

## **TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: A PROBLEM OR A CHALLENGE?**

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This article discusses the imbalance of university education versus knowledge and competencies of Language and Communication for Professional Purposes teachers required at universities of applied sciences. Graduate teacher education and vocational teacher education have both failed to meet the specific needs of teacher training for reasons discussed in this article. This problem appears in increasingly difficult teacher recruitment at such universities, as most teacher applicants have secondary school teacher education and no relevant experience or knowledge in professionally oriented language teaching nor working experience in the relevant fields.

Where are teachers of language and communication for professional purposes educated? Good question. The responsibility is shared and therefore evades focus. Universities of applied sciences currently employ a great deal of language teachers, full- or part-time; still their education is either built in the general teacher education or baked into the teacher training of universities of applied sciences, where these foreign language teachers are educated in groups

of teachers of mathematics, physics, banking, electronics, health care, accounting - or any other profession of teachers in subjects that are common for other teachers.

The problematics and didactics of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), however, differ considerably from both the above directions, both general language education of children and the didactics of professional subject studies. Therefore, ESP teachers need their own education program with contents tailored for their knowledge demands.

ESP has been referred to as "applied ELT" as the content and aims of any course are determined by the needs of a specific group of learners. ESP is often divided into EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes). Further sub-divisions of EOP are sometimes made into business English, professional English (e.g. English for bankers, doctors, lawyers) and vocational English (e.g. English for tourism, nursing, aviation, bricklaying).

According to Dudley-Evans [2, p.28] the absolute characteristics of ESP are:

ESP is designed to meet the specific needs of the learners. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the specialism it serves. It is centred not only on the language (grammar, lexis, register), but also the skills, discourses and genres appropriate to those activities.

ESP practitioners are also becoming increasingly involved in intercultural communication and the development of intercultural competence.

For Dudley-Evans [2, p.35] the defining characteristic of ESP is that teaching and materials are based on the results of a needs analysis. The key questions are:

What do students need to do with English?

Which of the skills do they need to master and how well?

Which genres do they need to master either for comprehension or production purposes?

It takes years of work to accumulate a sufficient knowledge base to be able to teach especially English, where the level is highest, let us say in Radiography and Radiotherapy, Industrial Engineering or Correctional Services. We could call this learning objective taking a minidegree in the subject area: sufficient knowledge of the subject area, essential organizations as employers, goals reached and goals aimed for, including common jobs and positions and some of their content. This knowledge is necessary for the teacher to understand the motives of communication.

In some English speaking countries governments are launching initiatives to help economic migrants obtain the practical English skills necessary to function in the workplace. For example, the new ESOL for Work Qualifications in the UK are designed to help employers and employees access courses which offer them the functional language skills demanded across a variety of employment sectors. Content includes topics such as customer care and health and safety.

Some teachers are afraid of making the transition from teaching general English to teaching ESP. There is also the danger that the novice ESP teacher will only use materials that they feel comfortable with and will not stretch their learners.

Bell argues that the depth of knowledge of a subject matter that a teacher requires depends on a number of variables which include:

How much do the learners know about their specialism?

Are the students pre-experience or post-experience learners?

How specific and detailed are the language, skills and genres that the learners need to learn? [1, p.20]

Although you perhaps don't need to be an expert in a specialist area, you do need to have some awareness and feel for a particular vocational area. Bell advocates the three Cs for helping teachers to improve their knowledge and skills in a particular area of ESP.

#### **Curiosity**

The teacher should be interested in the subject area and want to learn more.

#### **Collaboration**

Teachers should seek out subject specialists, show them their work and ask for their feedback.

#### **Confidence**

Confidence will grow as teachers explore the new subject matter, engage with subject specialists and learn from their learners [1, p.45].

Harding stresses that the general skills that a general English teacher uses e.g. being communicative, using authentic materials and analysing English in a practical way are also applicable to ESP. He also suggests that teachers should:

Think about what is needed and don't just follow an off-the-shelf course or course book.

Understand the nature of their students' subject area.

Work out their language needs in relation to their specialism.

Use contexts, texts, situations from their subject area.

Use authentic materials.

Make the tasks as authentic as possible.

Motivate the students with variety, relevance and fun.

Take the classroom into the real world and bring the real world into the classroom [3, p.33].

The current and future needs for teacher education and updating ESP teachers' knowledge at UASs are enor-

mous. This problem requires serious conjoint efforts by the science university departments that offer basic teacher education as well as input by the UAS departments.

In these programs ESP teachers need training for acquiring a knowledge base of specializations. This means training and practice of needs analysis, methodologies, tools for structuring the knowledge and applicable subject knowledge and writing, learning material and course books. ESP teachers also need to update their teaching activities, handout and article materials annually and create terminologies. They need training for this as well. The third major point is to organize a system whereby ESP teachers have opportunities to update their knowledge and skills of the language and communication practices in the fields they teach. A working group with representatives of both UAS experts and science university education departments discuss the problem and come up with reasonable solutions.

### *References*

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