English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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Abstract

ESP programs are a teaching method that focuses on the specific goals of learners and were seen as an alternative to ELT. This research attempted to define ESP by examining its nature, growth, and usefulness as a needs analysis in language learning and teaching. It was successful in varying the perspectives of language instructors, course designers, and learners into various components and various approaches and activities, demonstrating the importance of needs analysis to determine the needs of the learners.

Keywords: Developments of ESP, A revolution in linguistics, learner's need, Features of ESP, model of an ESP course.

Introduction

The development of teaching English for specific purposes is not a recent innovation, according to the history of ESP. Palmer and West at the beginning of the 20th century talked about ESP as a direction of teachers' attention to the specific goals of the learners. Michael West in India in the 1920s also discussed it as being formed in question of 'analysis of needs' when he asked: 'Why should learners learn English and how should they learn it?'(Abbots,1981). Firth (1935) also pointed out the same experience by urging English language course designers to bear in mind certain needs of the learner which was presented later as a basis for ESP, Brumfit (1977). The ESP programs were seen as only one alternative of ELT. At the beginning of the sixties, the direction and attention were to teach ESP courses.

Definitions of ESP

One can see that current English language education fulfills this criterion in order to meet the specific needs of the learner, as the target language is increasingly viewed as serving instrumental aims (Robinson, 1980). This means that ESP is directly focused on the development of specific knowledge or abilities. Unlike "general English," where mastery of the target language is the objective and ultimate goal of the course, ESP focuses on the learner's special needs or a group of learners. Dudley Evans and M. John (1998:1) see that: "Needs analysis, text analysis, and educating students to communicate effectively in the activities required by their study or job setting have always been and will continue to be the primary priorities of ESP."

Although past practitioners in the field have sought to define and come up with a different vision of it, there is no clear-cut definition. (e.g. Mackay and Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1978; Strevens, 1980, Ewer, 1981). Initially, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) described ESP as a method that does not rely on a certain language, instruction, or methodology. They say the definition of ESP is to answer the

following question: 'Why do learners need to learn a foreign language?' That is, they framed ESP in the primacy of learners' needs, by claiming that:

> Need is determined by the reasons why the student is studying English, which can range from study objectives such as enrolling in a postgraduate degree in an English-speaking country to job purposes such as attending business meetings or making hotel reservations. These goals serve as the foundation for determining the language to be taught. (p:3)

The second definition is Strevens' (1988) definition of ESP in his distinction between absolute characteristics and variable characteristics:

1   designed to meet the specified needs of the learner
2   related in content to particular disciplines
3   centered on language appropriateness
4   in contrast with 'General English'

The variable characteristics:

5   may be restricted to the learning skills
6   may not be taught to the particular methodology

The third is Robinson's (1991) agreement of need analysis priority in defining ESP. To comment, Munby (1978:2) believes that ESP stands for English for Specific Purposes, which refers to a type of English language instruction that focuses on the language skills needed for a particular field or profession. ESP courses are designed to meet the specific needs of learners who require English for their professional, academic or vocational purposes. For example, there are ESP courses for business, medicine, law, engineering, hospitality, aviation, and many other fields. These courses are usually designed to teach language skills that are specific to the particular field, such as technical vocabulary, specialized terminology, and communication skills relevant to the profession. ESP courses may also include authentic materials, such as reports, presentations, and case studies, to provide learners with real-world examples of the language they will need to use in their professional lives.

The ESP definitions of the writers stress the methodology of the disciplines and the nature of the interaction between the teacher and the learner which might be very different from that in a general English class (Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Ding & Evans, 2022).

Developments of ESP

Since the 1960s, English for Specific Purposes, ESP, has acquired its position within the teaching of English as a foreign or second language after it had been ignored in language teaching theories. Until then, most effort in teaching English as a foreign language focused on General English. By time, ESP was the most important

aspect of teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Business Purposes (EBP). It is also part of teaching Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) such as French, Spanish, German, and English and became project leader(only people are project leaders) in most Middle East countries (e.g. in Iran, Bates, 1978; Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Mackay and Mountford, 1978; Harper, 1986, etc.).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that there are three reasons for the emergence of ESP:

- **The demands of a brave new world**.

Following World War II in 1945, technology and commerce were the primary variables that created the demand for an international language for a variety of reasons, most notably the post-war economic supremacy of the United States. This was given to English.

This let people all over the world learn English because it was and still is the key and medium language for international currencies of technology and commerce (e.g. businessmen when buying and selling products, mechanics when reading instruction manuals, doctors when keeping up with developments in their fields, engineers, students when studying courses including textbooks only available in English...etc.).

In the 1970s, oil crisis development was accelerated which resulted in investment and western expertise in the oil countries. Suddenly, English was very much needed for business. After that, English language courses were very much needed with clear goals and objectives
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- **A revolution in linguistics**

As the demand grew for English courses, new ideas and theories began to emerge in the study of English language structure by language specialists, for describing language rules and usage. That is, the Chomskyan revolution in 1957 in his book 'Syntactic Structures' and later in 1965 in 'Aspects of the theory of syntax' had a great influence on the field of language and linguistics. He distinguished between performance (surface structure) and competence (deep structure) which brought attention to ESP.

The new studies, however, shifted from formal features (grammar) of language usage to the ways in which language is actually used in real communication (Widdowson, 1978; Belcher, 2009; Anthony, 2018).

So, this lead to the view that there must be, for example, differences between English commerce and that its counterpart of Engineering or Medicine. These kinds of issues represented naturally the development of ESP (Swales, 1985; Hyland & Shaw, 2016). Actually, from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the greatest expansion of research in ESP occurred (e.g. descriptions of written scientific and technical English by Ewer and Latorre, 1969; Swales, 1971; Selinker and Trimble, 1976; Anthony,

2018 and others). In the 1980s, the work in EST, which is considered a synonym of ESP was the most in demand.

- Focus on the learner (educational psychology)

Learners with different needs and interests would give some clues to the influence on their motivation to learn. This approach was very much relevant to the English courses to needs which would improve the learners' motivation and would make learning better and faster. As a result, several ESP courses began to take place, dealing with specific areas of studies.

Strevens (1988) summarizes the benefits and motives of ESP in the following four points:
1.   it is time efficient since it is focused on the learner's needs;
2.   it is relevant to the student.
3.   It is effective at imparting knowledge.
4.   .it is more cost-effective than 'General English'.

Huchinson and Waters (ibid.) traced the different phases in the development of ESP; these historical stages are the following:

a. Register analysis was mainly adopted by Swales (1971). It is basically concerned with the principle that each subject is established from a special register which is different from other subjects. It is an analysis of identifying and organizing the grammatical and lexical features of these registers. The aim was to produce a syllabus which gave firstly to language forms that would meet the subject specialisms of students (Turner, 2004).

b. Rhetorical or discourse analysis was associated with Widdowson (1974). It is

focused on sentence meaning production:

> "We believe that students' difficulties stem from a lack of familiarity with English usage rather than a lack of knowledge of the English system, and that as a result, their needs cannot be met by a course that simply provides more practice in sentence structure, but only by one that increases knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of various communicative practice." Hutchinson and Waters (1987:10-11) cite Allen and Widdowson (1974).

In other words, English use is developing students' understanding of how sentences are combined in discourse to produce meaning, instead of focusing on form (grammar).

c. Target situation analysis (Needs analysis) was identified by John Munby (1978) which concerns learners' reasons for learning. In his book 'Communicative Syllabus Design', his needs analysis model was simplified for course designers to offer special

courses in specific areas needed by the learner, taking into account the functional aspects of the course. He says:

"Beginning with the individual (a language participant or group of participants), one investigates his personal communication needs in light of the social and stylistic components that combine to generate a profile of such demands. This profile is then transformed into the ESP specification, which defines the participant's desired communicative capabilities..". (p: 32)

The procedures were established by defining linguistic features of the target situation which would ultimately arrange the syllabus of the ESP course. For example, according to Huchinson and Waters (ibid.), in a target situation where the learners will use the language they are learning to express and describe as such, the ESP course design process should be processed initially by identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation.

d. Skills and strategies associated with different work which concern basic interpretive strategies were identified by Grellet, (1981); Nuttal, (1982); Alderson and Urquhart (1984); Ding and Evans, (2022). This stage attempts to let the thinking processes underlie language use which enable learners to cope with surface forms (e.g. guessing the meaning of words from contexts, using visual layout to determine the type of text, similarities in L1 and L2) (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:13).
This approach generally emphasises on reading or listening strategies which get the learner to react to the analysis of how meaning is produced in written or spoken discourse..

e. A learning-centred approach of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who believe that the stages mentioned above are 'fundamentally flawed' because they are based on descriptions of language use. Their concerns are regarding ESP with language learning. They emphasise that:

"We can't just presume that describing and exemplifying how people use language would help them learn it. If this were true, we would only need to read a grammar book and a dictionary to learn a language." (p:14).

Nevertheless, their caution was:

"We still do not know very much about learning", (P: 51)   and continues

"Such an approach is inevitably more complex: it is based, after all, on a recognition of the complexity of the learning process. But everything must have the defects of its qualities" (P: 77)

This model is defined by Hutchinson and Water (Ibid.) as:

"a method with the affirmed aim of maximizing the potential of the learning situation" (p:77)
It is, (needs analysis), not only governed by the learner himself but by other

factors like society. Hutchinson and Waters base the learning-centered approach on two factors: needs and resources. Because of that, they assist the course to react to developments (Basturkmen, 2021).

Classification of ESP

The development of ESP has brought other branches. There have been attempts to classify the different branches of ESP. The following classification of ESP, according to Dudley-Evans and John (1998), contains two key areas: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (EOP). Robinson's classification, as depicted in a tree diagram (1991:3-4) is as follows:
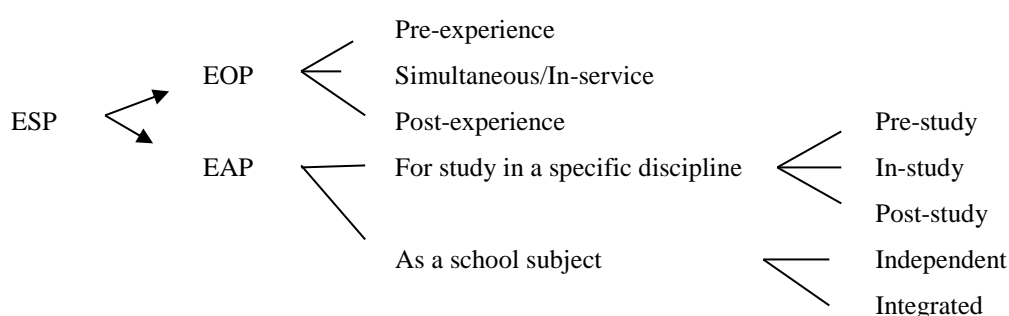

Figure 1 ESP classification by experience (taken from Dudley-Evans and John, 1998:6)

According to this classification, a very important division of courses is represented in time when they take place and the specificity of their appropriateness. A second set of distinctions is also made within ESP, which divides EAP and EOP according to discipline area and is shown below:
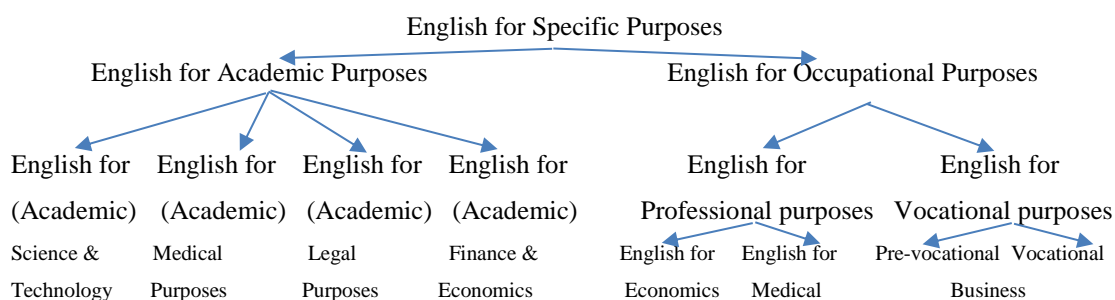

Figure 2 ESP classification by professional area, (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998:6)

English for Science and Technology (EST) and English for Medical Purposes (EMP) of EAP have been the main areas. Newly, the academic study of business, finance, banking, economics, and accounting has become increasingly important. For clarification, according to Dudley-Evans and John (1998), Medicine for Academic Purposes is planned for students of medicine, and Medicine for Occupational Purposes is designed for practicing doctors; vocational English is concerned with the language of training for specific trades and pre-vocational is concerned with finding a job and interview skills. In addition, a very important distinction should be mentioned

here between common-core English for General Purposes and English for Specific Purposes. Widdowson (1983) comments that:

"ESP is primarily a training operation that tries to offer learners with a limited competency in order for them to cope with specific clearly specified tasks... GPE, on the other hand, is fundamentally an educational operation that tries to educate learners with an overall capacity to assist them to deal with unforeseeable future events." (p:6).

Others, such as Strevens (1978), see that the difference is not clear,. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) indicate that in theory, there is nothing that could distinguish ESP from EGP but in practice, there is a great difference. To elaborate on the point, they state: "Not so much the existence of a need as the knowledge of the need is what separates ESP from regular English. Understanding the need for English will affect what is deemed an appropriate subject in language programs and, on the positive side, what possibility may be realized. Learners, sponsors, and teachers will all benefit from this understanding. Hence, even though it could initially seem as though the ESP course is distinct by its subject matter (science, medicine, business, tourism, etc.), this is only a consequence of the main problem of being able to clearly communicate why the learners need English.. To summarize, it is not the nature of the requirement that distinguishes the ESP from the Generic +Course. " (p:53).

Generally speaking, the main aspects of ESP are that it has geared the attention to a specific end in dealing with the language course. Strevens (1980:119) argues that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should be given greater emphasis than General English because ESP assumes that learning is more effective when:

1. The learner focuses on what they need.
2. The learner does not waste time on irrelevant material.
3. The learner can learn the target material more quickly.
4. The learner's motivation and willingness to learn are higher.
5. Success rates are higher.
6. A given expenditure on English-language education channeled through ESP is more cost-effective than the same effort channelled solely through General English.

Therefore, ESP is an approach to organizing an English language program in accordance with the content of the course that is relevant to the specific needs of a definite group of learners.

ESP has become a dominant and rapidly changing approach to the process of teaching English as a foreign language all over the world (see Mackay and Mountford, 1978; Dudley-Evans T. and M. John, 1998; Belcher, 2009). Robinson (1980) comments: "ESP is still a hot topic, and there are still a lot of unanswered problems with it. " (P:1).

Features of ESP

ESP courses have two central features. Firstly, they are designed to serve specific purposes related to students' needs for work or study. Secondly, ESP is based on an awareness of specialized needs not addressed by general English courses. Needs analysis is a crucial aspect of ESP courses, which includes identifying both the end-of-course requirements and the initial learning needs of students. Robinson (1991:2-4), (Widdowson, 1983), and (ELT Documents, 117, 1984:2-3).

Role of ESP teachers

The role of the ESP teacher is to try to be flexible, motivated, and to take risks. Also s/he needs to assess the effectiveness of the teaching material as well as to be aware of and keep in touch with up to date research.

The ESP teacher may have less subject knowledge than their students, especially in science, but ESP course books are designed to be understandable for teachers. However, a major challenge is the training of ESP teachers, which should include visiting scientific and technological institutions, reading materials on science and technology, and creating portfolios of informative material and visual aids. Since the 1980s, some universities and institutes in the UK and USA have offered ESP teacher training programs, including diplomas and MA courses. In developing countries, ESP teacher training programs are often covered individually by seminars or short courses in cooperation with organizations such as the British Council. (Ding & Evans, 2022), and (1980: 42).

Aspects affecting the model of an ESP course

There are two main aspects of influence on ESP model courses. They are the following: external and internal aspects. External ones are those that help the entire ESP program to achieve success and are responsible for planning, developing, financing, staffing, and managing, as well as their relations to experience and principle, (Stevens, 1978; AlHamash, 1978; Munby, 1978; Turner, 2004; Belcher, 2009; Anthony 2018) are not the concern of this research. The internal aspects, however, are our greatest concern because they acknowledge the importance of and need for attention to the learner's needs and expectations.

Accordingly, Hutchinson and Waters (1982: 100) assess the importance of data collection and analysis in ESP but conclude that: ESP materials are often not well-suited to the realities of the ESP classroom, lacking creativity and failing to fully exploit content knowledge. To address these issues, there is a need to mobilize both language and content knowledge to solve realistic communication problems, and to take a more adventurous and imaginative approach to content. Munby (1978)emphasizes the importance of understanding learners' identities and needs in designing effective ESP programs, and notes that specific communicative achievements should be prioritized based on learners' goals and career specializations.

(Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

The syllabus for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course should be based on learners' needs, and should specify what learners need to use English for. Learners' proficiency level in the target language, as well as their location, should be considered when designing the syllabus. For example, ESP courses for non-native students in an English-speaking community would have different objectives than those for non-native students studying abroad. ESP courses designed for foreign students who plan to study in the UK should also include a social English component, which may include cultural and social orientation. (Ding & Evans, 2022). This implies that learners' needs form part of the planning and guide the ESP course objectives:

"Learning objectives can be specified in terms of these particular uses of the language that can be determined when needs are obvious. Teaching is effective when the learner starts to show communicative proficiency in the necessary area." (Mackay and Mountform, 1978: 3).

Language skills in ESP

Language teachers are reconsidering the conventional classification of language skills due to the relevance of the functional and communicative approach (i.e. reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Brumfit (1984: 69), for example, suggests that it should be another division of language skills by commenting that: "The majority of teaching in practice entails compromising by mixing skills (or doing a separate activity referred to as "integrated skills"), and the definition of language entailed by this divide completely overlooks the purpose of language. The four components describe what happens, but they only address discrete, unmotivated, and external acts."
Instead, he proposed the following activities that students need:

 i)   Conversation or discussion;
 ii)   Comprehension;
iii)   Extended writing
iv)   Extended speaking (advanced level)

Brumfit's justification depends on two points. First, the new classification should be based on communication. Second, the focus should be on meaning rather than on analyzable formal elements. However, this classification is not yet detailed enough to be practiced or to consider the different skills used in different positions.

Below, is a discussion of each skill individually from an ESP point of view but we have to take the function of language skill into consideration. That is, the difference being that reading and listening deal with recognition of aspects of that structure, whereas writing and speaking are concerned with the production of the text (Basturkmen, 2021).

Reading skill

Traditional reading teaching which concentrates on forms rather than meanings or functions is less helpful for students to get much information in order to make full sense, though, among other skills, it plays a very important role in the academic life of students and we find that it is the skill that students of English make the most of. That is very clear in the students' eagerness to understand every single bit of the article or passage they read, (e.g. they use a dictionary for translation to solve the problem and spend hours and hours making sense of that passage).

"A new strategy that has appeared in recent years as a result of the focus on communicative competence, according to which "reading is every bit as communicative as speech conversation, and as a talent, it is far from passive." As a result, concepts of discourse analysis and communication have gained prominence." (Cortese, 1979:132)

Consequently, the communicative approach to language has been concerned with the importance and necessity of learners realizing the linguistic mechanisms that tie meanings with forms in sentences. The communicative technique allows learners to gain more out of a passage in less time via skimming (reading through the text to acquire the main points) and scanning (by looking for a specific piece of information). As a result, ESP students should be taught to read texts practically, analytically, and critically. Allen (1986:15) comments:

"..reading now has vital applications since language is seen as communication and is no longer taught as a separate topic in isolation during a designated time slot, but rather as a component of other courses "across the curriculum."
Learning to notice how language is used to represent particular thought processes, such as how it is used to describe, classify, generalize, form hypotheses, draw conclusions, and so on, is viewed as an essential part of studying subjects like physics or social science."

Generally, the progress of language teaching is fast and offers numerous approaches.

Writing skill

The written essay or assignment is the most common mode of evaluation in most postgraduate courses in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (McDonogh, 1985). Thus the skill is an important requirement at the university level, as seen in the use of written assignments.

It would very difficult to separate writing skills in the ESP view from other EFL development in language teaching of General English. Cohen et al (1979:552) insisted that the problems and difficulties of non-natives using written technical discourse in ESP classes were not technical or scientific vocabulary but the non-technical words (e.g. adverbial phrases, conjunctions) and these would be the most

difficult. The significance of learners' requirements was taken into consideration by researchers as they offered additional remarks on English teaching approaches and methodologies in response to these insights on the nature of scientific discourse.
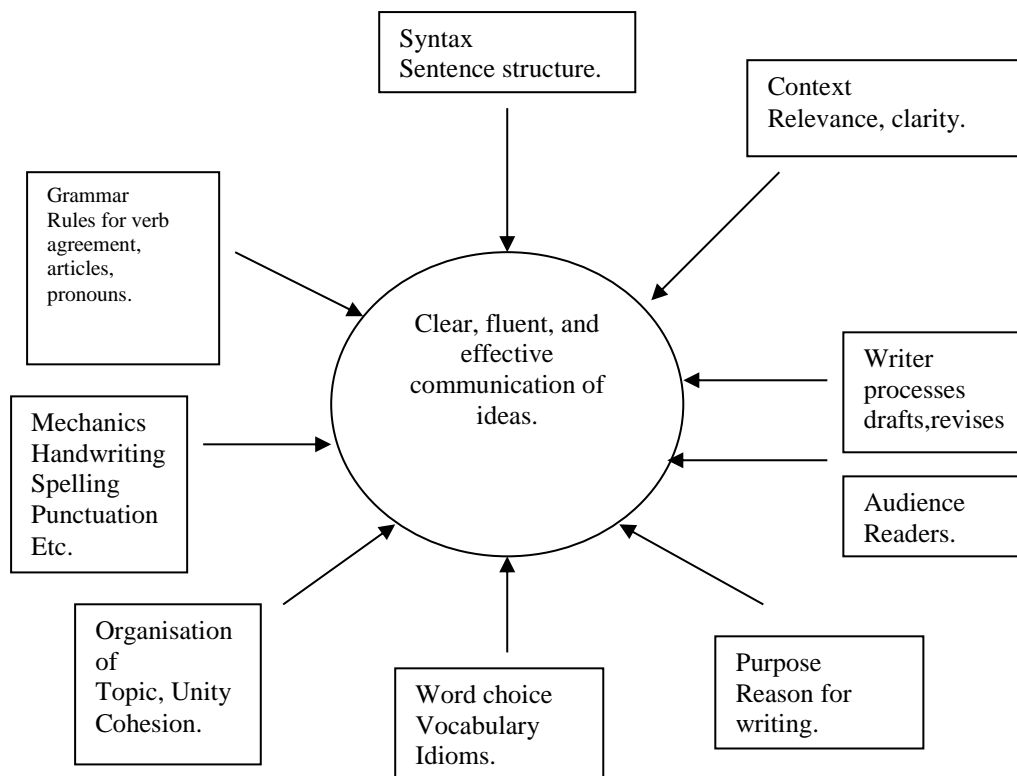

Figure 4: Elements considered in producing a piece of writing (adopted from Raimes, 1983:6)

Speaking and listening skills

"... the lack of endless time for consideration or modification of language being utilized limits oral communication (speaking and listening). Oral practice with thirty or more learners is significantly more difficult to plan than written communication, where one can take their time reading and writing individually (Pattison, 1987:5).

As a result, the communicative approach promotes language usage beyond the sentence level, giving the student an interactive role in the classroom. The communicative approach attempted to develop the learner's abilities as a speaker and listener.

According to Basturkmen (2021), one of the challenges is finding ready-made oral tasks in ESP materials. As a result, they attempt to emphasize the significance of exposing learners to a genuine type of oral activity, such as listening to true oral dialogue. According to their ideas, authentic resources are full of linguistic concepts and various forms of actions, as well as the types of processes that the learner employs in his connection with the language he hears. It may be argued that an explanation of oral speech that benefits ESP courses can also benefit general courses and vice versa.

-Translation skill

"Translation should not be seen as a single endeavour. There are countless translations available that can help you learn a foreign language in a variety of ways: (A) mental translation differs from written, verbal, and other types of translations. (b) conscious and unconscious translation; (c) translation from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1; (d) simultaneous translation requiring only a concentration on the essential ideas; (e) translation that is detailed and well edited; (f) translation that acts as an exercise or a test; and (g) translation that serves as a tool or a goal.." (Urgese, 1989:38)

This quotation is intended to emphasize the significance of translation as one of the language activities, or possibly as a fifth ability. Non-native teachers value the use of translation for their students. As a result, it is clear that translation helps to effectively teach English as a second or foreign language. Recent studies in countries where ESP is taught emphasize the importance of translation as a helpful technique in dealing with a scientific discourse at various educational stages by utilizing learners' L1 to be aware of how scientific information is carried through the linguistic system of the target language. It directs students' attention to the application of their scientific knowledge in their own language to the way the world works. Furthermore, the tendency of 'Arabising' scientific technology is rapidly spreading in several universities, such as King AbdulAziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where several reference works in medicine and engineering have been translated from English to Arabic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research attempted to define ESP by examining its nature, growth, and usefulness of a needs analysis in language learning and teaching. The success of changing the perspectives of language teachers, course designers, and learners toward various components and various approaches and activities demonstrates the significance of needs analysis. This requirements analysis determines the needs of the learners in order of importance.

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