it 'helps them … enhance and improve language abilities, pedagogical skills, and cultural knowledge' (Song and Cheng, 2011:100). The latter is about training those who are already engaged in ESP environment trough professional seminars and workshops.

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