

Variables in an ESP Operation: A

Theoretical Overview

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ملخص

إن تعميم تدريس اللغة الانجليزية أصبح متزايدا عبر العالم كنتيجة منطقية للعولمة اعتباراً من أن اللغة الانجليزية صارت أول لغة للحوار في العالم ، و ذلك في شتى المجالات العلمية منها و التكنولوجيا. لذلك فإن الجزائر كشتى دول العالم تبذل قصارى جهدها للعناية بهذا المجال ؛ حيث نجد اللغة الانجليزية تدرس في شتى المستويات، و من بينها الجامعة، و في مختلف التخصصات. وبالرغم من أهمية هذه المادة في البحث العلمي تبقى النتائج الدراسية اخصص عليها دون المتوسط. لذلك فإن من واجب الباحث الاعتناء بهذا المجال الهام.

ABSTRACT

The design of materials to ESP students is a task that requires several prerequisites. Since the course designer needs to take into consideration different variables that have been traced by ESP specialists. The first of these prerequisites is the Identification of learners' target needs (related to real life situation) ; language lacks and wants. The collected data is supposed to allow the course designer to derive the expected language competence compared with the actual language background of the learners, i.e. necessities and lacks. Processing the collected data allows the course designer to determine the process of the organisation of the ESP course or material.

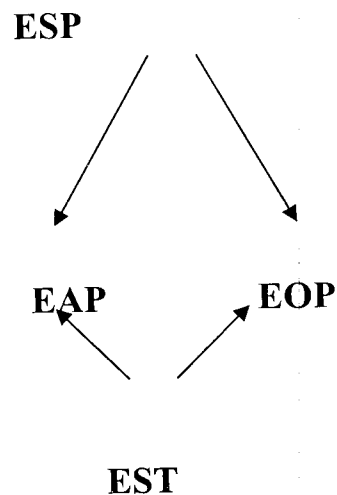
Variables in an ESP Operation: A Theoretical Overview

- ② The English language is of increasing importance world wide as a means of communication between specialists in many – if not all branches of science and technology. For this reason, Algeria as any other country in the world has adopted English in its educational programmes including university level where the teaching of the language is carried out in different fields for the achievement of specific purposes.

- ② This type of teaching represents situations where the learner has some specific reasons for learning English. This often, is believed to represent, a selected repertoire of words and expressions which can respond to specific needs of the learners in defined contexts. It is English for Specific Purposes(ESP).

- ② ESP can be taught either for Academic purposes (EAP) or Occupational purposes (EOP). It is worth noting that a third branch called EST –English for Science and

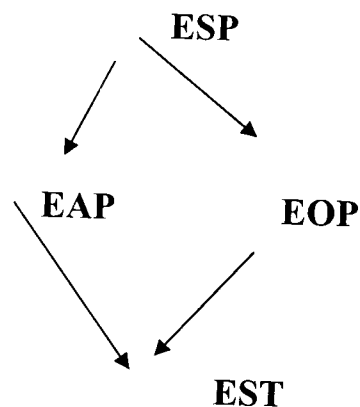
Technology is added. Some would maintain that it is a branch which can be introduced within the two first ones depending on the area of English language use (Stevens 1977,) . this can be explained through the following Diagramme.



② Diagramme1: subdivisions of ESP

- ② Hence the status of EST depends on the area of English use.; other specialists would maintain that EST is an individual branch.(Kennedy and Bolitho1984, Carver1984, miliani1984)

- ② On the other hand Mc Donough (1984) has proposed EST as a branch of EAP maintaining that EST is academically oriented.



② Diagram2 Subdivisions of ESP

② (Mc Donough1984,p.6)

ESP teaching operations involve four essential phases

- ② The identification of needs
- ② The production of materials
- ② Teaching
- ② Testing

1- Through the first variable the ESP practitioner attempts to bring an answer to the following question:

“Why do these learners need to learn English?”

At first sight the answer lies in the need to communicate and be full participant in the given target situation. Hence, the ESP learner must always be aware of both the final aim of his learning situation, and what he will need to learn to reach the set aim (Hutchinson and Waters 1987).

This implies the existence of different types of needs which have to be examined by the course designer:

i-Target Needs:

These are simply the needs of the target situation, i.e. what the learner requires in order to be able to communicate effectively in the target situation. These can be classified into three main types:

Necessities:

They represent the needed level of language proficiency of the students to achieve either academic or occupational purposes. They are also called the objectives (Robinson 1991; West 1993). The following table illustrates the objectives of an ESP student

Study Activities	Skills Required	Professional Activities
Lectures	Listening to understand content, listening for key words and phrases, making notes, asking questions	Presentations
Seminars	Asking and answering questions, understanding and expressing different points of view, reporting on work done, making notes	Meetings
Practicals	Understanding instructions, asking questions, understanding informal language, recording results	Fieldwork
Reading textbooks, articles, etc.	Understanding the overall content, distinguishing main points from supporting detail, skimming, scanning, evaluating, making notes	Reading reports
Writing essays, dissertation	Construction of reasonably accurate sentences and paragraphs, good organisation of ideas	Writing reports, letters, etc.

Table 1: ILLUSTRATIONS OF TARGET NEEDS IN EAP AND EOP SITUATIONS

This displays a clear picture of what an ESP learner requires as different needs may be very similar to the skills needed by professionals in the same field of study

Lacks :

Their identification involves the analyses of the learner's present language background in order to identify what the linguistic lacks are when compared to necessities. The lacks will determine the course content. In a foreign language situation, one of the most common types of needs analysis focuses primarily on the skills that learners may need, most commonly using a 'four skills' approach (listening, speaking, reading and writing)

In this vein the Council of Europe (1996) has suggested that communicative language activities can be sub-divided into reception (aural, visual and audio-visual), production (oral and written), interaction (oral and written) and mediation (in particular, interpreting or translating). A more comprehensive approach of the Council of Europe can be interpreted in the following table:

Reception	Spoken	e.g. listening and comprehension of lectures, or synopses
	Written	e.g. reading documentation/ plans/ abstracts
Interaction	Spoken	e.g. discussing work, talking on the telephone
	Written	e.g. e-mail exchanges, video-conferencing using texts
Production	Spoken	e.g. making presentations
	Written	e.g. writing reports/ letters integrated with graphics/ visuals
Mediation	Spoken	e.g. informal interpreting between friends/ colleagues
	Written	e.g. translating documents

Table 1.3: Communicative Language Activities (based on Council of Europe 1996)

Of course, more examples could be given. Written production, for example, may include essays, reports, letters, and notes on lectures, notes on books or articles, critical response... etc.

Wants:

They refer to the learner's own feeling towards his most important needs. The material designer will have to

consider the learner's suggestions in order to determine the content of the lectures.

ii- Learning needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have pointed the fact that the identification learning needs involve an answer to the following question: "how are we going to get to the destination?".

To provide an answer to the given question the material's designer will seek information about the learning situation, the aims of the course, the type of learners, their learning styles, the available materials and resources, the type of setting and finally the time load.

2- Data collected during this first phase will determine the content of the teaching material. For this Flook (1993) has given primary focus to the requirements of the target situation maintaining that the tasks performed in real world should form the bases of the designed materials. On the other hand, the designer has also to consider learner's lacks; the combination of

these two elements will allow the identification of the type of content of the ESP course.

On the whole, the different scholars mentioned above agree on the collection of the same type of information which have to be collected during the process of NIA. These pieces of information can be summarized as follows:

a- information about the target situation where the investigator has to seek the requirements of the target situation.

b- The students constitute the second area of interests. The investigator, or the course designer, will have to analyse their present language background in order to determine their lacks; analyse what they expect the language course to be(their wants); finally analyse their attitudes vis-à-vis the ESP course.

C- Finally, there is the learning environment from which the course designer will have to search for the available resources and the

different teaching aids, the institution, the type of classroom and the time load for the ESP teaching. The collected data allow the effective planning of the different courses along the period of the ESP training.

The combination of language and content required by the target situation, the students' actual knowledge and the available means will allow programme designers to produce and organise the necessary input. Then, the teacher will intervene to transmit the necessary language learner to the learner.

3- The ESP teacher is first of all a teacher of General English. The difference stands in the fact that an ESP teacher will teach students with special needs, for this reason he needs the necessary flexibility to cope with the requirements of the ESP situation. The teacher can have the necessary flexibility if he is aware enough of both the requirements of the ESP teaching situation and his role as a teacher as a whole. He will therefore be called a reflective teacher since he will be able to adopt a critical attitude towards himself to

challenge his beliefs about teaching, and thus change what needs to be changed.

- ② 4- The general framework of testing in an ESP situation will not go beyond the objectives set. Teaching is oriented towards specific purposes; therefore the testing framework will have to follow the same methodology. Making use of the fact that a lesson is a response to specific needs, the tests assess how much these needs have been satisfied. A successful evaluation seems to include two levels: the learner's assessment which is done to measure what the learner's have acquired; course evaluation, i.e. testing the effectiveness of the course.

Assessment not only quantifies the learners' abilities, but also gives an interesting opportunity for the teacher to test himself, reviewing both his course's content and his teaching methods.

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