Journal of Language and Translation
Volume 4, Number 1(7), (pp.35-40), 2014

Addressing the Dilemma in ESP Teaching: The English Language Teacher or the Subject-matter Specialist?

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Received: 20 May, 2013 Accepted: 13 March, 2014

Abstract
Teaching English for Specific Purposes (TESP) has been a controversial issue among EFL teachers and others. The question raised by many is whether the English language instructor or the subject-matter specialist should teach ESP courses. The main purpose of the present study was to re-address this issue. To this end, 60 second-year students majoring in Feqh and Islamic Law at Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch were randomly selected. Then, they were divided into two classes with 30 members in each. The classes were taught by two lecturers – an EFL instructor and a subject-matter specialist – for an entire semester. At the end of the course, two types of measures were used: an achievement test and an attitude questionnaire. Analysis of the results represented that the EFL instructor's class scored higher than the subject-matter specialist's class on the achievement test, and that they expressed greater satisfaction with their classes on the attitude questionnaire. Implications of the findings are discussed, accordingly.

Keywords: TESP; ESP; EFL teachers; subject-matter specialists; specialized english.

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructors have a lot in common with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors. Both are typically required to consider and gain insight into (i) linguistic development of learners, (ii) recent developments in the theories of teaching, (iii) contemporary ideas regarding their own position and role as well as those of language learners, and (iv) new technologies offered as an aid to improve their methodology (Strevens1988). The need to understand the requirements of other professions and willingness to adapt to these requirements are among the key elements that differentiate ESP instructors from their colleagues teaching EFL (Graham 1987).

One of the many controversial issues related to teaching English for Specific Purposes (TESP) is whether the English language instructor or the subject - matter specialist should teach ESP courses. Some argue that EFL instructors do not possess the sufficient knowledge of the subject matter; therefore, they may not be able to exchange ideas that are necessary to bring about the intended learning outcomes (Hamp - Lyon 2001). In contrast, there are some scholars who claim that ESP teaching is part of an English language teachers ' job and that it is, therefore, their responsibility to design or teach such courses (Gatehouse,2001).

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the ESP instructor should have the same qualities of the English language instructor. The ESP instructor should posses a) English language knowledge, b) thorough command of the course design, and c) expert knowledge of the related field of science. Apparently, most subject - matter instructors lack a and b, which cannot be ignored. Besides, Ziahosseiny (2002) believes that subject - matter specialists instructors should have these skills, i) command of the language the teacher is teaching - this component must ensure that

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teacher's command of foreign language is at least adequate for class purposes; ii) teaching techniques and classroom activities - the major part of teacher training is to assimilate a great body of effective techniques; iii) the management of learning- it is a crucial part of teacher's classroom skills to learn how to assess from moment to moment the progress of each individual in the class and how to manage the classroom activities.

Moreover, the ESP practitioners need three parts of information as well, a) information about education- about approaches to the task of teaching language; b) information about the syllabus and materials he will be using - the syllabus, the prescribed textbooks, other teaching materials (readers, workbooks, etc.) and c) information about language - when the teacher enters his course of training, his understanding of the nature of language is likely to be scanty (Anthony,1997)

TESP is considered as a separate activity within English Language Teaching (ELT). As ESP teaching is extremely varied in ELT, some authors such as Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) coined the term "practitioner" rather than "teacher" to emphasize that ESP work involves much more than teaching. They believe, many pivotal roles such as course designer, material provider, researcher, collaborator, and evaluator should be taken on by an ESP instructor.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an approach rather than a product - meaning that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology. Thus, the basic question of ESP is: Why does this leaner need to learn a foreign language? Here, the purpose of learning English becomes the core. Carver (1983) states that material, methodology, and authenticity are extremely important in any ESP instructional program. According to Carver, authenticity is the focal point in ESP programs, i.e. authentic tasks, texts, tests, and materials, but Rajabi, Kiany, and Maftron (2011) believe that another type of authenticity has to be taken into account and that is the " individual authenticity" - the reliable and competent ESP instructor. According to Rajabi, et al.(2011) most of us would assume that instructors are well equipped, dedicated, and willing to implement all the findings of research in the field, because they are " teachers" but little attention has been paid to the real and influential role of the ESP instructors.

Zoumana (2007), in concluding a study on pre - service ESP teacher training, argues that we can design ESP teacher training courses which are both content - oriented and intended for learning methodology. He thinks that basic knowledge in business, science and technology is required in rendering an ESP teacher operational; however, teachers trained this way build on the basic knowledge they have acquired.

One of the major goals of English courses in universities is developing reading skills for studying scientific and specific texts. Some scholars have indicated that university students most suffer from a limited range of general vocabulary rather than technical terms. Gilmour and Marshal (1993), for example, argue that many of students' problems in comprehending what they read are not caused by the specialist words of their subject matter, rather, the problems they face are mostly caused by general English words. Spack (1988) also, thinks that overcoming the problems students have is not simply a matter of learning specialist language because more often the general use of language causes the great problem. She illustrates this by using her students' complaints about their problems in understanding specialist texts. These are not due to the technical terminology, but mostly because of poor general vocabulary.

Wiwezaroski (2003) believes that "in order to succeed in preparing our students, we as professionals first lay a proper foundation of competencies" (p.123). Maleki (2006) stated that low English language proficiency of Iranian EFL students hindered their academic progress. Thus, strong English language proficiency is needed to reach one of the major goals of ESP courses, that is, reading at university level.

It is apparent that many controversial issues related to TESP have been raised to find out whether the English language instructor or the subject - matter instructor should teach ESP courses. To achieve such a goal the following questions were formulated:

RQ#1:Is there any difference in achievement scores of ESP learners who are taught by the English language instructor and those who are taught by the subject-matter instructor?

RQ#2: Towards whose teaching do students hold more favorable attitudes, the English language instructor or the subject-matter instructor?

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Sixty second -year Feqh and Islamic Law male. (*n*= 19) and female (*n*= 41) students from Azad University South Tehran Branch took part in this study. All university students in Iran are required to pass a general English course as a prerequisite to their specialized English.Therefore, all the participants in this study had passed general English and were qualified to take part in this study.

Sixty students out of eighty second- year Feqh and Islamic Law male and female students who had passed the general English course were selected to take part in this study. Then, they were divided into two equal groups of thirty members, i.e. Group A and Group B. Later, two instructors were told to teach the classes: a TEFL instructor and a subject - matter instructor. Each instructor randomly chose one class. The TEFL instructor taught Group A and the subject- matter instructor taught Group B. Both instructors had equal teaching experiences.

2.2 Instrumentation

Two types of measurement instrument were used in this study, namely a final achievement test and an attitudinal questionnaire. The first instrument of the study was a researcher- made achievement test that consisted of reading comprehension,vocabulary(general and law), and word forms questions (20 multiple choice items in each section).The reliability of the test was computed through Cronbach's alpha (r = 0.82). Moreover, the content validity of the test was approved by two ELT teachers.

The second instrument used was an attitudinal questionnaire. It was designed in the form of a questionnaire on which the participants had to indicate their degree of agreement with ten statements regarding their satisfaction with the teachers and the course they taught. In order to check the content validity and face validity of the questionnaire; first a questionnaire with seventeen questions in accordance with the study's purposes had been chosen. Secondly, three ELT teachers who had 10 years of experience in teaching English approved the content validity of ten questions. Each degree of agreement was given numerical value from one to five. Then, the total value of all responses to each statement was calculated. After that, the total values of responses were converted to percentages. Then the percentages of response to each statement about the teachers and the course they taught were compared to find the differences.

2.3 Materials

The textbook chosen to be taught in the class was "English for the Students of Theology and Islamic Studies" (Written by Hussaini, 1999), which consists of eighteen units. Each unit includes a topic in law with exercises on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and word forms. The teachers were asked to teach nine units.

2.4 Procedures

Both the achievement test and the attitudinal questionnaire were employed at the end of the course (1391-1392, Session II). Before students' sitting for the exam, the questionnaires were distributed, and immediately after their completion the final achievement test was administered simultaneously in both classes. The whole procedure took one hour and a half. Finally, results were compared and contrasted using descriptive and inferential statistics.

3. RESULTS

To address the first research question (RQ#1: Is there any difference in achievement test scores of ESP learners who are taught by the English language instructor and those who are taught by the subject-matter instructor ? A series of independent -samples *t*-test at the alpha level set at .01 was used. As shown in Table 1 below, students in Group A scored higher than those in Group B in all subcomponents of the achievement test (Table1). There was a significant difference between the reading comprehension mean score of Group A (M=16.52, SD=2.85) and that of Group B (M= 14.34, SD=3.55); t(38)= 3.92,p= 0.00**.**

Also, the mean score of vocabulary part of the test was higher for Group A (M=13.90; t= 6.860; p= 0.0005) compared with that of Group B (M= 11.5; SD= 5.367) . With regard to the word forms section , the results for Group A (M= 10.11; t = 8.480; p = 0.0005) and Group B (M= 9.90; SD= 2.875) were conspicuous . There appears to be a significant difference between the progresses of two groups.

Regarding the attitude questionnaire, the results were also remarkable (Appendixes 1 & 2). Almost most of the Group A members strongly agreed that their teacher and the course he

taught fulfilled their experiments. Only a small number of students in class A disagreed with the state ment 2 (%6.66), 7 (%3.33), and 8 (%6.66).

Table 1
Independent-samples t-test for Reading Comprehension Achievement Test Scores

	t-test for Equality of Means						
						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Variables	*t*	*df*	*Sig.*	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Reading Comprehension Test Scores	3.92	58	.00	5.21	1.851	-0.527	+1.549
Vocabulary Test Scores	6.86	58	.00	4.36	1.752	-0.391	+1.496
Word Form Test Scores	5.48	58	.00	2.73	1.33	-0.296	+1.15

* $p < .01$

On the other hand, nearly most of the Group B members contended that their instructor and the course he taught were unsatisfactory. A small number of class B students agreed with the statements 2 (%10), 6 (%16.66). % 6.66 of class B students strongly agreed with the statements 1 and 6. Only %3.33 of students in class B strongly disagreed with the statements 3, 5, 8, and 10. However, a few students in both classes neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements.

4. DISCUSSION

Given the findings of the current study, it seems that language attainment (EFL reading skill, and vocabulary) is better developed under the EFL instructor's leadership. Reading is a complex syntactic analysis mixed with a semantic interpretation of the text, which requires professional knowledge to teach it (Field 2003, Ziahosseiny 2002). Becoming an effective teacher of ESP requires more experience, additional training, and extra effort. The subject - matter instructors should at least have the same training input as any instructor of EFL. Carver (1983) claims that there are three characteristics common to ESP courses: authenticity, materials, and methodology. He defines the concept of authenticity in ESP programs, as authentic texts, tasks, tests, or authentic learning materials, but, the present researchers believe, another type of authenticity has to be seriously taken into account and that is the "individual authenticity"– the reliable and competent ESP instructor. Most of us would assume that teachers are well qualified, dedicated, and willing to implement all the findings of research in the field, because they are instructors but little attention has been paid to the real and influential role of the ESP instructors.

The EFL instructor's class (Group A) also scored much higher on the vocabulary section of the final achievement test than the subject instructor's class (Group B). The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the study conducted by Gilmore and Marshal (1993) in which it was claimed that many of students' problems in understanding what they read are not caused by the specialist vocabulary of their subject study, rather, their main problem in reading is with general English words. Moreover, this study verifies the argument put forth by Spack (1988) according to which overcoming the problems students have is not simply a matter of learning specialist language but more often the general use of language is what that causes great problem. According to Maleki (2005) the meaning of the word "specific" that goes with the term English for specific purposes does not mean "specialized",and the aim of teaching ESP is not to teach special terminology or jargon in a specific field of study but rather that the aim is to teach English with a specific content which is normally mixed with general topics.

The gap between the mean scores of Group A and Group B is most likely to be attributable to the subject instructor's teaching. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that ESP teacher should have the same qualities of the general English instructor. The subject - matter instructor should at least have the same training input as any instructor of EFL. He / she should have English language knowledge, through command of the

course design, and expert knowledge of the related field. The latter, is easy to overcome, because, as Zoumana (2007) points out, we can design ESP teacher training courses which are both content - oriented and intended for learning methodology. Therefore, EFL teachers trained this way build on the basic knowledge they have acquired. A very important quality of the ESP teacher, as Robinson (1991) believes is flexibility, that is, changing from being an EFL teacher to being an ESP practitioner. This specific quality of EFL teachers, ESP teaching is the responsibility of EFL teachers to fulfill expectations of different groups of students.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study was basically centered on the question: who is more qualified to teach ESP courses? Given the lengthy controversy over this issue, it seems that this has created a healthy debate in ELT profession. It is our considered opinion that EFL instructors are not specialists in the field, but they are expert in teaching English; their subject is English for the profession but not the profession in English. They help students, who know their subject better than the instructors do, develop the essential skills in understanding, using and/or presenting authentic information in their profession. A professional ESP instructor must be able to switch from one professional field to another without being obliged to spend months on getting started. Therefore, as far as the implications of this study are concerned, subject-matter instructors who are interested in teaching English should attain the necessary qualifications. This study may add to the existing repertoires of our knowledge about LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) teaching in general and TESP in particular. In sum, although this study's findings cannot be seen as conclusive due to the limitations existing in any type of investigation, it is hoped that the result of the present research which is in line with an accurate body of knowledge obtained from previous studies can help shed light on the contention over the legitimacy of either ESP instructors or EFL instructors.

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Appendix A

Class A: For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement by placing a tick in the appropriate column.

1. strongly agree 2. agree 3. disagree 4. stronglydisagree 5. no idea

	1	2	3	4	5
1. This class was so useful.		%70	%16.66		%13.33
2. I can read and comprehend specialized texts much better than before.	%83.33	%10	%6.66		
3. My teacher's method of teaching was well.	%86.66	% 10		%3.33	
4. My teacher's command of English was well.	%16.66	%66.66	%10		%6.66
5. I understand English structure much better than before.	%16.66	%76.66		%3.33	%3.33
6. I can translate English texts to Persian much better than before.	%10	%60	%13.33		%16.66
7. I was motivated in this class.	%86.66	%6.66	%3.33		%3.33
8. My teacher emphasized on teaching English not law.	%10	%73.33	%6.66	%3.33	%3.33
9. My class was interesting.	%6.66	%66.66	%16.66		%10
10. I wish I could have more English courses with the same teacher.	%33.33	%40	%10	%3.33	%13.33

Appendix B

Class B: For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement by placing a tick in the appropriate column.

1.strongly agree 2. agree 3.disagree 4.strongly disagree 5.no idea

	1	2	3	4	5
1. This class was useful.	%6.66	%16.66	%43.33	%30	%3.33
2. I can read and comprehend specialized texts much better than before.		%10	%60	%13.33	%16.66
3. My teacher's method of teaching was well.		%3.33	%53.33	%33.33	%10
4. My teacher's command of English was well.		%3.33	%70	%13.33	13.33
5. I understand English structure much better than before.			%86.66	%10	%3.33
6. I can translate English texts to Persian much better than before.	%6.66	%16.66	%33.33	%10	%33.33
7. I was motivated in this class.		%3.33	%50	%33.33	%13.33
8. . My teacher emphasized on teaching English not law.			%76.66	%6.66	%16.66
9. My class was interesting.		%3.33	%13.33	%63.33	%20
10. . I wish I could have more English courses with the same teacher.			%23.33	%63.33	%13.33