



Distinctive Characteristics of English for Specific Purposes and General English

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), abbreviated as 'ESP,' has been a significant movement in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) since the 1960s. Are there the distinctive characteristics between ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and GE (General English)? This paper explores the distinctive characteristics that differentiate ESP from General English (GE). The findings reveal differences in syllabus design, materials, teaching methodology, and evaluation. ESP courses are tailored to the specific needs of learners based on needs analysis, whereas General English courses lack this customized approach. According to the findings, ESP teachers take on multiple roles, including mentorship, syllabus design, material provision, collaboration, research, and evaluation, which distinguish them from General English teachers. ESP is a distinct activity within ELT, emphasizing learner involvement and participation. The paper concludes with a recommendation that ESP teachers should receive special training in the areas of needs analysis and material designing so that they can be able to meet the specific needs and high expectations of their students.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Needs Analysis, General English (GE), Roles of an ESP Teacher

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a branch of Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT), can be categorized into two primary branches: English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes (Dudley-Evans and St Jones, 1998; Robinson, 1991; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). These branches are further branched out into specialized areas such as English for Medical Purposes, Business English, Scientific and Innovative English, Engineering English, and Nursing English, among others. ESP stands as a distinct field within ELT, with its unique teaching methods, materials, and assessment techniques. It significantly influences ELT because it revolves around the use of subject-specific content, places the student at the center of the learning process, and tailors its teaching, materials, and methods accordingly.

ESP courses are typically designed for intermediate and adult learners (Dudley-Evans and St Jones, 1998). Robinson (1991) emphasizes that ESP is an advanced approach to language teaching where all components, including content and methods, align with the learner's specific language-learning goals. Instructors at the tertiary education level who lack ESP training might struggle to identify the unique needs of their learners, develop effective ESP courses, or accurately assess their students. Inexperienced English teachers sometimes erroneously assume that ESP and General English share the same contents, materials, and teaching methodologies. However, it is clear that ESP differs significantly from General English. ESP educators should not only excel in English but also possess expertise in needs analysis, syllabus design, and material development. To truly meet its objectives, ESP practitioners must understand the distinctive features that set ESP apart from General English. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the key characteristics of ESP, distinguishing it from General English (GE).

ESP AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

English for Specific Purposes, commonly referred to as ESP, found its roots in the 1960s. Its emergence can be attributed to several factors, including the aftermath of World War II in 1945, substantial advancements in science and technology, the growing use of English as the global language for science, technology, and business, the increased financial influence of oil-rich nations, and a rising number of international students in English-speaking countries such as the UK, USA, and Australia. ESP primarily evolved during the 1960s and 1970s with the aim of aiding individuals for whom English was a second language in their pursuit of education in an English-medium environment or in their engagement with academic literature in the fields of science and technology, typically written in English (Swales, 2020). Recalling the beginnings of ESP, Swales notes, "In the 1960s, ESP was essentially focused on English for Science and Technology, carried out by a handful of individuals or very small groups scattered across various locations" (2020:4).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explained that ESP emerged as a response to the global demand for learning the English language, primarily driven by its importance in the domains of science, technology, and commerce. The development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching was a direct result of learners' specific language needs tied to their professions or job descriptions. Since its inception in the 1960s, ESP has become a crucial and innovative component within the Teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language movement (TEFL/TESL), as described by Howatt (1984). Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 7) aptly stated, "English now became subject to the wishes, needs, and demands of people other than language teachers."

Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) provided a comprehensive definition of ESP and categorized its characteristics into absolute and variable ones.

Absolute characteristics:

- ESP caters to the specific needs of learners.

- ESP may incorporate fundamental techniques and exercises relevant to the fields it serves.
- ESP focuses on language skills (grammar, vocabulary, register), discourse, and genres appropriate to those activities.

Variable characteristics:

- ESP can be associated with or designed for specific academic disciplines.
- ESP may employ a distinct teaching methodology in specific contexts, as compared to 'General English.'
- ESP is typically intended for adult learners at the tertiary level or in professional settings, although it can also be used for secondary school students.
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students but may occasionally be used for beginners.

Dudley-Evans & St John's (1998) definition draws influence from Strevens (1980) and includes a range of variable characteristics, particularly useful for discerning discussions on the precise definition of ESP.

An integral stage in ESP is needs analysis, which forms the foundation of the entire ESP framework. Needs analysis is considered pivotal in ESP, though it is not exclusive to this educational approach. Strevens (1980) emphasized that needs analysis is a crucial starting point for language teaching geared toward specific purposes, particularly when dealing with the nuances of scientific discourse. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argued that any language course should be based on needs analysis. Hamp-Lyons (2001) asserted that needs analysis plays a significant role in ESP/EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course design. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) defined it as the "process of determining what and how to structure a course."

CLASSIFICATIONS OF ESP

Conventionally, ESP is divided into two main branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Both of these branches are subdivided into further branches like English for science and technology, English for law, English for vocational purposes etc. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) divided ESP into three areas: English for Science and Technology, English for Business and Economics and English for Social Sciences; each of which is subdivided into EAP and EOP. They failed to notice a lot of differences between EAP and EOP, and pointed out that people can work and study concurrently. They argued that in many cases the language which is learnt for immediate use in a study environment can be used later in a job environment. It is implied that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP is the same. However, there is a significant difference between these two terms. EAP (English for Academic Purposes) refers to any English teaching that is related to academic study needs [Dudley-Evans, St Jones, 1998 and Robinsons, 1991]. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) argued that in the area of EAP, English for Science and Technology (EST) has been recognized as the focal area, but English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and English for Legal Purposes (ELP) have continuously gained their grounds. More recently, English for Management, Finance, and

Economics (EMFE) has progressively been vital to Master of Business Administration (MBA) courses. According to Robinson (1991, p.21) "EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) involves work-related needs and training". Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) explained that the term, EOP consists of professional purposes in medicine, law and business, administration and vocational purposes for non-professionals in both of work or pre-work situations. For example, English for Medical Purposes (EMP) is a course that centers on practicing doctors and English for Business Purposes (EBP) is developed for communicative functioning of English in business contexts as they reasoned.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.17), "EOP is also known as EVP (English for Vocational Purposes) and VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language)". According to Hamp-Lynos (2001), EAP is a branch of applied linguistics consisting of a significant body of research into effective teaching and assessment approaches, methods of analysis of the academic language needs of students, analysis of the linguistic and discourse structures of academic texts, and analysis of the textual practice of academics. (p. 126). In the view of Strevens (1977), EAP is a shift from teaching literature and culture of speakers of English to teaching English language for communicative purpose. He added that English language should be matched to the needs and purpose of learners. EAP takes place in a variety of setting and circumstances. From the discussions, above, EAP refers to English teaching that is required for educational purposes. On the other hand, EOP refers to English teaching that is required for professional purposes.

THE DIFFERENCES IN ESP AND GENERAL ENGLISH

English for Specific functions (ESP) is totally different from General English (GE) teaching and learning; however it is specialized English. It has been growing as a definite discipline since 1960s. ESP is focused-English learning and teaching scenario during which teaching ways and learning surroundings are totally different from General English. The foremost vital distinction between ESP and GE (General English) is that the learners and their functions for learning English. ESP learners are typically adults who have already got the acquaintance with English and learned the language so as to communicate with a group of skilled persons. An ESP course is developed on the basis of learners' needs. So, a needs analysis is so crucial for developing an ESP course. ESP centers more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varied from business studies to medical sciences. The crucial aspect of ESP is that English is not taught as an issue separated from the learners' real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter vital to the learners. In fact, GE (General English) and ESP differ in teaching, learning, developing syllabuses, developing materials and evaluating the learners. Most importantly, in GE (General English), all four-language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are stressed equally. However, in ESP, only the needs analysis can determine the needed language skill or skills, necessary for the learners' syllabus. For example, in ESP setting, a 'spoken English course for tourist guides' focuses merely on the development of tourist guides' speaking skills.

The fundamental objective of presenting ESP in fluctuated non-local/worldwide settings is to furnish students with important English aptitudes to adapt to their academic or professional settings. According to Basturkmen (2006), General English Language teaching typically starts from a clear starting point but often leads to an uncertain outcome. In contrast, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) strives to accelerate learners' progress and guide them towards a well-defined goal, with the intention of achieving specific objectives. Basturkmen also suggests that ESP's focus on efficiently moving from point A to point B might lead some to perceive it as a primarily practical undertaking. As Holme (1996 referred to in Potocar, 2002) recommends that ESP should encourage students to gain important language skills to use their knowledge by joining work related abilities with personal improvement and sociocultural knowledge. With regards to Widdowson (1983 referred to in Ajideh, 2009), the quality between ESP and EGP exists in the methodology/approach we, in general, prepare for training purposes. While ESP is objective-oriented learning approach the specification of objectives relates to the aim of the target learners. General English, on the other hand, does not analyze the particular of goal of the learners. ESP is a need-based approach where the details of goal are in line with the specific needs and requirements of the learners. General English, then again, does not focus on the learners' needs and requirements. Above all, the essential function of an ESP instructor is to design a course based upon the required needs. Then again, a General English instructor does not design an English course focusing on the needs assessment. 'What distinguishes ESP from General English is an awareness of the need' (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 53). So, it can be concluded with the view of Robinson that an ESP practitioner is almost a teacher of General English unless he/she understands and focuses upon the special needs of his/her students (Robinson, 1991).

Roles of an ESP and General English Teacher: A Comparison

It is difficult to ascertain an instructor's roles and responsibilities in a general or specific setting since it is not fixed. It continues changing because of the distinctions in syllabi, courses and teaching (Jordan, 1997). This very reality guides us to comprehend different functions of EGP and ESP teachers. If an ESP instructor and a General English instructor are not the same. What are the differences between these two varieties of teachers? Hutchinson and Waters (1987) answer this inquiry quickly that in theory there is no differentiation; nevertheless, there are numerous distinctions 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 recognized some specific roles of an ESP practitioner as a teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. These exceptional roles make an ESP specialist different from an instructor of General English. Flexibility is thought to be a success for an ESP teacher. It is, in fact, a personal quality which transforms a General English 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).

A Teacher

First and foremost, the ESP practitioner is a teacher. According to Robinson (1991), initially as the ESP teacher, he/she should retain the qualities of an honest general language teacher alongside the special qualities desired for his/her own field. In some ESP contexts, e.g., English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and Business English, as a mentor, the teacher offers one-to-one advice and guidance 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). On the other hand, in a General English context, a teacher is typically the fountain of the content knowledge. He/she asserts his specialist within the category of the content knowledge and rarely is a mentor or adviser of his students.

A Course Designer and Materials Provider

ESP practitioners are thought to be course designers and material providers to their students. These courses and materials ought to be along the lines of completely different expected needs and contexts of the learners. Usually, it is terribly laborious to search out applicable textbooks that answer most of linguistic and communicative needs of learners during a specific context (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). That is the rationale why an ESP teacher must prepare his own teaching materials. He/she should either collect materials from varied sources or should develop his/her own materials (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). However, the work of an ESP teacher is beyond this. He/she must assess the efficaciousness of these materials throughout the course. In comparison, a General English teacher follows the prescribed syllabus and teaches published textbooks, which are recommended for different levels by the school/college/university authorities. He/she even adheres to the teaching methodology recommended in the book or advised by the authorities.

A Collaborator

Since ESP practitioners need to work in numerous academic and professional settings, they have to own basic knowledge of their students' specialism to develop courses and select/develop teaching materials. Practically speaking, an ESP instructor cannot master specific needs of all the disciplines that he/she is instructed to teach. In such a scenario, the collaboration with the subject specialists of the particular disciplines is suggested (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In cooperation, an ESP teacher with the assistance of a subject teacher is aware of subject syllabus and the professional responsibilities of his/her students. The particular collaboration encompasses some extended cooperation between the ESP teacher and therefore the subject specialist. A subject specialist may assess the teaching materials prepared by the ESP teacher in certain situations. In the fullest cooperation, the subject specialist and ESP practitioner teach an ESP course together. It is known as 'team-teaching' (Robinson, 1991, p.88). This kind of collaboration is not needed in a GE (General English) context.

A Researcher

An ESP professional is additionally alleged to have an interest in research methods which will be useful in activity numerous tasks like needs analysis, course design and materials development. planning and material choice. This role is much required within the field of EAP in which volumes of analysis are revealed already (Swales, 1990 cited in Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). A teacher ought to build necessary skills for these aforementioned research-based works. ESP teachers have to look into the specific needs of the learners through the investigation of the needs. Hence, an ESP teacher should have skills in research. According to Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998), teachers should make a comprehensive view of learners' identified skills and the relevant texts (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In the field of General English, there is no such research because the same traditional grammatical structures are being taught till now.

An Evaluator

An ESP practitioner evaluates the linguistic knowledge and skills of students as well as the courses and materials he/she himself developed (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). A General English teacher also accomplishes this role to a certain extent as he/she is also involved in the evaluation of his/her students.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion, it is deduced that General English centers equally on all four language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing. On the contrary, ESP focuses on the learners' needs that determine the focused language skill or skills. In ESP settings, learners are typically intermediate or advanced adults who have already gained necessary skills in English and they learn the language in order to communicate during a specific academic or professional context. Practically, ESP combines subject matters and English language teaching together. Above all, the origins of ESP lie in satisfying learners' needs. Therefore, an ESP course is developed on the basis of a needs analysis. There is no other alternation to needs analysis to develop ESP courses. Afterwards the evaluation of an ESP course results from the learners' satisfaction and skills and knowledge. There is no directing or dominating movement in ESP now; however, there are different approaches, materials and methods used in ESP. ESP always complies with ESL/EFL teaching. GE (General English) does not focus on the learners' needs; instead, it follows traditional English language teaching and learning. In GE (General English), teaching contents, approaches, methodologies, materials and evaluation are not identical to ESP. However, both of ESP and GE (General English) can join the line of English language teaching.

The comparative roles of ESP and General English teachers, highlighted in this paper, reveal that though there are some similar grounds for both of ESP and GE (General English) teachers in their individual roles, ESP teachers still have a variety of responsibilities that GE teachers do not carry out. General English teachers carry out the traditional role in teaching English to the learners. On the other hand, an ESP teacher or practitioner has to play the roles as syllabus designer, a material designer, an organizer,

a collaborator, a facilitator and a researcher while teaching the English language. As compared to General English teachers, ESP practitioners have to be more flexible in their teaching approaches because of ever-changing teaching situations and autonomous students in ESP contexts. Both General English and ESP teachers should be skilled and trained to produce successful results in their respective fields. However, it can be recommended that ESP teachers must be provided special trainings 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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