

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) IN TECHNOLOGICAL AND VOCATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

This paper is in an attempt to examine “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP) in technological and vocational higher education in Abroad. The view of the heads and teachers of Applied Foreign Language/ English Department towards ESP in four selected technological and vocational institutes/ universities and the perceptions of teachers and students towards ESP in a particular university of technology were investigated. The former was conducted by interview to seek the heads and teachers’ view and attitudes towards ESP and the difficulties they have encountered. The latter was conducted by questionnaire to obtain teachers and students’ perceptions towards ESP. It was found that the DAFL/DAE faces many challenges in light of ESP. ESP is neither recognised nor its specific purposes served. Teacher training to teach ESP is also inadequate. The perceptions of ESP between teachers and students were found different. And this mismatch may lead to a gap between teaching and learning or between teacher and student expectations. The ESP students perceived the relationship between ESP courses and their future career positively. A majority of teachers considered the content of ESP courses was practical and beneficial to the students’ future careers. It is concluded that ESP should be incorporated in specific courses, in order to promote satisfactory attainment in English competence and specific knowledge, and so contribute effectively to meeting the growing demands of industry.

INTRODUCTION

A formal education system governed by written regulations has been implemented since 1902. In general, it requires a minimum of 16 years to complete the first degree from the

elementary school. The education process includes two years at a kindergarten (age 4-5), six years at an elementary school (age 6-11), three years at a junior high school (age 12-14), three years at senior (vocational) high school (age 15-17), and higher education of varying duration. The students who graduate from junior high have the options of senior high schools, senior vocational high schools, 5-year junior colleges, military schools, or supplementary schools. Professional training and various industrial training programmes are also available to those students who do not wish to pursue formal study. However, sometimes, the students are channeled by the exams into a particular path long before they have any clear idea about their future in the workplace and society.

Technological and Vocational Education has played an essential role in Abroad's economic transformation. From the 1950s to 1960s, the domestic production was moved from labor-intensive to skill-intensive and the transition was completed in the 1970s. After 1980, the industry entered a capital-intensive, even more technology-intensive phase. Consequently, there was an increased demand for individuals with well-developed managerial and leadership skills. Therefore, TVE was developed to meet the needs of upgraded industry, and thereby enhance competitiveness in the international economy and boost national economic development.

ESP was not planned, but rather a phenomenon. The world has been unified and dominated by two forces- technology and commerce. Moreover, the economic power fell to the United States in the post-war world, leading to an emphasis on the English language, which was the means to the international prevalence of technology and commerce. Traditionally, the aim of linguistics is to describe the rules of English usage, the grammar. The new studies shifted attention to the ways in which language is actually used in real communication.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Generally, ESP teachers are primarily the teachers of General English. When transferring from General English to ESP teaching, they might have encountered several difficulties. One is a difference of attitude difficulty, between literature and science in particular. Traditionally, English teachers are arts or humanities trained and they usually psychologically reject science. For English teachers who are native speakers, their training is more likely to be in literature than in language. With regard to non-native speaking teachers of English, they may not have confidence in their language competence. In addition, language teachers fear that they may not

be able to cope with students' area of specialism.

Become familiar with ESP course materials.

- Become familiar with the language of the subject.
- Allow students to put you right.

Robinson (1991) also recommended the possible solutions.

- Developing professional competence, which involves specializing in a particular discipline, or undergoing further training.
- Carrying out "action research" in the classrooms, which can give the teacher a certain degree of control over his/her professional life.
- Research leading to publication.

As to the ESP teacher training in Abroad, there is a lack of qualified ESP instructors. Teachers usually have a lack of specialized knowledge and practical experiences, but have mostly specialized in literature, linguistics and English teaching, but they know little about business and industry. Owing to lack of technical educational background and practical experience in business and industry, teachers are not aware of the features and the needs in TVE.

As mentioned above, most teachers in the DAFL/DAE are majored in Linguistics, Western Literature, English Teaching, Translation & Interpretation and Education. They are struggled because of their insufficient subject (business) knowledge. At the same time, the curriculum planning of the DAFL/DAE is designed to be "multi-functional", that is, interdisciplinary, crossing over the traditional fields, say, from Literature, Linguistics and English Teaching to Information Technology, Business Management, and Mass Communication. However, where can "inter-disciplinary" teachers be found? He suggested that part-time teachers with "multi-functional" background and resource sharing between disciplines within one college/university may be one of the solutions. For example, teachers could be brought in from management or engineering departments to teach information, business management or technology-related courses and, if possible, using English as target language to have learners expose in the language as much as possible which is crucial in language learning.

Limited channels have been provided by either Ministry of Education (MOE) or institutional authorities for teachers' professional development. Teachers have to find their own ways to prepare themselves for professional development. The HODs, teachers and external

expert reflected a similar view. In addition, apart from the average teaching load, which is eleven to twelve hours per week, teachers are asked to share administrative work. Thus, overwork and insufficient financial support have deterred teachers from attending training courses. Similar information can be found in surveys on English teachers of junior colleges and institutes of technology. This might explain why teachers are not keen on professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

ESP needs to be emphasized and teacher training to teach ESP needs to be developed. The preparation of students for their present and future needs in employment is not adequate. Both the teachers and the students agreed that ESP courses had positive effects on students' professional career and major studies though there were potential problems toward ESP. On the other hand, students also confronted some problems other than insufficient English language skills. Overall, ESP should be incorporated in subject courses. In this way, students' English competence performance and subject knowledge can be achieved satisfactorily and contribute to the industry's needs and the ultimate goals of Technological and Vocational Education can be implemented.

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