

The Most Prominent Roles of an ESP Teacher

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Abstract

One prominent feature of many ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses, which make them rather different from EGP (English for General Purposes) courses, is the presence of adult learners, who are primary workers and secondary learners. As ESP is a highly learner-centered approach, paying close attention to the multidimensional needs of learners is of essential importance. Therefore, ESP teachers should follow a comprehensive adulthood-oriented approach, not only focusing on the linguistic needs of learners but also paying particular stress on the learners' psychological needs and preferences. In this humanistic context, an ESP teacher should follow an integrative approach, acting as a simultaneous teacher and counselor. Thus, ESP teachers should go beyond classroom settings, which lead them to their second important role concerned with a close collaboration with content teachers. This collaboration provides ESP teachers with useful information on the most effective syllabuses and instructional approaches to meet the learners' needs. Unfortunately, due to the unreasonable prejudice of many content teachers, it is rather difficult for many English teachers to develop a close collaboration with them. In response to this difficult situation, cooperation between English teachers and ESP learners is highly recommended. ESP teachers should also act as action-based researchers and theorizers to fulfill the ongoing needs of language learners effectively.

Keywords: adulthood-oriented approach, action-based researcher, counseling, integrative approach, team teaching, ESP, EGP

1. Introduction

ESP has been an innovative approach to language teaching, which has been widely used over the last three decades. There exist three fundamental reasons for considerable attention, given to this approach after the Second World War (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The first reason is related to the unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical, and economic activities on a large international scale. The second reason is concerned with revolution in traditional linguistics and primary focus on communicative approaches to language teaching. Finally, serious consideration, given to the psychology of learning and individual learning differences such as preferred learning styles, strategies, needs, and interests, has made ESP programs of growing importance. Therefore, ESP is more a psychological trend rather than a linguistic one. In such a humanistic setting, major decisions about appropriate syllabus, methodology, and evaluation process are made based on learners' reasons for learning English. On the other hand, most of English teachers design required syllabuses not only based on their professional knowledge of teaching English for communicative purposes but also based on learners' academic and linguistic needs. Given this, it is rather difficult to differentiate ESP courses from EGP courses because many EGP teachers adopt an ESP approach in designing appropriate syllabuses.

ESP teachers should equip language learners with appropriate linguistic and strategic competencies, which enable them to improve their academic competence independently. It is evident that in such a purpose-oriented approach, the role of ESP teachers is of essential importance. ESP teachers have to take multidimensional and unpredicted responsibilities because of the on-going changing patterns of learners' needs. They should formulate certain goals and objectives, select and develop effective materials, plan appropriate courses, and evaluate the learners' patterns of development. This means that an ESP teacher cannot follow any dictated pre-determined methodology as well as any priori syllabuses. Therefore, in such a complex setting, ESP teachers cannot take on

traditional language delivering roles. Instead, they have to act as teachers, course designers, collaborators, researchers, and evaluators simultaneously. Moreover, ESP teachers have the most essential role to enhance the learners' instrumental and integrated motivation.

Thus, the roles of ESP teachers are very extensive based on learning settings and needs. However, in any ESP framework, an ESP teacher can act effectively if he/she cares about three essential and prominent responsibilities, which can cover the other duties. Therefore, the present article elaborates on three prominent roles of ESP teachers.

The first role of an ESP teacher is following an adulthood-oriented approach toward ESP programs concerned with acting as a simultaneous teacher and counselor. The second prominent role of an ESP teacher is cooperating and collaborating with content teachers to design and teach the materials effectively. Finally, ESP teachers should act as action research practitioners and theorizers to adjust themselves with learners' short-term and long-term needs. Each of these roles is discussed separately.

2. Adulthood-Oriented Approach toward ESP Programs

Certainly, one of the most prominent principles, which make many ESP programs radically different from EGP programs, is adopting a flexible adulthood-oriented approach by ESP teachers. This means that in ESP settings, learning and teaching activities should be interpreted in terms of adult learning specifications and characteristics. Therefore, such a different perspective on ESP programs should be the major focus of both ESP curriculum designers and teachers. This is of essential importance because ESP and AE (Adult Education) programs share many similar perspectives such as learners' autonomy, motivation, self-confidence, self-directed learning, and so forth, which cannot be underestimated. In fact, an adulthood-oriented perspective toward ESP is considered as an integrative approach, in which an ESP teacher has the double responsibility of *Teaching* and *Counseling*. Thus, in applying the adulthood-oriented approach in ESP programs, teachers should take into consideration relevant properties, listed by Sifakis (2003) as follows,

- a stage in the life cycle of an individual
- a certain form of societal status (acceptance by the society in which they live)
- a collection of ideals and values (the notion of adulthood)

These characteristics were also emphasized earlier by Habermas (1978), who believed that ESP teachers should develop personal growth and full development or maturity of adults. Besides, as adults are usually serious in what they undertake, ESP teachers should encourage learners to reinforce a greater sense of perspective and ability to make sound judgments based on their accumulated experiences. Finally, an ESP teacher should reinforce an inherent autonomy in learners, which makes them responsible decision makers and develops their motivation for voluntary participation and personal involvement in learning tasks.

Therefore, the mentioned characteristics of adult learners are of crucial importance due to the type of learning styles and strategies, they consciously and subconsciously apply in leaning situations in general, and in ESP settings in particular. In addition, regarding the necessity of adopting humanistic approach in ESP courses, different learning problems should be taken into account more seriously. Among the most important barriers to learning, learners' anxiety, embarrassment, and loss of self-confidence are of crucial importance. In fact, in adulthood - oriented approach to learning, learners' self-respect and respect for others are highly stressed. In such a holistic approach, a sense of discipline in the learning process should not be taken for granted.

Regarding the mentioned points, the social role of ESP learners is of primary prominence since it makes ESP programs similar to AE programs. The social role of ESP learners is actually related to their occupational specification and their interaction with people working in the same or other occupational environments. In fact, the majority of ESP learners are primary workers and secondary learners. Thus, they are able to acquire knowledge mainly from experience rather than academic texts and media. ESP learners are usually self-directed or sponsor-directed; therefore, their performance is heavily dependent on level of motivation and sense of self-fulfillment, they usually get from learning situation. Naturally, most of learners inevitably experience some barriers to learning because of being far from educational practices for a long time. Some barriers to effective learning can be lack of requisite skills, theoretical bases, enough time for studying, and high degree of vulnerability. Thus, there should be a great link with ESP and AE programs, and the relevance should be reflected clearly in all aspects of ESP curriculum planning. Given that, an effective ESP program should focus primarily on three essential principles.

The first principle is ESP learners' awareness of the learning process. The second one is the adult learners' particular language-learning pattern in relation to their general learning process. Finally, the existence of an

explicit learning contract, which should be made between ESP curriculum planers, language teachers, content teachers, and learners. These principles are further discussed.

2.1 ESP Learners' Awareness of the Learning Process

Perhaps, the active participatory role of learners in every ESP program is of much more prominence than in other educational programs. In fact, in any ESP programs, the learners should be considered as 'student participants', who voluntarily and actively take necessary steps toward achieving certain academic and occupational goals. In other words, learners should be responsible enough to link their actual academic and occupational needs to the concomitant instructional syllabus and methodology. In such a humanistic atmosphere, learners are more conscious and reflective on their learning preferences than conventional learning contexts.

Furthermore, the active participating role of ESP learners should be extended to the self-evaluation and self-regulation of learning process if an effective ESP program is desired. In other words, through self-determination and self-regulation of leaning processes, learners can judge their capabilities effectively and can organize required courses of action. Thus, great awareness of learning process in any ESP contexts is heavily dependent on learners' degree of linguistic competence, self-autonomy, and the interaction between teachers and learners.

2.2 Learning Characterizations of Language Learning in ESP Context

Certainly, identification of particular learning characterizations of ESP learners is highly related to general cognitive learning patterns. In other words, before elaboration on particular learning process of ESP learners, detailed elaboration on general learning skills and strategies is of fundamental importance. After such a detailed analysis, identifying the skills, strategies, and knowledge required to learn language for general communicative purposes is necessary. Finally, through getting insight from general learning patterns in both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, particular knowledge, skills, and strategies required to use a language under certain ESP circumstances can be identified more effectively.

2.3 Learning Contract in an ESP Setting

In every ESP program, establishing a learning contract, which is a particular form of educational negotiation between different figures in ESP programs, is necessary. This negotiation should be conducted with three groups of people.

The first group is the organizers, sponsors or providing agencies, who provide assumptions not only about the degree of subject-specificity and purpose of the program but also specify eligible requirements of the learners. Second, the teachers who provide initial expectations of the program and apply their exterior experiences from similar programs. Therefore, the teachers translate the sponsors' aims into tangible teaching materials and integrate the specified objectives with the leaders' abilities. The last group is the learners who reflect their existing knowledge and anticipation of the course.

In fact, the existence of a learning contract, as Hertzberg (1972) claimed, brings about a proper cooperation between ESP teachers and learners. Therefore, in such a negotiated program, learning process is changed into a complete cycle, in which learners are left with a feeling of satisfaction of learning something worthwhile. On the other hand, the learning process is sequential and cumulative because it is built on adult learners' existing knowledge and expectations. Thus, learning process is voluntary and purposeful. In such a flexible context, ESP learner has to be fully aware of methodological principles and learning objectives, underlying the actual teaching process.

In general, in an adulthood-oriented approach toward ESP programs, detailed needs analysis should be conducted to reach a complete profile about the participants' needs. Certainly, a detailed profile includes useful considerations about the learners' personal vocational experiences, general learning theories, personal language learning experiences, preferred learning strategies, and decision-making abilities. Therefore, in such an integrative approach, an ESP teacher has a double responsibility of teaching and counseling.

3. ESP Teacher as a Skillful Counselor

The counseling role of an ESP teacher is actually a restricted pedagogical therapeutic role, which should not be equated with professional psychiatric one. A counseling teacher is a good, intelligent, creative, sincere, and energetic person, who is warm towards learners and responsible for sound judgment (Wheeler, 2002). The counseling teacher should act in the way that seems attractive, trustworthy, and skillful. Some personal attributes such as warmth and positive regard, cultivating hope, and being non-judgmental and sympathetic are of essential importance for an ESP teacher. Furthermore, a counseling teacher should have some therapists' characters such

as emotional stability, open-mindedness, commitment, genuineness, flexibility, interest in people, confidence, sensitivity, and fairness. This humanistic approach enhances the positive, non-competitive, uncomplicated, and openly reflective role of learners. Certainly, in such an accepting atmosphere, teaching and learning activities occur in a cooperative way. This cooperative approach helps language teachers and content teachers to deal with major problems more conveniently than traditional approaches.

4. The Cooperation between an ESP Teacher and a Content Teacher

The next important role of an ESP teacher is establishing a good rapport with the content teacher to develop effective ESP materials. This means that ESP programs are highly beneficial if English teachers and content teachers negotiate with each other.

Up to now, there have been many controversial opinions about the most effective methodologies in ESP programs and the role of language and content teachers. There exists wealth of studies, most of which indicated that language-teaching programs cannot be separated from other academic programs, or EFL programs cannot be considered as ‘ivory towers’, divorced from other academic disciplines (e.g., Bacha, 2003; Bhatia & Candlin, 2000; Canagarajah, 2002; Duff, 2001; Johns, 2003a, 2003b; Mukattash, 2003; Nickerson et al., 2005; Swales, 1990; Zhu, 2004).

Originally, the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to ESP programs was emphasized by Swales (1988), who developed a framework and categorized the interdisciplinary activities into three groups of cooperation, collaboration, and team-teaching based on useful insight from Barron’s (1992), Dudley-Evans and John’s (2006) frameworks.

Based on Swales’ framework, cooperative activities are concerned with a low level of cooperation between English teachers and content teachers, where ESP teachers consult content teachers about different aspects of academic fields. During collaborative activities, language teachers and content teachers work together to devise appropriate negotiated syllabuses as well as teaching/learning activities. Finally, in team-teaching activities, both English and content teachers work together in the same ESP classroom to teach the material simultaneously.

4.1 Empirical Background

Based on Dudley-Evans’ categorization of interdisciplinary activities, many researchers have focused on the significant efficacy of collaborative and team teaching activities in ESP programs (e.g., Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hayland, 2002; Johns & Swales, 2002; Owl, 2003; Street & Verhoeven, 2001; Warschauer, 2002). Based on the results of the mentioned studies, teaching English in many ESP settings is so complex that it cannot be accomplished efficiently with either English teachers or content ones. Therefore, a closer cooperation between two teachers is strongly felt. In fact, teaching ESP courses with English teachers may lead to the failure to fulfill the students’ academic needs. In comparison, teaching English with content teachers may lead to the students’ great failure to learn necessary language components and skills, without which fulfilling the academic needs are not possible.

Jordan (1997) emphasized the importance of team-teaching activities to improve writing abilities of ESP learners. He indicated that due to the various technical written genres and writing organizations of different academic disciplines, language teachers are not able to teach them effectively on their own. In such complicated settings, teaching language with English teachers may lead to the great failure of the learners to analyze different writing modes and genres to cope with varied demands of writing in their own professions.

The importance of team-teaching activities to improve writing in ESP courses was also justified by Bacha and Bahous (2007) for teaching particular academic writing skills to Business freshman and sophomore students in the Lebanese American University. Based on the findings, after graduation from the university, the graduate students, who were taught ESP materials with English teachers were competitive on the market and well sought for career placement in Lebanon and around. However, in informal interviews with 10 business faculty members, it was generally commented while students’ business background was credible, their English skills could be further developed if they were thought under team-teaching EAP approach. Some researches even emphasized the necessity of team-teaching activities for improving reading comprehension skills in ESP settings (e.g., Mahala & Swilky, 1994; Owl, 2003).

Finally, the close cooperation between English and academic experts is of essential importance, particularly in the area of law and teaching English for legal purposes. As an example, Northcott and Brown (2006) explored the interaction between language translators and law lecturers to solve specific legal terminology questions. The researchers emphasized the use of related translation activities to train highly qualified legal translators, or highly trained interdisciplinary specialists, known as lawyer linguists. Unfortunately, due to the great complexity

of translating and interpreting legal terminologies, neither legal nor language experts could accomplish the tasks appropriately. In fact, the researchers investigated different legal translated extracts, which had been translated with either of the two experts or with the cooperation of them. The results reflected that the latter kind of translation or cooperative translation was the most precise one. Such an interdisciplinary approach to translate legal texts has been justified by other researchers (e.g., Bhatia, 1993, 2001; Joseph, 2004; Langton, 2002; Sarcevic, 1997, 2001; Weber, 2001). The essence of the cooperation is so high that many lawyers mistrust translated legal texts, produced by a translation service outside law making process (Sarcevic, 1997). In fact, legal terms denote concepts that cannot be translated without appropriate conceptual understanding. This means that many legal words have a general meaning, but they have a special legal meaning in each legal system. Therefore, if translators do not have sufficient legal and linguistic expertise, they self-interpret the terminologies, which may bring about many socio-political problems. Certainly, in such a complicated setting, English teachers cannot work independently and require a closer cooperation with legal specialists to remove the ambiguities.

5. ESP Teachers as Active Practitioners

Despite the essence of administrating ESP courses worldwide, the demand for professional ESP courses has not met in many areas of the world. This may be due to lack of effective teacher-training programs. Therefore, in many cases, ESP teachers should involve themselves in self-training programs based on the detailed needs analysis of ESP learners (Master, 1997). One important reason for ESP teachers' failure in designing effective instructional programs may be a variety of learners' needs, which cannot be covered in restricted training courses. In other words, participating in ESP training programs cannot prepare language teachers to act as highly qualified ESP practitioners in many actual instructional settings. As an example, even many skillful ESP teachers are sometimes unable to deal with learners' needs in the area of business, full of different clients (Boswood & Marriott, 1994). This means that ESP practitioners should advocate ethnographic and practical approaches toward ESP teacher-training programs, with greater focus on their actual classroom experiences rather than being stuck to theoretical suggestions. In fact, incorporation of a practical dimension into teacher-training programs is highly effective because training "without the practical base and impetus of an actual course to run" is a limited concept (Northcott, 1997, p.9). Therefore, ESP practitioners should insist to train themselves while they are seriously involved in actual ESP settings. In this case, they are mostly considered as professional participants (Maclean, 1997).

Although teachers' self-training programs cannot completely substitute actual ESP training programs, they will inevitably lead to effective teaching and learning results provided that they are developed and practiced appropriately with ESP practitioners.

One effective teacher-training curriculum is offered by Chen (2000) as an Action-Research Program, in which an ESP teacher starts with a set of ESP theoretical assumptions, as an initial guide to practice. In this program, ESP teachers put the theoretical assumptions into practice regarding particular teaching/learning contexts. This means that no absolute theory can be blindly followed in ESP settings. Therefore, ESP teachers are better to put their theories into practice through applying appropriate professional reflection, problem solving, and decision-making processes. In addition, ESP teachers can get useful insights from their innovative teaching activities, which can theorize and validate later through practice.

6. Meta-Analysis

Through developing self-training programs, ESP practitioners can get better insights about the learners' needs and offer more practical solutions to fulfill them through applying useful teaching, learning, and counseling activities. In addition, through repeated use of ESP learners' preferred techniques, particularly the more innovative ones, they can offer new ESP theories, appropriate for the other ESP practitioners, working in similar contexts.

In general, in ESP courses, initially the role of English teachers are more prominent than EGP courses to provide a useful vantage point for understanding mutual misunderstanding between academic and linguist aspects. In other words, English teachers act as an interface between two worlds, focusing on potential problem areas in language review sessions, and enabling participants to formulate the questions that will elicit the information needed from the academic specialists. Thus, as academic specialists become more familiar with learners' academic and linguistic needs, the role of English teachers becomes less prominent. However, in some situations if English teachers are provided with enough academic content information, they can develop and enhance the academic language skills of ESP participants. In fact, such an interdisciplinary community, in which members from different discourse communities participate with the aim of joint construction and instruction of ESP texts, removes the traditional boundaries between disciplines, which certainly lead to more effective ESP programs.

In general, English teachers have the potential to develop close ties with content teachers as they become more familiar with their particular teaching contexts. This close tie enables English teachers to identify particular linguistic needs of the participants necessary for success. With this cooperation, English teachers may be in a position to provide feedback to the content teachers, who may be less familiar with second language teaching situations and often have to be involved in teaching ESP courses. In fact, building such a close rapport between English teachers and content teachers ultimately lead to major improvements in both content and language domains (Jackson, 2004).

In general, in order to have influential ESP courses, ESP teachers should conduct extensive studies to explore short-term and long-term needs of the participants. In fact, ESP teachers should act as action-based researchers and theoreticians, who reach more innovative findings and approaches based on specific demands of ESP settings. Therefore, the next or perhaps the most important role of an ESP teacher is acting as an active practitioner and action-based researcher.

7. Implication for Practice

As it was mentioned earlier, ESP teachers have to take multidimensional responsibilities to fulfill short-term and long-term learners' needs in either academic or occupational domains. In fact, ESP programs are tailored to the needs of specific groups of learners throughout a small duration. In spite of small duration of the courses, the expectations of different ESP figures such as sponsors, curriculum planners, academic departments, executive authorities, learners, and evaluators are rather unreasonable. Unfortunately, ESP teachers are often blamed for the deficiencies of the programs unfairly. In other words, the inability of many learners to fulfill the occupational and academic expected needs is mostly related to the teachers' inappropriate approach instead of inefficient curriculum planning and limited time devoted to the instructional program. Such negative feelings toward English teachers inevitably enhance the feeling of inferiority and lack of self-confidence in front of members of academic or occupational boards, which ESP teachers work for. Therefore, they are unable to cooperate with them effectively to get useful insights about the specific needs of the learners and the academic content, they have to teach. However, as it was mentioned, the close collaboration between teachers and learners and team-teaching activities in ESP programs are of essential importance. Therefore, in such difficult situations, English teachers have to work as action-based practitioners and theoreticians, who have to put many assumptions into practice and theorize them, if prove successful. However, due to higher sensitivity and expectation of ESP learners and sponsors, their specificity of needs, limited time, complicated syllabuses, complexity of specific academic content, and many other reasons, English teachers cannot act by themselves. Therefore, the essence of teacher-training programs is more strongly felt in ESP settings in comparison with other educational programs. In such teacher-training programs, many teaching tips, strategies, and techniques, contributing to the teachers' effective instruction, should be expanded. In addition, due to the importance of adulthood-oriented approach in ESP courses, the adults' psychological and educational needs should be investigated, and skillful counseling teachers should be trained.

Moreover, due to the importance of teacher-training for ESP courses, particular workshops should be administered to enable ESP teachers to share their knowledge and experiences with each other. Such programs can be administered in online way to enable many ESP teachers to take part in them even at home. In such programs, it is recommended to provide teachers with some specialized fundamental knowledge about the academic content, which they have to teach in ESP classes. Besides, due to the variety of genres in different disciplines, ESP teachers should be able to analyze the moves and steps of the particular genre, which they have to teach. ESP teachers should also learn many ESP and semi-ESP terminologies and their applications in different academic fields. In fact, semi-ESP vocabularies are much more troublesome as they are interpreted in different ways in different academic fields.

Unfortunately, in spite of the great importance of ESP courses, in many situations, very inexperienced and untrained teachers are sometimes sent to teach ESP learners. They can be either English teachers or content teachers, who have limited familiarity with English or academic content. Unfortunately, due to the great prejudice of many academic faculties against English faculties, team-teaching activities are totally taken for granted and considered useless. The result in such situations is clear. Therefore, administrating teacher-training programs and workshops for the content teachers, who want to teach ESP courses is of crucial importance.

In general, as ESP teachers should follow interdisciplinary approach instead of traditional linguistic delivering roles, their responsibilities are much more serious than the responsibilities of EGP teachers. In fact, ESP teachers not only should have enough linguistic competence to teach necessary language components and skills to the learners but also should have enough content competence to communicate English content more effectively. This

is possible if ESP teachers can act as active practitioners and collaborate with their students or related academic faculties frequently. In addition, since most ESP learners are primarily workers and secondarily learners, their psychological barriers to learning should be discovered and removed with experienced counseling teachers, who know the most fundamental psychotropic issues. Therefore, regarding such problems and many others, the necessity of administrating useful teacher-training programs and workshops is crucially felt. Administrating such programs may seem expensive and time consuming at first. However, regarding the benefits, administrating such programs should be considered as the most essential priority in any ESP policy-making programs.

8. Conclusion

The present article was a detailed elaboration on three essential roles of ESP teachers in both ESP for academic and occupational settings. In fact, as most of ESP learners are primary workers and secondary learners, following a more integrated approach, which deals with learners' needs in more multidimensional way, is necessary. In other words, many ESP teachers should follow an adulthood-oriented approach and act as simultaneous teachers and counselors dealing with both linguistic and psychological needs of learners in a parallel way. Therefore, in such a balanced approach, learners are more motivated and involved in self-directed learning, which is the most fundamental purpose of ESP programs. The counseling role of ESP teachers should not be restricted to classroom settings. ESP teachers should develop an accepting attitude toward content teachers to get useful insights about the academic content, which they are going to teach. In other words, ESP teachers should closely collaborate with content teachers to design the syllabus and get better teaching tips, which enable them to fulfill the learners' needs more effectively. Therefore, both ESP and content teachers should negotiate without any unreasonable biases against each other. Finally, as ESP programs are essentially learner-centered, the learning needs of learners are of priority. Because these needs are variable, following a pre-determined syllabus and methodology is unreasonable. In fact, an effective ESP teacher should be continually involved in action-based theorizing about all the relevant aspects and act as an active practitioner.

In summary, ESP teachers have to take heavier responsibilities than EGP teachers; therefore, it is better for them to take part in ESP teacher-training programs and workshops. In this case, ESP teachers can share their experiences and knowledge with each other to improve their teaching quality in a short time.

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