

Meeting the needs of agribusiness students in an ESP-reading context

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the needs for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) among the Agribusiness students in Jember State Polytechnic. It investigated the students' attitudes towards English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and their readiness for it. The study focuses on the issue of designing a suitable core course of English for Specific Purposes introduces ESP through academic reading. The study is based on the investigation of the learners' needs. The aim of the study is to propose a suitable course in which ESP can be integrated or injected within the regular English for General Purpose's classrooms in order to facilitate the students' academic progress within Agribusiness current issues.

Keywords: English for agribusiness; EFL context; ESP

INTRODUCTION

To cope with the needs of this society, the field of English language teaching has rapidly developed during the last few decades. Its ever-changing nature has been influenced by some factors such as the educational requirements and objectives. Accordingly, the demand for English courses designed to meet the needs of specific group of learners has specially become urgent since decades ago. Therefore, the English language courses should come as a response to students' needs or what Swales (1988) terms, "wider roles". In this regard, English should not be taught as a separate subject exiled from the learner's real needs; rather it should be part of the subject matter area based on its importance to the learner. Hence, it is important to distinguish the difference between General English (GE) and English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Actually, there is a very fine line that districts GE from ESP but is tangible as Hutchinson et al. (1987:53) claims, "in theory nothing in practical great deal" .

In the Agribusiness Study Program of Jember State Polytechnic, English is taught with a general aim to introduce students the current issues in agribusiness. In the foundation year, first and second semester are mostly given in reading practice materials. The Polytechnic prerequisites the students completion of 4 credits to be enrolled in the first year of specialization. During my personal teaching experience at the Agribusiness study program, a contextual teaching approach of teaching and assessment is followed. In my personal opinion, this is to prepare them to have academic and general speaking course at the next semester.

When the students at their third semester, they may be referred to have intermediate stage of proficiency. Users at this level are expected to be able to handle the main structures of the language with some confidence, demonstrate knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary and use appropriate communicative strategies in a variety of social situations through general speaking course and the academic one. Many students, especially in the Agribusiness study program, cannot foresee the practical use of General English (GE) when moving to the first year in their actual major of specialization. In fact, they are unable to conceptualize the efficacy of GE as facilitating their academic progress, simply because it does not serve their learning needs. The learners' need of academic English is ignored or under-emphasized in their first semester since it was "ghost" for them. Therefore, based on needs analysis, this study attempts to identify the English language learning needs of the foundation years students. It proposes the need to integrate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) terminologies

and specific functions of a particular content, namely the 'Academic Reading Program' in the curriculum along with the grammar functions and skills. As Orr (1998:1) stated, "English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is research and instruction that builds on General English (GE) and is designed to prepare students or working adults for the English used in specific disciplines, vocations, or professions to accomplish specific purpose" . Hutchinson and Waters (1987:1) visualize ESP as the leaves and branches of a language tree. Without any roots to absorb water, leaves or branches would not grow up. Therefore, it cannot be ignored that GE is considered being the roots which support ESP to flourish and it paves a way to the learners to achieve their desired academic progress.

This main aim of conducting this study is to examine the need to launch an ESP Reading Program at the Agribusiness study program in order to facilitate the academic progress of the foundation year's students. To reach this end, this paper first, investigates Agribusiness students' English language learning needs and attitudes towards ESP. Finally, it proposes the need to initiate an Academic Reading Supplementary Program based on the results of the needs analysis. The study tries to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards ESP-reading needs?
2. What are the language skills the students need to improve within ESP-reading in order to support their academic progress in their current and future studies?

During the past few decades, the science of ESP has developed considerably as an outcome of the rapid expansion of various domains of human knowledge that derived more specific language needs. ESP addresses certain group of learners based on their needs as part of an academic curriculum in educational institutions. There are many fields of interest that require particular linguistic competency such as technical English, scientific English, medical English, English for business, English for political affairs, and English for tourism. Wright (1992:2012) defines the concept as, "ESP is, basically, language learning which has its focus on all aspects of language pertaining a particular field of human activity, while taking into account the time constraints imposed by learners" . Mackay and Mountford defined ESP as the teaching of English for a "clearly utilitarian purpose" . The purpose they refer to is defined by the needs of learners, which could be academic, occupational, or scientific. For many, ESP context must be preceded by a sizeable background of general English and is associated with mature learners by large as it has a profound relation to specialization in different fields.

Most ESP definitions studies three themes: the nature of language to be taught and used, the learners, and the context. All the three aspects are connected together to realize certain practical purpose. Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) state that, "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". It is worth mentioning that teaching language in general, and English, in particular, is no longer just a matter of application that serves all needs through any kind of syllabus and methodology. Rather, it is a regulated application that deals with each situation or given discipline independent of the other. And unless language teachers are trained enough to handle such situations and realize the idiosyncrasies of ESP, fruitful outcomes would never be reached.

The procedures used to collect information about learners' needs are known as "Needs Analysis". Needs analysis (NA) is a formative stage that should be taken into consideration prior to, during, or after a language program. Researchers have different approaches in defining NA, but many of them agree that NA reflects necessities, wants and needs of learners in their subject area. Schutz and Derwing (1981:30) point out that this was a new concern with ESP: "most language planners in the past have bypasses a logically necessary first step: they have presumed to set about going somewhere without first determining whether or not their planned destination was reasonable or proper". Nunan (1988:130) defined needs analysis as "techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design". In ESP learners' needs are often described in terms of the outcomes or what the learners will be able to do at the end of a language course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined needs analysis by distinguishing between target needs, i.e. what the learner needs to learn, and "wants" which are the learners' views concerning their needs.

Needs analysis is recommended in English language teaching in general, and in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in particular. According to Robinson (1991:7), "needs analysis is generally regarded as critical to ESP, although ESP is by no means the only educational enterprise which makes use of it". Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) argue that "any language course should be based on needs analysis". Dudley-Evans & St John (1998:121) state that "needs analysis is the process of establishing the what and how of a course". They also point out the following three elements of needs analysis:

First, needs analysis aims to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners. Second, needs analysis study also aims to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group. Third, needs analysis study aims to know the target situations and learning environment so that data can appropriately be interpreted. Dudley Evans & St John (1998:121)

Jack C. Richards (2001:90) states that "the goal of needs analysis is to collect information that can be used to develop a profile of the language needs of a group of learners in order to be able to make decisions about the goals and content of a language course". He also argues that needs analysis in language teaching may be used for various purposes. Some of these purposes are:

- a. To identify the language skills a learner needs to perform a certain role.
- b. To determine the needs of students from a group for training in particular language skills.
- c. To help determine the adequacy of and efficacy of an existing course in addressing the potential needs of students.
- d. To identify the gap between what the students are actually able to do and what they need to be able to do.
- e. To collect data about a particular problem that learners are experiencing.

In needs analysis, the main source are the learners, people working in the study field, ex-students, documents relevant to the field, colleagues and ESP research in the field (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The main instruments for executing needs analysis study are questionnaire, analysis of authentic oral and written texts. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991).

In Indonesia, there is an enormous needs analysis (NA) studies which has been undertaken. Within the nation wide context, unfortunately, there is a serious lack of research related to ESP. It is important to mention that NA literature published by our scholars is scarce and more attention is required to meet the gradual increase in numbers of ESP courses in Indonesia. This study sheds light on the studies conducted in order to serve for a better conceptualization of the present study.

The researcher conducted a needs analysis study to investigate the Agribusiness learners' needs in Jember State Polytechnic. The study focus was mainly to reveal the ESP needs of those students. The three tools used in this study were interviews, email dialogues and questionnaires. The study aimed to identify the program practices that were effective in bringing about the students' needs. Based on the findings, the study suggested the implementation of a content-based curriculum model to be used to integrate language and college courses. Also, more cooperation is required between the language center and subject teachers to develop awareness about learners' needs. Pritchard & Nasr (2004) conducted a needs analysis study to develop materials that would help improve the reading performance of the third year engineering students. The need analysis was conducted to investigate the ways in which students and teachers perceive major required reading skills. Based on such perceptions, a reading program was designed to meet the needs of both parties. The reading program was implemented and was effective in improving the students' reading abilities. However, only a questionnaire was used to collect the data without involving the administrators or teachers.

In 2010, Harrbi investigated the perceptions of ESP-reading courses by science and technology students. The total number of students who participated in the study was 49. The study results indicated that the majority of the respondents are mainly interested in reading as a skill.

In short, the field of ESP includes a number of needs analysis conducted on language programs in many different areas. Needs analysis has been conducted in ESL and EFL settings representing academic and professional ESP programs. In Asian countries, especially in Indonesia, needs analysis studies have covered a group of different specialties. Many of these studies investigated the students' academic needs, however, up to my knowledge; no study to date has looked specifically at the English language needs of the science lane students in the foundation year.

METHODS

Every situation has its own factors that makes is dissimilar to other situations and so do needs analysis approaches in foreign language teaching. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) "the choice of method will depend on time and resources available and the procedures of each will depend on accessibility" (p.56). This study adopts the quantitative method. The information was collected through a questionnaire because it seemed to be the most appropriate tool for gathering the views and demands of the learner.

Participants

The participants in this study are the first year's students of Agribusiness study at Jember state Polytechnic. The English language program during the first year is ESP course. In the very first meeting they were given the questionnaires of need analysis and a certain kind of placement test focusing on reading for vocabulary and grammar relate to novice and intermediate levels that consist of Agribusiness terms. It took a meeting full to do both, filling the questionnaires and doing the placement test. The sample of the study consists of 40 students whose age ranges from 18-19 intakes in 2019/2020 academic year. All the students in this nature speak Indonesian and Javanese as their mother tongue, so none of them is native in English.

Procedure

This study employed one source of survey which is questionnaire. The questionnaire was written in Indonesian to guarantee the students' full comprehension of the items included. The questionnaire was designed to explore the respondents' perceptions about ESP and its significance to their current and future studies. The survey questions try to analyze the target situation, the present situation and the context situation. The questionnaire included 14 questions, 12 questions were close-ended with multiple options so that students can choose their answers. The other 2 questions were open-ended as students were freely able to express their views.

3. Instrument

In this study, Document survey is used which is a paper-based survey tool. A paper-based survey is a questionnaire in some pages of paper that the target audience can complete. Paper-based surveys are usually created as forms with written questionnaire to be answered to provide analytical data. The analytics reveal written responses which later on can be summarize as bar graphs or pie charts with all demographics presented as percentages for each questionnaire item.

Limitation of The Study

The survey in this study designated only a group of 90 students in the 2019/ 2020 academic year. As such, the representative sample may limit the generalization of the findings. In addition, this study does not investigate all stockholders' views and perceptions about the significance of ESP courses to the academic progress of students. Finally, the study is limited as it investigates the need of the ESP-reading in the Agribusiness study, the goals and the targets for the students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of the questionnaire distributed to respondents which divided into some aspects involving vocabulary proficiency, grammar mastery and reading comprehension, the researcher can classify that students goals in learning ESP in Agribusiness because they want to master English vocabulary that related to their major. It was the most chosen by the respondents. It means that students argued that vocabulary related to agribusiness was important to be mastered. Second, ten percents or only four out of forty students wanted to master of English grammar. They assumed that

grammar is the uninterested materials since they focused on communication context so they thought vocabulary is more important than grammar. For the reading materials, 16 students or 40 percents can understand the text relate to the Agribusiness terms well. The rest considered the reading materials difficult enough due to lack of vocabulary mastery. Since the questionnaire given to first year students so the material decided for the reading, vocabulary and grammar tests were only using high frequency vocabulary in the novice to intermediate level. The parts consist of matching vocabularies or expressions with their meaning, finding the meaning of words, phrase or sentence, finding the meaning of words based on the context, identifying class words in the text, and identifying errors in sentences through subject verb agreement forms. And from the result, the researcher can see that they actually still need materials in correcting grammatical sentence. Almost 50 percents respondents gave almost 80 percents false answers in correcting grammar sentence parts. However, it can be caused by their willingness to improve their grammar were low. As we know that for Indonesian learners learning tenses is boring. It needs extra effort to improve this, how the teacher integrate the grammar and the reading material creatively was the significant problem since not all teachers are creative enough to do that.

The point about speed reading got low percentage in this questionnaire, may be the students were not familiar with it. While skimming and scanning were important according to them and consideres to be included in teaching material. Moreover, 32 students or 82 percents students said that they need the activity of silent reading. This activity is conducted in order to comprehending the reading text. Next, 28 students or 70 percents students wanted pair discussion included in teaching material and implemented in the classroom. Then, 20 students or 50 percents students argued that small group discussion had to be considered involved in reading activity at English for Agribusiness teaching material. Meanwhile, 12 students or 30 percents students chose analyzing of word meaning based on the context needed in reading activity. It was the least respondents respond toward students' need in reading comprehension activity since it is the complex one, most of them wanted reading comprehension given in the next semester along with other skills English have, such as listening, writing and speaking.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study is carried out in order to provide an insight into the needs, functions and problems of English use among Agribusiness students who are not English natives. It is hoped to provide a baseline for obtaining a wider range of input into content, design and implementation of an ESP course by involving people as learners, teachers, and course developers in the planning process. Although the present investigation does not intend to represent English for Agribusiness materials, the researcher does believe that the sampling frame might give a relatively good representation of material designed. Needs analysis is part of the curriculum development and is basically required before a syllabus development for English language teaching. The findings from this study can be used as guidelines for developing an Agribusiness English syllabus that could lead to the improvement of the teaching materials. It is anticipated that the conclusion of the present investigation could be utilized by those who are responsible for policy and planning as well as the related organizations in order to have a clearer understanding of English needs for Agribusiness study.

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