

English for Specific or Academic Purposes at An-Najah Univ. with Reference to Electronic Learning

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Abstract: we aim to look at the teaching of English to various technical and scientific fields of study and the related insights brought about from such language applications with the methodology based on teacher's class observations, students' exams and a short questionnaire all of which have resulted in a paper including 1) introduction (background of students, literature review, experience of West Bank universities with ESP or EAP); 2) the present situation; 3) innovative applications with reference to E-learning, and 4) conclusions and suggested changes.

Introduction

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) can be defined as a sub discipline in applied linguistics aiming at using the English language to create a technical variety of language with certain discoursal features to achieve a particular specific or academic purpose. This definition can be substantiated by Hutchinson and Waters' (1987:19) definition:

“ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.”

As a lecturer of English teaching 10322 (Univ. Eng. II for science students), we'd like to share our teaching experience with you. It sounds rational, at least, to us to ask why we should teach miscellaneous English for scientific routes when we can teach English for specific or academic purposes." That is, we can select books that would suit the various language needs of sub-fields of science such as electronically-biased books, agriculturally-biased, mechanically-biased, medically-biased, and so on. In the event where this is not possible, we can compile relevant handouts.

Background of students: It is roughly expected that 70% of the students of this university received education at public Palestinian schools, and 30% of them is estimated to be educated at private and UNRWA schools. We usually receive students after having had approximately 12 years of learning English as a foreign language.

Literature Review

In a pre-conference event of 2008 on the ESP and EAP advances in the 21st century, it was convincingly argued that globalization, achieving higher levels of a suitable educational infrastructure and the expansion in the ways education is delivered have motivated ESP and EAP research. This paper is no exception; it has been influenced by these factors toward more oriented English.

In her article “Speech Acts in English Language Teaching” Suzan Baleghizdeh (2007, pp.143-155) correctly emphasizes the role of speech acts in our daily use of language, i.e., language functions, which connects with ESP/EAP at the point of achieving various linguistic purposes and relying on presupposed knowledge of academic goals/needs and the world at large. In his article “English Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Computer-assisted language Learning “, Farid Bordbar (2010-pp.27-54) rightly suggests that almost all teachers are positive about the computer use in the class. He also highlights how important the teachers’ vision of technology, experience with it, their level of computer skill and competence are.

In a conference in 2010 on improving TEFL Methods & Practices at Palestinian Universities, the co-researchers Majdi Abu Zahra and Ahmed SH Shayeb deliver a presentation titled “Is ESP a Need? Birzeit Public Administration Students as a Case Study” in which they highlight the global status of ESP; in the process, they assert that the history of ESP dates back to 1960’s and it has now become one of the most important areas of EFL teaching, assuring that Tel Aviv University, Birmingham and Aston University offer MA programs in ESP (Abu Zahra and Shayeb: 2010:87). We back them on this, asserting that most recognized universities create ESP/EAP programs to nurture their students’ needs in various technical and non-technical fields, e.g., shots in mechanical engineering English, electronic English, nursing Eng., literary English, etc., and we have pioneered employing pragmatic issues as illustrated above to render its role (the ESP) more efficient and effective. In the same conference of improving TEFL methods, Dr. Abdulkarim Daraghmeh delivers a presentation titled “Teaching ESP in a Blended Learning Setting” where he references the on-line language learning models and concerns raised by technology integration practitioners.

Experience of West Bank universities with ESP or EAP

A survey of six universities: Arab American University of Jenin, Beir Zeit Univ., Bethlehem Univ., Palestine Polytechnic University, Alquds Univ. of Abu Dees and Hebron Univ. which were asked via email the question of how they were catering for ESP/EAP of their scientific majors has indicated that Beir Zeit Univ. gives four communications (general English) courses for different levels. As for English for

specific purposes, they have three compulsory English courses: English for law, English for public administration and English for journalism. Beithlehem Univ. has the following to say:

"In response to your question about how we cater for our science (biology, chemistry, math, computer and information technology), business, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and nursing) students: we don't have a set textbook for any of these fields. In each of these fields, and sometimes a combination of fields, we have materials that we compile from different sources that we use as teaching materials. Part of the materials are work on word analysis including lists of stems and affixes. The emphasis on some reading sub-skills, most importantly identifying information needed for comprehension questions, identifying discourse markers, or transition words, etc., summarizing important information in non-text form or transferring tabular information to text."

Palestine Polytechnic University gives the teacher the freedom to prescribe the textbook he/she thinks fit to meet their students' academic purposes; no well-defined program seems to exist. However, Abu Dees, Arab American University of Jenin and Hebron Universities had nothing to say in response, despite reminders.

II. The Present Situation: As you probably know, the language needs of all scientific routes at an Najah Univ. are nourished by using Key Words in Science and Technology from Cobuild series by Bill Mascul. 3

This book mainly contains topics about research and discovery, the environment, information tech, medicine, genetics, physics, space, etc. Being miscellaneous as one may realize, the book is thought to meet approximately the general needs of all science and technology students at this university.

However, there are voices among students and others showing disapproval of this technique and showing interest in books oriented towards specific sub-fields. To support our claim here, we ran a questionnaire across one class asking students if they would prefer the present book for their majors or one focused on their major. The result was as follows: the questionnaire was given out to 31 students who all responded with 22(71%) showing desire to change the book and (9)29% preferring to keep the present book in use (a point of interest to the curriculum committee).

The present book, as you may all realize, is badly copied to the point that some students as well as teachers lost interest in it.

Also, the present situation lacks in electronic facilitation such as computers which clearly impairs teaching. Such a situation will force teachers to fall back on personal computers.

III. Innovative Applications: we will discuss as many as 10 points under this heading.

1) Driven by instrumental considerations, i.e., career-related English, we made use of the insights obtained from teaching this course and highlighted the question of register and its kinds (the varieties of English used in various fields of study) and made students aware of these kinds through exposure or listening to related recorded material. Students, in their exams, reacted to this course fairly positively, ranging from learning many useful vocabulary items to getting engaged in scientific and technical discussions to wishing a repeat of similar courses. Some, however, expressed the desire to study purely specialized English such as medical, mechanical, electrical etc.

2) To meet the language needs of these students., we asked them to further their readings in the specialized English of their particular majors with forms to be filled out with related vocab or reports to be written out. We also got students engaged in compiling a technical dictionary in the particular major of a group of students, thus conducted in a framework of an ESP project.

3) We develop and expand their vocabulary in relation to pertinent word-formation by looking up the root and its various related word-forms and using these forms in a meaningful context.

4) Vocab. lists were, thankfully, introduced by Mrs. Mizyed last semester. Following a discussion on this item in one of my classes, 15 out of 40 approved of them. The rest were reserved about them as a mere reproduction of the textbook, with a few showing interest in receiving them.

5) Supportive to the vocabulary list is a question list on the main texts to check comprehension and keep students busy in class and out of class.

6) In previous courses, students were encouraged to launch "ago-green campaign" to make the community more aware of a green (harmless) environment. It seems students need further encouragement and support on the issue from the university administration.

7) An incentive and innovative endeavor would be to integrate E-learning exercises in our teaching programs. For example, we can take some time out to change students' atmosphere by working in your office or even at home. To implement such a plan, teachers would need to enroll in a training course.

8) An Najah Univ. has used the computer in the teaching/learning process as in computerizing marks and the whole registration process.

9) It has also recently started automating the attendance and absence of students.

10) E.10322 exam Students' reaction to the exam was rather long to the point it caused them a negative feeling (affective filter_ a hypothesis of second language acquisition) and put them under real pressure of time. It sounds wise to us that the exam can have one part of writing either writing comments and answering questions or writing a paragraph as either can test the writing skill. We would think, in this regard, that this discussion can have its implications to other similar exams.

11) The most recent creation is the researcher's ESP/EAP strategy of writing an ESP/EAP research report intended to bridge the gaps of any ESP book that can't nurture all students' ESP language needs where students are asked to raise worthwhile novel questions or highlight problems in their own majors for research followed by subsequent recasting of answers or solutions in a research report of the following format:

I. Introduction

A. Introductory/topic sentence

B. Objective

C. Definition of a related concept or problem

II. Methodology

III. Research findings

VI. Conclusion and recommendation

The strategy has been applied to E10322/52 and worked as an extra-curricular activity.

IV. Conclusions and suggested changes

1. We enthusiastically back up the 22 students who propose changing the book for a more specialized textbook because A) this is likely to motivate students further and save them from the affective filter negative learning experience/negative feeling based on the assumption that students crucially/ intrinsically (psychologically) care about their majors. B) It promotes their specialized knowledge and thus paves the way to a happy major where students become abler to gain the content of their subject more thoroughly.

2. The Google and electronic dictionaries can be good sources of knowledge, facilitation and illustration. The OCC (on-line course content) is very good for efficient communication with students., let alone the LCD projector which can make classes more interesting and entertaining, particularly in presentations, if they can always be made available. It seems there's growing interest worldwide to

use computer in teaching. What a great comfort would it be if we could automate all our exams? In fact, the year 2014/2015 witnessed a full automation of the E10322 mid-term exam at an Najah Univ. Also, Moodle can be a helpful tool for both teachers and students. However, we can talk about examples of failing technology on-line which represents a frustrating waste of time.

3. Related technical recorded material on cassettes or CD's can be offered as supplementary home material to improve their specialized English. For further acquaintance with a technical approach to teaching a technical/electronic text, you can visit our web <http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/.electronictext.doc>

4. OCC can effectively be used for distance learning. Also, televised sessions are thought to be contributory to distant students. From a wider perspective, distant learners of English will probably find electronic learning a useful facility.

5. The ESP/EAP orientation of exams is recommended.

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