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Review Paper

Academic Needs Analysis: A Case of Iraqi University ESP Students

Zainab Tariq Al Kaabi
Assistant Lecturer, Department of English Language, Al-Esraa University, Bagdad, Iraq
Corresponding Author: Zainab Tariq Al Kaabi, E-mail: tariq1308zainab@yahoo.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been a distinct activity in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) since 1960s. The flowering period of ESP has been identified due to many incidents like the Second World War in 1945, the rapid scientific expansion, the growth of science and technology, the increased use of English as the international language of science, technology and business, the increased economic power of certain oil-rich countries and increased numbers of international students studying in English Speaking countries. Needs analysis is the key essence of ESP. The paper reviews the history and development of ESP, the notion of needs analysis in ESP setting and some important components of ESP needs analysis. This review of trends in the teaching of English for specific purposes (ESP) presents recent developments in ESP among Iraqi postgraduate students. The study showed that most of the studies conducted in the Iraqi context have focused on the design of syllabus and on the problems faced by teachers and students in studying ESP courses. Possible research directions for all three social turns of ESP are also suggested.

Introduction

ESP is a linguistic approach especially designed for learners of English to be able to use it in practical situations. Munby (1978) states that ESP courses are "those courses where syllabi and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of communication needs of the learner". ESP is the term which expresses the English programs that are designed to meet specific needs of English language at various universities.

English for specific purposes (ESP) is a broad and diverse field of English Language Teaching. The term (ESP) "describes language programmes designed for groups or individuals who are learning with an identifiable purpose and clearly specifiable needs" (Encyclopedia Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1999). ESP is a subfield which seeks to serve the language needs of learners who need language in order to carry out specific roles, and who need to acquire content and real world skills of a second and foreign language rather than to master its grammar and pronunciation (i.e., language for its own sake) (Richard & Roger, 2001).

It is difficult to provide a delineating definition for ESP as a recognizable activity within the broader professional framework of English language teaching. This is because this field is divided into several other subfields. There is an interwoven relationship between the main field and the subfields such as English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Science and Technology (EST) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

ESP does not mean that the English language that is used in certain specialization is special. The special thing is the restricted information that is included (words, and propositions) which has specific use in this specialization, and which is selected from the whole repertoire of English language (Makey & Mountford, 1978). Then, ESP is a restricted kind of language where the

vocabulary items may often have their specialized character, and the grammar may usually be limited in range and may have unusual distribution (Wilkins, 1976). Moreover, forms that are used frequently in general language.

Researchers of the ESP syllabus design insist that the communicative needs of the learners should be specified before any other step because it is believed that these needs are the key phrases to any further work, i.e. right from the beginning, an ESP objectives should be specified as accurately as possible (Mackey and Mountford, 1978: 10). Knowing these needs enable the course planner to narrow down the area of use and usage.

For a syllabus to be at least communicative in its essence, its design should consider the specific communicative needs of the learners, why a learner needs to learn. We should first know the purpose of the course. Then depending on this purpose, one may outline the ways that achieve that purpose, (i.e. the materials). This is done by an adequate research into the language that is actually used by the learners in their practical life. The most well-known work on need analysis is that by John Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design, 1978. Procedures that are used to assess the learner's needs are a questionnaire, interviews, observations, data collection, informal consultations of sponsors, gathering texts, etc. If a questionnaire is used, the questions should be prepared in such a way that can elicit the required information. There should be many questions so as to avoid any gab in the resulting information (ibid).

Munby presents a highly detailed set of procedures for discovering target situation needs (i.e., the need to use language at a specific situation, for example, a waitress in a restaurant needs to know what to say in intention, directing someone, or prohibition). Munby calls this set of procedures "The Communicative Needs Processor" (CNP). It consists of a range of questions about key communication variables (topics, participant, medium, settings, etc) which can be used to identify the target language needs of any group of learners. These categories are eight and they are investigated by proposing detailed questions within each variable or category in order to specify the relevant information (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987.

If we take the category of participant, for example, the questions that will be asked concerning his age, identity, language, sex, nationality and level of education whether he is a zero beginner (i.e. the learner has no English at all), knows some English (vocabulary and letters) he may be considered here as false beginner because what he knows is not sufficient for him to use English.

Definition of ESP

Brunton (2009) describes ESP as an absolute characteristic: ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. He also describes it as a variable characteristic: ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

The description above showed the limitation of what ESP is. Since it is intended to meet specific needs of the learners, ESP course emphasizes on need analysis before beginning the course. It is the basic part of ESP course and cannot be neglected. Massouleh and Jooneghani (2012) define needs analysis as, "procedures used to collect information about learners' need." It starts with the question 'why do these learners need to learn English? The awareness why the learners learn English will influence the content of the language course (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012).

Literature Review

Najmaddin and Sur (2019) state that ESP courses are used in all Higher Education institutions in Kurdistan/Iraq. These courses are supposed to provide students with both awareness and skills to handle communication in English in the target subjects. This paper addresses the effect and shortcomings of "Administrative Reading in English', an ESP course taught in Kurdistan Technical Institutes. The paper examines the extent to which these courses fit the needs of Kurdish students; and whether the curricula of the course reflect the characteristics of a systematic standard ESP course. Data was collected through a questionnaire distributed to three different student groups and interviews were conducted with instructors. The data is used to identify the drawbacks of the course material; and investigate the relevance of the teaching methods, assessment and the language used, to the level, motivation and needs of the students. The research concludes that a solid curriculum that takes

into consideration students' motivation for learning as well as their receptive and productive learning skills has not been correctly constructed for the courses in general.

Al Mudhaffar (2012), in his study, states that in 2003 Iraq faced a variety of abrupt sociocultural changes following the advent of war and the end of the Sadaam Hussein regime. The subsequent ten years of reconstruction brought about new needs and demands for Iraq and its population. These challenges came to light with Iraq's sudden thrust into a global environment, where English is becoming increasingly important. This study examines the evolving language needs of Rumaila Operation Organization (ROO) employees based in Basra. Specifically, the need for course work that will improve English language skills and enhance performance in the work place is critical. Due to the prior restrictive political environment of Sadaam Hussein and the security risks of the last ten years of a post conflict environment, not much research has been undertaken regarding the importance of business English in Iraq. Therefore, a critical need exists to research the teaching of English in Iraq to identify education solutions useful in the short run. This needs analysis utilizes surveys and informal interviews with three different groups of stakeholders: employees/students, teachers, and administrators of ROO. This study sits within the context of a license contract between three major oil companies: South Oil Company (SOC), British Petroleum (BP), and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). The results demonstrate a critical need for the conversational skills of the students, allowing them to gain the confidence necessary to engage in both formal and informal business discussions, and in improving their effectiveness in collaborative decision-making in this business environment. This research will allow potential stakeholders in Iraq to consider the needs of the employees/students and TESL professionals that are specific to this unique environment and its distinct type of work.

Shalan et al (2012) conducted a research in an attempt to design an ESP syllabus for Iraqi Students at Colleges of Physical Education. The existing English course in these colleges adopt the old and traditional method in teaching English which mainly focuses on structure and discrete points of the English language while the proposed syllabus is designed according to the students" needs and interests. The proposed syllabus is supposed to give the students opportunities to practice English language as possible, teach English skills interactively, encourage the students to express their own opinions and decisions, use more activities, participate in group discussion, role play, and increase their autonomy in adding and selecting materials of their own.

Ahmadvand (2013) conducted a study that aimed at evaluating the existing English course entitled "A Course in English for Students in the Colleges of Physical Education, 1987" through a questionnaire distributed to both instructors and students at these colleges, designing an ESP syllabus for 1st year Iraqi students at the Colleges of Physical Education, applying the proposed syllabus to a sample of ESP Iraqi students at the Colleges of Physical Education, and evaluating the proposed syllabus according to the students" achievement, attitude, and ELT specialists" points of view.

Hoa (2016) argues that in recent years teaching English, especially English for specific purposes, at universities, has received much attention from students, teachers, and relevant authorities because of high teaching effectiveness. These results showed that students after graduation do not meet English requirements of employers, so unemployment becomes more serious. This is an alarming situation because English is becoming the almost indispensable communication language of young people nowadays. This empirical study consists of a survey of teachers and students at universities in Hanoi by listing the factors related to teaching English for specific purposes. Then, we give some recommendations for improving the effectiveness of teaching English for specific purposes so that students can meet the English requirements for their work and lives.

Edan (2011) argues that English language has become the lingua franca, people around the world learning English for specific purposes. The aim of this study is to investigate the most common challenges that the teachers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) face in Iraq. The study used a quantitative research design using a questionnaire survey to collect data from 50 ESP teachers in Iraq. The findings showed that teachers face three types of problem, challenges related to the students like students' low proficiency and lack of learners needs analysis. Moreover, the challenges related to the teachers themselves include the lack of qualifications, lack of specialized knowledge and lack of contact with subject teachers. Lastly, challenges related to the environment and context In Iraq include the lack the suitable teacher material and the heavy focus on examination and large number of students in the classroom. The study recommends that teachers should be carefully trained and make workshops with subject teachers to expand their understanding.

Conclusion

In the field of ELT (English Language Teaching), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is concerned with specific English language needs of the target learners and has been an innovative and distinct field since its inception in 1960s. This term refers to teaching a specific genre of English for students with specific goals. Over the years, it has gained more popularity. Based upon the discussion and analysis, it is perceived that ESP is goal oriented and focused English teaching and learning, designed for the specific learners according to their academic and professional needs. Many ESP writers assert that needs analysis in ESP setting is so vital for identifying specific needs of the learners as per their academic and professional areas. The needs analysis models, discussed and highlighted in this paper, diverge from each other. The practitioners/researchers in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should gain a solid knowledge on some fundamental aspects of ESP and ESP theoretical models of needs assessment. Accordingly, the paper has attempted to discuss and review the development, history and notions of ESP, the main instrument, 'needs analysis', some important components and some pragmatic models of ESP needs analysis. To some extent, the researchers or students can benefit from the current study as it is based upon the salient features of English for Specific Purposes.

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