

Towards the contextualization teaching of the speaking skill in higher education in the North Benin: from an ESP perspective.

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Abstract : ESP stands as a broad diverse field of ELT, which is still in its infancy, here in BENIN, where unfortunately a set of perspective are not yet reached as both parameters in the teaching/ learning process, i.e. teachers and learners claim their dissatisfaction with the context and the form of the courses, as it does not meet either academic or professional expectations once they are, fully, involved in real situations and they encounter a set of difficulties at different levels, including that of the low level of English language proficiency while trying to communicate in the target language. In the same line of thought, and unlike EFL where the focus is placed on the four (04) skills, in ESP, there are emphasized in one situation which is considered as inappropriate in other context. Hence, the main aim of the current paper is to propose set of hopefully valuable techniques and strategies to improve the learner's ability to communicate effectively in their target situation through developing the speaking skill while trying to contextualize the teaching/ learning situation, e.i., drawing tasks and activities from real situations to meet learner professional prospects.

Key words: ESP, teachers, learners, contextualization, skill, speaking, strategies, techniques, professional schools.

Learning the English language can be considered nowadays as one of the necessary requirements within the foreign languages learning. In this sense, English is believed to hold the lion-share since it is regarded as the international language of communication. Aside from the speaking and listening, learning a language can also be associated with the ability to read and write effectively in the target language. Hence, the process of learning, in this case, is constituted of two main components; the first element is the acquisition of knowledge through listening and then verbalized through speaking. The second element, on the other hand, refers to the fact of gaining knowledge through reading then writing.

Therefore, to achieve a better professionalization of the teaching/ learning process, the language teachers are strongly invited to adopt/ adapt a set of strategies and apply techniques to help their learners develop, in a way or another, their English proficiency level.

Throughout this present article, the attention will be, chiefly, focused on the adoption of the contextualization teaching as an approach to language teaching while addressing one of the non-separated skills which is the speaking skill as a key to accomplish definite purposes.

In this sense, and as a first step toward the contextualization teaching of the speaking skill, one may feel the need to provide, a somehow thorough and a clear, definition of the above-cited approach from an ESP perspective. Therefore, the contextualization teaching approach is primarily based on teaching the language focusing on either the four skills or only one and editing the course content before, during and after the planning of the course depending on the requirements of the target situations and the learners' needs, as well. In the same line of thought, Merrifield (2000) maintains that " the focus is on the application rather than on the possession of basic skills and knowledge".

Taking the context as the first standing point from which the ESP practitioner needs to start, associated with the two parameters, fundamentally, the target

culture besides, the current and the future practices of our learners, can be regarded as a first stone in the building of such approach.

As far as the ESP classroom is concerned, the ESP practitioners have more autonomy to design, provide, and adjust their courses depending on their learners' own needs, based on the language used in the specific context they want to establish, to afford, later on, a direct relationship between the already set objectives, the learners' current wants, lacks, and their future expectations throughout the development of the course.

To this end, and for the sake of achieving better learning outcomes from the part of our learners, it is believed to be of worthy significance if learning English for specific purposes is contextualized in different dimensions, applying different strategies, and adopting a variety of techniques.

As a first step towards applying this approach to our cases, i.e., to different ESP contexts, a needs analysis and identification of our learners' wants, lack besides, their expectations is highly believed to be one of the pre-requisite. In the same line of thought, and after drawing a clear profile for our learners, the ESP practitioner moves to another level where he/she plans his course based on the results of the already set needs analysis to select the suitable materials, divide the syllabus and design the environment where the learners enjoy learning motivating them to participate in their courses either individually or collaboratively while creating team-works including only learners or going even, beyond to work in teams with their ESP teachers.

Bearing in mind the fact that unlike EFL instruction where the focus is placed upon the four skills, in ESP, there are priorities among skills; a skill which is emphasized in one situation is considered as inappropriate in other context depending on the necessities of the particular situations the informants are taking part in, or to another extent, they are expected to involve in. In this regard, Dudley-Evans et al (1998:24) maintain that:

In many situations, especially when the medium of instruction was not English, for example in Latin America, this meant a focus on reading. In other situations it might involve a different skill, such as listening for international students embarking on academic courses in the UK.

As far as the teaching of the speaking skill is concerned; the core of this article, Brown (2001) mentions the following points which should be taken into serious consideration:

- Fluency;
- Phonology clarity;
- Strategies;
- Being able to produce chunks of languages;
- Appropriacy (register, etc);
- Understanding elliptical forms;
- Use of other cohesive devices...

In the regard, fluency can be considered as the first device the ESP teacher needs to develop among his students. For this end, fluency according to Graham (2004) should include the ability to:

- Use language spontaneously;
- Listen and comprehend spontaneously;
- Respond spontaneously;
- Compensate for any lack in any of the above.

At this level, the ESP teacher who seeks to develop his learners' ability to communicate effectively in the target language with a close focus on the speaking skill can be, more or less, achieved in an accurate way if the following criteria can be put into practice:

- Creating meaningful contexts.
- Reducing the learners' speaking anxiety.
- Creating artificial settings where students are asked to interact as if in real situations.
- Enhancing the learners' level of English language proficiency through developing their vocabulary and language while introducing new concepts, exploring, and discussing its specific use can strengthen their specialized knowledge of the field they are concerned with.
- The use of authentic materials can be considered as an essential ingredient in the development of such an approach. In this respect, many authors among them Robinson share the view that " Authenticity is a key

concept in ESP courses". (Kennedy et al 1984, Robinson 1991, Dudley-Evans et al 1998, Basturkmen 2006).

Dudley-Evans et al (1998:28) move a step forward where they define authenticity as follow:

Authenticity lies in the nature of the interaction between the reader (or hearer) and the text. Part of the process of needs analysis is finding out exactly how learner use different sources so that activities in the ESP class can reflect what happens in real life.

- Selecting meaningful and universal themes may enhance the learners' motivation which can be reflected, later on, in their positive attitudes towards the ESP course.
- The use of visual aids helps learners to recognize essential ideas and locating this latter in specific contexts. In this vein, Bongolan et al (2005:02) write: "visuals make both the language and the content more accessible to students."
- Team-teaching by either collaborating or cooperating with the learners. This can be carried out by sharing responsibilities from both parts; that of the ESP teacher and that of the learners too. This latter may help learners take full responsibility for their learning by being autonomous learners.
- Providing a network which may help teachers to be in contact with their learners everywhere and anytime; being online or offline. While online teachers may have a direct contact with their learners through modules, via emails and so forth. Yet, when offline, students can have access to tasks, materials, courses and so on.

As one of the characteristics of ESP courses is: “...turning learners into users” Carver (1983), this is done mainly for the sake of promoting an autonomous learning as cited before. Considering this fact, the following table is an attempt at summarizing the main strategies, which are proposed for the sake of improving the learners’ speaking skill:

The Fluency- Focused Strategies	The Accuracy-Focused Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using English as a tool for interaction with others and with oneself. • Interacting with teachers during the course. • Seeking opportunities to speak English. • Playing different games in English including the speaking ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating and memorizing words, sentences and phrases. • Reading and imitating native speakers. • Asking feedback from teachers

Table 1.1 Strategies for the Improvement of the Speaking Skill.

Bearing in mind that, the researcher is a novice practitioner who lacks, definitely, experience and who seeks to gain expertise and opt for the development of the teaching/ learning process through seeking different techniques and strategies while adopting the contextualization teaching approach to enhance the learners, speaking skill for an easy and a better communication in the target language.

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