

How to define the concept of teaching ESP

Yigitali Abduqodirovich Allamurodov
Termez State University

Abstract: It is certainly clear the fact that teaching ESP varies greatly from than that of EAP. For this reason, this article aims at defining the true characteristics of teaching ESP how much attention it has gained in the world of foreign language teaching. It also reveals absolute and variable characteristics of this trend that often mislead others to interpret basic principles of ESP inaccurately.

Keywords: ESP, EGP, absolute characteristics, variable characteristics, specialized, specific, language diversity and etc.

English for specific purposes (ESP) refers to the teaching and learning of English for an instrumental purpose – work or study related – and embraces a great diversity of language teaching and learning situations around the world.

This “diversity of language teaching and learning situations” is furthermore highlighted that there is a weak connection between ESP and definite teaching strategies which “may not be taught accordingly to any pre-ordained methodology”. On the contrary, other have tried to assign the teaching of language for specific purposes (LSP) a special methodology since the language teaching pedagogy in LSP classrooms explicitly relies on “routines, practices and assumptions of the targeted discipline or workplace“. Hence, they claim that LSP (and thus ESP) teaching and general language teaching (like ELT) clearly differ in terms of pedagogic approaches and activities. Here, others contribute to the idea of a specific LSP/ESP methodology by providing concrete examples of activities found in ESP courses around the world. While this ESP activity pays particular attention to the comprehension of subject-specific texts, another example considers language production with regard to target situations, namely the “Workplace Project Team Meeting Simulation”. Here, students have to arrive at decisions with their colleagues like in real team meetings. These examples demonstrate in which ways ESP offers tailor-made activities to learners of English, meaning that the learners and their specific background are especially taken into account. In particular, the considerations of the students’ specialism like in the case of the divinity students and of the authentic profession-related purpose of the team meeting in the second example *can* be part of EGP lessons, but they *always* should play central roles in ESP-settings.

Similarly, linguists explicitly support the claim that ESP features an autonomous and tangible methodology. In their definition of ESP they hold the view that (a) ESP teaching has to rely on the practices of the respective disciplines (e.g. problem-

solving methodology of academic study) and that (b) ESP classroom interaction may considerably differ from the one found in EGP classes. Furthermore, they reject Robinson's claim of ignoring specialist language when defining ESP. Based on needs analysis, activities for an ESP course are defined. These activities, however, require students to make use of certain "registers, genres and associated language" and thus they see language as an inevitable feature for defining ESP. In particular, there can be found following definition of ESP:

1. Absolute characteristics:

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

2. Variable characteristics:

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
- 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.

Learner needs, an ESP methodology, and specialist language are at the core of this ESP definition. All in all, ESP is not a "particular ... product" that includes detailed instructions on how to teach, but in fact it is a *modus operandi* for when it comes to "teaching English to specified people". This *modus operandi* amplifies the field of ELT, as explained in the following paragraph. With regard to the different degrees of specificity in ELT, linguists propose a "*continuum of ELT course types*" original emphasis. According to them, English language teaching constantly oscillates between "clearly definable General English courses" and "very specific ESP courses". Given the fact that "the ultimate goal of English learning is not to learn, but to apply", this continuum illustrates how ELT enables English learners to employ the language according to general or highly tailored contexts. Now, ESP, as a *modus operandi* for reconsidering ELT, approaches ELT by elongating the ELT continuum. In this way, learners of English can choose a position along this continuum that fits to them best, meaning that different nuances of ELT correspond more adequately to different types of English learners. When defining ESP, one particular question often remains unanswered, namely 'What does the S in ESP stand

for?’ Throughout the aforementioned definitions of English for specific purposes, the adjectives ‘specialized’, ‘specified’ and ‘specific’ are frequently used. In particular, “specific needs”, “specific disciplines”, and “specific teaching situations” are often seen. Considering the etymological background, ‘specific’ means “having a special quality”. Such a special quality seems to be the common denominator when talking about ESP learners, ESP teaching, and ESP disciplines. This is defined this quality as “precision”. Language used in a certain discipline or profession is precise, and thus specific, if its speakers are able “to speak and write more precisely about aspects of the field that outsiders sometimes find impenetrable” due to the presence of characteristic features on the levels of lexis, semantics, syntax, and phonology. Put differently, specific language use can serve as a precise social marker, signifying a particular professional community. Such a view directly contradicts another perspective that does not see a notable difference in “all English use” and in English for discipline-related target situations. Similar to the former definition of the S in ESP is to the point of view. Like others, it is stressed that the ability of participating successfully in a subject-specific discourse when written that “equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and professional cultural contexts” should represent the chief purpose of ESP. Hence, being precise in terms of language use as well as in the teaching of communicative skills are two major characteristics that make ESP specific.

Summing up, ESP directly relates to the field of language teaching and provides a chance to see the traditional field of ELT in a new light. As regards ESP methodology, it remains debatable if such a characteristic system does exist. This debate, however, shifts the focus towards specified learners and specialized language and thus boosts considerations with regard to ESP syllabus and course design, ESP material development, the categorization of different ESP types, and the roles of ESP instructors. ESP methodology is the terminological point of departure for the analysis of the specific interplay between specified learners’ needs and specified teaching material as well as of the specific interaction between ESP learners and ESP teachers. Given the fact that ‘specific’ equals ‘precise’, ESP is characterized by such precise interplays and interactions.

References

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