

The Differences and Similarities between English for Specific Purposes(ESP) and English for General Purposes(EGP) Teachers

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ABSTRACT: *This theoretical study aims to explore the differences and similarities in the roles of English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for general purposes (EGP) teachers. It also highlights the implications of these differences and similarities for English language teaching (ELT), course materials and classroom practices. The review of previous studies reveals that EGP focuses on general English language abilities of students whereas ESP focuses on specific skills and needs of learners based on a detailed analysis of learners' professional/academic needs. This distinction has important implications for ESP teachers. In addition to the role of a language teacher, an ESP practitioner has to assume certain special roles, for example, as a course designer, material provider, collaborator, researcher, evaluator and cultural interpreter. Therefore, the study recommends that special pre- and in-service training/refresher courses should be arranged for ESP teachers so that they may become equipped to perform challenging tasks related to their job.*

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT); English for Specific Purposes (ESP); English for General Purposes (EGP); English for Academic Purposes (EAP); Needs Analysis; Material Designing.

Introduction:

ELT can broadly be divided into ESP and EGP(Hutchinson &Waters, 1987). ESP is assumed to be more focused, practical and object-oriented (Dudly-Evans &St John, 1998) as compared to EGP. It is interested in investigating the needs of the learners, preparing teaching materials, and devising appropriate teaching methodologies. Owing to these special roles, an ESP teacher is termed as ‘practitioner’ (ibid) and holds a different position than an EGP teacher. The differences of context and purposes of instruction assign distinctive roles to ESP and EGP teachers. The ESP teachers perform a variety of roles like that of collaborator, researcher, course designer and material developer along with conventional role as a teacher. That’s why an ESP teacher has to be well-trained in professional skills and flexible in approach in order to cope with the specific needs of his/her students. In an ESP context, the target situation demands a teacher to tailor his/her instruction to specific rather than general purposes.

The study will discuss the topic as following. First, it will present the review of the literature about some theoretical and practical similarities and differences between ESP and EGP. Secondly, it will highlight the specific roles of an ESP teacher/practitioner in comparison with those of an EGP teacher. Finally, it will present the implications of the comparison of these roles.

2 Literature Review

A working definition of ESPcan be that it is a comprehensive term which refers to the teaching of English to those students who learn the language for a particular work or study-related reason. ESP has always focussed on needs analysis, text analysis and the training of learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their academic or professional situation (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).ESP can broadly be divided into two main kinds: ‘English for Occupational/Vocational/Professional Purposes (EOP/EVP/EPP).... and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)’ (Jordan, 1997, p.4).

English for General Purposes (EGP) is called ‘TENOR- the teaching of English for No Obvious Reason’ (Abbot, 1981 in Jordan, 1997, p.4). The title applies to those English language learning contexts where learners have no easily recognizable reason to learn the language.EGP generally

refers to the English language education at school levels where the students are made familiar with the structural/grammatical elements of English language to pass the exams (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

2.1 Similarities and Differences of ESP and EGP

ESP can be viewed as a special and specific edition of EGP that incorporates practical linguistic skills to enable students for the successful performance of professional tasks (Potocar, 2002). However, EGP provides basic knowledge and skills of English language at a school level where the occupational/professional and higher educational orientations of the students are not defined properly. The main goal of introducing ESP in various non-native /international settings is to equip learners with necessary English language skills to face their practical situation communication challenges in their future careers. As Holme (1996 cited in Potocar, 2002) suggests that ESP should help students to acquire necessary language skills to utilise their knowledge by combining work-related skills with personality development and socio-cultural knowledge.

According to Widdowson (1983 cited in Ajideh, 2009), the distinction between ESP and EGP lies in the way we define and implement the learning purpose. While ESP is objective-oriented learning where the specification of objective corresponds to the aim – the training operation – which deals with the development of restricted competence, EGP, on the other hand, is aim-oriented which does not equate the specification of objective to aim – an educational operation – dealing with the development of general capacity (ibid). While the primary role of an ESP teacher is to design a syllabus based on realistic goals and evaluating students` performance through the evaluation of relevant language skills, the EGP teacher does not necessarily set the goals and objectives of the programme. Therefore, an ESP teacher is basically involved in a `training operation` equipping the learners with a `restricted competence` to cope with defined tasks, an EGP teacher, on the contrary, is involved in an `educational operation` equipping learners with a general capacity `to cope with undefined eventualities in future` (ibid,p.163).

The specificity of ESP courses demands a teacher to adopt a different role and teaching strategy to transfer knowledge to his students. First of all, he/she has to identify learners` needs that will, in fact, determine the

method, material and the level of language teaching (Robinson, 1991). 'What distinguishes ESP from General English is an awareness of the need' (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p.53). So, it can be inferred that an ESP practitioner is almost a teacher of General English unless he understands and focuses upon the special needs of his/her students (Robinson, 1991). However, it is likely that specific linguistic knowledge and skills may be relevant and useful to more than one subject or profession (Holme, 1996). For example, skills required for communicative competence for different occupations may be similar (Potocar, 2002).

2.2 Comparative roles of an ESP and EGP teacher

It is not easy to ascertain a teacher's role in a general or particular context because it is not static. It keeps on changing owing to the differences in syllabi, courses and teaching contexts (Jordan, 1997). This very fact guides us to understand various roles of EGP and ESP teachers. If an ESP and an EGP teacher are not the same, then the question is what are the differences between them. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), while referring to ESP and EGP, answer this question very briefly that theoretically speaking there is no distinction; however, there are many differences in practice. 'There is no single, ideal role description' (Robinson, 1991, p.79) for an ESP teacher because there is a huge variety of ESP courses and contexts. However, Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) have identified some specific roles of an ESP practitioner as a teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. These special roles make an ESP practitioner less similar to the teacher of General English. Flexibility is assumed to be a secret of success for an ESP teacher. It is, in fact, a personal quality which transforms an EGP teacher into an ESP practitioner and helps him/her to instruct successfully various groups of students, even at a very short notice (Robinson, 1991, p.80).

2.3 Role as a Teacher

The ESP practitioner is a teacher first, so he must possess the qualities of a good general language teacher along with the specific qualities desired for his own field (Robinson, 1991). 'The methodology of ESP teaching may not differ radically from that of General English' (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.13). But keeping in mind the specificity of ESP in the strict sense, it is assumed that the role and methodology of a practitioner

varies from that of EGP teacher. An ESP teacher is not the 'primary knower' of the carrier content of the material (ibid). The reason is obvious because ESP includes the specific knowledge of the target situation, field of knowledge or profession but a teacher is, usually, trained in language skills only. That's why learners may know more about teaching material or content than teacher. A skilled teacher can channelize students' knowledge to bring forth effective communication strategies in the class. The teacher in these situations becomes a 'consultant' (Robinson, 1991) who prepares a classroom strategy with the help of students to meet their desired learning goals.

In certain ESP contexts, e.g. English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and Business English, the teacher assumes the role of a mentor who offers one-to-one advice to students. This kind of special attention has proved to be more helpful to students in achieving their communication skills and 'linguistic accuracy' (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.14). In an EGP context, a teacher is usually the fountain of the content knowledge. He asserts his authority in the class and seldom serves as a mentor or consultant of his students.

2.4 As a Course designer and materials Provider

ESP practitioners are expected to devise courses and provide materials to their students. These courses and materials should be in line with different needs and contexts of the learners. Usually, it is very hard to find appropriate textbooks that respond to most of linguistic and communicative needs of students in a certain context (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). That's why an ESP teacher has to prepare his own teaching materials. He/she either collects materials from various sources or writes his/her own when the desirable is not available (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). But the job of an ESP teacher does not end here; he/she has to assess the efficacy of those materials during and after the course.

In comparison, an EGP teacher follows the prescribed syllabus and teaches published textbooks recommended for different levels by the school authorities. He/she even adheres to the teaching methodology recommended in the book or advised by the authorities.

2.5 As a Collaborator

As ESP practitioners work in various academic and professional genres, they need to have knowledge of their students' specialism to plan courses and teaching materials. Practically speaking, a teacher cannot master specific requirements of all the disciplines, he is asked to teach. In such a situation, the collaboration with the subject specialists of the specific disciplines is advised (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). This kind of collaboration may be of various kinds; simple cooperation, specific collaboration and the fullest collaboration (ibid). In cooperation, an ESP teacher with the help of subject specialist knows about the subject syllabus and the professional responsibilities of his/her students. The specific collaboration involves some extended cooperation between ESP teacher and the subject specialist. The latter provide the former an access to the actual content of the subject course which can be used in classroom activities. A subject specialist may assess the teaching materials prepared by the ESP teacher in certain situations (ibid). In the fullest cooperation, the subject specialist and ESP practitioner teach the class together. It is known as 'team-teaching' (Robinson, 1991, p.88). This kind of collaboration is not needed in an EGP context.

2.6 As a Researcher

An ESP practitioner is also supposed to have an interest in research methods that can be helpful in performing various tasks like need analysis, course designing and material selection. This role is much needed in the field of EAP where volumes of research have been published already (Swales, 1990 cited in Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In order to get benefit from this research, a teacher should have aptitude and skill for the research. While assessing the needs, teachers must go beyond the cursory analysis of students' desired skills. They should make a comprehensive view of learners' identified skills and the relevant texts (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In the field of EGP, there is no such research because the same traditional grammatical structures are being taught till now.

2.7 As an Evaluator

An ESP practitioner not only evaluates the linguistic knowledge and skills of students but also the courses and materials he himself devised (ibid). Discussion with the students and their on-going needs analysis can

be very helpful to know the compatibility between course and materials taught and students' identified learning priorities. An EGP teacher also performs this role to a certain extent as he is also involved in the evaluation of his/her students.

2.8 Cultural Understanding as a Role of ESP Teacher

An ESP practitioner similar to an EGP teacher must understand and respect the cultural sensitivities of his students especially while teaching in a non-native setting. Moreover, an ESP teacher should also be aware of the differences between various academic or professional cultures where he/she works (ibid). He/she must keep in mind this kind of cultural awareness while designing courses, preparing materials and instructing the class.

William (1981) suggests that an ESP teacher should have the 'knowledge of students' world' (p.91). Robinson (1991) finds the term 'knowledge of students' world' vague and specifies it. He argues that it may include 'culture and personal concerns as well as their specialism' (p.80). It will be interesting to note that the specific culture of ESP classrooms stipulates students' respect as they might know more about subject content than their language teachers (Smith, 1983).

3 Implications for the materials, classroom practices and ELT

Generally speaking, the spread of ESP has also influenced English language teaching. At present, many ELT teachers analyse the needs of their students to make their programmes more effective (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). So it may be suggested to the educational leaders and policy makers that conditions must be created to encourage research culture among ELT teachers. In this regard, teachers should conduct 'action research' that would help them to analyse the efficacy of their specific language courses and the methodology applied for them (Kennedy, 1985 as cited in Robinson, 1991).

In the light of afore-mentioned literature, it seems that an ESP practitioner has to perform more roles as compared to an EGP teacher. Therefore, special training courses must be arranged and set as a pre-requisite for entry into ESP teaching. The pre-service, in-service and refresher courses can be fruitful for the specific training of ESP teachers. As there is a huge variety of ESP contexts and courses, it is not possible to train a teacher for all of them. So McDonough's (1988 as cited in

Robinson, 1991, p.94) division of 'wide-angle' and 'narrow-angle' division of training course seems appropriate here. Usually, newcomers to the ESP teaching field do not know which specific situation of ESP they will choose for teaching. That's why 'wide-angle' courses- includes training in general language teaching and broad ESP skills- are recommended for pre-service training and more specific and specialism-oriented 'narrow-angle' courses are recommended for in-service training. Moreover, Ewer (1983 in Robinson, p.94) also recommends training for ESP teachers to face 'attitudinal, conceptual, linguistic, methodological and organisational problems that they may face while performing various roles.

There has been a significant change in the domain of teacher-learner relationship under the impact of differences in the roles of ESP and EGP teachers. ESP teaching is more student-centred as compared to EGP. In an ESP classroom, a teacher will find older students than EGP ones. Sometimes, even students are more knowledgeable about subject content than teacher himself. Teachers should avoid asserting absolute authority in such situations and try to adopt an informal style of teaching to encourage students' participation in the classroom activities. Initiation-Response-follow up sequence of classroom discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975 as cited in Dudley-Evans & John, 1998) may not work in an ESP teaching situation where a learner can initiate the discussion or ask question to which a teacher has to respond. So ESP teachers are suggested to be flexible in their classroom practices even during the lesson (Jordan, 1997).

The implications for material designing have also been far reaching. The immense work in relation to the languages of various disciplines and professions has informed people about the various functions of English language. It has inspired many people to initiate materials writing projects in all fields of ELT (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). Because of the developments in material designing, ESP has shown that 'how a communicative language curriculum could be turned into either a functional-notional or a task-based syllabus' (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.19). This may help teachers to motivate students by providing them a chance to use language to convey their own purposes and meanings. As ESP ensures student autonomy, it would be a good idea to ask students to select materials themselves. This freedom of choice can enhance their creativity and motivation (Ajideh, 2009).

4 Conclusions

The comparative roles of an ESP and EGP teachers highlighted through the above literature makes it amply clear that though there are some common grounds for both the teachers in their respective classes, still the ESP teachers have a number of responsibilities which make their job more demanding. The ESP teacher or practitioner while performing the traditional role like an EGP teacher has to become a material designer, an organiser, a councillor, a facilitator and researcher at the same time. The diversity of their roles needs to be highly reflected in the practices carried out in their classes for the attainment of their teaching objectives. As compared to EGP teachers, ESP practitioners have to show more flexibility in their approaches because of ever-changing teaching situations and autonomous students in ESP contexts. Both EGP and ESP teachers should be skilful and trained to produce fruitful results in their fields. But it can safely be assumed that ESP teachers must be given special training in the required skills like need analysis and material designing to enable them to meet the specific needs and high expectations of their students.

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