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Abstract
In a variety of local, regional, national, and international contexts of today’s global era, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) proves to be an effective tool to facilitate communication and interaction in various fields. To develop ESP instruction in the context-specific way requires professionals and instructors’ great efforts on sufficient needs analysis and careful strategies design. On the basis of thorough literature review on ESP and ESP instruction, this paper probes into needs analysis and strategic approaches of ESP course development. The extensive strategies on syllabus design, course delivery and assessment are discussed and presented in the paper so as for more confidence and capabilities from practitioners developing successful ESP instruction in specific contexts.

Keywords: ESP, Context-specific, Needs Analysis, Strategies and Approaches

1. Introduction
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a significant movement in language education. It provides more opportunities for English language researchers and practitioners to explore the curriculum, course design and implementation of ESP education. Now we are living in a world where more and more people are using English in a growing number of occupational contexts. As a result, English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals and institutions are increasingly required to design and deliver ESP courses tailored to specific professional and academic activities. For example, eighty-five percent of all information in science and engineering in worldwide informational storage and retrieval networks is in English language. Likewise, in many universities, more and more professional courses are encouraged to be taught in English in addition to using textbooks written in English. Wide-ranging ESP projects are also developed in diverse contexts. For example, strengthening the academic English capacities of college teachers; equipping employees in international companies with English language skills to meet business requirement; enhancing Airport passport control officials’ ability to interface with international visitors, and so on. Whatever the specific contexts, an exciting transition is experienced from highly structured, intensive English classes mostly directed toward minors and adult learners to the development of strategic and purposeful curricula to engage professionals and quasi-professionals in English for specific purposes. Developing ESP instruction in specific contexts is in great demand and high expectation. Both researchers and teachers in this field have been and are striving for the right needs analysis and strategy design. Along the way, some questions may emerge about what ESP was, what is could be and how it could be better realized.

2. Literature review
The ESP initiative began in 1950s and 1960s when there was an expansion of scientific, technical and economic activities on an international scale (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). The demands and the needs of communication in English have also increased accordingly. As a result, English instructors are pressured to adapt their teaching to meet the professional needs of learners in their specific environment and context.

ESP is a branch of English Language Teaching which in turn is divided into two main branches of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) such as Medicine, Engineering, Theology, etc. and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) such as English for secretaries, technicians, etc. According to Robinson (P. Robinson, 1991:1), what is considered “specific” about ESP in a given location in the world may not be considered the same elsewhere. Thus, it is impossible to provide a certain definition for ESP which could be constant anywhere. Others like Tom Hutchinson and Allan Waters (1987/1992:18) prefer to apply the expression “What ESP is not” instead of trying to explain what ESP actually is. In this case, they would say: 1) ESP is not teaching “specialized varieties” of English, because using English for a specific purpose does not mean using one special aspect of language; 2) ESP is not teaching a series of words and structures (grammar) to people who need it; 3) ESP, in terms of educational methods, is not different from other teaching methods. Although contents in ESP are pretty different from those of general English, there is no account for difference between educational processes. So, what is ESP? Hutchinson and Waters point out that ESP is not a result or a product; rather it is an approach to achieve a result. The nature of “specific purposes” of ESP is determined according to the nature and type of learners’ needs. Therefore, educational needs, investigational needs,
occupational needs, and etc. each has separate goals and needs English in a different time and a different place. So, the goals of ESP are specified in accordance with these needs and contents for teaching English are defined on their bases.

Indeed, in the last four decades, ESP has evolved from a somewhat obscure branch of ELT to a mainstream, standalone focal point of international, interdisciplinary scholarship and practice attuned to the multiple and complex needs of a “flat world” (Basturkmen 2010). With much controversy, contemporary scholarship for ESP has critically examined, among other things, the complex contextual issues surrounding the conceptualization and delivery of ESP instruction (Allison 1996; Watson Todd 2003), “authenticity” in the development of materials and curricula (Widdowson 1998), and complex ethical issues about who decides what learners need (Belcher 2004; Edge 2003; Lee 2008). In China as well, for the last 15 years, there have been numerous studies on ESP courses including courses for nursing or medical students (Lee, 1998; Chia et al. 1999), for business students (Chen 1998; 2000), and for students in travel and leisure management (Tsai 2005; Liang 2007). The goal of these studies is to provide the effective instruction of the English language education that meets the academic or professional needs of students. As these and other efforts and debates continue to play out, English language professionals such as our teachers are increasingly in demand to provide ESP for a variety of local, regional, national, and even international contexts.

3. Needs analysis and ESP instruction

3.1. Need analysis

Needs analysis plays a vital role in developing ESP instruction. It has been one of the key factors and an integral part of ESP research and practice for researchers, course designers, material developers, testers, evaluators as well as classroom teachers for many years. It is the process of establishing what and how a course will run. Pyianapa (2004) states that needs analysis is a means to identify what a learner receives and helps to determine the ESP course they require. It is noted that the word “needs” has been used differently by several researchers. Firstly, needs can be considered as the learner’s study or job requirements; that is, what they have to be able to demonstrate at the end of their language course. Widowson (1981) views this type of needs as a goal-oriented definition; whereas Berwick (1989) perceives it as “objective”. Secondly, needs can be defined as what the learner has to actually do to acquire the language. According to Widowson (1981), this is a process-oriented definition of needs and is related to transitional behaviors, the tool for learning. Thirdly, needs can refer to what the learners themselves would like to gain from the language course. This implies that learners may have personal aims, in addition, to the requirements of their study or job; in other words, wants or desires (Berwick, 1989). Finally, need may be interpreted as lacks, that is, what the learners do not know or cannot do in English (Robinson, 1998).

In addition, Graves (1996) mentions that needs analysis involves finding out what the learners know and can do, and what they need to learn or do. In other words, needs analysis involves seeking and interpreting information needs at the end of a language course, and can be called a target situation analysis (TSA). This is the best known framework for a TSA type of needs analysis which concentrates on communication purposes, communication settings, the means of communication, language skills, functions, and structure. In addition, in terms of types of needs, Mackay (1978) divides the needs into two types. The former is academic needs where English is required for further academic study. For example, medical students requiring English in order to understand the lectures or read medical textbooks in English. The latter is job needs where English is required in order to perform a particular job, such as, technicians requiring English in order to read technical English in English is used. In the present study, the needs of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) based on job needs defined by Mackay are investigated. The functions and problems in using English skills are also included in the study.

3.2. Sufficient needs analysis in ESP instruction

Every ESP professionals and instructors have a pretty clear understanding that needs analysis is defining element of ESP and critical to the overall success of any ESP course. However, in many instances, people just undervalue the needs analysis or make it rushed through. A lot of cases shows that once a decision is made to commit employees to an English training program, the company or the learners would too often put themselves in a rush to the process. They would more like to get everything started quickly and check the prompt effects of ESP instruction. That’s a big problem which needs to be addressed for needs analysis in any ESP program. The ESP professionals need to get control of the whole situation and guide clients and students through necessary pre-training steps of sufficient needs analysis and course design.

For every ESP course, needs analysis could involve a large amount of time and efforts. Therefore, professionals and instructors who are engaged in ESP should work in teams and step by step. One team
may be in charge of data collection, while another team is engaged in data analysis, and the third one with course design according to the analysis results from the first two teams. Taking an example of an ESP course to equip employees in international companies with English language skills to meet business requirement, a “needs analysis” team might conduct a series of interviews with management and workers to understand what they consider as critical business practice. Those initial conversations would be supplemented by the team’s participant observation in the field with specific attention to how those critical business practice are realized through language. With data in hand, the same team or another team might then examine and collect the language needed to meet business requirements. Finally, the original team or a third team would take that analysis of language and develop a scientific syllabus to meet those goals.

In a word, making sufficient needs analysis is a very necessary and indispensable step in ESP instruction. ESP instructors should be realistic and transparent with the client about the time and cost involved in the needs analysis and course design steps (Salas, Mercado 2013). Experience has too often proven that rushing through or even skipping over essential needs analysis steps will inevitably lead to ESP program failure and students’ bad training experiences.

4. Strategies and approaches of ESP instruction

Not all ESP is created equal. To meet specific requirements from different fields of industry, the overall success of ESP programs needs the context-based syllabus design, purposeful and flexible course delivery, and scientific assessment strategies.

4.1. Syllabus design

4.1.1. Based on needs analysis

All successful syllabus design of ESP course is based upon thorough context-specific needs analysis. ESP needs analysis is based on data drawn from multiple sources. Data collection may include interviews with professionals in the field, employers, and employees, along with observation of participants’ daily professional practice and the language tasks they are involved in, as well as examination of the language that mediates their professional activities. Rigor, relevance, and authenticity are enhanced by the use of language artifacts, which might include legal beliefs, court transcripts, audio of transcripts, and videotape of deposition statements in a course for international legal professionals (Salas, Mercado 2013). In the same sense, an ESP program for public safety officials may include meetings with local, regional, and national organizations to learn about their specific responsibilities and the actual daily routines of public safety officers. Only on the basis of needs analysis can the scientific course syllabus be designed by ESP instructors. Each course syllabus is context-specific and aims to meet specific students’ needs. In this process, ESP teachers are more than English language experts for their potential students. Actually, they must be ready to become doctors, researchers, lawyers, officers, and businessmen, etc.

4.1.2. Not overly vocabulary-driven

For those English teaching professionals new to teaching ESP, especially those who have got vast experiences in teaching English for more general purposes, there is always a misleading belief or concept: they often consider ESP as vocabulary-driven instruction. Consequently, in the process of syllabus design, they would hold the idea that the difference between a non-ESP course and an ESP course is realized through the delivery of vocabulary lists. Such extensive lists may be enhanced by putting in certain authentic materials in which ESP-specific vocabulary is presented in context, or by putting in new words into practice within the context of learners’ professional activities. In this way of syllabus design, an ESP course for technical engineers or business operators might be the same as a course directed toward any other professionals --- except for special focus on vocabulary and its use. ESP syllabus design process cannot be overly vocabulary-driven. Understanding the whole picture of communicative needs and how those needs are realized in a professional context of practice is served as the basis of reasonable syllabus design. Practitioners designing an ESP curriculum have to think both at the micro level (in terms of vocabulary, for example) and at a macro level (the professional communicative tasks, the formats or modalities of those tasks). Simply speaking, the specific professional activities are certainly featured by specific lexis and key words, but also by how those words are put into use in the certain context. The syllabus designers should pay special attention to this respect.

4.1.3. “RAFT” strategy

A big piece of ESP is identifying and prioritizing the various genres, language tasks, and modalities.
of communication that characterize a particular community of practice (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). One visual way of conceptualizing content and tasks across language modalities for a given purpose is adapting the innovative and flexible strategy known as RAFT: Role, Audience, Format, and Topic (Santa 1988). The “RAFT” strategy stresses how context determines language in use by professionals in a certain field. Factors that shape the language for specific professionals in specific fields include who is speaking to whom (role/audience); the medium of format for that interaction; and the topic of the interaction or desired outcome. Through RAFT strategy, ESP instructors designing a curriculum would like to build up the various contexts that a specific professional meets and stimulate ESP learners’ awareness of how those contexts mediate their interactions.

4.2. Course delivery

4.2.1. Be goal-directed

As to course delivery, every ESP teacher must keep in mind the goal-directed nature of ESP instruction. They commonly stress the achievement of those goals over the specific method of methods by which they are achieved. To reach the goal, ESP instructors must establish a balance that leads to a learning experience found to be fruitful and productive by all parties involved, most especially the students. To enhance the ability to achieve the goal, they should be able to resort to all kinds of instructional strategies and practices that keep in harmony with learner needs, expectations and interests. For example, many teachers in English training for general communicative purposes would try to avoid extensive use of L1 in the classroom, while in some cases, however, this use of L1 in the ESP classroom may be perfectly acceptable if the use is purposeful. An ESP class may actually support the systematic, judicious use of L1 to communicate meaning and content. Some particular instances are when it comes to the explicit learning of vocabulary or having students get familiar with content as they prepare to engage in a task for fluency development.

4.2.2. Be customized

ESP is tailor-made to address the short- or long-term professional communicative development of individuals. The course delivery are supposed to be highly customized to specific learners in specific contexts. In terms of materials, ESP practitioners have many choices in hand. Textbooks or not, it depends on how specific are the contexts in which students find themselves. It might or might not prove to be too general. After all, understanding the needs and expectations of our learners will play a vital role in determining the appropriateness of materials under consideration and arriving at the best possible choice for the course at hand (Salas, Mercado 2013). The textbooks must be in the right position to offer what learners wish to get through the ESP experience. First a list of learners’ needs should lay out by the standard needs analysis, then the textbook could be reviewed to decide to what extent it meets those needs. For the whole course delivery, a significant degree of customization is the best course of action.

Considering that we are living in a highly technological 21st century, ESP instructors should find out complementary resources on the Internet for teaching and learning to meet the needs of students. This could facilitate the customization of ESP course delivery to a certain extent. For example, if we are developing a business English course for advanced learners, we may seek out and use authentic texts and materials related to business negotiation, strategic management, effective leadership, employee motivation, and a number of other topics that may be of interest to our target learners. Whichever possible, we would maximize the opportunities provided to us by a connected world in which we are involved in virtual communities and interactions across time and space. In general, high technology and popular culture can engage ESP instruction in more creative ways to be customized to learners’ needs.

4.2.3. Be flexible

Unlike English programs for general purposes, ESP courses with many special features are too often developed in a context-specific way, which consequently makes ESP course delivery more flexible and creative. For example, the traditional semester format may not be feasible when the learners are working professionals. More flexible and targeted instruction with concrete objectives and measurable practice is more appropriate for ESP situations, for which a semester format may become a barrier. It would be helpful to offer more alternatives for learners in scheduling and in delivery format, even including online resources for additional learning and practice. What’s more, largely with adult learners in mind, ESP should also stress opportunities for self-study and practical applications (Salas, Mercado 2013). Depending on needs analysis, explicit grammar instruction may or may not be included in an ESP class. Likewise, any distinct skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing may or may not be addressed. For these and any other reasons linked to learners’ expectations and
learning outcomes, ESP teachers could make the course delivery more and more practical and flexible. The greater the flexibility, the more effective the learning experience will be to the needs of working professionals.

4.3. Assessment strategies

More often than not, assessment is considered the last step of a certain course development. However, it is commonly recognized as an important and meaningful procedure to check the outcomes of learning experience. An effective way to go about course design and assessment is to “backward plan” (Salas, Mercado 2013). That is: a syllabus may move backward from the goal of learning outcomes (final assessment in mind), and then proceed with planning detailed program of study. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), an assessment of a particular learning outcome can be of various types, thus adding relevance, interest, and choices for students as appropriate. When developing the instruments we wish to use, we must decide which skills, process, or knowledge we want to assess and then determine the ways in which student achievement can be gauged more effectively so that it leads to “the information we need to gain about the students we serve” (Bailey 1998, 2). Whatever format the syllabus takes, we stress that the assessment should be aligned to that particular structure.

Compared with general English training courses, ESP programs require a particular set of assessment strategies. ESP teaching is well known for its learner-centered and content-based approach, so is the assessment procedure. To make assessment strategies in sync with the ESP syllabus, an ESP course should not focus on a multiple-choice test about grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Instead, in ESP situations, instructors could consider more authentic assessment formats, such as language-in-use test, problem-solving tasks and performance-based activities. The assessment strategy exactly reflects the various contexts that the professional might experience. Students are put into the designated contexts to measure their capability to use language for the sorts of professional functions that will be expected of that individual. Among these strategies, one approach is to generate a series of representative professional communicative tasks from the needs analysis and provide students with multiple chances for focused practice and feedback. The examples are: a face-to-face interview, the written composition of a report or complaint, etc. Another format may focus on practice with the exemplary structure the professional might encounter, such as writing an invitation or completing a certain type of request or report specific to a professional context.

5. Conclusion

In the real situation of ESP teaching practice, many instructors have experienced some sort of disappointment and frustrations. In the survey of ESP program instruction, Salas and Mercado (2013) recounted a true story of how an ESP business English teacher took on the course with great enthusiasm. She taught as she had taught any other basic English courses and her students were excited initially but gradually stopped attending the classes. She asked why, and the responses she got was that they did not find the course relevant to their needs. Her experience is not alone. Many teachers have recognized such feelings, especially in the transition from EGP (English for General Purposes) to ESP. ESP is tailor-made to meet learner-specific needs in the application of English for their specific field of study. ESP instruction should be realized in the context-specific way. Sufficient needs analysis and scientific strategies design are recognized as the critical processes for the overall success of an ESP program. To reiterate, on the basis of sufficient needs analysis, the syllabus design should be context-based, not overly vocabulary-driven; the course delivery should be purposeful, customized and flexible; the assessment should be practical and syncretic with syllabus. In the same sense, related survey and personal experience in ESP instruction also tell us a positive ESP experience largely depends on ESP instructors’ willingness and capability to recognize learners’ needs, possibilities and their own commitments to striving to meet these specific requirements in specific contexts. With professionals’ great thoughtfulness and big efforts, ESP will continue to be an efficient and effective tool for local, regional and national development in a global era.

6. References