



ESP – A Provocative Approach for Professionals

Rodica Silvia Stan

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (Romania)

rodicasilviastan@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The current level of global economy involves a wide landscape of career opportunities and implies well-prepared professionals. This is why graduate students of technical universities should become successful members of the global workforce. Most students, future specialists, need to become proficient in a foreign language, usually English, in order to meet a predictable range of communicative needs. The best environment to achieve this purpose is the language course offered by the universities the students belong to.

2. Needs Analyses

2.1. Need for ESP

Undergraduate students who are preparing for careers in the global economy by taking courses in English, are in need of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This paper looks at the process of designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for students of agriculture and horticulture within a Romanian state university of agriculture. The students are in the process of developing expertise that will enable them to succeed in their future internships and future jobs. They need to master communication skills in English.

2.2. The ESP course design

An ESP course design is usually based on the specific needs of learners of a particular discipline. The target group in question are students of agriculture, agricultural economics, and horticulture. The ESP course designers conduct needs analyses to ascertain the students' target needs and learning needs and then integrate the required linguistic elements and skills into the syllabus. The pre-course needs analyses are used to obtain information and data concerning 'the need for communication skills' [6] in order to give directions for the course design and syllabus development. Questionnaires are given to students in order to gain insights into their perceived needs, preferences and gaps. Pre-course tests for reading, speaking, and listening are taken by all the potential course participants every year before the language course begins. From the results of the tests, we could establish the language level of the students, which was helpful in the design of the course. We concluded that at the end of the language course the following needs were absolutely necessary: communicating with foreign peers; reading professional literature, academic journals; writing technical and academic articles; attending conferences, lectures; technical or business negotiation in English; reading instructions; writing instructions; visiting and receiving foreign peers.

2.3. The students

The students usually have a language background when they proceed to ESP study. Most of them studied English for 10 or 11 years in primary, secondary and high school. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Since ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methodology are based on the learner's rationale for learning, the role of the ESP practitioner is essential to the success of ESP program. Students were organized in groups of 20-25 and are all undergraduates, aged from 18 to 25. Except for having learnt English for at least 10 years at school some of them had working experience abroad for several years. In terms of their subject-matter specialties - agriculture, horticulture, landscaping, forestry, topography, agricultural products management, environment protection - there was a wide variety of questionnaires.

2.4. Tests and questionnaires

Tests and questionnaires were given to students in order to gain insights into their perceived needs, wishes, preferences, and gaps. Alongside with these, information was sought about their specialist areas, work experience, personal background and other relevant details that would play some role in shaping the program. Members of the teaching staff, administrative personnel in the Education Section from whom we could determine the objective communication needs in jobs and the sponsor's expectations for this project were also interviewed. The tests included listening, reading and speaking, and were taken by all the potential course participants every year before the language course began. From the results of the tests, we could ascertain the language level of the learners, which was helpful in course design and materials selection.



3. Method

The next step is to connect general English with technical English. Several courses were organized with the language input from general to specific, taking into consideration all the skills. For example, in order to check the speaking abilities, topics were sequenced in three stages. In the first stage, general topics were used, such as personal data, nature, easy conversations and story telling. The second stage progressed towards covering general technical topics, such as talking about home and European agriculture, old and modern methods of cultivating plants, EU legislation. The third stage of topic selection included designing projects and business presentations for students conferences. Since the students were from multi-disciplinary areas, their needs of terminology, of technical English varied greatly so that the 'common core or nucleus' (Robinson 1991) of special English had to be taught in such a way as to break the gap between general and technical English.

3.1. Material organization

In order to accomplish all these the appropriate materials should either written or adapted. Hutchinson and Waters [7] assert that there are three possible ways of applying materials: using existing materials, writing materials and adapting materials. According to Robinson, [12] these come in the form of textbooks and in-house materials. Taking into consideration the aims and objectives of the university the students belong to, the course design and course syllabi, all the types of materials - published textbooks, tailor-made materials and written materials - were employed in the program.

3.2. Published and written textbooks

Published textbooks have the advantages of saving time, costing less than in-house materials, having greater availability, and being easy access for learners to reviewing and referencing. There was insufficient time and human resources to write all the textbooks for this program. Consequently, it was decided that some courses should be instructed with published textbooks to exploit the syllabus objectives. In order to meet the students' needs and expectations, the selection of textbooks took into consideration the following ideas: the selection of textbooks with appropriate contents relevant to learners' level of English and professional interests; avoidance of extremely difficult textbooks because students would be confounded with difficult language added to the complexity of terminology, and, consequently lose interest in the text; paying attention to both verbal and visual information of the textbooks. Alongside with published textbooks written textbooks were used; such materials are more specific for unique learning situations, and for more suitable methodology for the intended students. These integrated materials proved to be successful in terms of assisting the students' professional needs and linguistic development.

4. Conclusions

The endeavours to conceive an ESP project proved to be successful both on campus and at future workplaces. This research led to several conclusions: course designers of any ESP program should firstly explore the potential students' actual and various needs, wishes, gaps, and requirements. The course designers should help students identify their learning needs since sometimes the learners do not have a clear picture of their own capacity; though ESP students are usually learners of the intermediate or advanced level and in specific disciplines, they still need to improve their knowledge of general English. The ESP course provides various types of support to meet the learner's specific, identified needs and objectives. The modules conceived within the course provide learning opportunities, which address the needs of students that cannot always be met in the classroom.

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