A Descriptive Analysis to ESP Course Features and Elements

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the importance of ESP course features and elements for course designers. This importance is due to the specific characteristics of both ESP courses and ESP participants. Henceforth, ESP course design will not be efficient and effective if the elements and features of the course are not taken into considerations. Such of these features; the ESP course audience who are the population to whom the ESP course will be given, ESP Course goals that describe the skills wanted to be achieved at the end of the course by the population and ESP course constraints that are the obstacles that can hinder the success of the course and that need to be detected and overcome.

Key words: ESP course, features, elements, goals, constraints, effectiveness.

1

Introduction

ESP course elements and features have a paramount help to course designers. They allow them to design reliable courses that meet the real needs of ESP participants. Such of these elements are ESP course audience who are the learners who will take the course, ESP course content that includes language description and skills to be learned, ESP course goals that describe the objectives of ESP learners from taking the course, ESP course constraints and evaluation.

1 ESP Course Features and Elements

1.1 ESP Course Audience

The ESP course audience should be identified before the start up of the teaching program. The identification includes gathering the maximum of information about the audience. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) all the information about the age, gender, nationality, study or work specialism, knowledge of English, educational background and interests should be known in advance. The audience is put in the heart of the process. This takes us to the principle of the ESP course which is based on the learners needs. In order to meet those needs the teaching process should start first by identifying who is this ESP learner and where he comes from.

2

1.2 ESP Course Content

The content of the ESP course is not like the content of general English course. In ESP the notion of specificity is respected. This specificity is linked according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) to many parameters as shown in this table:

Language description	Structural, notional, functional, discourse based
Language points	Structures, functions, vocabulary
Micro-skills	Deducing meaning of unfamiliar words
Text types	Manuals, letters, dialogues, experimental reports, visual texts, listening texts
Subject matter area	Medicine, economics, biology, mathematics
Content organization	By a set of patterns of components, by a variety of patterns, by a focus on certain skills like communicative ones

Content sequencing	From easier to more difficult, to create variety, to provide recycling,
Content organizing	To units, to topics, to skills

ESP Course Parameters Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters

(1987:100-101)

From this table one can say that the ESP course content goes straight to the needs and interests of the ESP learner. This confirms the fact that ESP courses are tailored made.

1.3 ESP Course Goals

The ESP course goals are generally negotiated between the teachers and learners of ESP. However when it comes to workplace course it is generally the employer who specifies the goals wanted from the ESP course. Fraida Dubin and Elite Olshtain (1986:26) point out that "the overall goals are set up by the employers' representatives". In a course for Management English, for instance, the stated objectives might be for learners to develop the following abilities:

3

- to negotiate in English with clients,
- to correspond with foreign companies,
- to take part in business meetings in English,
- to develop business vocabulary,
- to make phone calls in English .

Therefore the target result from any ESP course is seeing the ESP learner move from one level to another from being unable to write an email for example in English to being able to do so.

1.4 ESP Course Constraints

As there are goals to any ESP course there are also constraints that may hinder the success of this course. Robinson (1991:41) cites Munby's view about constraints related to ESP course and he says:

> "constraints upon the implementation of the syllabus specification, include such things as government attitude, the status of English, logistical and administrative matters, the students' motivation and expectations, and methodological issues".

This implies that government attitude can really constitute a real threat to the success of an ESP course or pragramme if there is a contradiction of views between course designers and the government or decision makers. Logistical and administrative matters may also influence negatively the implementation of an ESP course. If the success requires the use of some information technology tools like computers or software and if these components are not provided by the administration the failure will be the result of this ESP course.

Students' motivation can also lead to the failure of the ESP course because the ESP learner constitute the backbone of ESP. If the ESP learner does not get what he expects from his teacher in matter of content or way of teaching, he will not be motivated to follow and hence the ESP course will fail.

4

Thus and as a conclusion to this part related to content, goals and constraints of the ESP course we can say that they are the keys of success. An ESP teacher who gives irrelevant content to his learners will not guarantee their love to his course. An ESP course without predetermined goals will not be correctly assessed whether it has succeeded or failed. An ESP teacher who does not predict the constraints that may hinder the success of his course will not be able to face them and find solutions when they take place.

1.5 ESP Course Evaluation

Evaluation is of a paramount help in ESP teaching. It is the tool that helps both the ESP teacher and learner to see whether their performance is on the right way or not. Evaluation can be referred to as the measurement of the ESP teaching/learning efficiency. Rani (2004) distinguishes two types of relationships with evaluation:

Evaluation and the Teacher:

■ Evaluation helps the teacher know to what point he has been able to achieve the instructional objectives.

■ Evaluation helps the teacher to organize appropriate learning activities for the students to achieve the objectives.

■ Evaluation helps the teacher to improve his classroom procedures and methods of teaching/learning in the light of feedback.

Evaluation and the Student:

■ Awareness about objectives: Statements of clear objectives enable the students to know clearly what the teacher expects from them and they cooperate with him in achieving the learning goals.

■ Increasing motivation: Knowledge about their performance serves as a motivating factor to the student and ultimately facilitates learning.

5

■ Greater chances for increasing abilities and skills. Constant feedback makes students aware of their strengths and weaknesses, this leads to improve subsequent performance.

Evaluation then concerns both the teacher and the learner because ESP teaching is a collaboration between the two sides. The teacher needs to evaluate his teaching ways to see if he is meeting the needs and wants of his learners. The learners also need to evaluate their commitment in the classroom and their motivation to see whether their objectives are possible to be achieved or not.

1.6 Assessment vs Evaluation

Assessment is often confused with evaluation, but the two concepts are different. Assessment is used to determine what a student knows or can do, whereas evaluation determines to what extent a course or program is efficient and successful. Assessment is the process of collecting and reviewing data for the purpose of improving the current situation. Evaluation is seen as an act of making judgment on the basis of a set of standards or factors.

According to Herman and Knuth (1991) assessment data affects student advancement, placement, and grades, as well as decisions about instructional strategies and curriculum. Assessment is generally used to refer to all activities teachers use to help students learn and to measure student progress. Assessment is a tool for articulating goals and objectives for student learning. This tool allows teachers to gather data about how well students are meeting the learning goals. These collected data are used to improve students learning.

6

Evaluation on the other hand focuses more on the course or the programme and whether it is meeting the needs of the students or not. Evaluation is rather the process by which all the parts including teachers, schools, and students are evaluated to measure the success of education programmes. Effective evaluation can be understood as a collaborative activity and an on-going process. In other words all the three parts collaborate together in evaluation including the institution, the teacher and the learners.

We believe that both assessment and evaluation should always take place in educational setting. They both give education, teaching and learning stakeholders a clear view that helps better gage the success or failure of education programs. It is therefore necessary in English for specific purposes teaching to assess and evaluate students. Assessment and evaluation procedures should correspond with curriculum objectives. This assessment can be formative where the focus will be on the process and products of learning. It has to be continuous in order to provide the ESP teacher

with the student's progress towards achieving the curriculum objectives. This assessment is also summative as it takes place at the end of a unit of instruction.

The summative assessment helps the ESP teacher to determine the knowledge and skills that have been developed by the ESP learner over a period of time. Therefore, continuous assessment is vital for ESP learners. First, when assessing students, teachers should know very well the objective behind it; learners' assessments objective should be identified beforehand. Then, the obtained results will be studied to measure the performance of ESP learners. To do so a checklist that includes all the items of the taught program can be used and in which ESP learners give their opinion about what went well and what did not go so.

Consequently, all the ESP teaching/learning stakeholders including teachers, students, programs and courses and administration are all concerned with assessment and evaluation and on a continuous manner. Communication plays a vital role in both assessment and evaluation. The teacher has to inform and communicate evaluation results to his learners to get them more involved and motivated. The institution also has to inform both teachers and learners about assessment objectives and results in order to get the collaboration of all parts and henceforth to reach effective results. Sustainability should be the essence of both evaluation and assessment. Sustainable and continuous evaluation and assessment help improve the situation and correct previous lacks and mistakes.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that course designers should take all the ESP course features and elements in consideration before, during and after the design of any ESP course to any population. They should identify ESP course audience and should gather data about them and their area of work or study. ESP course designers should identify

7

the content ESP course in respect to the needs of the target population. The content includes items such as language description, texts types and content organization. Another element and one of the fundamental ones that should be identified in collaboration with participants is ESP course goals that are generally negotiated between the teachers and learners of ESP. The goals explain the wants of participants and what to do with language at the end of the ESP course such as emailing, conferencing and negotiating. These above ESP course elements will not lead to success if course ESP course designers do not pay attention to ESP course constraints such as the logistical and administrative ones. The last element that should not be eliminated or ignored by ESP course designers is evaluation that allows both ESP teacher and his learners to measure the success of the ESP course and whether the goals are being achieved or not.

References 8

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