



Main Characteristics of ESP Teachers' Classroom Language Communication

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Abstract

*The target goal of the current paper is to thoroughly analyze and introduce the characteristics of ESP teachers' classroom language communication in the light of socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge and personality characteristics. The content of the language used by the teacher will be thoroughly elaborated and introduced according to three main qualities of teaching practices common to all EFL courses: these include the **classroom culture, instruction and socioemotional skills**. The concept of classroom culture in ESP context implies the teacher to create a supportive learning environment, where students can feel emotionally safe and supported. The teacher also promotes positive behavior in the classroom by acknowledging students' achievements that meet or exceed expectations. Within the instructional phase the teacher facilitates the lesson to promote comprehension by explicitly articulating the objectives, providing clear explanations of the concepts and connecting the lesson with subject-specific content knowledge and students' experiences. The teacher checks for understanding to ensure most students comprehend the lesson content. The teacher also provides feedback to deepen student understanding, she may as well provide specific comments or prompts to help identify misunderstandings. Thus the ESP teacher builds students' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to actively analyze the subject-specific content of the lesson. In view of socioemotional skills, three aspects are focused: learner autonomy, perseverance and social, collaborative skills. The ESP teacher provides students with opportunities to make choices and take on meaningful roles in the classroom. Students make use of these opportunities by volunteering to take on roles and expressing their ideas and opinions throughout the lesson. The teacher promotes students' efforts, has a positive attitude toward challenges, and encourages goal setting, thus fostering a collaborative classroom environment.*

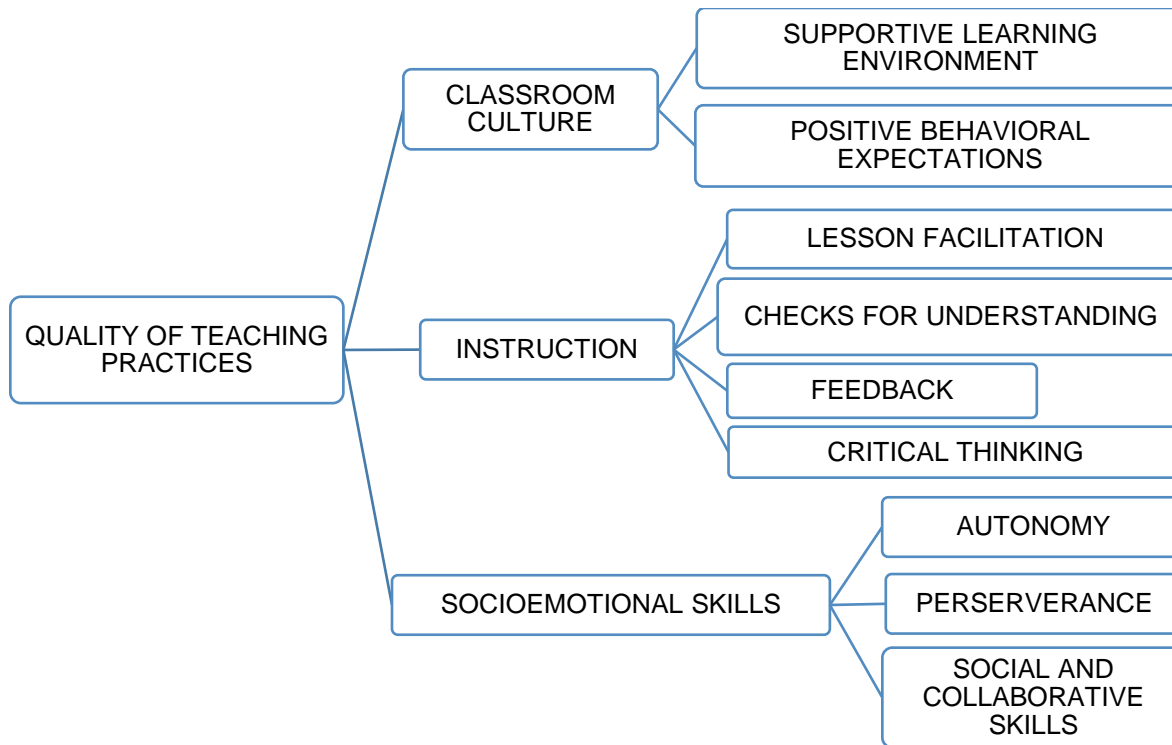
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A number of interconnected trends suggest that ESP is again emerging as a key strand in the ELT context. As English gathers momentum as the main language of international communication, it is perceived as the language of career opportunity, so the pressure grows for teaching to be more directly employment-related [1]. Although better teaching practices are needed to tackle the learning/teaching crisis in the ESP instruction, most education systems do not regularly monitor them, either because they do not recognize the importance of such practices, or do not know how to adequately monitor them. Our observations in the current paper have been based on a recent classroom observation tool named "Teach" observer manual, which has been developed under the supervision of World Bank Group education experts, and after launch has undergone a rigorous validation process over two-year timeframe. It is intended to be used as a system for diagnostic and professional development to help teachers worldwide improve their classroom practices. Thus, having successfully passed the "Teach" reliability exam and done an extensive observation and comprehensive research in the field of teaching languages for specific purposes, our current aim is to highlight the main characteristics of ESP teachers' classroom language communication identifying and defining most useful qualities of teaching practices in ESP instruction. The qualities of teaching practices are traditionally organized into three primary areas:



Classroom Culture, Instruction and Socioemotional Skills. We might represent the classification of the qualities of teaching practices in Figure 1 given below:

Fig. 1. Quality of Teaching Practices in ESP



Classroom Culture: The teacher creates a culture that is conducive to learning. The focus here is not on the teacher correcting students' negative behaviors but rather the extent to which the teacher creates:

- a supportive learning environment by treating all students respectfully, consistently using positive language, responding to students' needs, and not exhibiting gender bias in the classroom
- positive behavioral expectations by setting clear behavioral expectations, acknowledging positive student behavior, and effectively redirecting misbehavior.

Instruction: The teacher instructs in a way that deepens student understanding and encourages critical thinking and analysis. The focus here is not on content-specific methods of instruction, but rather the extent to which the teacher:

- facilitates the lesson by explicitly articulating lesson objectives that are aligned to the learning activity, clearly explaining content, and connecting the learning activity to other content knowledge or students' daily lives, and by modelling the learning activity through enacting or thinking aloud
- does not simply move from one topic to the next, but checks for understanding by using questions, prompts, or other strategies to determine students' level of understanding, by monitoring students during group and independent work, and by adjusting his/her teaching to the level of students
- gives feedback by providing specific comments or prompts to help clarify students' misunderstandings or identify their successes
- encourages the students to think critically by asking open-ended questions and providing students with thinking tasks that require them to actively analyze subject-specific content.



Students exhibit critical thinking ability by asking open-ended questions or performing thinking tasks.

Socioemotional Skills: The teacher fosters socioemotional skills that encourage students to succeed both inside and outside the classroom. To develop students social and emotional skills the teacher:

- instills autonomy by providing students with opportunities to make choices and take on meaningful roles in the classroom. Students exhibit their autonomy by volunteering to participate in classroom activities
- promotes perseverance by acknowledging students' efforts, rather than focusing solely on their intelligence or natural abilities, by having a positive attitude toward students' challenges by framing failure and frustrations as part of the learning process, and by encouraging students to set short and long-term goals, and
- fosters social and collaborative skills encouraging collaboration through peer interaction and by promoting interpersonal skills, such as perspective taking, empathizing, emotion regulation and social problem solving. Students exhibit social and collaborative skills by collaborating with one another through peer interaction [4].

The next important issue that needs to be addressed in relation to qualities of teaching practices is the content of the language that the ESP teacher uses in the whole instruction process. Thus, within the classroom culture **supportive learning environment** the teacher does not yell at students, scold them, shame and ridicule to discipline them. Instead, the teacher shows outward sign of respect toward students. For example, the teacher uses students' names, says "Please" and "Thank you" or shows some other culturally relevant sign of respect. In his/her communication with students the teacher consistently uses positive language, for example, encouraging phrases such as "Great job!" or "You can do this!", "You are such a talented group of students!". The teacher promptly responds to students' needs in a way that specifically addresses the problem at hand. Another tough issue common to all ESP teaching instruction is gender bias, which is conditioned by relevant number of male or female involvement in the current sphere of specialization. It should be noted that in this regard the ESP teacher should not exhibit gender bias and should not challenge gender stereotypes either. The teacher provides students of all genders with equal opportunities to participate in the classroom activities and has similar expectations for all students. For example, the teacher calls equally on all genders to answer difficult questions.

As for **positive behavioral expectations**, so the ESP teacher can be effective at prompting positive behavior by setting clear behavioral expectations throughout the lesson for classroom tasks and activities. For example, upon introducing a group activity to the class, the teacher explicitly states the expected behavior for students in the group. This may include, "Use a quiet indoor voice" or "Take turns in speaking". If students are working independently, the teacher gives directions on what to do when they complete the activity. The teacher says, "Please quietly get up, bring your worksheet to me, and read while you wait for classmates to finish." The ESP teacher may also acknowledge students' positive behavior that meets or exceeds expectations with the following statement: "I just noticed that members of Group A are taking turns to speak and are proactively working on the next assignment". When a problem arises, redirection of misbehavior effectively addresses the problem at hand and focuses on the expected behavior, e.g. if the students are talking loudly and being disruptive during a lesson, the teacher says, "Remember to use quiet voices," and the students quiet down. Alternatively, the teacher is not observed setting clear behavioral expectations, but students are well-behaved throughout the lesson.

Within the process of actual **instruction**, the ESP teacher is supposed to facilitate the lesson to promote comprehension by explicitly stating the specific lesson objective and aligning the lesson activities to the stated objective. For example: near the beginning of the class the teacher states, "Today we are going to observe...". Each lesson activity is clearly related to the objective or the learning goal initially stated by the teacher. The teacher's explanations of the content should be clear, logical, easy to understand and may be accompanied by authentic subject-specific illustrations and various representations. The teacher meaningfully connects the lesson to the subject-specific knowledge of the students or their professional interests and experiences. The teacher also connects the lesson to a prior content previously observed by them. So the connection between the current lesson and other content knowledge or students' professional expectations and visions should be purposeful and clear. In some other cases the ESP teacher is supposed to model the learning activity by enacting all parts of the



procedure demonstrating each step of the process or by enacting the procedure thinking aloud. Modelling can take place at any time in the lesson including at the end. If the learning activity is procedural in nature, modelling will include an enactment of the procedure for learners to observe, however, if the activity focuses on developing a thinking skill, a complete model will include a think aloud. The teacher may also demonstrate his/her thinking process as part of modelling, for example if the task is to learn the meaning of new terms in the text, the teacher not only provides the definitions, but also demonstrates how she uses context clues to find the meaning of certain subject-specific words or terms. In a similar situation students and the teacher may co-construct knowledge by enacting a procedure together to get the final product.

In the next stage of instruction, the ESP teacher is supposed to check for most students' understanding. For example, the teacher asks students to demonstrate their knowledge by having all students share their answers, e.g., by asking each student to read out the sentence or statement they wrote using this or that subject-specific term. Thus the teacher systematically monitors most students by circulating the classroom and approaching individual students or groups to check their understanding. The teacher observes most students' work, clarifies individual concepts, and asks questions. It is common for an ESP teacher to substantially adjust teaching for students. When students have misconceptions, the teacher may initiate back and forth exchanges to help them understand all points of misunderstanding, which provides students with more opportunities to learn. The ESP teacher may also provide more challenging tasks for those who already have an advanced understanding. In the next phase of providing feedback the ESP teacher may be highly effective if his/her specific comments or prompts contain substantive information that will help clarify students' misunderstandings. For example, the teacher says, "Do you remember what happens when we...?", or "Let's look at your notes. Now let's look at your answer. What do you need to change to find the correct answer?" In order to develop students' critical thinking skills, the ESP teacher asks students a number of open-ended questions and at least one of them builds upon students' responses by asking students to justify their reasoning, further explain, or clarify their ideas. The teacher asks, "How do you think, why...?", "What facts or ideas make you think that...?", "What do you think happens next?", "What would happen if...?". Thus, the teacher provides substantial thinking tasks and activities.

In terms of **socioemotional skills**, the ESP teacher aims her efforts at the development of learners' autonomy, perseverance as well as social and collaborative skills. The teacher explicitly provides students with at least one substantive choice that is related to the learning objective. For example, the teacher allows students to choose between writing an essay or doing a presentation, or in another case doing an individual project or peer project. The teacher provides the learners with opportunities to take on meaningful roles in the classroom, in which they are responsible for parts of a learning activity. For example, the teacher gives a student the opportunity to write something on the board and explain it to the rest of the class how s/he tackled the main challenge to solve the issue. In ESP context students may be occasionally offered to share a related experience when the teacher is explaining a concept. In order to boost learners' perseverance, the ESP teacher frequently acknowledges students' efforts toward mastering new skills or concepts and identifies these efforts explicitly. For example, when students solve a difficult problem they had been struggling with, the teacher praises and highlights the efforts they made to solve the problem. The teacher says, "You have progressed so much on...", "If you keep practicing and using the strategies we learned in class, you'll master them all very soon!", The teacher has a positive attitude towards students' challenges and helps students understand that failure and frustration are normal parts of the learning process. In a similar situation, when a student is struggling with a problem set, the ESP teacher says: "Let's think about how we can go over this". The teacher also encourages the students to think of different resources they could turn to for help, for example asking a friend for advice or looking for answers in various online and offline resources. The ESP teacher should also encourage students to set short- and long-term goals. The teacher may reference both short- and long-term goals at the same time, particularly when encouraging students to see a short term goal that would help them achieve a long term goal. Within the ESP context these goals may be directly connected with the learning objectives and outcomes of the ESP course curriculum, as well as the learners' target language learning needs, lacks and wants. The last aspect of socioemotional skills development process to be observed in the current paper is learners' social and collaborative skills development. Thus within the ESP course instruction the teacher should promote substantial student collaboration by asking them to work together to produce a product, solve a problem, complete a worksheet, or present a new idea, create a diagram,



illustrate a set of terms and term combinations, etc. The teacher promotes also students' interpersonal skills by encouraging perspective taking, empathizing, emotion regulation, or social problem solving.

To conclude, the quality of teaching practices is the backbone of success in any EFL course. The current research might be a great value to ESP teachers who need to relate their teaching of English directly to the vocational and professional needs of their learners. Overall, careful and thorough consideration of the practices highlighted in the current paper in the ESP context might bring to impressive results in the field of the teaching and learning, particularly in the development of learners' professional language communicative competence.

References

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