

Barriers to Teaching English for Specific Purpose among EGP Teachers in the ELI

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Abstract

This study, attempts to provide insights into the barriers that hinder the general English teachers in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University from getting engaged in ESP teaching. The Findings of the study show that the lack of functional academic literacy and field knowledge, the lack of suitable training, the lack of course materials and the lack of ESP libraries are the main barriers to teaching ESP. The goal of this study is to facilitate the obstacles of teaching ESP and help general English teacher to cope with the emerging teaching situation by suggesting some recommendations that would be effective for overcoming these obstacles.

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Since 1960's, the field of (ESP) English for Specific Purposes has developed to become one of the major domains of EFL teaching today. The increasing number of ESP programs offered in different parts of the world is an apparent indication of its growth. Despite the fact that professional ESP teaching is a global concern, unfortunately, in Saudi Arabia, there is paucity of ESP practitioners as there is no concept for understanding the obstacles that hinder the general English teachers from teaching ESP courses or offering ESP teacher training. Thus, the majorities of EGP teachers lack the basic requirements of teaching ESP and decide to stay in their comfort zone and restrict themselves to teaching general English. According to Majjid M Al-Humaidi "The situation in the Saudi context is even more complicated as there is not even a separation between ESP and English for General Purposes (EGP) when it comes to syllabuses and methodology, and who is better trained to teach what. Needs assessment, which is a major component of ESP, never exists, and, if does, it is never systematic, but rather based on teachers' intuitions" Cited in Kiran (2013). This study is an attempt to provide constructive data to the ESP teaching situation in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz university, it investigates the obstacles that thwart general English teachers from getting involved in the ESP situations. The investigation is based on a questionnaire that explores the main barriers which hinder the general English teacher in the English language institute from engaging in the ESP profession. Hopefully, the study will contribute to ESP in the English language institute at King Abdulaziz University. Accordingly, the decision makers in the institution and the general English teachers who are going to teach ESP classes can find this study useful in different ESP situations. Raising the awareness of the barriers that stand in front of our language teachers would provide a better understanding of the challenges of teaching ESP. Furthermore, it would help the future teachers to cope with the requirements of ESP and overcome these obstacles.

The motivation for the present study stemmed from the lack of empirical studies into the issues, concerns and barriers that demotivate EGP teachers from becoming ESP practitioners. The researcher didn't find any study that investigates the involvement of the EGP teachers in the ESP sitting and the barriers they encounter in this regard. Unfortunately, most of the studies deal with the barriers and the challenges that the ESP teaches struggle within their ESP classes. In his study, *An exploration of the main difficulties, challenges and requirements of the ESP teachings and requirements of the ESP teaching in Algeira*. Mebitll (2011) discussed the main issues the language teachers encounter in an ESP teaching situation when exploring the land of ESP. However the participants in this study are all experienced ESP teachers.

This study, attempts to provide insights into the barriers that impede general English teachers from getting engaged in ESP teaching. Furthermore, it is intended to facilitate the obstacles of teaching ESP and help general English teacher to cope with the emerging teaching situation by suggesting some recommendations that would be effective for overcoming these obstacles.

In particular, the basic objectives of the research were the following:

- 1-Is the General English teacher in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz university enough prepared to cope with an ESP teaching situation?
- 2-What are the main obstacles that hinder our General English teachers from becoming ESP practitioners?
- 3- What are the suggestions that need to be taking into consideration to overcome these obstacles?

The hypothesis of the study is based on the premises that:

- 1-the vast majority of the teachers in the ELI have not been trained as ESP teachers. Thus, they find it quite difficult to cope with the ESP teaching situations.

2- The researcher believes that there are some barriers that hinder general English teachers from becoming ESP practitioners. These obstacles are: A-Lack of FAL and field knowledge. B- Lack of a suitable training. C-lack of course material. D- Lack of ESP libraries. E- Demotivation.

To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher will conduct an exploratory-study in which she will use a questionnaire in the process of data collection. The questioner is designed for the EGP teachers in the ELI and intended to investigate the teachers' perceptions of ESP, their willingness to get engaged in this field, and the obstacles that hinder them from doing so. Before the data analysis the researcher will introduce the study by reviewing the main conceptions of the field of ESP. Then, the researcher will analyze the data to conclude the findings of the study. Finally, the researcher will suggest some recommendations that would be effective for overcoming these obstacles.

Key Words: EFL: English as a Foreign Language. ELT: English Language Teaching
ESP: English for Specific Purposes. EGP English for Specific Purposes. FAL functional academic literacy

Literature Review

Definitions of ESP

The changes in the nature of teaching and learning the English language have instigated the beginning of ESP as a sub-field of English language teaching. The communicative trend in teaching and learning the English language is a reflection of the need to learn English for different reasons such as daily communication, academic or business purposes. Thus, English for Specific Purposes was introduced to meet these needs. Actually, there are various definitions that are related to the ESP context. According to Mackay, ESP is

the teaching of English for a “clearly utilitarian purpose” (1978). This indicates that the purpose depends on the learners’ needs whether it is scientific, occupational or academic. According to Harmer (1983:1) ESP is “...situations where the student has some specific reasons to learn a language.” Four years later, Hutchinson et al (1987:19) offer another definition which declares that ESP is: “An approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learner’s reason for learning.” In 1988, Strevens states that “ESP is particular case of general category of special-purpose language teaching. The same principles apply no matter which language is being learnt and taught.” He elaborates on this definition by further by arguing that a definition of ESP should differentiate between absolute and variable characteristics.

The absolute characteristics are as follow:

- Designed to meet specified needs of the learners;
- Related to content, to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- Centered on the language appropriate to those activities, in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc;

In contrast with “General English”.

Variable characteristics:

*ESP may be, but is not necessarily:

- Restricted as to the language skills to be learned.
- Not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

A similar definition of ESP which discusses the absolute and variable characteristics is that of Dudley-Evans *et al* (1998). This definition is a modified version of Strevens's definition in which both authors cooperated to offer the following variable characteristics.

- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level;
- 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.

Although there are many definitions of ESP, one may conclude that there are two main common characteristics that most researchers agree on. First, ESP is based on a particular context. Second, ESP is based on the learners' specific needs.

The Roles of the ESP Practitioner

Dudley Evans describes the true ESP teacher or ESP Practitioner as needing to perform five different roles. These are 1) Teacher, 2) Collaborator, 3) Course designer and materials provider, 4) Researcher and 5) Evaluator (1998).

The ESP practitioner as a teacher. The difference between the ELT teacher and the ESP practitioner stems from the specificity of the ESP course. The ESP practitioner is no longer the Atlas figure of the class since he is not a subject specialist. The students themselves tend to know the content of the materials more than the teacher since it's based on their background knowledge. However, the ESP practitioner is responsible of creating opportunities of learning and generating authentic communication in the classroom. Furthermore, the ESP practitioner has to choose the appropriate teaching method that suits not only the students' target needs but also their present needs such as their enjoyment and involvement in the materials.

The ESP practitioner as a collaborator. Since the ESP practitioner lacks the subject knowledge, Dudley-Evans & ST. John (1998) suggest collaboration between ESP

practitioners and subject specialists. The aim of this collaboration is to support the ESP practitioner in the process of gathering the information and the materials of the course, designing the tasks required from the students, defining the nature of the communication in the subject. Moreover, the collaboration might extend to team teaching enabling both ESP practitioner and subject specialist to act simultaneously in the same classroom.

The ESP practitioner as a course designer and material provider. One of the biggest challenges that encounter the ESP practitioner is designing the whole course starting from the materials. In the ELT courses, the teachers have plethora of educational resources and teaching materials. In the other hand, the ESP practitioners struggle due to the paucity of teaching materials. Thus, part of the roles of the ESP practitioner is creating his/her own materials and/or adjusting the authentic materials that are used in workplace.

The ESP practitioner as a researcher. In order to fulfill the other roles, the ESP practitioner should be a researcher. He/she should search for the students' target needs, goals and interests. In addition, he/she should educate him/herself about the subject matter and finally search for the authentic materials that meet the students' needs.

The ESP practitioner as an evaluator. Lastly, the ESP teacher is expected to be an evaluator as the evaluation process is involved in different stages of the program. Before designing the course, the ESP practitioner should evaluate the needs of the students in order to make the right decisions about the course design. During the course, he/she should evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching method, materials and the students' interaction. At the end of the course, the evaluation takes place to assess the students' learning outcomes.

ESP VS EGP Teaching

Teaching ESP is considered one of the sub-fields of second language teaching. Thus, it shouldn't be independent from EGP since it is a branch of general language teaching and shares some characteristics with ELT. Huchension and Waters support this view when they

were asked about the difference between EGP and ESP. They state "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal" (1987). In the other hand, Strevens (1988) argues that: "ESP differs from general English in that it is based on a close analysis of the learners' communicative needs for a specific occupation or activity, as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity". McDonough (1984) goes forward where she claims that the ESP practitioner needs to understand the professional requirements of the academic or the occupational fields. For this reason, he should accommodate a variety of means and ways and adopt new ideas. As Eva Donesch, (2012) has examined "nowadays teachers are aware of the importance of needs analysis, and perhaps it is this that has been the greatest influence that the ESP approach has had on the teaching of general English".

Objectives of the Study

This study, attempts to provide insights into the barriers that impede general English teachers from getting engaged in ESP teaching. Furthermore, it is intended to facilitate the obstacles of teaching ESP and help general English teacher to cope with the emerging teaching situation by suggesting some recommendations that would be effective for overcoming these obstacles.

In particular, the basic objectives of the research are to answer these questions:

1-Is the General English teacher in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz university enough prepared to cope with an ESP teaching situation?

2-What are the main obstacles that hinder our General English teachers from becoming ESP practitioners?

3- What are the suggestions that need to be taking into consideration to overcome these obstacles?

The Method of the Study

This is a quantitative research in which the use of a questionnaire has provided the researcher with a considerable amount of data about some issues related to the ESP teaching situation.

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Participants

The participants involved in this study are (10) EGP teachers employed in the English Language Institute in King Abdulaziz University. Their EGP teaching experience ranges from 5 to 9 years. All of them are doing an MA in TESOL and familiar with the nature of the ESP. Only one of them had specialized training in the field of ESP.

Instrument

The questionnaire has been distributed with the purpose of identifying the obstacles that hinder our EGP teachers from becoming ESP practitioners such as lack of specialist knowledge, lack of training, lack of materials. Furthermore, it tests the teachers' preference of the appropriate solutions that can overcome these barriers.

The questionnaire consists of (10) questions which have been divided into three rubrics; each rubric holds a distinct label. The following table illustrates the structure of the questionnaire:

Rubric labels:

One: Background and Profile.

Two: ESP challenges

Three: Solutions and recommendations.

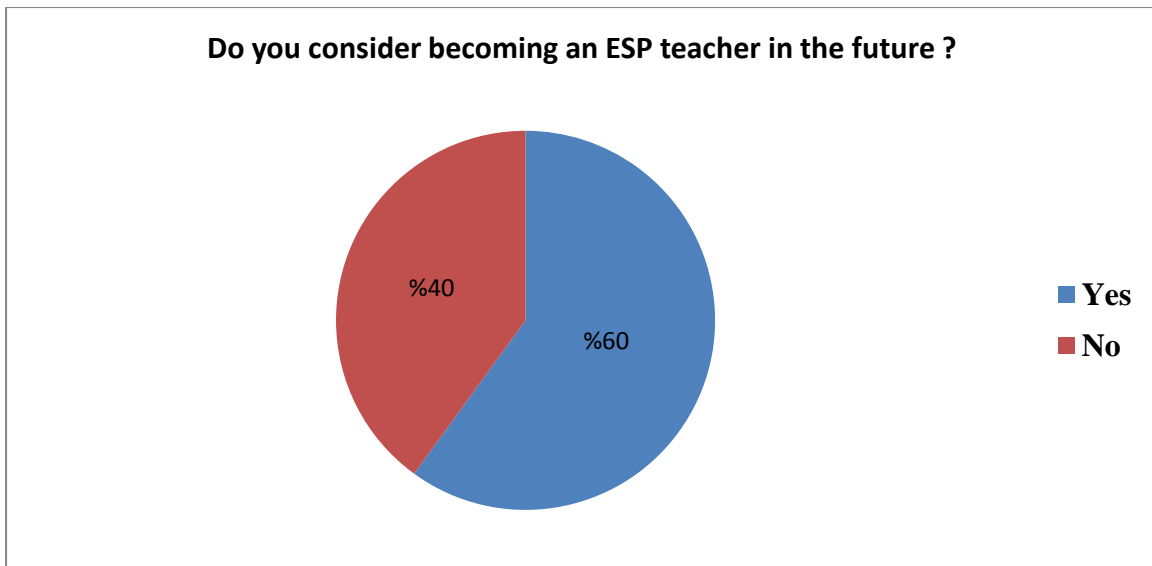
The first section, entitled ‘background and profile’, consists of questions related to personal data concerning the EGP teachers’ name, qualifications and years of teaching experience. The second section is concerned with their willingness to become ESP practitioners, their perceptions of the competent ESP practitioners and the obstacles that hinder them from becoming ESP practitioners. The third section deals with the solutions that they consider effective for overcoming these barriers.

Findings

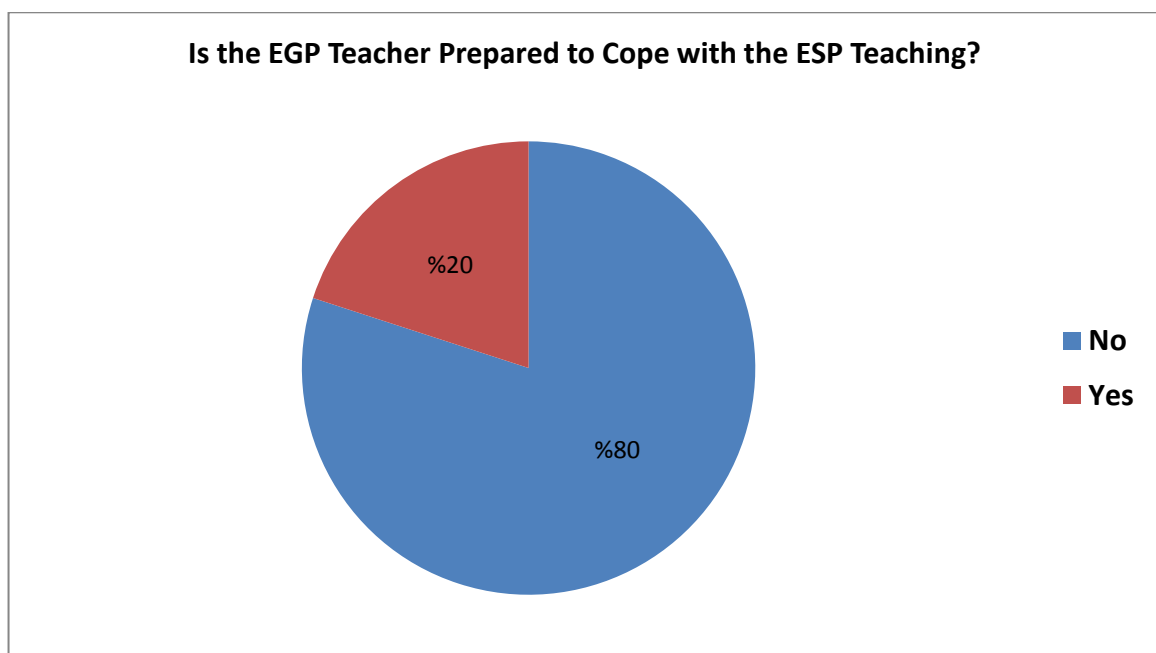
A-Background and Profile Analysis

The first rubric in the teachers’ questionnaire was intended to gather personal information about the EGP teachers in the ELI. For that reason, to offer a clear picture of those teachers being involved in the study, information such as: qualifications, teaching experience as General English teachers and ESP training, have been very significant for the researcher. This section shows that all the participants have a bachelor degree in English and their teaching experience ranges from 5 to 9 years. Only one teacher out of the 10 participants has had special training for teaching ESP.

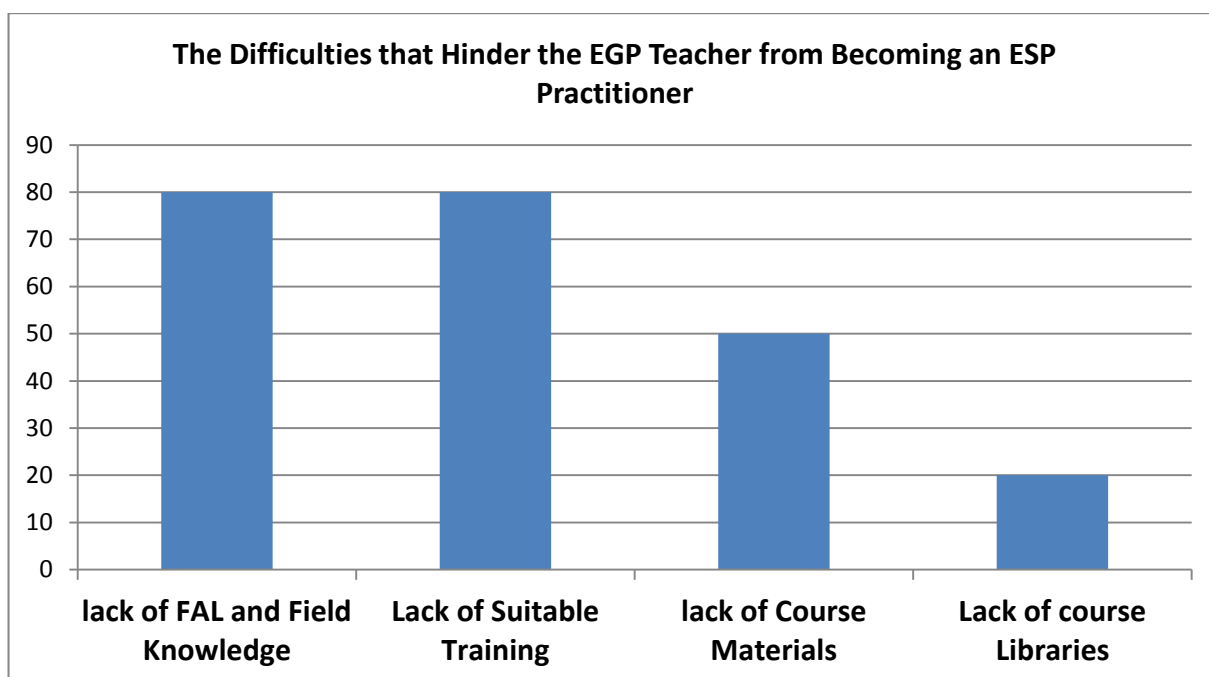
B- ESP Challenges



The first question in rubric B of the questionnaire shows that 60% of the 10 participants in this study consider becoming ESP teacher in the future. This means that they see ESP as part of their professional development and understand the importance of meeting the needs of learners in the specific contexts that they want to learn English for.



It is almost observed that (80%) represented in (10) teachers are not prepared to teach ESP. Being unprepared for the teaching of ESP implies that the EGP teachers encounter some serious barriers such as lacking a specialized training and having a limited repertoire of the specialized terminology of specific fields they are teaching.



This question is based on five hypotheses that have proved to hinder EGP teachers from becoming ESP practitioners.

A-Lack of functional academic literacy and field knowledge

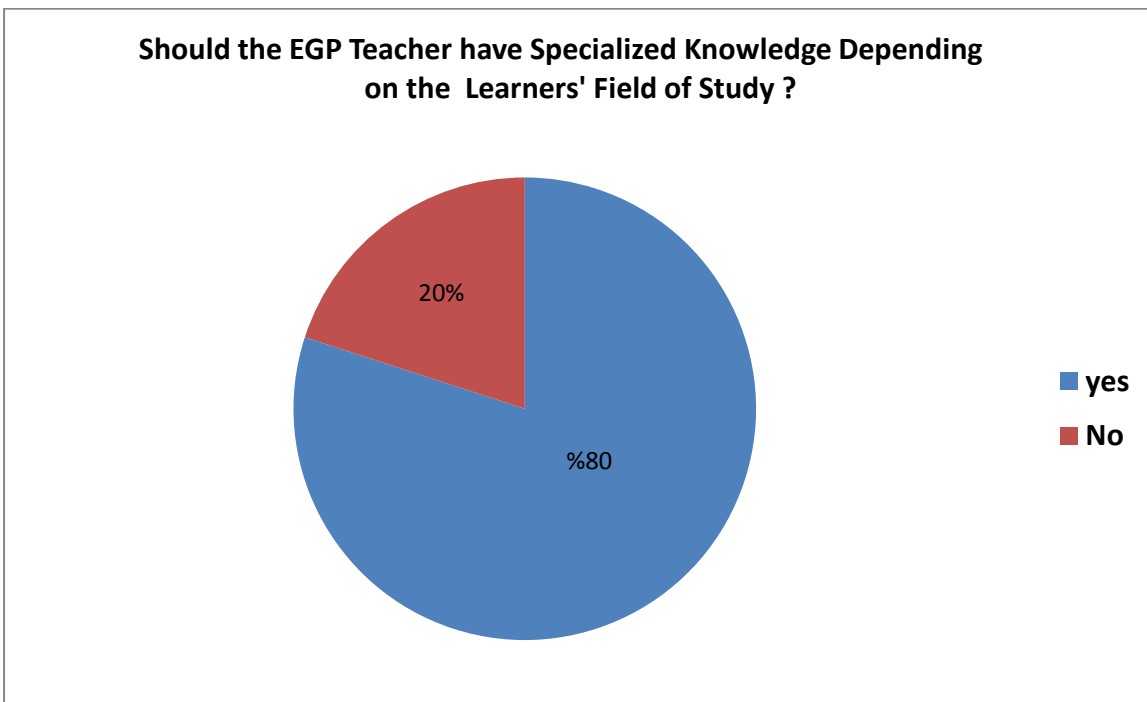
B- Lack of suitable training

C-Lack of course materials

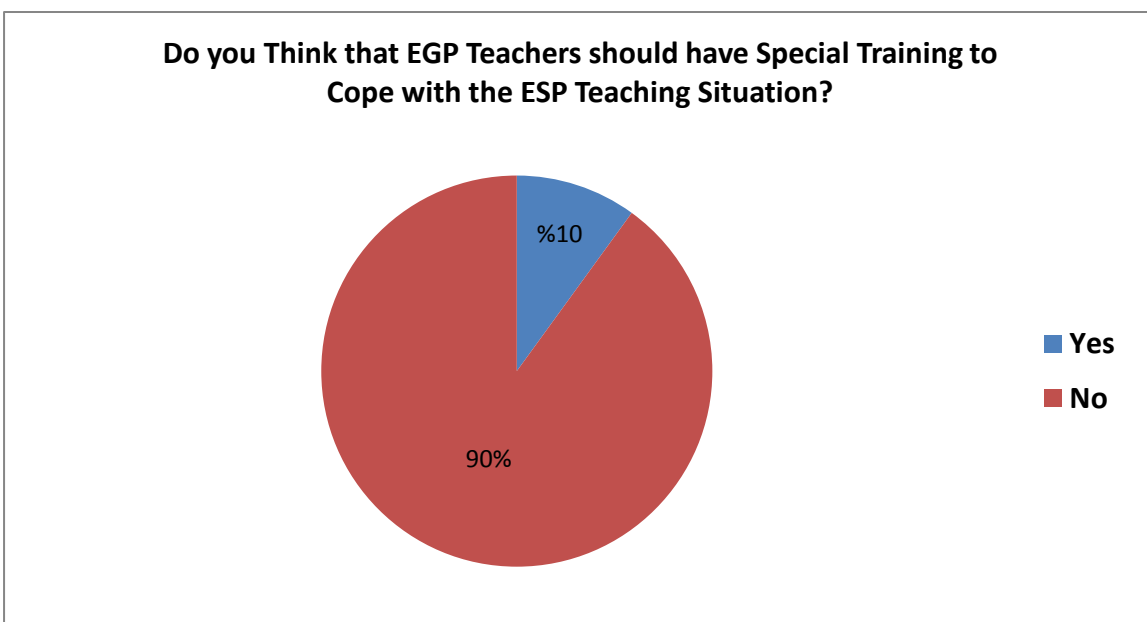
D- Lack of course libraries

E-Demotivation

The participants were allowed to choose more than one answer. 80% of the 10 participants consider (A,B) as the main barriers to ESP teaching. The Lack of course materials come second with 50%. Demotivation is left with 0% and for this reason the researcher decided to exclude it from the chart.



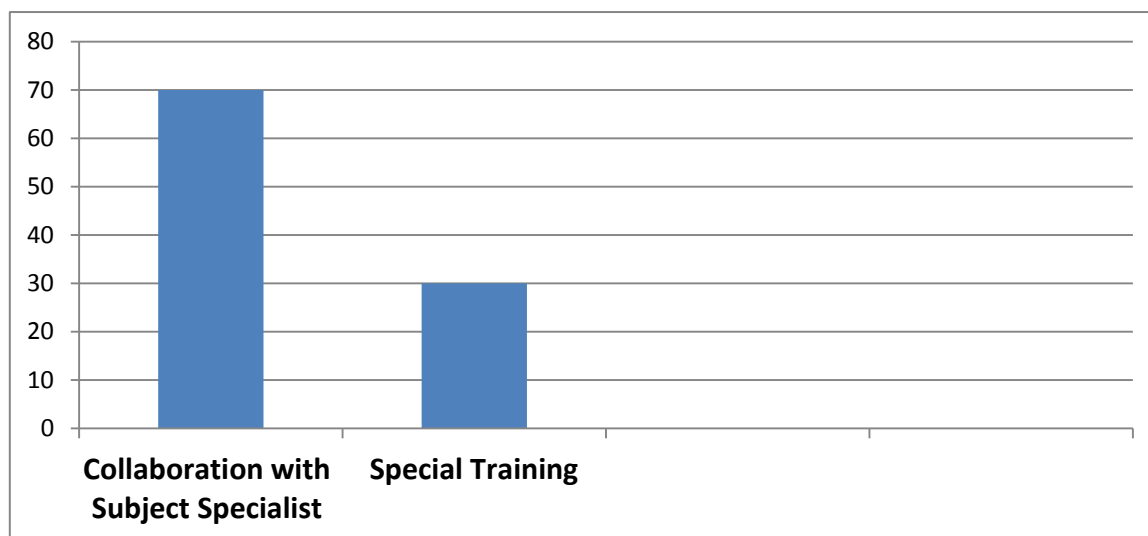
8 teachers out of 10 agree on the necessity to acquire a specialized knowledge depending on the field they are teaching. On the other hand, only 2 of the participants considered the specialized knowledge as being not important for them.



Almost all respondents believe on the necessity to undergo appropriate language training to cope with the ESP situation. One of the participants adds " Yes, unless they have a good background about a certain major and a talent in teaching GE, then they could cope with it without training"

C- Suggestions

Which of these Recommendations do you Consider more Effective for Overcoming these Obstacles?



This question is based on 3 recommendations that have proved to be effective in overcoming these obstacles. The recommendations are:

A- ESP teacher should collaborate with subject specialist/ team teaching.

B- ESP teacher should have a special training in this field /seminars and workshops.

C-Teacher should work in team with other ESP teachers across the country through using ESP forums.

The chart shows that 70% of the 10 participants think that collaboration with subject specialists is the most effective solutions for overcoming the lack of subject knowledge. In the second place comes special training with 30%. The last recommendation was excluded from the chart since none of the participants see it effective for overcoming the ESP challenges.

Due to the results of the questionnaire, the barriers that hinder the EGP teachers in the ELI from becoming ESP practitioners are:

A-Lack of functional academic literacy and field knowledge

B- Lack of suitable training

C-Lack of course materials

D- Lack of ESP libraries.

Lack of FAL and Field Knowledge

The lack of functional academic literacy is one of the main barriers that hinder EGP teachers from teaching in ESP settings. ESP teaching requires understanding the jargons and the language input of the specific field. The ESP teacher is not only supposed to have FAL but Language content and subject content of a given text, namely its surface structure and deep structure in Chomsky's (1965) terms. FAL requires mastering the cognitively complex, relatively unimpeded or context-reduced language of the academic classroom (Collier, 1992). The EGP teachers struggle with the FAL because they find the academic literacy and the language input in the ESP course is totally different from the one they deal with in their daily conversations. EGP teachers lack the terminology and the field knowledge of the ESP course. Thus, some of them feel unqualified for teaching ESP and prefer to stay in their comfort zone which is teaching general English. On the other hand, some EGP teachers who are obliged to

teach ESP struggle with lack of FAL and field knowledge and tend to either teach using the translation method or over simplify the course materials.

Lack of a Suitable Training

EGP concentrates on teaching the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills to meet the communicative needs of the daily conversations. Teaching ESP is different from teaching EGP in terms of the focus on the language context and students' needs. Although ESP and EGP teachers share similar educational skills, teaching ESP requires linguistic competencies and content knowledge. Thus, EGP teachers need to be trained in order to understand the needs and the characteristics of the ESP setting. According to Chostelidou, Griva, & Tsakiridou (2009), "The impact of teacher training on optimizing teaching and learning opportunities in the ESP classroom need hardly be argued as the distinct characteristics and the nature of English for Specific Purposes require awareness on the part of the ESP teachers as to the diversified roles and the modern instructional needs assumed of them". However, the EGP teachers in the ELI are not familiar with the ESP setting and lack the training, skills and strategies for ESP teaching. They have not received any efficient training to meet the complex roles of ESP practitioners. Thus, they perceive themselves as unable to meet the demands of the ESP course and help ESP learners with the functional academic literacy and the field knowledge.

Lack of ESP Materials

One of the main barriers that hinder the EGP teacher from becoming ESP practitioners is the lack of course materials. Designing the whole course starting from the course plan to the syllabus and finally the content is a huge challenge to the EGP teacher who

is used to deal with clearly specified materials. Providing the ESP learners with the appropriate materials that meet their needs is a difficult task to do since it demands understanding the context in which the students practice the language, identifying their needs and helping them to practice the communicative skills of the specific purpose that they want to learn English for.

Lack of Course Libraries

The fact that there are no libraries in the ELI is also reported to affect the teachers involvement in the ESP field. Having no official resource to the ESP materials raises the challenge of teaching ESP and forces the teachers to purchase these materials by themselves or restrict themselves to the limited free materials they find online.

The final question in the questionnaire reveals that the EGP teachers in the ELI find the following recommendations more effective for overcoming these obstacles:

A- Collaboration with subject specialist

B- Special training

Collaboration with Subject Specialist

Chen (2000) believes that the EGP teachers should not be expected to have sophisticated content knowledge, but key concepts are required to design an ESP syllabus that backs up the content course. Savas supports this view and maintains that EGP teachers could definitely be a competent ESP teacher through collaboration with subject specialist. In this regard, the subject specialist shares the responsibility not only of helping the language teacher to overcome the fear of a lack of content knowledge but also of introducing him/her to the modes of disciplinary thought and values (2009).

Collaboration with subject specialist for both EGP teacher and subject is recommended to develop the confidence and the competence to effectively integrate language and content instruction in ESP teaching, which entails 1) analysis of texts, materials, and curriculum; 2) classroom observation, reflection, and feedback; 3) collaborative action research and reflection; 4) development of integrated or complementary lessons, materials, or curricula; 5) collaborative or team teaching (Crandall, 1998).

Special Training

Current language teaching departments in Saudi Arabia don't include special programs for ESP training. In this case, Chen suggests that pre-service training after undergraduate study can be a solution. On the other hand, in-service training programs can be helpful for currently working EGP teachers. Both prospective and current language teachers can attend professional development workshops to let themselves attain a second field of expertise, such as medicine, engineering or law. In these settings entailing constant participation in situational decision making and professional involvement in the disciplinary culture can help prospective ESP practitioners to conceptualize proper notions for teaching approaches (2000).

Conclusion

This study provided some useful information about the main barriers that hinder the EGP teachers in the ELI from becoming ESP practitioners. It revealed their attitudes towards teaching ESP, their needs and their suggestions to overcome these obstacles. Due to the results of the questionnaire, the barriers that hinder the EGP teachers in the ELI from becoming ESP practitioners are the lack of functional academic literacy and field knowledge, the lack of suitable training, the lack of course materials and the lack of ESP libraries. To overcome these barriers, they should look at the ESP situation as a challenging field that requires their interest and determination. The EGP teachers should understand that they don't have to be specialists in the students' professional fields in order to become ESP practitioners. They need to develop their competence in students' particular professions through attending seminars and workshops. Another solution that can help in overcoming the lack of subject knowledge is the collaboration with subject specialist. These recommendations were discussed in the present research hoping that they would open more avenues for potential development in the ELI.

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Appendix

ESP Questionnaire

Barriers to Teaching English for Specific Purpose among EGP Teachers in the ELI

A- Background and Profile

1-Name:

2-Qualifications:

3-How long have you been a General English teacher?

.....Years

4-Have you had any specialized training for teaching ESP?

Yes /No

B- ESP Challenges

5- Do you consider becoming an ESP teacher in the future? Justify your answer?

6-Is the General English teacher prepared to cope with an ESP teaching situation?

7-According to you, what are the difficulties that hinder the General English teachers from becoming an ESP practitioner? "you can choose more than one answer"

A- Lack of FAL and Field Knowledge

B- Lack of a Suitable Training

C-lack of course materials

D- Lack of ESP libraries

E-Demotivation

8-Should EFL teachers of ESP have a specialized knowledge depending on their learners' field of study?

9- Do you think that EGP practitioners should have special training to cope with the ESP teaching situation?

C-Suggestions

10- Which of these recommendations do you consider more effective for overcoming the challenges of becoming an ESP teacher?

A- ESP teacher should collaborate with subject specialist / team teaching.

B- ESP teacher should have a special training in this field / seminars and workshops

C- teacher should work in team with other ESP teachers across the country by providing an ESP forum.

End of Questions
Thank you