

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES TEACHERS IN IRAQ

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ABSTRACT:

English language has become the lingua franca, people around the world learning English for specific purposes. The aim of this study is to investigate the most common challenges that the teachers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Iraq face when they give lectures to students who study different majors in English language. The study uses a quantitative research design using a questionnaire survey to collect data from 50 ESP teachers in Iraq in the studying years 2017/2018. The findings showed that teachers face three types of challenges which are: students related challenges like students' low proficiency and lack of learners' needs analysis, teachers related challenges like lack of qualifications, lack of specialised knowledge and lack of contact with subject teachers, and environment and context related challenges like the lack of suitable teacher material, the heavy focus on examination and large number of students in the classroom. The study recommends that teachers should be carefully trained and makes workshops with subject teachers to expand their understanding.

1. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a learner needs-based approach to English language learning and teaching. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes requires special courses and programs focusing on ESP learners needs to enable them to utilize the English they need in their own professional fields (Hutchinson & Waters, 1996). However, Teaching English for specific purposes, finding proper materials to designing a course, conducting the needs analysis and familiarity with the subject knowledge might be challenging for teachers. Very few studies have investigated the challenges and problems faced by ESP teachers in Arabic context and no study have been conducted in the Iraqi context, therefore this study fills the gap by investigating the problems faced by Iraqi ESP teachers. ESP involves in some fields includes a totally different language because teaching English for Business or IT, for example, requires special knowledge that even the English native speakers' teachers are not familiar with it. (Belcher 2009, Suzani &

Yamini, 2011). The term of English for Specific Purposes was mentioned in 1960s, the notion was associated with teaching English based on a learners' specific need. Back then, the type register analysis was employed to make learning materials and design English for Specific Purposes course, but these courses didn't meet the students' expectations (Brunton, 2009). English for Specific Purposes is an English language teaching recognizable activity with implications for the design of syllabuses and materials as well as its presentation and then evaluation Far (2008, p.3). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an English language course of which the teaching materials or the syllabuses of the course are adjusted with the desires of the students. By the technological revolution and globalization era, science and information flow heavily which requires learners to communicate using the English language. English for Specific Purposes came up due to the awareness that English for general purposes did not meet all the English language learners around the world especially those who needs specific knowledge of English language Basturkmen (2010).

Brunton (2009) states that “ESP has increased over the decades as a result of market forces and a greater awareness amongst the academic and business community that learners’ needs and wants should be met wherever possible.” The learners need a specific vocabulary in relation to their fields not only the general knowledge of the language. The students of ESP classes should be exposed to learning material which are related to their subject matter in order to able to enhance their knowledge of English language. Brunton (2009) explain of ESP. The reasons for the emergence of English for Specific Purposes are the demands of a new focus on the learner, a brave new world and a revolution in linguistics. These reasons point towards the need for new specializations in English language teaching (ELT) and English language learning (ELL). Since English is lingua franca for many people in the world, it is now being used in every sphere of communication in international trade, business relationship, science and technology.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 What is ESP?

Tell me what you need English for I will tell you the English you need (Hutchinson & Waters 1996). The main objective of teaching English specific purposes is to make the learners are able to use the English language in effective way in doing tasks and in doing their works in their specific fields’ situation. Robinson (1991) recommended that an ESP course ought to be founded on a Needs Analysis (NA) to indicate what precisely it is that the students need to do through the use of English language as a medium. What is the needs analysis in ESP? NA can be characterized as a methodology to get data about the, desires, requests and demands of the students so as to structure the course accordingly. The requirements examination approach is viewed as the essential key issue in ESP. Therefore, ESP courses are created from a NA which spotlights on what precisely a student needs to learn in English. The rise of ESP occurred during the Second World War and it is as yet creating.

ESP English language teachers are teachers at vocational schools, colleges and universities, as well as any other teachers who deal with their students’ professional development. Professional ESP teachers are experts in teaching English for any profession, able to design teaching materials based on the content material presented by the professors, or experts in the subject Ahmed, M. K. (2014). ESP teachers teach academic skills to future (or real) professionals. They teach English for the profession and encourage their students to use their background knowledge along with the academic skills in dealing with all sorts of authentic information in their profession. ESP teachers design courses according to their students’ professional needs, having in mind their target language use situation Ahmed, M. K. (2014).

2.2 Definition of ESP

Brunton (2009) describe ESP as: Absolute characteristics: ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves. ESP is cantered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable characteristic: ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

The description above showed the limitation of what ESP is. Since it is intended to meet specific needs of the learners, ESP course emphasizes on need analysis before beginning the course. It is the basic part of ESP course and cannot be neglected. Massouleh & Jooneghani, (2012) defines needs analysis as, “procedures used to collect information about learners’ need.” It starts with the question ‘why do these learners need to learn English?

The awareness why the learners learn English will influence the content of the language course (Massouleh & Jooneghani, 2012)

2.3 Issues in ESP Teaching

Chen (2011) described language pedagogy as the challenge of ESP in Taiwan context. One main problem is the widespread opinion that there is no solid theoretical basis to support the teaching ESP. There were confrontations whether ESP should be viewed as a tool or a discipline, whether ESP should be considered a practical skill or knowledge capital and whether ESP instructors should be “insiders” or “outsiders. The next problem in the teaching of ESP could be seen from the study conducted by Alameddine (2012) in teaching business English for Arab speakers. The writer found four major problems in teaching business English. They are: (1) negative transfer, (2) the difference in writing strategies, (3) prepositional knowledge and (4) collocational patterns.

2.3.1 ESP Teaching Methodology

Basturkmen & Helen (2014) marks it as debatable whether ESP has a distinctive methodology. Methodology in English Language Teaching (ELT) and ESP differ little and that it is not possible to say whether general ELT has borrowed ideas for methodology from ESP or whether ESP has borrowed ideas from general ELT (Basturkmen 2010). He identifies two characteristic features of ESP methodology: ESP can base activities on students’ specialism (but need not do so), and ESP activities can (but may not) have a truly authentic purpose derived from students’ target needs. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) maintain that what characterizes ESP methodology is the use of tasks and activities reflecting the students’ specialist areas. Post-experience ESP learners have specialist knowledge from working or studying in their specialist areas and a ‘deep-end strategy’ can be used.

3. ESP TEACHERS’ ROLE

Most authors agree that the ESP teachers’ works involve much more than teaching. Dudley Evans and St. John (1998)

prefer the term ESP Practitioner as this definition seems to be more detailed and complete. They distinguish the following roles of ESP practitioners: as a Teacher where ESP is a practical discipline with the most important objective of helping students to learn. However, the teacher is not the primary knower of the carrier content of the material. The students, especially where the course is specifically oriented towards the subject content or work the students are engaged in, may know more about the content than the teacher. As course designer and material provider Since it is rarely possible to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material – sometimes no really suitable published material exists for identified needs - ESP practitioners often have to provide the material for the course. As Researcher, Research has been particularly strong in the area of EAP (genre analysis), ESP teachers need to be in touch with the research. Teachers carrying out a needs analysis, designing a course, or writing teaching materials need to be capable of incorporating the findings of the research, and those working in specific ESP situations need to be confident that they know what is involved in skills such as written communication (Bojović, 2006).

4. METHODOLOGY

The study is a fully quantitative research design, this research design will be used in this present study to provide breadth and depth information and findings in the present study. Therefore, the present study used quantitative approach benefiting the advantages of quantitative studies to collect data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study employs a descriptive statistical approach for data collection and analysis as quantitative instrument to shed some light on the problems faced by the Iraqi ESP teachers in Iraq. The study will use a survey questionnaire as a data collection instrument. The sample of the study will be 50 ESP teachers in Iraqi universities. The sample teachers are Iraqis, their mother tongue is Arabic, and they have an experience in Teaching English for specific purposes at least for three years. The questionnaire will be distributed through E-mail to the teachers. The

survey consists of 15 questions were formed based on the literature review and the theory aim to address the problems faced by Iraqi ESP teachers. The gathered data will be

analysed statistically and inferentially where the percentage and frequencies will be counted and presented in tables and charts.

5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

| No | Item | Very Easy | Easy | No Problem | Difficult | Very Difficult |
|----|---|-----------|--------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1 | Lack of students need analysis | 5.52% | 6.63% | 17.40% | 34.53% | 35.91% |
| 2 | Students' low level and proficiency of English language | 3.04% | 5.25% | 11.33% | 25.14% | 55.25% |
| 3 | Lack of preparation, training and qualifications | 16.85% | 10.22% | 3.59% | 46.69% | 22.65% |
| 4 | Lack of specialized knowledge of the subject | 1.66% | 11.05% | 27.35% | 24.86% | 35.08% |
| 5 | Lack of contact with the subject teachers | 3.31% | 6.63% | 20.86% | 33.01% | 36.19% |
| 6 | Traditional and old teaching methods used in teaching ESP | 0.55% | 11.33% | 7.18% | 25.97% | 54.97% |
| 7 | The big difference between Arabic and English languages for learners | 8.01% | 14.92% | 17.68% | 22.38% | 37.02% |
| 8 | The design of lectures and textbooks | 6.91% | 1.93% | 20.44% | 37.29% | 33.43% |
| 9 | The shortage and not suitable teaching material | 3.04% | 2.21% | 21.27% | 27.07% | 46.41% |
| 10 | Classes with too large student number and heavily focused examination | 3.04% | 16.85% | 10.50% | 22.38% | 47.24% |

As we can see from the table above, the results can be classified into categories

1. Difficulties related to the students:

The data showed that most of the teachers in the survey (70.44%) think that the low proficiency of the students in the ESP classroom is construct major obstacle and make it difficult to the teachers to teach. Students' low and different proficiency of English language among students and has a

negative impact on ESP teachers in their teaching process.

The data showed that majority of the teachers (75.69%) think that the absence and lack of students' needs analysis is a big challenge in teaching ESP as the students' needs are not clear in learning ESP which makes it difficult to teach.

2. Difficulties related to the Teachers

Teachers' qualification are big challenge for teaching ESP as the majority (779,94%) of the teachers believe that it is difficult to teach ESP, moreover, teachers think that the use of old teaching methods (80,93%) is a major challenge in teaching ESP adding to the fact of lack of theoretical framework in teaching ESP makes the process even more difficult. In Iraq, some teachers have English qualifications yet but cannot teach ESP due to low proficiency and poor skills.

In addition, the teachers lack specialized knowledge as the data showed (59.94%) believe that make teaching is challenge for them, this difficult makes lectures are not attractive to learners. In Iraqi context, the number of English language teachers trained in their major is still small and insufficient. Based on the data, (69,17%) of the teachers participated in the survey think that lack of contact and collaborate with the subject teachers results as a challenge for them in teaching ESP. According to data, (70.44%) of respondents, the reason why they have difficulties in teaching ESP is due to the big difference between English and Arabic. Parts of speech, grammar, word usage and pronunciation, this results in the lack of English vocabulary among Iraqi students. In addition, lack of teaching materials and incomplete design of textbook content and lectures are big issues for teaching ESP as expressed by the teachers in the survey (70.52%) (74.48%). The fact that in the Iraqi syllabus, the content of the books, sometimes, use foreign resources and compiled material. Moreover, it emphasises only on the vocabulary and grammar, heavy focus on theory, not scientific and practical content This makes textbook contents inappropriate and inconsistent for the Iraqi actual situation. In fact, the lectures and textbooks in Iraq still have many shortcomings. Lastly, (69.62%) of the teachers have expressed that the too large number of students inside the classroom and the major focus of the syllabus on examination is a challenge and make it difficult to teach ESP. Classes with too large student number and heavily focused

examination have a negative impact on teaching ESP. Now, English classes in Iraq usually have 40 students or more.

In a nutshell, teaching English for specific purposes in Iraq face many difficulties and challenges cause by objective and subjective factors. These factors have clear negative impact on the teaching process in Iraq. Towards effective teaching of ESP, there should be a connection and collaboration between the teachers, students, and stakeholders of the education process in Iraq.

6. DISCUSSION

One of the biggest challenges that teachers may face is the insufficient knowledge of the students needs and the lack of knowledge of learners' reasons for learning ESP. Kennedy and Bolitho, (2012) argues that for the English language teacher in EFL context, like in Iraq, should consider objectively the students' needs of learning English exactly, this is the way that ESP differs from the EGP. When the students are aware of their needs, it makes it easier for the teacher to chose what is reasonable and acceptable for learning the specific course of ESP.

The low proficiency of English language students plays central role in the teaching process, the education system in Iraq still heavily focused on memorising and examination which affects the students' learning process. This results from the fact that in Iraq, most people prefer their children to study in a prestigious schools and universities, so they can get large firms and therefore get a job with high salary, therefore, the students will lose the knowledge they have acquired as they admitted their learning purposes of getting high scores. Meanwhile, the education system and main teaching strategies in Iraq focuses on developing the students' knowledge of the language and the four English language skills. Hence, the teacher plays the main role as the ultimate authority of knowledge. Teachers of English language in Iraq should have bachelor or master's degree in linguistic or literature, but when it changes to ESP, teachers have to

teach courses of other discipline which demands a specific knowledge which impose the teacher to acquire and learn new type of knowledge. (Cai, 2014). For effective teaching of ESP, collaboration with subject teachers and specialists is required along with knowledge instructors and subject-relevant materials Sullivan (2002). ESP teachers can develop close relationship with subject teachers through collaboration Alibakhshi, Ali, & Padiz (2011). This collaboration enables the English language teachers to identify the students' need as they become familiar with teaching contexts. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). So, subject teachers might offer great help about basic jargon and text types, the language usage. Materials in ESP should be chosen carefully to reflect the real language, but in some cases, the teacher's role in ESP not a writer but a material provider, but in some cases, the teacher has to make and form his/her own teaching material when he/she doesn't find ready-made materials that match the needs of the learners. However (Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John, 1998). ESP teaching in Iraqi context still ineffective as the teachers don't have enough specialised knowledge. As aforementioned in the result section the teachers admitted they can't teach ESP as they lack the specialised knowledge and don't fully understand the specialised terminology by looking for the suitable ESP teaching material from others' experience. This enable the teachers to expand their knowledge of the course they teach. Teachers experience, qualifications and training determine the success of the teaching process, this requires patience and diligence. In order to establish a practically effective and well-informed ESP teaching in Iraq, teachers should be trained carefully to overcome the challenges and meet the students' expectation. The results of the study in accordance with a study has been conducted on the ESP challenges and problems such as (Koran, S. (2014), the results also go in line with a study conducted in the Vietnamese context by (Hoa, N. (2016) the results are in accordance as the English language in both countries considered as a foreign language. Therefore, it's expected

that same challenges can be faced by the ESP teachersE.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESP is increasingly vital for the development of English language teaching in Iraq. The study aimed to examine the challenges faced by the Iraqi English language teachers in teaching ESP, the study attempted to provide an overview of the challenges confronting the profession. The study used a questionnaire survey to collect data from 50 Iraqis English language teacher with an experience in teaching ESP, the findings showed that the challenges classified into three categories: challenges related to students, teachers, and environment. The study recommends that ESP teacher should be trained in professional courses, and shares their experience with others, technology should be integrated in ESP teacher to make the lectures more attractive and save time and effort. Moreover, teachers need to establish close relationships with students to share and understand the difficulties that they encounter. teachers should also increase the students' competencies and proficiency by encouraging students to participate in the classes. Teachers should update and use up to date teaching methods by reducing the heavy focus on examining and teaching grammar and focus on the students' skills. Lastly the Iraqi ministry of education should take into account that teaching ESP is one of the major fields of English language hence, needed procedures should be taken to overcome these challenges.

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