Factors Influencing ESP Learning and Teaching

The factors influencing the design of ESP programs are numerous; some of the most important ones are discussed below. It is important that teachers should be aware of factors that affect the course. Due to this, nowadays, more teachers are now producing their own materials.

1. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH

a) In the Community

ESP programs are often the indirect result of **political decisions made at the governmental level about the role of English within the country** in which the learners are studying. These decisions **may restrict or widen the role and hence the use of English within the community.** The role of English in Anglo-phone countries is more extensive than in the Arab speaking ones. In the former, English is used as a medium of communication in business, government and education whereas in the latter it plays a more restricted role as a subject on the school curriculum and as a medium providing access to science and technology, such differences have considerable impact on ESP programs since the student's knowledge of English and their awareness of their needs for English will vary according to their exposure and familiarity with English and its usefulness to them.

b) In the Institution

Programs objectives may vary according to whether the students are studying in an **institution where English is the medium of instruction or in one where English is simply an additional subject on the curriculum**. In the former situation, the students need English to study other subjects in the curriculum; in the latter situation the study of English may have to compete with other subjects, this can happen in cases where the decision to have an English program in certain level is taken by administrators because it is regarded as essential for achievement in chemistry, physics, etc., students may need to read a textbook in English to have access to their subject matter, thus in such a situation they should be able to read in English and it is crucial that the materials should be highly motivating.

2. RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS

The number and nature of facilities available should greatly influence programs when designing courses such as: the size of classes, the degree of homogeneity within classes with respect to abilities and subject discipline and the quantity of instruction (refers to the number of hours), given English and whether the time available is to be spread on it over a period of time or used intensively as for example in one/six month pre-study course. In any program much depends on the teachers of both English and specialty field and their attitudes. ESP is only possible when language teachers are willing to learn something about the subject matter but who often lack confidence in approaching specialist.

A further respect concerns the role of the subject teacher since any decision use of an ESP approach relating to a specific subject demand some degree of cooperation between language and subject teachers.

3. LEARNER'S PROFILE

a) Age

The older the learner is, the more likely susceptible to have his/her own definite ideas on why s/he is learning English. In fact many ESP learners are adults and their utility of learning English is likely to be more apparent. It is then a question of matching the needs of the learner as s/he sees them with his/her needs as perceived by his/her language teacher. <u>There is likely to be more agreement on needs between the teacher and the learner at adult level since the purposes are more likely defined.</u>

b) Level of Proficiency

The learner may for instance be a trained scientist able to operate in his/her field of study in his/her own language but not in English. The teacher's task is to teach the language but the texts s/he chooses must be beneficent to student in their content and value.

This presents problems for the teacher who may be insecure or lacking specialist knowledge when facing specialist-texts. The learner may be looking for the linguist skills and ways of thinking appropriate to his/her particular discipline; nevertheless, the teacher's role is to teach both language and content with or without the cooperation of the subject teachers.

c) Motivation

It is possible to find out student's motivation for learning English and match the content of courses. To this motivation the chances of successful learning are increased. There are of course various levels of motivations which make the situations more complex. With high motivations, learning is much likely to succeed, however, problems occur either if the course content and learning motivation do not match or the level of motivation is low. Materials have to be carefully designed to raise this motivation.

There are 2 types of motivation: **instrumental** motivation and **integrative** one. English instrumental motivation is when English is seen as a means to achieve some particular or professional purposes. Integrative motivation is where the learner identifies him/herself with the social or cultural aspects of learning English. Generally, it is assumed that ESP programs tend to emphasize the instrumental aspect of student's motivation.

d) Attitudes to Learning

Attitudes to an ESP course may be influenced by a student's previous learning of English where his/her learning has not been successful. There may be a negative feeling towards continuing something which in the past has connotation of failure and vice-versa.

According to Ellis (1994: 199), the learner's attitude depends on:

1) The language in question
2) Its speakers
3) Its culture
4) Social benefit behind learning it
5) Its specific uses in certain settings
6) Their position in their society

In order to overcome the learner's reluctance to study English, the ESP teacher should develop materials in the form of texts, more closely linked to the skills required by the student and by a functional rather than strictly a structural approach. The learner's involvement and participation as a member of a team in group work would also motivate him/her and enable him/her to hold a positive attitude.

Reading is for instance one of the skills required by the student; many students are used to a word by word approach and a concept of reading which implies the necessity of knowing that every word in the passage means new exercises to practice. In contrast, in order to change the attitude towards this skill, a book entitled **Reading in the Language Classroom** by Williams Eddie (1984) deals with general problems of reading comprehension as well as devoting chapters to **skimming** (which is the quick research for a particular piece of information in a given text) and **scanning** (which is picking out pieces here and there to be able to get the meaning of the text) and **Indepth reading** (which is reading for a deeper comprehension to get a great deal of information and build a complete understanding of the text)

[All these are sub- skills of the skill of reading.]

e) Aptitude

Some folks may take excellent marks in all school subjects except in foreign languages courses and vice-versa; Skehan (1998: 187) in discussing this phenomenon states that *"A talent exists which is specific to language learning. A strong contrasting viewpoint would be that abilities which facilitate language learning are the same as those important in any learning and simply operate on different material [...] [but] people have strengths and weaknesses [...] these strengths and weaknesses equip individuals better for some areas than others [...] a talent for language is specific and so different from any general mix of cognitive abilities. The claim, in other words, is that language has qualitative differences from other areas, and may represent an altogether different knowledge system."*

Hence, those who perform well in their language courses tend to possess an ==innate== talent, gift or predisposition -uninfluenced by the environment (Skehan 1998) and separate from intelligence and motivation (Caroll 1981)- that others lack which is known as **Aptitude**. Carroll (1981) believes that this ability depends on **FOUR** characteristics that constitute it:

- **Phonetic Coding Ability**
- **Grammatical Sensitivity**
- **Inductive Langue Learning Ability**
- **Rote Learning Ability**

f) Empathy

This feature of the personality of the learners involves **the ability to put one's self in other's position** in order to understand their intentions, to be sympathetic with their thoughts and generally have a glimpse at what they see. According to Guiora (1972), success in foreign language learning requires from the learner to be as much empathetic as possible with the speakers of his/her target language.

g) Anxiety

Any person feels anxious towards certain persons, actions, moments or in certain settings and this might inhibit the progress in doing some tasks especially in the field of language learning. Despite this fact, there exist **TWO** types of anxiety: **Facilitative** anxiety and **Debilitative** one. The former makes the learner repeat the attempts to perform a certain task; whereas the latter makes him/her avoid such actions.

h) Extro/Introversion

Introvert students tend to be shy and do not look to impress others or their affirmation whereas extrovert ones keep on searching for attention and recognition from the others. Generally, researchers revealed that extroversion could correlate with success in language learning, yet it is also possibly true that introversion does not inhibit this process.

i) Risk Taking

This feature involves the **readiness to try to accomplish unknown or new tasks**. Researchers found that this trait correlates with positive progression in language learning.

4. LINGUISTIC ASPECTS

There are 3 questions (besides others; see lesson of Needs Analysis) to be answered in an ESP situation:

1) What sort of English will the learner need?
2) What is his/her purpose in learning?
3) How specific is his/her purpose?

These questions can be answered by looking at various aspects of the learning situation, and in this part the language to be learned by the student.

a) THE LANGUAGE

Any analysis of needs should have at its central point the type of English which it will be necessary to teach, if the learner is to achieve his/her purpose; the learner may need to be taught a certain vocabulary, specific grammatical forms and functions. Each subject matter has its own vocabulary often highly specialized or technical. In addition, much technical vocabulary is typified by compound nouns and by many words with specific prefixes or suffixes such as: ante, poly, etc.

In scientific English there may be a tendency for more passives and more complex nominal groups to occur. We must look beyond the grammatical level to see what function the structure has in the text.

Looking at the sentence from a functional viewpoint, however, the sentence could in fact be performing an act of definition, what a scientist is doing as s/he writes or speaks is performing an act of acts like: defining, classifying, generalizing, drawing conclusions, hypothesizing, etc.

The learner has to be taught how to recognize these functions, and how to produce the appropriate grammatical from to express a particular function. S/he must also be taught how different functions are linked together in a text to perform a larger unit.

5. TEACHER

Many definitions refer to ESP as teaching English to those students who learn the language for a particular work or study-related reason. ESP has always focused 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).

English for General Purposes (EGP) is called 'TENOR- the teaching of English for No Obvious Reason' (Abbot, 1981 in Jordan, 1997:4). This refers to people who learn English in contexts where they have no easily recognizable reason to learn the language. EGP generally refers to the language taught in schools where students are exposed to structural/grammatical elements of English language to be tested in the exam.

a) Comparison between ESP and EGP

Many linguists believe that ESP is derived from EGP because it incorporates specifics linguistics skills oriented to specific learners in order to improve their professional performance. Generally, teaching EGP is providing basic knowledge and skills of English language to young learners at schools level where the occupational/professional and higher educational orientations of the students are not defined properly. Whereas, teaching 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.

ESP had been described as **objective-oriented learning** and EGP as **aim-oriented learning** because ESP deals with the development of restricted competence, on the other hand, EGP deals with the development of general capacity. 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' .

In order to reach the objectives of ESP courses**, teachers are required to adopt a different role and teaching strategy to transfer knowledge to their students**. According to Robinson (1991) the first step for him or her is identifying the learners' needs that will, in fact, determine the method, material and the level of language teaching. 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).

b) Comparative roles of an ESP and EGP teacher

Giving limited roles to teachers is not objective since the learning process takes place in different settings each time, for example: syllabi, courses and teaching contexts. 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 the differences

between them are. Theoretically speaking there is no distinction between ESP and EGP, but in practice they differ in many ways (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) proposed five roles of an ESP practitioner as **a teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator**.

c) Role as a Teacher

An ESP practitioner should be qualified as a good language teacher besides specific qualities to teach learners of particular domain. 'The methodology of ESP teaching may not differ radically from that of General English' Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998:13). Because of the specificity of ESP, the role and the methodology of an ESP practitioner varies from that of EGP teacher. An **ESP teacher is not the 'primary knower' of the carrier content of the material**. Both roles are different 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 the reason why learners may know more about teaching material or content than teacher.

Robinson (1991) described a skilled teacher as <mark>someone who can channelize students' knowledge to bring forth effective communication strategies in the class</mark> which transforms him to a 'consultant' who prepares a classroom strategy with the help of students to meet their desired learning goals.

1) Course designer and materials Provider

One of the roles of ESP teachers is designing courses and providing materials according to their learner's needs and to the learning contexts .Dudley-Evans & St. John, (1998) claimed that it is very difficult to find appropriate textbooks that respond to most of linguistic and communicative needs of students in a certain context that is 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). Beside preparing courses and providing materials an ESP teacher has to assess the efficacy of those materials during and after the course. In comparison, an EGP teacher follows a prescribed syllabus, a teaching methodology and published textbooks recommended for different levels by the school authorities.

2) Collaborator

Practically speaking, a teacher cannot master specific requirements of all the disciplines, s/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 collaboration had had divided into **three** types; simple cooperation, specific collaboration and the fullest collaboration. In simple cooperation, the subject specialist helps the ESP teacher to understand the subject syllabus and the professional responsibilities of his/her learners. The case of specific collaboration the subject specialist gives the ESP teacher an access to the actual content of the subject course which can be used in classroom activities. In the fullest cooperation, the subject specialist and ESP practitioner teach the class together. It is known as 'team-teaching'.

3) Researcher

In order to fulfill the other roles an **ESP practitioner should have an interest in research methods that can be helpful in performing various tasks** like need analysis, course designing and material selection, and to do that a teacher should have aptitude and skill for the research..

This role is much needed in the field of EAP where volumes of research have been published already (Swales, 1990). 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 comparison, research does not exist in EGP because the same traditional grammatical structures are being taught till now.

4) Evaluator

For an ESP practitioner, assessing her/his success of failure is by evaluating his/her students also by discussing with them their on-going needs which can be very helpful to know the compatibility between course and materials taught and students' identified learning priorities.

Ibid confirmed that "an ESP practitioner should not only evaluate the linguistic knowledge and skills of students but also the courses and materials he himself devised". An EGP teacher is a permanent evaluator to his/her students through test and exams.

According to Morena Bracaj (2014) a well specialized teacher plays an important role in the effectiveness of the learning process. In order to meet the learners' needs, ESP practitioner should follow some steps:

- **Selection**: In this phase, there is the selection of the appropriate teacher because not every teacher can be specialized for these courses but only those who feel that they can do such a thing and they are ready to contribute for it.

- **Continuing personal education**: Teachers should be well-educated people. There are variations in how the trainee's personal education is improved – either simultaneously with his/her professional training; or consecutively where first two or three years of study with no elements of training as a teacher are followed by the fourth year containing methodology of foreign language teaching or one year post-graduate course of teacher training; or, as in many countries, by in-service courses.

- **General professional training as an educator and teacher:** This element involves what all teachers need to know regardless of which subject they teach. Therefore, educational psychology, social psychology, and the principles of educational thought are crucial and the elements lead the trainee to understand the nature of education, outline the organization of education, know and manage the different skills of students, and also understand the role of syllabus and teaching materials.

- **Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language:** This phase is crucial because special training of teachers make them understand students` needs better, which is in fact very important for ESP courses because based on what they need, the teachers can offer them the appropriate knowledge and this knowledge would be very helpful to them.

❖ <u>CONCLUSION</u>

Taking into consideration these elements in any E.S.P. course or any type of courses as a matter of fact, would definitely result in a very wise enjoyable and fruitful teaching/learning process.