A framework for development and implementation of an ESP course for students of Agriculture

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**Abstract**

This article attempts to tackle the fundamental questions in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) practice and will provide a framework used for a course and material development of ESP for the needs of students in Agriculture. ESP material and a coursebook have been designed in collaboration with specialist professors, based on a needs analysis with the focus on developing the skills needed for mastery in ESP. The ESP coursebook with corresponding online support material were introduced in the curriculum with the aim of developing students' language competences and aid in professional growth of future oenologists, viticulturists and pomologists.

**Key words:** ESP, needs analysis, material development

**Introduction**

The main aim of this article is to report on the design and implementation of an ESP course of English for students of the first year of Viticulture, Oenology, and Pomology. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a specialized English Language teaching that aims to develop specific skills of the learner. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998.), the ESP practitioner typically embraces multiple roles, such as teacher, course and materials developer, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. Although ESP courses involve learning the very same set of skills as learning General English, ESP, in addition focuses on acquisition of specialized lexicon and registers. In order to develop and administer a course of ESP a teacher often has to have a number of skills in choosing appropriate materials, evaluation procedures, a syllabus and a suitable methodology good enough for managing learning strategies and modelling the input to the ESP course.

The current situation of learning a foreign language at a tertiary level in Croatia is the continuation of language instruction from the secondary school, students leaving school around B2 level of the Common European Framework of References for Languages and starting tertiary English at this level. The language instruction program at the Agricultural Department of the Polytechnic in Pozega amounts to 60 hours, distributed in the first two semesters of studies. The language groups differ in size and ability to almost 50 students. All the students need a good English Language command, with the specific aims of getting to know specialized vocabulary and being able to use the language in the prospective profession or study, by becoming prepared for some common situations such as going for an interview, conducting professional correspondence or making presentations. Students should also be proficient enough to do research for their thesis which means that they should be able to find, read and evaluate English Language sources. Having such a wide array of needs in mind, with relatively little amount of language instruction hours, the teacher must be tactful in choosing contents, materials and methods that would motivate students to participate in the lectures and to work on their own. In this article I will share my experience and present a framework for an ESP course development process that may help teachers with some of the problems they may come across in designing their ESP course.
ESP pedagogy
The difference between ESP pedagogy and general English teaching is that ESP pedagogy is responsive to the learner's communicative needs and is flexible to course objectives. In other words, it 'is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need' and this 'awareness will have an influence on what will be acceptable as reasonable content in the language course and, on the positive side, what potential can be exploited' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989).

Needs analysis
In the ESP approach a needs analysis (also known as needs assessment) plays a crucial role in designing a course. It is very important to do the analysis of the target group of students. Such analysis gives two kinds of information. The first reflects learners "possession"- their current level in their L2-ESP, motivation, methods of learning they have experienced, etc. The second represents what students want to achieve - what traditionally has been called "ESP needs". There are different ways of finding information about students' needs. At the tertiary education level it is usually done through various questionnaires, surveys, group discussion or individual talks. In our case students completed a questionnaire. Even though the students' data are very important they should not be overused. The obtained information does not mean that teachers should teach only what their students want since there are certain things, such as curriculum, standardization and institutional guidelines that must be taken into consideration. However, when developing a new course, a needs analysis helps the teacher to combine the desired and required in deciding about the goals and objectives of the course as well as selecting the appropriate teaching materials.

Course design
Course design is guided by a needs analysis and it focuses on closing the gap between existing and desired linguistic proficiency. ESP is essentially a training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain clearly defined tasks. These tasks constitute the specific purposes which the ESP course is designed to meet. (Widdowson, 1992.).
This characterization is an outline of ESP course design, which is 'the process by which the raw data about a learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989.). The ESP course design is guided by two elements: the course design approach and the course objectives.
The approach to course design is realized in the form of a syllabus which spells out (either in terms of temporal chunks or curricular transitions) what is to be learnt. The prime objective of a syllabus is to break down vastly stretched knowledge into manageable units (Nunan, 1988.) and according to Basturkmen (2003.) a certain degree of adaptability as well as flexibility in the syllabus is required. Nunan (1988.) suggests ESP syllabus designers to equally focus on 'language functions' as well as on 'the subject matter through which the language is taught'. Course design includes syllabus development, instructional methodology or approach and assessment procedures. Decisions in connection with these segments of course design are made in response to the needs of learner populations. Teachers need to determine which aspects of ESP learning will be included, emphasized, integrated and used as a core of the course. The ways of conceptualizing the content are numerous. Teachers may focus on developing "basic skills", communicative competences, vocabulary awareness, intercultural competences, etc. What teachers should keep in mind is that even though separated in structural charts, all skills and aspects of the language are
interwoven in the real communication and for that reason they should be treated, taught and tested as an inseparable unit. The syllabus is designed on the outcome of the needs analysis, but teachers must be prepared to model it to accommodate emerging challenges and undiscovered realities.

Figure 1. ESP course design approach

Selecting and developing ESP materials
Graves (1996) points out that teaching materials are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course.

For most teachers, selection of teaching material depends on their availability. In our case that was the stage in which the specialist professors offered their help by sharing their experience and knowledge and giving valuable information on authentic materials the use of which is constantly emphasized in ESP practices (Harwood, 2005). When teachers start developing their ESP materials they should follow the four basic precepts in ESP materials development. They are: suitability for the proficiency level, relevance to learners' needs, creativity in tasks/activities and discursive strategies, and stimulation of the target speech acts. Some overarching characteristics of instructional materials are that they do not teach, but facilitate the learning process; present a clear and coherent unit structure; are in consonance with pedagogical approaches; and offer problem-solving tasks, as well as lay down models for language use (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989). After collecting and choosing the appropriate teaching materials we started planning the course with online support material for testing and evaluation assessment that would enable the blended teaching approach which combines face-to-face environment with online learning. A combination of various reading and listening activities, grammar activities as well as work with up-to-date authentic audio-visual materials has been prepared. Our suggestion is to be as flexible as possible in this stage of work and be prepared to adjust and make slight changes in the course while teaching, so that your course can address your students’ interests and needs best.
Corkiness

Figure 2 An example of a Web-based exercise intended for students’ vocabulary practice

Evaluating the course
Course evaluation is important in ESP pedagogy because it gathers the evidence to understand the effectiveness of the course in terms of the skill enhancement of learners. It is the last, but not the least important stage for teachers because it helps to improve and promote the effectiveness of their course.

Our evaluation was done in two different ways: implicitly and explicitly. Implicit evaluation took place during the semester. Students gave us clues on their progress by completing various online tests and exercises and participating during the classes. Through numerous online exercises and tests sources and areas of difficulties were diagnosed. Explicit evaluation took place at the end of the course when students were asked to express their attitudes towards the course and fill in the online questionnaire. The obtained results gave us insight into the effectiveness of the course.

Course development as an on-going process
As we can see developing a new ESP course is difficult, but a very important process. Before teaching a course we need to formulate the goals and objectives of the course, conceptualize the content, select the teaching materials, and thoroughly plan the course and decide about the ways of evaluating it. We must keep in mind the purpose of an ESP course which aims to fulfil the needs of students.

In the process of developing the course we are constant learners and our professional experience, our views, teaching concepts and methodological knowledge is constantly changing in order to meet the needs of the new generations of students. Today's students are defined as New Learners with a fundamental difference in the way they approach knowledge acquisition, problem solving and moving into the workforce (Dobbins, 2005.). Every generation of students is different and it is inevitable to modify our course and adjust it to them. Furthermore, quite often we face unexpected and unplanned situations in the classroom in which our flexibility helps us make the necessary changes in the very process of teaching.
The results obtained from the evaluation help us diagnose areas and sources of difficulties, give insight into our performance, determine the extent to which the objectives of the course are being achieved and help realize the effectiveness of the course design. For a teacher the development of an ESP course should never be considered as a completed task, but as an on-going process.

Conclusion
The ESP course and materials for students of Viticulture, Oenology and Pomology have been designed from scratch by the author – an EFL teacher without an agricultural background. Over these three years, I have learnt through trial and error. This paper based on my experience has attempted to identify and explain some issues for ESP course design and development. As the paper illustrates the ESP course development process starts with a needs analysis followed by a course design, selection and development of materials and course evaluation. ESP course development should be considered as an on-going process in which the teacher makes the necessary changes to harmonize students’ interests and needs, even as the course is in progress.
The reward for that time-consuming task is the ESP course that will positively affect both students and their teacher.

References