

Factors Affecting the Learning of English for Specific Purposes of the students at Dai Nam University

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to identify common factors that impact English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction at Dai Nam University (DNU) and to offer strategies for addressing obstacles that reduce the subject's efficacy in the classroom. The results demonstrate that the course's goals of improving students' speaking abilities and ESP vocabulary, as well as their strong proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and speaking, teachers' effective instruction, and the course book's reasonably adequate and pertinent ESP content, all positively impact students' learning of ESP. Nonetheless, the findings show that a variety of factors, including those related to students, teachers, and the university itself, have a negative impact on ESP learning at the university. Furthermore, the results have shown a few possible ways to go beyond obstacles that both teachers and students have faced along the way.*

Keywords: *ESP, factors, learning English for Specific Purposes*

1. Introduction

English for academic and professional purposes is included in English for specified purposes (ESP). Learning ESP has become more and more necessary in recent decades for proficient English communication, and as a result, the significance of ESP instruction has been emphasized. Thus, assessing the efficacy of ESP learning—that is, looking into the variables affecting this subject's acquisition—is one of the most important current ESP topics in the college setting. By identifying those elements, it is thought that the study may assist educators and students in limiting negative effects and increasing good ones, as well as in fostering a supportive learning environment for DNU students.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of ESP

ESP can be defined in a number of ways. It is a method of teaching languages in which all decisions about method and content are based on the learners' motivation to learn, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987). According to Robinson (1991), ESP is a company that integrates practice, training, and education. It is founded on three main knowledge realisms: language, pedagogy, and the participants' or students' field of specialization. Richards & Rodger (2001) state that ESP is an initiative designed to address the linguistic needs of learners who need to gain material and practical skills through English instead of just mastering the language for its own purpose, such as students, engineers, nurses, and others, and who depend on the language to execute

certain activities.

The simplest way to explain ESP is to say that in building language education programs, decisions should always be based on how much students need to learn English. In light of this, as ESP has developed, the word "particular" has acquired new significance. ESP comprises teaching students how to use English in academic, professional, or workplace situations, according to the definitions given.

2.2. General characteristics of ESP

Concerning to characteristic of ESP, Robinson (1980) stated that an ESP course would have three features. Firstly, it is purposeful and aims at the successful performance of occupation or education by an individual or a group of learners. Secondly, it is based on an analysis of learners' needs and is adapted to meet these needs. Finally, it may differ from a general English (GE) course concerning skills, themes, topics, situations, functions, language, and methodology.

Additionally, from his own definition, Strevens (1988, p.1-2) differentiated between absolute characteristics and variable characteristics of ESP. ESP has some absolute characteristics: it consists of English language teaching which is designed to meet specified needs of the learner; its content, i.e. themes and topics and is related to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; it focuses on the language appropriate with those activities in syntax, lexis, semantics, discourse and so on. He also included the contrast of ESP with GE in the absolute characteristics of ESP. Additionally, ESP also has the variable characteristics

in which ESP may be, but is not necessarily, restricted as to the language skills to be learned and has not been taught according to preordained methodology.

3. Methodology

The current study examines common factors influencing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning at Dai Nam University (DNU) using a qualitative research approach. A focus group interview was used to interview six EFL students. Focus group interviews are “the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six,” according to Creswell (2013, p. 218). Every student was asked to answer questions about common factors influencing learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and their attitudes toward these aspects. The interview was audio recorded, including the questions and responses from the respondents.

4. Results & Discussion

The results reveal that many factors negatively influence ESP learning at the university, including students’ factors, teacher factors, and factors from the university.

4.1 Learners’ factors

4.1.1. Learners’ needs

Robinson (1980) emphasized that students’ needs are based on their own motivation and occupation, making learning a foreign language easier. Mountford (1981) believed that “needs” are necessary and desirable for language institutions.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) believe that learners’ needs encompass both internal and external factors, including teachers, teaching environment, learning style, motivation, anxiety, and cultural background knowledge. These factors are essential for effective language teaching and learning.

4.1.2. *Learners’ motivation:* Some researchers define learning motivation as the effort that learners put into learning a second language (L2) due to their desire or need to do so, or as a combination of effort, desire, goal attainment, and favorable attitude. Motivation in second language learning studies is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves students believing they have the skills to achieve desired goals and voluntarily participating in activities to improve their capabilities. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, arises from sources outside the individual and is linked to higher anxiety and lower self-esteem.

4.1.3. *Learners’ cultural knowledge:* To determine the relationship between learners’ cultural knowledge and ESP learning, numerous investigations were carried out in ESP learning environments. The research’ find-

ings suggested that cultural information is crucial to ESP learning. “It can be questioned whether the teaching of culture is necessary to integrate in teaching English, which has become the international language,” according to some studies that found language acquisition, particularly ESP vocabulary, requires an understanding of culture, while other studies view the cultural content as merely a means of motivating students (Mckay, 2002). He also emphasizes the need for ESP students to understand the culture associated with a specific language use, as it reflects culturally distinct worldviews, patterns, rituals, and ways of living.

4.2. Teachers’ factors

4.2.1. Teachers’ teaching background

Specialist major teachers and language major teachers are the two main sources of ESP teachers. Put differently, there are often two ways in which they become an expert in teaching ESP. Some teachers start off as English teachers after completing specific coursework or pursuing careers in business, science, engineering, security, medical, or any other field. When teaching ESP, they take advantage of their specialized knowledge.

Alternatively, and more frequently, instructors majoring in languages are asked to teach an ESP class, and they must become knowledgeable about the specialist fields they teach. According to Dulley-Evans and John (1998, p. 60), the majority of ESP teachers are trained in language instruction and lack first-hand knowledge of the subject matter and setting of other disciplines.

4.2.2. Teachers’ specialist knowledge

It is stated that instructors with specialized majors typically feel confident when imparting topic knowledge, but instructors with training in general education or literature sometimes feel uncomfortable and perplexed by texts whose subjects they are unfamiliar with. As a result, subject matter experts—such as ESP teachers—must ensure that they have a solid foundation in the field.

Troike (1994) suggests that specialized English Language Teaching (ELT) courses should be taught by subject-matter experts, as it is a straightforward and adequate approach. However, another researcher argues that a strong foundation in English Language Teaching can make language major teachers effective ESP practitioners. Both theories emphasize the importance of specialized knowledge and positive attitude in ESP instruction.

4.3 Learning environment factors

4.3.1. *Syllabus or Curriculum:* A syllabus is essentially a list of the topics that will be covered in class.

It shows what the learner who completes the course successfully will receive. It is called an evaluation syllabus in this instance. Furthermore, a syllabus can also show the sequence in which the material will be covered. Because it contains presumptions about the nature of language and learning, this might also be referred to as the organization syllabus. The learner's syllabus is the final kind of syllabus. The network of knowledge that emerges and grows in the learner's brain is what will allow them to comprehend and retain subsequent knowledge.

4.3.2. Materials (textbook): In the process of teaching and learning ESP, materials are important. They are best viewed as a tool for accomplishing goals and objectives that have previously been established in relation to the requirements of the students. Every learner group is different, therefore ESP teachers should select resources that best meet the needs of their students in terms of the course's objectives, language proficiency, learning preferences, teaching methods, and other factors. For this reason, material evaluation would be crucial and significant for both teachers and language learners.

4.4. Solutions to deal with those factors that hinder their ESP teaching and learning

First, teachers implemented several strategies to address students' anxiety when using ESP in and outside of the classroom. These included encouraging students by giving positive feedback rather than criticism, showing patience and enthusiasm for their learning and growth, fostering a laid-back and cooperative learning environment where no one will feel singled out, avoiding intensely competitive evaluation and assessment, and setting realistic and appropriate learning goals. In addition, when implementing the activities and learning materials, teachers are always aware of the language competency levels of their students. When teaching, English language teachers may not have the necessary professional knowledge. Teachers always read a lot of scholarly English books, pick up tips from colleagues, or even just ask their English-majoring pupils who excel at specific knowledge how to solve the problem. Regarding the knowledge and skills that students require, it is suggested that they be provided with all English language proficiency as well as specialized English capabilities. But they should concentrate more on developing some specific abilities, including speaking, listening, and reading, for their future careers. Teachers at the school changed their teaching methods to accommodate students with varying backgrounds by promoting independence, independent study, pair

work, and group projects. Furthermore, they showed greater tolerance and focused attention on struggling students in order to prevent students from losing interest in ESP classes.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

In summary, teaching and learning ESP is such a complicated field with so many interconnected components that it would be incorrect to approach this problem from a limited perspective. Thus far in this study, significant topics pertaining to common elements influencing ESP teaching and learning at DNU as well as possible remedies for the negative factors have been taken into account and investigated in the setting of the institution, both theoretically and practically. Based on the results of a few positive and negative elements, the researcher has given the college and its instructors some pedagogical recommendations in the hopes that they would improve the impact of ESP teaching and learning.

Only a small number of DNU students are included in this study; subsequent research may concentrate on the opinions of the teachers. A cross-sectional study or mixed method could be used in future research to examine and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of teaching and learning ESP, as well as to identify any additional obstacles or problems that teachers and students may encounter. Furthermore, the current study only focuses on the quantitative results.

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