Original Paper

An Integrated Approach to ESP Teaching: A Case Study

Kassoum KONE[1]

[1] English for Specific Purposes, Université Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Abstract

This article is about the relevance of the integrated approach in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching. The purpose was to show the extent to which that teaching approach is essential in meeting ESP learners' needs, as compared to a training based on grammar points and discrete items of the language. The study was grounded in the genre theory and it was made around main questions as follows: what is the appropriate approach to ESP teaching-learning? Should teaching ESP be about discrete items, grammar, or an integrated approach? What does the adoption of the integrated approach entail? To address these concerns, we conducted a research with the target population (6 learners from two different companies), through a semi-structured interview guide. The findings revealed that the integrated approach gives to ESP courses more meaning. The implementation of authentic activities is a means of giving the possibility to the students to build and acquire global knowledge in the language, which is far better than focusing on grammar points and isolated and floating terminologies.

Keywords

approach, discrete items, ESP, genre, integrated, needs

1. Introduction

The growing need to prepare individuals capable of operating in a variety of socio-professional contexts has given English for Specific Purposes [ESP] a prominent place in the language classroom. With this new reality, researchers and practitioners in the field of ESP are constantly engaged in a process that seeks to develop the best approaches for more effective learning.

Several approaches have thus emerged from this desire to make ESP easier to learn. Among these approaches, many practitioners tend to adopt the teaching of discrete items of the language. However, this approach has been extensively criticized for not giving enough space to communication. The integrated approach will thus come to the forefront because of the emphasis it places on both the needs of the learners and the communicative aspect of the language (Koné, 2022).

The researchers who defend this paradigm believe that the adoption of the integrated approach to ESP teaching offers better prospects for improving the training conditions of learners so as to meet the objectives that led to the emergence of ESP. Based on the ongoing debate on the best practices to be adopted in the ESP classroom, we are interested in the best approaches for the teaching of ESP. Therefore, what is the appropriate approach to ESP teaching-learning? Should teaching ESP be about discrete items, grammar, or an integrated approach? What does the adoption of the integrated approach entail? The answer to these questions will lead the following work.

2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Review of Literature

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has many definitions in the research community. Indeed, in their quest to popularize the term, many scholars have tried to give their points about the meaning of the concept. Robinson (1980) defines ESP as teaching intended for learners who need English for specific needs and objectives. These objectives can be professional, academic, and so on.

The definition provided above is in perfect harmony with the one given by the International Organization for Teacher Education (IOTE, 2005). According to the tenants of this organization, the term ESP refers to the teaching or learning of English for a specific profession (Medicine, Law, Economics, etc.) or for business in general. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) maintain that the particularity of ESP lies in the fact that learners are aware of their needs in the language.

Focusing on the different definitions, ESP teaching-learning seems to show interest in a variety of domains. Such a view is confirmed by Crystal (1987, p. 378) in the following terms:

> There is no theoretical limit to the number of special purposes to which language can be put. As society develops new facets, so language is devised to express them. In recent times, whole new areas of expression have emerged, in relation to such domains as computing, broadcasting, commercial advertising, and popular music. Over a longer time scale, special styles have developed associated with religion, law, politics, commerce, the press, medicine, and science. A detailed linguistic account of any one of these areas would itself require an encyclopedia, as the analysis of the language used would require an exposition of the conceptual system that gave rise to it.

It, therefore, clearly appears that ESP continues to evolve with a view to embracing new professional fields as they emerge. In order to do so, ESP continually focuses on the learners' needs. Described by Nunan (1988) as a "data collection process", needs analysis plays a prominent role in ESP to the extent that it helps the practitioner identify the elements to be included in his curriculum. In the words of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), needs analysis accounts for the "necessities, wants, and lacks" of the learners with a view to coming up with useful data regarding what they know and what to include in the

13

teaching material.

From the above, it stands out that ESP is primarily both learner-centered and learning-centered (Hutchinson & Waters, *op. cit*.) as it places great emphasis on the learner. Teaching ESP usually appears as a difficult task for many teachers. Such difficulties mainly rest in the approach used. Indeed, while some teachers believe it should be the teaching of discrete items and grammar points to meet learners' needs, some others apprehend the approach to the teaching of ESP should be integrated.

2.2 The Genre Theory

In communication, a genre is a system of choices available to the user of the language which allows him to achieve or express meaning in a given environment. Swales (1990) is one of the first to apply genre theory to ESP. He asserts that like genre, ESP also stipulates that linguistics characteristics must be connected to the context of use. ESP aims at offering learners the means of communication that will increase their knowledge in a given academic and/or professional community. Swales (idem, p. 85) asserts that: "A genus comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share a set of communicative objectives. These objectives are recognized by expert members of the parental discourse community".

Halliday (1978) thinks that language, by its use, is a form of socialization, which allows various forms of the interpretation of social and socio-cultural relations. He explains that the contexts of language use are never isolated. They are likely to reappear in other situations; which he (Halliday) calls the "types of situation". This reproduction of usage situations allows users to develop, over time, types of semantic interaction in these contexts.

This semantic development in a framework of use is, according to Halliday (ibid), the language register. By linking a context of use to a semantic situation and a grammatico-lexical model, the register refers to the description of the domain of use of the language, and how the participants (the tenors) are mutually linked.

The domain is the system of activities in a given environment that takes into account the participants, their practices, and the circumstances. The concept of "tenors" sheds light on the social relationship that exists between the participants involved and their interactions in the conversation. In other words, genre theory aims at helping learners make appropriate language choices that match their needs or social positions. The approach thus emphasizes the active involvement of the learner during the learning process.

It is about the creation of a discursive community, that is to say, a community that shares the same linguistic discourse in a given domain in order to achieve their goals and meet their communicative needs. The analysis of this communicative need generally represents the starting point in an ESP course.

Furthermore, communicative events must be a matter of mutual understanding by professionals. To be more explicit, the establishment of a kind of language code is necessary in order to allow learners to reflect and realize private intentions in their field of specialty, thus accomplishing social activities through communicative purposes.

From what precedes, it is clear that genre theory focuses on the process of language learning and acquisition. Language skills and linguistics compounds are presented as a whole and not in separate elements (lexicon and grammar) because language is a whole set composed of structures, meanings, functions, and others. Therefore, none of these components goes without the others in a language acquisition process.

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Context of the Study

As a language specialist, we have been teaching ESP for years in several national and international companies. For instance, we taught English at the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Integrated Management Center (IMC) for more than one year. Through time, we had the opportunity to test various approaches to ESP teaching. From this experience, we have come to the conclusion that the best approach to meet learners' needs is the integrated approach.

3.2 Population of the Study

Our learners were mainly composed of managers in different companies. We had to equip them with the language they need to deal with their daily tasks in order to be effective in their domain. Among many other tasks, they should be able to hold meetings, deal with conferences, read and understand emails and chat with their colleagues in English.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

For the collection of data in this study, we have used semi-structured interviews in order to collect learners' impressions of the teaching approach they have experienced. The purpose was to allow them to have opinions and say what they feel about it. In other words, they should be able to say whether the method helps meet their language need or not.

In so doing, we did the interview with learners from two different companies. They were three from each company. We made the decision to make a synthesis of the opinions collected in company A, which allowed us to have a general view of the group, which we named *group 1*. We did the same with the other company, which we named *group 2*. The interview was conducted in French to allow the interviewees, express themselves freely and have much to say. Using the English language could lead to speaking anxiety.

4. Presentation of the Results and Discussions

4.1 Presentation of the Results

The question asked to our respondents was: *What do you think about the teaching approaches you have experienced when learning English?* The purpose was to have the respondents compare the teaching approaches they have experienced while learning English throughout their careers.

During the interviews with Group 1, the respondents found that there have been considerable evolution when comparing the former approach used to teach them and the new one we introduced. In other words, they considered that the integrated approach is "*more useful*" to the extent that they learn more aspects of the language.

More specifically, they welcomed the fact that the integrated approach offers them more opportunities to learn English through "*texts and videos that provide more information about their professional domain*". In a word, the respondents from Group 1 found the integrated approach more interesting and better than the former approaches their teachers used to teach English in their company.

As regards Group 2, most respondents expressed a positive view about the integrated approach, which they described as "*exciting*". In fact, they considered that the procedures brought in by the integrated approach were interesting because it "*allows them to use information from their professional world to learn English and use it to communicate effectively*".

Nevertheless, some respondents from Group 2 deplored the fact the integrated approach is much more demanding in terms of efforts from the learners. In their words, involving learners in completing such a variety of tasks, as is the case with the integrated approach, can be hindering for professionals learning English. Such a view is mainly based on the rationale that workers are too busy with their professional activities, which does not let them much time to spare for completing demanding English tasks.

Despite their complaints, the respondents from Group 2 agreed that the integrated approach is much more beneficial for them in terms of opportunities to learn English. A summary of respondents' opinions is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Summarized Responses from Respondents in the Submitted Language

Question	Group 1	Group 2
What do you think about the teaching approach you experienced?	We think it is an approach, from which we learn several things at once. It allows us to study texts and videos which provide us with knowledge about our field and we find this very interesting. As compared to what we used to see before, where everything focused on grammar and vocabulary points, we feel learning more with approach and actually, it is a good one	*It is an exciting approach, because it allows us to use information from our profession while learning and communicating in English. We watched videos related to our job.* However, it remains a bit complex. We use too many things at once. Meaning, we watch videos, study some texts and we have to make comments, exchange about all of those elements. We find that too demanding, because we are workers and we don't have enough time. Apart from that point, the approach can be among the best.

4.2 Discussions

Genre theory states that the focus should be on the process of language learning and acquisition. Language skills and linguistics compounds should be presented as a whole and not in separate elements (lexicon and grammar) because language is a whole set composed of structures, meanings, functions, and others.

Therefore, none of these components goes without the others in a language acquisition process. In this way, learning the language should allow learners to express meaning in various communication contexts they face, as argued by Halliday (op.cit.), Swales (op.cit.), and Bathia (2004) ESP students should therefore be equipped with means of communication that will increase their cultural background in the professional community.

Concretely, the language forms taught must be specific to their domain and must, therefore, be associated with linguistic knowledge. In other words, Courses in ESP should aim at developing learners' communicative skills and strategies according to their needs. We have to carefully identify these skills and communicative strategies in order to effectively develop them.

The four main language skills should not be addressed in isolation during learning activities. Yet to be able to write or even speak a second or foreign language, it is not enough to claim to know it. Instead, it necessarily requires good oral comprehension without which it is not possible to communicate effectively. When language skills are therefore not addressed in an integrated way, from a communicative perspective, students cannot make a social use of it.

Our personal experience as a social learner-user of English edifies us on the possibility of fully and exclusively acquiring language skills. Communication in real-life situations requires more than one language skill. Therefore, teaching that integrates the four main language skills allows learners to acquire the four skills simultaneously.

Two approaches to language teaching generally make it possible to integrate language skills. These are content-based teaching and task-based teaching. The first emphasizes learning the language through content that interests them (a subject, a theme, a series, a character, etc.), while the second insists on the execution of tasks (solving situational problems) requiring the communicative use of language. In both approaches, peer and group work is used to increase learner interaction and collaboration. In other words, it is about developing tasks whose completion requires the holistic use of English to solve problems related to real-life communication.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, rather than focusing on terminologies and isolated grammar points, ESP teachers and practitioners must encourage the integrated approach to language teaching, especially ESP. In this way, learners will be able to use language related to their field as a whole. In this case, the courses will give students the opportunity to analyze both the formal and functional aspects of the language in social and cultural contexts. They will then be more comfortable in their production of the language in their professional life.

ESP courses should have more meaning. The development of authentic activities (activities which reflect as faithfully as possible the use of English in the real life) is a means of giving the possibility to the students to build and acquire global knowledge of the language, and not essentially isolated and floating terminologies. As for the grammar rules, they will appear in contexts so that the learners can learn them implicitly during the learning process. These grammar rules and terminologies will no longer be the subject of decontextualized teaching.

References

Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. London: Continuum.

Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Glmenze, J. (2000). Email Communication: Some Emerging Tendencies in Register. *English for Special Purposes Journal*, *19*(3). https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(98)00030-1

Halliday, M. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-Centered Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733031

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1992). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1994). *English for Specific Purposes*. Glasgow: Cambridge University Press.

Kone, K. (2022). *Apprentissage par expérience et enseignement de l'Anglais de Spécialité (ASP): Les cas de l'UFR des Sciences Médicales, UFHB* (Doctoral dissertation). Abidjan: Felix Houphouët Boigny University.

Nunan, D. (1988). Principles for designing language teaching materials. *Guidelines*, *10*, 1-24. Singapore: SEAMEO RELC.

Robinson, P. (1980). *ESP*. Oxford: Oxford Pergamon Press.

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre Analysis: Eng lish in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.