

ESP Teaching for Tourism. An Experimental Study

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Abstract

This paper is focused on those teaching and learning methods and techniques which can improve the practical use of English for work-related purposes, this giving the students the opportunity to develop their language skills by means of attractive, motivating and useful learning activities. The paper aims at providing an in-depth knowledge about ways of studying and applying English for Specific Purposes in the Tourism field, as well as types of activities to be used in the classroom in order to assist learners overcome language difficulties. It is of great importance to emphasize the specific tasks and strategies used while teaching ESP for Tourism classes, strategies that differ from the ones used in a traditional English language classroom. The main purpose of all these ESP methods and approaches is to prepare students for their future jobs so that they can perform effectively in their area of work.

Key words: ESP, tourism, Needs Analysis, teaching methods, experiment

J.E.L. classification: K00

1. Introduction

A great deal of articles discuss how ESP (English for Specific Purposes) can be defined, its historical background, its main characteristics, and the general distinction between General English and ESP (see Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Brindley, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Finney, 2002). For the sake of our paper, we are going to refer to ESP as the process of teaching and learning English with emphasis on a discipline or professional area (in our case, English for Tourism).

2. ESP – definitions and main approaches

In their book, "Developments in ESP: A multi-disciplinary approach" (1998: 6-7), Dudley-Evans and St. John classify ESP into English for Academic Purposes (English for Science and Technology), English for Medical Purposes, English for Legal Purposes, English for Management, Finance and Economics) and English for Occupational Purposes (English for Professional Purposes and English for Vocational Purposes). "Within English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) there are two sub-sections: *Vocational English*, which is concerned with the language of training for specific trades or occupations, and *Pre-Vocational English*, which is concerned with finding a job and interview skills". On the other hand, Carter (1983) suggests three types of ESP, which are, English as a Restricted Language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes (EAOP), and English with Specific Topics (EST).

"ESP ... involves developing new kinds of literacy, equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and professional cultural contexts. Establishing exactly what are the specific language, skills, and genres of particular groups on which we need to base learning priorities may well be expensive, time consuming and skill-intensive. But it is this research which both makes our teaching effective and our practices professional, and we should not give these up easily" (Ken, 2002: 385-395).

According to Basturkmen (2006: 18), "in ESP, language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in these environments. As the syllabus is based on needs, it is likely to be motivating for learners, who see the obvious relevance of what they are studying".

In order to design English curricula that meet the needs of students, we also have to consider the needs of both educational institutions and work places that may hire them. Therefore, the needs are those of learners, employers and even teachers and our teaching methods should rely on our student's needs, their future qualifications and their employers' expectations.

For the development of their language skills, students must be engaged in as much active practice as possible. The purpose of ESP deals mostly with "language in context" without focusing on grammar rules or ways of structuring the language. The skills taught and developed within the classroom are the ones the learners need for the exact purpose they came to class. In our case, teaching for Tourism classes, the emphasis is mainly placed on communication skills, i.e. the continuous process of improving the students' speaking skills as they have to become competent in using English in their work environment where the English language is required.

The efficiency of the ESP approach throughout the English classes is obvious due to its following positive aspects: it provides an increased exposure to language, authentic resources and involves an adequate learning environment; it reveals learners' needs and necessities which will be helpful in designing the new approach, selecting the materials and evaluation; it helps students develop their skills to communicate effectively in the Tourism field; it is useful in developing the four skills by means of different activities; it improves students' English language proficiency by developing students' oral proficiency with a focus on accuracy of grammar and pronunciation; it exposes students to the real language through the use of authentic materials (Basturkmen, 2010); it increases students' ability of further personal development in language teaching; it increases intercultural difference awareness through discussions about authentic materials that introduce students to cultural values and concepts from different parts of the world (especially when it comes to ESP idioms; in this regard, see Leonte and Istratie-Macarov, 2016: 226); it collects information about learners' language problems; it helps students into a better integration in the field of work according to the job requirements.

3. Study design, research methodology and results

As mentioned above, the paper aims at designing an ESP approach throughout the English classroom activities for the Tourism field of study. It mainly focuses on increasing the English language instruction in the previously mentioned domain by teaching what students need to learn rather than what the teachers want to teach. Research indicates that a learner-centered approach with a more communicative and interactive teaching style and with respect to the active participation of the learner in his/her learning will be beneficial to the students in the tourism field.

The main hypothesis of our study was as follows: the students' ESP skills will improve visibly if they are involved in various (communicative) activities based on needs analysis. The research methods underlying this study are the experiment, the survey and the observation.

For the purpose of our study, we divided the students majoring in Tourism into two groups, i.e. a control group and an experimental one. The control group consisted of 22 students (4 males and 18 females) and the experimental one had 27 students (5 males and 22 females), aged between 19 and 23.

The experiment (which lasted one month) began by giving a pre-test to determine the students' level in the English language acquisition. The initial test applied to both groups revealed that the students' intellectual potential varied. Thus, we had to design a set of differentiated (and sometimes individualized) activities in order to adapt them to each intellectual level.

Although the teacher explained that the assessment was a stress-free test and that students should not feel nervous about it because the aim of the assessment was to determine their level of English language acquisition, they still had to be very serious about it and pay a lot of attention to the exercises. Then, we handed in the papers which contained three items. The first item was meant to test reading skills that is, reading comprehension and reading for specific information. The second item contained a multiple choice exercise which aimed at testing students' level of grammar

acquisition, while the third item contained a writing task. The requirements were clearly explained to the students. The results of this initial test are given in the table below:

Table no. 1 Initial test results – the experimental group

Grade	0-4,99	5-5,99	6-6,99	7-7,00	8-8,99	9-10
No. of students	2	3	5	8	5	4
Group average	7,20					

Source: authors' own processing

Table no. 2 Initial test results – the control group

Grade	0-4,99	5-5,99	6-6,99	7-7,00	8-8,99	9-10
No. of students	1	3	3	7	6	2
Group average	7,00					

Source: authors' own processing

Some observations and recommendations were made in connection to the initial test:

Table no. 3 Initial test: observations and recommendations.

Item	Observations	Recommendations
1.	The exercise was rather easy, so the students did not find any difficulties in reading the text in order to identify the correct information. Some students had some problems in matching some words/expressions to their meanings.	-more exposure to authentic reading texts.
2.	The exercise implied general knowledge of English grammar, so more than half of the students had some problems in choosing the correct answer appropriate to the context.	-more grammar exercises (syntax and morphology). -general revision of English grammar
3.	Big problems regarding personal written production (difficulties in expressing both short and more complex sentences)	-more writing exercises -more grammar exercises (morphology and syntax) -vocabulary and spelling exercises

Source: authors' own processing

Thus, the initial test revealed that the groups were almost similar, and that there was a slight difference between the two groups before the experiment, in terms of the students' level of English language acquisition.

The second step consisted in applying a Needs Analysis questionnaire to the students in the experimental group in order to check their degree of interest towards their needs when studying ESP. This questionnaire revealed that the students from the experimental group were interested in more real-life activities and strategies, in using authentic materials, focused on developing their speaking, listening and reading ESP skills (in the field of Tourism). Thus, they expressed their desire to develop their language skills, especially their communicative ones, in order to better integrate into the labor market.

In the third stage, the control group students were taught ESP by means of traditional methods while the experimental group students were subject to the research, being taught ESP in connection to Needs Analysis. In order to teach ESP to the experimental group according to the needs analysis approach, a learning unit was developed based on the framework of this approach. Therefore, we designed various activities giving them the occasion to improve their ESP skills and find out what they lack, want and need when studying English for their future professional careers. The taught topics (for both groups) were distributed as follows: week 1 - The second Conditional sentences and language in context (communication); week 2 - Listening strategies, Pronunciation and

Vocabulary; week 3 -Reading strategies (booking a hotel room) and Communication practice; week 4 - Writing / creating a hotel advertisement. Furthermore, we designed a series of activities based on needs analysis, in order to develop the students' ESP skills; such activities included reading comprehension, multiple choice listening, discussions, debates, role play, problem-solving, job interviews and letter writing.

Although the two groups had the same teacher and syllabus throughout the experiment, the difference implied a certain focus on the experimental group's needs. The students acquired a certain degree of English knowledge by means of a range of complex exercises which were useful in avoiding boredom and maintaining students' interest alive: discussions and debates on various topics, mind mapping, role-plays (developing skills such as self-awareness, creativity, acting skills, critical thinking and learning to shift roles as a result of seeing the realities of life), skimming for the gist, prediction in group or pair-work activities, self-assessment, peer-assessment and different writing tasks.

One of the most important goals concerning the modern educational approaches consisted in the interaction of the students throughout the English classroom activities. Thus, students had the chance to work in pairs or in small groups or individually. In addition, pair work activities gave weaker students the occasion to work better with their colleagues, which helped them become more confident. As far as individual work was concerned, it enhanced students' reflection on the newly acquired information, self-confidence and independence.

The achievement test represented the fourth step of our experiment, its main goal being to check the difference in the level of the students' English language acquisition (i.e. the experimental group compared to the control group). The test was the same for both groups, but the students representing the experimental group expressed their preferences for using more authentic materials, namely tourism-related vocabulary (touristic brochures, hotel advertisements) in the needs analysis questionnaire.

Teachers are always responsible for the assessment tasks, but we tried to offer this opportunity to the students to get involved in the process of testing (Douglas, 2000), thus taking into account their needs expressed in the questionnaire. We had to decide which areas are more appropriate for student involvement as well as to monitor and design activities in which students take responsibility for certain aspects of the assessment process. Taking into account that students expressed their preference to read more authentic texts related to their future professions, such as texts from tourism web pages, magazines, newspapers or tourism brochures, we chose an article containing vocabulary and information related to their field of study. Students had to read the article carefully and to match certain words/expressions from the text to their meanings/explanations. The second item checked the students' ability to recognize second conditional sentences and it consisted of rephrasing them. For the third item of the post-test, the students were asked to write a web page for their city including some historical information, some of the most important touristic objectives and also activities that can be performed here.

The achievement test revealed that the class average of the experimental group increased visibly, i.e. 8.50 (compared with the results from the initial test). Thus, the results are distributed as follows:

Table no. 4 Achievement test results – the experimental group

Grade	0-4,99	5-5,99	6-6,99	7-7,00	8-8,99	9-10
No. of students	0	1	9	6	5	6
Group average	8,50					

Source: authors' own processing

Table no. 5 Achievement test results – the control group

Grade	0-4,99	5-5,99	6-6,99	7-7,00	8-8,99	9-10
No. of students	0	1	4	11	4	2
Group average	7,70					

Source: authors' own processing

The results of the achievement test triggered the following observations and recommendations:

Table no. 6 Achievement test: observations and recommendations

Item	Observations	Recommendations
1.	A significant percentage – students from both groups registered a high performance regarding the reading comprehension of the text.	Students should continue practising reading for comprehension and reading especially authentic texts to improve their vocabulary.
2.	Most students improved their writing skills but there are still some problems with the second conditionals.	More (communicative) activities involving grammar exercises
3.	A remarkable improvement in using related vocabulary when describing their hometown, but there are still some problems for some students when writing complex sentences in a composition.	More writing tasks concerning their job-related vocabulary.

Source: authors' own processing

The results of the achievement test show a difference of 0.7 points between the experimental group and the control group regarding the acquisition of English language. A comparison of the two groups shows that the experimental group registered a significant improvement in each item of the achievement test. Although it is not a remarkable improvement, it shows progress. Therefore, teaching English from a needs analysis perspective proves to be more efficient than the traditional approach and thus this will help them into acquiring a certain job-related vocabulary in their future career. Thus, the overall progress is obvious. That is why we consider that the objectives have been attained and thus the hypothesis has been confirmed.

4. Conclusions

Our experiment has proved the benefits of modern activities during the ESP classes. The purpose of ESP is to deal mostly with "language in context" without focusing on grammar rules or ways of structuring the language. The skills taught and developed within the classroom are the ones the learners need for the exact purpose they came to class. In our case, teaching for Tourism classes, the emphasis was mainly placed on communication skills, i.e. improvement of the students' speaking skills as they have to become competent in using English in their work environment. That is why we designed „an ESP approach”, more exactly a needs' analysis perspective for a learning unit during the English language course.

The efficiency of the ESP approach throughout the English classes became obvious due to the following positive aspects: it provided an increased exposure to language through authentic resources; it revealed learners' needs, wants and necessities; it helped students develop their skills to communicate effectively in the the Tourism field; it was useful in developing the four skills by means of different activities; it improved students' English language proficiency by developing their oral proficiency with a focus on accuracy of grammar (*in disguise*) and pronunciation; it increased intercultural difference awareness through discussions about authentic materials that introduced students to various cultural values; it collected information about learners' problems; it helped students to better understand their field of work and their job requirements.

Our research indicates that a learner-centered approach with a more communicative and interactive teaching style and with respect to the active participation of the learner is beneficial to the students in tourism field. Both the questionnaire and observation used as needs analysis instruments for this paper reported that accurate listening and speaking skills are the primary skills needed by an English language learner aspiring to work in the tourism field.

As shown throughout this paper, the role of the teacher shifts from what he/she is traditionally known to be, the knowledge provider, to being a facilitator. For better results, both the teacher and the learner worked collaboratively to contribute to beneficial learning and they had equal responsibilities for the techniques employed in teaching and learning. The teacher collected some interesting material and adjusted it to the needs of the particular course, but also to the needs and learning styles of her students.

Being concerned about their responsibilities as ESP learners, the students got interested in the lessons as they were related to their future work. Activities such as "Dubbing" or "Debate" when students had to create a hotel advertisement were designed to resemble real-life situations as much as possible and they were student-centered as they helped learners gain self-confidence in speaking in a specific situation. Moreover, they focus on the students' creative skills by creating a screenplay for a travel agency advertisement and a message that would express the spirit of the company and attract people's attention. The activity was perceived as motivating, since the students played the roles of travel agency owners and could use their creativity and imagination to design advertisements. Learning also took place through technology integration that simulated real life tasks for professionals. Moreover, we were able to observe students' involvement in classroom activities and the progress made throughout the process of English language learning.

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