

A Vignette on Reflective Teaching: Potential Challenges Faced by Future ESP Practitioners

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As ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is designed to meet specific needs of learners (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), developing such a course will involve complex procedures of, as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), among others, Language Descriptions, Theories of Learning, and Needs Analysis. In line with this, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) claims that an ESP practitioner, thus, plays the roles as a teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher as well as evaluator. This paper presents a vignette based on teaching experiences gained from the course of ESP taken by six-semester students of an English Education Study Program. It will highlight some hindrances, in particular, met by the students in their project on ESP course design. The potential challenges faced by the students, as future ESP practitioners, in developing ESP courses will therefore be discussed. It is expected that the discussion will be of beneficial contribution to students wishing to work in ESP area, teachers of vocational schools, as well as lecturers of ESP-related courses on future practice of ESP as an approach to course design.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, course design, reflective teaching

I. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), under the umbrella of English Language Teaching (ELT), was initially developed at the end of Second World War in 1945 as the response of expansions in science, technology and commerce which brought a consequence of English becoming the accepted international language. The growing number of people who needed to learn English in different fields, such as businessman who wants to be able to conduct business presentations, and engineers who needed to read manuals, etc, urged ELT practitioners to develop a course that meet learners' specific needs.

In its development, ESP is defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as an approach to language learning, which is specifically aimed to meet particular needs of learners. Being simply an approach, ESP does not refer to a special form of language, grammar nor different form of language teaching. Rather, it is an approach to course designs that accomodate particular needs of learners.

Graves (1996b) proposed that developing a course includes a cycle of planning a course, teaching the course, and modifying the plan, in which teachers are believed to involve in the whole tasks. As ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is designed to meet specific needs of

learners (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), developing such a course will involve complex procedures of, as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), among others, Language Descriptions, Theories of Learning, and Needs Analysis. Besides, Graves (1996a) also listed the component of ESP course development framework as Needs assessment, Determining goals and objectives, Conceptualizing content, Selecting and developing materials and activities, Organization of content and activities, Evaluation and Consideration of resources and constraints (p. 13). In line with that, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) claims that an ESP practitioner, thus, plays the roles as not only a teacher, course designer and materials provider, but also collaborator, researcher as well as evaluator.

This paper describes the challenges faced by students taking ESP as university subject particularly in conducting project on course design.

II. ESP in the Curriculum

This part will describe the context of ESP as a course taught at university level. In English Education Study Program, Yogyakarta State University, ESP course has two credits and is taken by students in their sixth semester. The class is usually attended by between 40 and 50 students. In terms of the background knowledge of students, before taking ESP subject the students took subjects such as Sociolinguistics, TEFL Methodology, English Instructional Technology, and School Curriculum Development that supposedly support students in understanding theories learned in ESP subject. Meanwhile, some other similarly supporting subjects, such as Materials Development and Language Assessment are taken in the same semester.

Referring to the course outline, this course is one of the units in ELT series leading to the effort to develop the students' language awareness through the teaching and learning activities covering the cognitive, affective, and psychomotoric domains. As an integral part, this course has the aim to provide knowledge on English Language Teaching Programs for specific purposes based on the needs theories for the learners.

Besides, this course is aimed at providing skills in designing programs on English for Specific Purposes whether for the needs of occupational or general schools and creating an attitude to give an emphasis on the learner and the practical needs of learning English. Another aim of this course is to provide experiences and exercises in specific vocabulary for specific discipline. This course covers practical experiences in fieldworks, lectures on theories covering the topics of the background of ESP, the development of ESP, learners' needs analysis, various approaches in ESP, a review on ESP syllabi, and the writing of material development.

Transferring the course description to the reality, in ESP class that I taught, I decided to divide the syllabus into two major themes, namely discussions of theories and workshops. The ultimate goal is that I can bring into the classroom the real life experience of designing ESP courses. To achieve this, I designed a syllabus that focused more on the workshops than the discussions of theories. The previous academic year experience in fact showed that focusing more on the theory discussions would not be enough to give ample opportunity for students to come up with their course design.

Topics covered in discussion sessions include basic concepts as What is ESP? and The Development of ESP. Meanwhile, fundamental topics in framework of ESP course design such as ESP as an Approach, Conceptualizing Content, Formulating Goals & Objectives, Needs Analysis & Assessing Needs, Organizing the Course (syllabus design), and Materials Development and Evaluation were integrated into the workshops. By so doing, the concepts and theories can thus be applied into students' projects immediately after they have been discussed.

During the workshops, the students work in groups of 4-5 members, in which they will stay for the whole project. As some topics need a follow-up outside classroom, they need more than one meeting to complete. For example, the topic of Needs Analysis and Assessing Needs took 3 meetings for students to come up with the result. The first meeting was allocated for a discussion of the concepts, followed by students' work on a brief description of the target learners and a list of interview questions for the Needs Analysis process. The meeting was followed by students' project outside classroom to conduct Needs Analysis by interviewing and or observing the target learners. In the next meeting, students presented the result of the interview and observation and received feedback from the class and lecturer. Finally, in the last series of meeting the students handed in the final draft of the Needs Analysis, shared their experiences to class and reflected upon what they did during Needs Analysis process based on the guiding questions.

III. Reflective Teaching: Challenges in Designing ESP course

The result of students' final project reveals that conducting workshops comprising a brief discussion of the concepts and theories directly followed by students group work potentially assists the students to manage how to apply the concepts into the practice. However, from the students' work as well as students' questionnaires, it is indicated that students still had difficulties mostly in formulating goals and objectives, designing syllabus, and developing materials, which are elaborated as follows:

A. Determining Goals and Objectives.

This part of the project was considered tricky by students in that they needed to carefully distinguish goals from objectives before they conceptualized the information of 'What do learners need to learn?' into particular goals and objectives. Some students found that the objectives they suggested seemed too general. As a consequence, the workshop should firstly focus on distinguishing the goals from the objectives before students formulate the appropriate goals and objectives of the course.

B. Designing Syllabus.

Designing syllabus, or referring to Graves' (2000) term as Conceptualizing Content, involves work as considering the background information of the learners, such as who the learners are, what they want to learn, what they need to learn, what to include and what not to include in the course. The work thus can be seen as the basis to the whole arrangement of the course.

The challenging part of designing syllabus was when students dealt with selecting, adapting and putting the language focus in appropriate sequence. Also, determining course duration, the number of meetings, and matching what learners need to learn with their language proficiency seemed to be demanding tasks.

C. Developing Materials

As ESP course is designed to meet particular needs of learners, it appreciates self-developed materials more than commercially available ones. Consequently, ESP course designers should always be ready with materials that suit the learners' background. This implies that students need to get themselves familiar with topics relevant with any professional fields despite being not specialists in such fields.

Students in fact admitted that collecting texts containing relevant topics in learners' field, as engineering, medicine or business, and searching for specific terminology in those fields were laborious process in that in some situations they should further adjust the texts with learners' level of proficiency once they came across topic-relevant texts. To deal with this, I would suggest that students be given training in exploring topic-relevant texts and specific terms and collocations used in learners' target situations. Students may also be encouraged to discuss with stakeholders in learners' workplace, for example their manager or supervisor, to find out any language focus and texts that learners need to master and can thus be included in the materials.

IV. Conclusion

In an effort to prepare students to be ESP practitioners in the future, ESP as a subject taught at university is supposedly designed to bring real life experience for students to develop English courses that meet specific goals of learners. This paper has showed in which parts of the course development process students found obstacles. In line with that, based on my teaching reflection, some implications are worth considering for the next teaching learning process. First, applying a framework of course development suggested by Grave (1996a) helped students to have a clear procedure to conduct the project. Second, students needed more trainings to put the concepts into practice, especially in formulating the goals and objectives, organizing the contents to produce a syllabus and searching for suitable materials that fit learners' needs. This implies that most of the sessions should be devoted more to workshops than to discussions of theories, and steps in the framework may be broken down into smaller scale of tasks. Finally, referring back to the concept of ESP as an approach, not having its own language, methodology nor a specific form of language teaching, students themselves and I believe that success attained in ESP class results from supports from the teaching learning process in other subjects, such as TEFL Methodology, Materials Development, and Sociolinguistics in Educational Contexts. Thus, integrating the notion of ESP in such subjects is well worth considering.

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