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THE ROLE OF MATERIALS IN TEACHING ESP

В статті розглядаються особливості використання матеріалів у контексті викладання англійської мови професійного спрямування; визначається роль викладача. Використання новітніх технологій розглядається як комплементарний засіб, що збагачує методику викладання іноземних мов.

Ключові слова: англійська мова, професійне спрямування, використання матеріалів, новітні технології.

В статье рассматриваются особенности использования материалов в контексте преподавания английского языка профессиональной направленности; определяется роль преподавателя. Использование современных технологий рассматривается как комплементарное средство, обогащающее методику преподавания иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: английский язык, профессиональная направленность, использование материалов, современные технологии.

The peculiarities of materials usage in the context of teaching ESP are under analysis; the role of ESP teacher is defined. It is considered that the use of high technologies complements and extends the methodology in ESP teaching.

Key words: English language, specific purposes, materials usage, high technologies.

The actuality of the problem. The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has generally been seen as a separate activity within English Language Teaching, and ESP research as an identifiable component of applied linguistic research. For some of its teaching ESP has developed its own methodology, and its research clearly draws on research from various disciplines in addition to applied linguistics. This openness to the insights of other disciplines is a key distinguishing feature of ESP. ESP has always retained its emphasis on practical outcomes. The main concerns of ESP have always been, and remain, with needs analysis, text analysis, and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study and/or work situation. It has often been noted that ESP is a materials-led movement and that part of the role of the ESP practitioner has been to write teaching materials to meet the specific needs of learners.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the reasons for using materials which seem significant in the ESP context; to define the role of ESP teacher; to consider the role of high technologies in the ESP methodology.

We will start our article by looking at definitions of ESP found in the literature. Hutchinson and Waters [1] see ESP as an *approach* rather than a *product*, by which they mean that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material and methodology. Streven's [2] definition of ESP makes a distinction between four *absolute characteristics* and two *variable characteristics*. Robinsons [3] accepts the primacy of needs analysis in defining ESP. Her definition is based on two key defining criteria and a number of characteristics that are generally found to be true of ESP. Her key criteria are that ESP is "normally goal-directed", and that ESP courses develop from a needs analysis, which "aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English" [3, 3]. We tend to accept the definition of Dudley-Evans and St. John [4]. They believe that a definition of ESP should reflect the fact that much ESP teaching, especially where it is specifically linked to a particular profession or discipline, makes use of a methodology that differs from that used in General Purpose English teaching. By methodology they refer to the nature of the interaction between the ESP teacher and the learners. In more general ESP classes the interaction may be similar to that in a General Purpose English class; in the more specific ESP classes, however, the teacher sometimes becomes more like a language consultant, enjoying equal status with the learners who have their own expertise in the subject matter.

Dudley-Evans and St. John stress two aspects of ESP methodology: all ESP teaching should reflect the methodology of the disciplines and professions it serves; and in more specific ESP teaching the nature of the interaction between the teacher and learner may be very different from that in a general English class.

They also believe that language should be included as a defining feature of ESP. While the specified needs arising from needs analysis relate to activities that students need to carry out (rather than language), a key assumption of ESP is that these activities generate and depend on registers, genres and associated language that students need to be able to manipulate in order to carry out the activity.

Their definition encompasses ***absolute*** and ***variable*** characteristics.
Absolute characteristics:

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- ESP is centered on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

Variable characteristics:

- 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 a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners [4, 4-5].

Materials are used in all teaching. Four reasons for using materials which seem significant in the USP context are:

- as a source of language;
- as a learning support;
- for motivation and stimulation;
- for reference.

In some situations, where English is a foreign not a second language, the ESP classroom may be almost the only *source* of English. Materials then play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language, which implies that the materials need to present real language, as it is used, and the full range that learners require.

As *a learning support*, materials need to be reliable, that is, to work, to be consistent and to have some recognizable pattern. This need not mean a rigid unit structure; there wouldn't be a fixed format.

To enhance learning, materials must involve learners in thinking about and using the language. The activities need to stimulate cognitive not mechanical processes. The learners also need a sense of progression.

To *stimulate* and *motivate*, materials need to be challenging yet achievable; to offer new ideas and information whilst being grounded in the learners' experience and knowledge; to encourage fun and creativity. The input must contain concepts and/or knowledge that are familiar but it must also offer something new, a reason to communicate, to get involved. The exploitation needs to match how the input would be used outside the learning situation and take account of language learning needs. The purpose and the connection to the learners' reality need to be clear.

Many ESP learners have little time for class contact and rely on a mix of classes, self-study and *reference* material. For self-study or reference purposes, materials need to be complete, well laid out and self-explanatory. The learner will want explanations, examples and practice activities that have answer and discussion keys.

The materials will need to take account of different learning styles and allow for the explorer, who will follow through a train of thought; the browser, who will pick and choose at random; and the systematist, who will work through methodically. This implies that an important feature is the overt organization of the material – through informative contents pages and an index.

All this places high demands on the materials and great pressure on materials writers. Not surprisingly, producing one hour of good learning

material gobbles up hours of preparation time. Each stage of finding suitable carrier content, matching real content to learning and real world activities, composing clear rubrics, planning an effective layout, is time-consuming. Preparing new materials from scratch for every course taught is clearly impractical. One of the myths of ESP has been that you have to write your own materials. This then leads to the myth that every ESP teacher is also a good designer of course materials. Only a small proportion of good teachers are also good designers of course materials. A good provider of materials will be able to:

- select appropriately from what is available;
- be creative with what is available;
- modify activities to suit learners' needs;
- supplement by providing extra activities.

The balance between these will vary from course to course, situation to situation.

Selecting materials, like selecting a partner, involves making choices and decisions. To make good choices we need to have good criteria on which to base our decision. Numerous criteria, such as factors about the learners, the role of the materials, the topics, the language, the presentation, have been put forward for the analysis of materials and each of them has validity.

We would suggest that initial questions to ask when selecting materials include:

1. Will the materials stimulate and motivate?
2. To what extent does the material match the stated learning objectives and your learning objectives?
3. To what extent will the materials support that learning?

Very often it is not a whole book we need to evaluate but a unit or just an activity. Identifying and separating the real content and the carrier content of a particular activity is crucial to this process. The carrier content must be appropriate and the real content must match the course objectives. We think that the only way to check this is to "be a student" and do the activities, thinking carefully about what we are actually having to do to complete them successfully.

Often, being creative with what is available is crucial, especially if the work environment is heavily constrained. Situations can vary along the cline of:

- given materials have to be used;
- small range of material to choose from;
- freedom to choose from any material.

Modifying activities is generally for when the input and carrier content are adequate but some or all of the exploitations are unsuitable. There could be many reasons why the exploitation is unsuitable. There could be many reasons why the exploitation seems unsuitable and each requires different action, e.g.:

1. There are too many activities, so either there is repetition or too many different objectives are dealt with at one time.

2. The activities focus too strongly on carrier content.
3. The activities are too mechanical.
4. The activities focus too quickly on the detail of the carrier content.
5. An activity is linguistically flawed.

What are the possible modifications?

1. Select the activities that are central to the core objective.
2. Replace them with activities which focus on real content. This may mean preparing a new activity.
3. Change the rubric to change the focus or drop the activity.
4. Add in an activity or two before those given in the material.
5. With an established, high-level group, ask them what the problem is.

There is no dividing line between modifying materials, supplementing with extra input and activities, and preparing materials from scratch. It is a question of degree and perspective. To supplement with extra activities can be viewed as a form of modification. Changing the input is more likely to be viewed as supplementation or preparing new material. The skills ESP practitioners need in order to provide different input and extra activities include:

- matching carrier content to real content;
- providing variety;
- grading activity level to learning and language level;
- presenting the material well.

Matching carrier content to real content. The development of new material could be from one of two directions: one starting point is having some good input/carrier content. This may come from a client or from the learners or be something we have come across. When the starting point is good carrier content, the next stage is to analyze it to determine what real content it could be exploited for. Then it is a question of whether, where and how that real content fits into the course. The other starting point is where there is a gap in the course material; that is, there is a course objective, some real content for which there is, no suitable material available. In this case, the first stage is to search for some suitable carrier content.

When the real and carrier content are matched, the next stage is to draft activities. The resources, group sizes, approaches to learning and target activities must be considered when selecting activities so that they are appropriate for the learning environment. In ESP, the learners are not primarily language learners; they are or have been learners of other disciplines and this has to be a major consideration in the devising and delivering of a course.

Providing variety. Variety is essential in any language class, but it is particularly important in an ESP class as there is sometimes the danger of the ESP class becoming rather a dry affair that fails to motivate learners. It is necessary to practice a number of micro-skills in one class, to introduce a range of activity types and to vary the type of interaction taking place during the class.

We should ensure that we focus on a number of micro-skills in a class; a reading class dominated by deducing the meaning from context is likely to be less effective and motivating than one that focuses on a number of related micro-skills, for example deducing meaning from context, learning certain key core business vocabulary items and investigating collocations.

The use of a wide range of exercise types increases motivation, for both the learners and the teacher. Learners welcome this variety, but, when we use a new exercise type, we must familiarize learners with it so they know what they are expected to do. A visual element in an exercise is often effective as it both increases variety and avoids the danger of too much writing to be read and understood as input for a task.

A teacher should also make learners think when they do an exercise. An exercise that requires some pulling together of ideas from different sources, some drawing on the learners' own knowledge, or even some simple calculation is much more challenging than a purely mechanical exercise, and can both increase motivation and improve the chances of retention of the target language or skill. But this should not happen all the time: a teacher also needs to vary the amount of challenging material and the demands that it makes on the learner.

It is necessary to ensure that the ESP class is varied in the nature of its interactions. Changes from teacher input to individual work to pair work to class discussion can provide this so long as they are not overdone. We should also build in choice as far as possible: some students would rather work on their own than in groups or pairs, so we can allow them to do so for at least part of the class.

Grading exercises. Grading is considered with the amount of support provided to enable learners to do a set of exercises, and with providing learners with tasks at different levels of difficulty. Many ESP practitioners find themselves in the situation where their groups are of very mixed abilities. Such a situation requires an approach to material which to some extent caters for everyone. One way this can be achieved is to present each task or set of exercises at three levels: unsupported – partially supported – fully supported [5]. In addition, activities differ in their conceptual level [6] and can be graded according to complexity of processing.

Presenting the material well. A final, important step is to present the material well. This includes writing good, consistent rubrics, planning layout and proofing. Consistency helps learners to focus on learning rather than working out what to do. A unit of material might have the following broad format:

- objectives stated;
- context and task stated;
- preparatory exercises;
- provision of input;
- sequenced, graded activities to gather key information;
- activities to focus on macrostructure issues;

- activities to focus on structures and lexis;
- application of information gathered;
- extension activities;
- answer key and teachers notes.

Technology offers the possibility of alternative materials and classroom interactions. Essentially there are some modes that are being used in language learning and, to some extent, in ESP teaching. They are the use of video discs, the use of CD-Rom, the use of the Internet and the use of the computer for either CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) work or Data Driven Learning based on corpora held on the computer.

Because information in the form of sound, high-quality pictures, or video requires large amounts of storage space, multimedia and hypermedia often make use of the large storage capacity of DVDs or CD-ROMs.

DVDs and CD-Roms can be used:

1. to support a course, e.g., revising basic skills or language;
2. to enhance a course by providing extra topics for the course;
3. as free-standing material. The CD-Rom or video disk presents a self-contained unit or set of units, and no other material is provided;
4. to provide data which can be exploited for language purposes;
5. to provide authentic material originally designed for a purpose other than learning language.

Although research provides some evidence that learning from multimedia is slightly more productive than learning from traditional materials, more impressive claims that multimedia and hypermedia may herald the restructuring of traditional education and result in experiences of greater personal relevance are still largely without strong empirical support.

Intuitively, however, they offer several advantages. Multiple presentation formats allow students more diverse experiences. Some ideas may be easier to understand when portrayed in a realistic video, when heard or when carefully outlined in text. Multimedia also allows experiences that are more like the rich and motivating contexts found outside the classroom. To the extent that students have some flexibility in controlling what they encounter or the form in which information is presented, students may also be able to adapt learning experiences to their individual needs.

Concerns about multimedia and hypermedia do exist. Critics often lament the lack of imagination in many commercial products and observe that many products do not really offer alternatives to existing traditional instructional materials. Finally, students may not have the academic skills necessary to be responsible for their own learning.

The Internet can also be used as a tremendous source of material for ESP classes, generally where students are involved in project work or case studies.

To get students to use the Internet productively, teachers are going to have to play an active role. They might require that students “study” specific

Web resources or they might require students to use the Web to gather resources to generate a product (for example, a paper on specific topic). These approaches may provide an **incremental advantage** over existing practices in that students have access to many more resources and can access these resources more efficiently than is presently the case, but they do not offer a **transformational advantage** [7].

Student experiences would still emphasize similar classroom activities and the same cognitive skills, even without the Internet. The transformational advantage of Internet activities would be realized if students were engaged in different learning activities emphasizing new areas, such as information literacy, or in finding ways to effectively target skills that have always been valued, but that are difficult to develop in some content areas, such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Here is somewhat different way to think about how you might want to use Internet resources. Consider how Internet access might contribute to an active learning environment. The Internet can provide factual answers to simple objective questions, but it can also provide information that students can use in trying to resolve complex problems and questions with no definitive answers. Using Internet resources in the investigation of complex problems is a good way to integrate the use of technology into nearly any content area and a way to take on challenges that students can attack collaboratively. Giving students the opportunities to use knowledge and skills in ways that are authentic to the discipline provide valuable opportunities for assessment.

CALL materials have all the advantages of self-access materials; learners can work on their own and can carry out tasks without support or feedback from the teacher. Materials for CALL are generally produced using authoring packages which enable the teacher to introduce exercises into an existing exercise framework and use the same exercise types.

The establishment of a number of computer-based corpora of texts provides an extremely useful resource for ESP researchers, teachers and ESP learners [4; 8; 9]. For researchers and teachers there is the opportunity to look in detail at lexical features; one example is to investigate the frequency of lexis in a text or a corpus, and, to determine which are technical terms, semi-technical lexical items and general vocabulary items.

For ESP teaching the corpora provide a resource for students wanting to check whether they have used the correct collocation in their writing, a question that frequently occurs when feedback is given on writing.

The described modes have undoubtedly widened choice in ESP teaching, and provided the means whereby learners can do more on their own and can control their own learning; but these activities generally supplement the regular ESP class and the role of the teacher. They do not normally replace the class and the need for the teacher. The use of the devices is most successful where it is integrated with the classroom courses, and the learning activities are consistent in methodology with those of the classroom courses.

Making a **conclusion** it is important to mention that preparing materials benefits from a co-operative effort because the exchange of ideas, availability of different abilities and strengths, and piloting that can take place are invaluable for the quality of the final material. One of the skills ESP teachers need is the ability to assess a situation from a variety of viewpoints and then to select and adapt materials to match the learners' needs. *Flexibility and willingness* to take risks are the name of the game. The use of technology complements and extends the learner-centered methodology that predominates in ESP teaching. The main advantage is that learners can access the source material in their own time, work through the material at their own pace, choosing topics and subject areas to match their own interests.

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