THE OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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English for Specific Purposes (henceforth, ESP) has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners since its emergence in the 1960s. After much debate and controversy, ESP is now widely known as English focusing on learners' special needs and reasons for learning. In Hutchinson and Waters' words 'ESP…, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning' [1, p.19]. Dudley-Evans and St John provide a more comprehensive definition of ESP, based on the research of the three pioneers in the field, Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Strevens (1988) and Robinson (1991) and claim that ESP has indeed both absolute and variable characteristics, but unlike Strevens, who identified four absolute and two variable characteristics, they speak about three absolute and four variable characteristics. Therefore, according to Dudley-Evans and St John, ESP's absolute characteristics emphasise that ESP (1) is designed to meet specific needs of the learner; (2) makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves; (3) is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities, while its variable characteristics enlarge

ESP’s scope and postulate that ESP (1) may be related to or designed for specific disciplines; (2) may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English; (3) is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation; (4) is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. They also claim that ESP could be used for learners at secondary school level, not only tertiary, and due to the fact that most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, it can be used with beginners as well [2, p. 4-5].

The general overview of ESP given above, invokes that ESP develops students’ awareness of their future concerns, be them academic, if they choose a scientific career, or occupational, if they choose to find a job as soon as possible. Hence, ESP encompasses both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) as its two main branches.

According to Kay Westerfield, ‘EAP classes offer discipline-specific support for upper-division undergraduate students and for graduate students’ and therefore, has one definite aim ‘to introduce learners to the specific communication needs of their future academic and professional discourse communities’ [3] and this view is supported by many modern ESP researchers.

University lecturers and teachers, design courses that aim at achieving this goal, they formulate accurate learning objectives specific to the disciplines they teach, they spend a lot of time looking for discipline-specific materials/texts that would be authentic, and then elaborate tasks for comprehension and analysis. They combine different components of both Academic English, specialized terminology, and academic writing to get a well-designed course. The authentic material then is tailored to the undergraduates’ needs to enable them to accomplish certain professional tasks. All this is done to help their disciples to benefit fully from ESP courses and to enable them to participate in national and international conferences, seminars, workshops and exchange programs. University students indeed need these skills if they want to become competitive in their future jobs.

English for Occupational Purposes, on the contrary, is more oriented towards students’ immediate needs. It is based mostly on

specialized terminology, professional jargons, set expressions and strategies dealing with not understanding and not being understood. It provides the exact content needed to cope with problems in the workplace. It is more suited for vocational schools or onsite training organized by the companies to improve their employees' language skills.

The outlined characteristics and requirements of ESP are themselves indicators of the benefits one can gain from ESP training.

Chris Wright is of the opinion that ESP's benefits are threefold. He states that, 'In the intensive, accelerated and subject specific learning contexts of ESP courses, trainees can increase their learning speed, efficiency and effectiveness'. Firstly, they can increase their learning speed because they 'learn what they need, when they need it, in authentic, content-based contexts'. This approach is a wonderful opportunity to learn in an accelerated, intensive context. Secondly, due to the teachers' efforts to design the ESP course, and the needs analysis, students use the tailored learning resources to acquire the pre-identified linguistic items and skills. And this makes the course efficient. And thirdly, on completion of an ESP course, trainees are ready to use language appropriately and correctly in job related tasks, i.e. effectively [4].

At the same time, it would not be an exaggeration to say that ESP training, to a greater or lesser degree, ensures the stakeholders personal, social and economic benefits.

As we have already mentioned, ESP training focuses on immediate learners' needs and this is the most important aspect of one's professional development. Therefore, learners are more motivated to grasp everything the instructor says. They start thinking that ESP is namely that course that will pave their way to success; the course that will focus on what they indeed need and thus it will shorten the time for achieving their aims and this fact best illustrates the personal benefits one can gain. The learner does not want to waste time on memorizing things he considers irrelevant for his job. He wants to participate in the life of the company he works for, to become a fully-fledged member of it, to take decisions and to give advice. If he

manages to meet all these challenges, he gets an enormous personal satisfaction. Is it not an excellent example of personal benefits?

If we refer to English for IT, for instance, as a particular example of ESP, it is worth mentioning the fact that most IT companies in Moldova are outsourced, therefore without a proficient level of English for IT, it will be more difficult for the university graduates to get the positions they apply for. Computing provides plenty of job positions, but it requires a good command of English, especially ESP, let alone programming languages which are exclusively in English. The course English for IT, therefore, provides undergraduates an excellent opportunity to develop their language skills in the context of their specialism. Students can read and understand original sources of information to keep up with the new discoveries and inventions; they can participate in professionally-oriented workshops and international conferences to share and enrich their knowledge, they can benefit from Erasmus' exchange programs, etc. Bringing home their experience, they are looking for new ways of implementing it in their workplace or study. Thus, the company or the university they work for or study becomes commercially viable. It will increase its productivity, which, in its turn, will have a sensible impact on the society they live in. And, of course, if productivity rate goes up, the prices go down and this is an essential socio-economic factor for a developing country, like Moldova.

To sum up, ESP is concerned with the communicative needs of speakers of a foreign language in facing a particular workplace, academic or professional context. It addresses specific problems that learners are likely to encounter in their professional or academic settings and can provide models of how professionals face problems and find solutions through simulations and role plays. ESP training can help learners to function effectively at work or in a study program. In other words, it brings the real world in the classroom. ESP training aims to improve learners' specific skills and knowledge that will lead to increased performance and thus will improve the opportunities for international employment. It is generally acknowledged that ESP trainees perform better in the globalized economy, they can easily

progress in an English speaking company and they are successful in complex, multilingual environments.

References:

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