

## Communicative Approach in Teaching English to ESP Learners

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### ABSTRACT

*Learning English language opens wide roads to the success in all fields of study, research and occupation for graduates. It opens access to sources of information, gives the opportunity to get acquainted with achievements of world science, to be informed of progress, suggesting the presence of a formed language competence not only in the system of teaching of English for Academic Purposes, but also English for Specific Purposes in accordance with the State Educational Standard of higher professional education to the preparation of qualified specialists in the republic. Thus, this thesis presents an overview of the communicative approach in teaching ESP learners.*

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The ESP area proves to be in great demand for a global community of people speaking different languages, where efficient command of English can help to contribute to professional as well as personal development of each individual learner. English has become a necessary tool in order to obtain a job, get promoted, and perform effectively in the working world. Urgent needs to improve language competence and ESP proficiency for non-language students have arisen. The Commission of the European Community (Brussels, 2002) has proclaimed crucial domains for further activities:

- improving and extending life-long language learning
- making foreign language teaching more effective
- creating a more language friendly environment.

Teaching language for specific purposes enables teachers to come closer to the very heart of what students really need in order to communicate and be successful in their future professions or studies. Effective language teaching and learning can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learners' needs, capabilities, potentials, and preferences in meeting these needs. So, it is necessary to gain deep insight into study needs of the ESP students.

Some ESP teachers believe their main job is to teach vocabulary of a given field or profession. But the communicative approach to language teaching currently recognized as the dominant approach implies teaching language as a skill and as a means of communication. The concept 'communicative competence' introduced by Dell Hymes is based on the original idea that speakers of a language should have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community. Thus, the goal of language acquisition is communicative competence: the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. One of the aims of ESP teaching is to prepare students for professional communication with other specialists world wide. In this respect it is important to activate learners' interests, awareness, confidence, autonomy in learning by employing communicative classroom activities. Some observation data show that such non-communicative activities and techniques as asking questions

to the text, doing exercises monotonously etc. cause boredom in the classroom. Students attitude towards discussion/debates activities, presentations, reading and listening for specific information, brainstorming, project works are highly positive. There is high motivation among students towards problem-solving activities at all levels. Problem-solving groups work well when topics include the concepts of learners' needs, each member of the group has a specific role and the tasks are clearly set out for them. Learners use language to communicate for real reasons: to explain their ideas, make suggestions, and, finally, reach a consensus. Law students traditionally display very positive attitudes towards such activities as developing cases in court using authentic materials. Divided into two teams (defence team and prosecution team) they use reasons to try to convince the judge and the jury of their clients claims to guilt or innocence.

They offer evidence, evaluate the significance of the evidence, interpret testimony, analyze and evaluate the arguments produced by the opposite side. Such activities develop core critical thinking skills (analysis, interpretation, evaluation etc.) and the basic elements of communication providing a realistic context for language practice.

### **ESP Syllabus**

Designing an ESP syllabus is not an easy task to perform because of its significant and complex role. However, it obviously satisfies a lot of needs since it has a multi-functional purpose. Thus, syllabus designers need to be aware of the different functions the syllabus fulfils so that it can be designed and used most appropriately.

For that reason, Munby (1978) introduced Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) as an approach to investigate specific communication needs of a particular group, according to socio-cultural and stylistic variables which act together to find out a profile of such needs. That is to say that the target needs and target level performance are established by investigating the target situation. In the CNP, descriptions are taken from "the variables that affect communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other" (Munby, 1978: 32). This process will engender the nature of the content that will be selected and set up for ESP learners' programme.

In ESP, the nature of the content is extracted from real life situations in which the syllabus designers have to select the most relevant language discourses that will supply for learners target requirements. However, "it is necessary to introduce what is known as common-core language (Miliani, 1994) selected according to students own needs" (Benyelles, 2009:64) in order to provide basics of language knowledge. Accordingly, "one might begin with grammar and pronunciation only, as one does in a structural approach, but introduce work in the language functions, and in discourse skills fairly early, and in time increase the component of the course" (Yalden,1987:94).

ESP rejects 'synthetic' approaches to course design (Basturkmen 2006:103); so, it is important to present the language using an eclectic method by combining the required features of the language systematically and gradually according to the target objectives. The syllabus is also an essential document in the teaching/learning process since it provides a set of principles for materials production, teaching, and testing; this is why, it should be flexible, open-ended, and subject to regular adjustment.

### **Material Production**

Do ESP textbooks really exist? This is a fundamental question Johns (1990) addresses. One of the core problems he presents is that "ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Johns, 1990, p. 91).

"In the real world, ESP developers are not provided with sufficient time for needs analysis, materials research and materials development" (Kristen Gatehouse, 1999). The notion of time in the teaching process is of paramount importance especially in ESP, because the analysis of the target situation and the research of the appropriate materials need adequate time.

Suitable materials in ESP are not generally easy to get "It is likely that a course tailored to the needs of specific group of learners will not be available," (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 106). For that reason, the

ESP teacher has to develop materials which present as clearly as possible useful area of the language so that learners can perceive the relation between the content of the course and their requirements.

The production of such materials and suitable activities is not a simple task because the ESP teacher is neither a materials designer nor a subject specialist; besides, “few teachers have had any training in the skills and techniques of materials writing”. In order to assist and guide ESP teachers in producing adequate materials, there have been identified some defining principles that should be stated as purposeful objectives in designing pedagogical materials:

- A. good materials give a stimulus to learning; in other words, they do not teach but, encourage learners to learn, they will, therefore, contain:
- B. Interesting texts;
- C. Enjoyable activities which stimulate the learners’ thinking capacities;
- D. Opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills;
- E. A content which both learner and teacher can cope with.
- F. Adequate materials provide a comprehensible and rational unit structure which will conduct both the teacher and the learner through a range of activities in such a way as to maximize the chances of learning. Accordingly, “a materials model must be clear and systematic, but flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety”.
- G. Materials should represent a vision of the nature of language and learning, and reflect the teacher considerations and feelings about the learning process.
- H. Materials should reveal the nature of learning tasks and should “create a balance outlook which both reflects the complexity of the task, yet makes it appear manageable.”
- I. Materials should introduce the teachers to the use of new and updated teaching techniques.
- J. Materials should supply appropriate and correct representation of language use.

In ESP, the analysis of the target situation provides the basic data that leads the material designer to establish the process through which the course will be presented. By the combination of the different outcomes related to the learners needs, the learning environment and the pedagogical approach, it will be possible to produce the needed ESP course with an appropriate content.

In a sum the role of ESP teachers is to produce and present the language content and the course activities in a various ways to help and motivate the students to learn the target language needed to update their academic or occupational knowledge.

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