English for Specific Purposes

10

Helen Basturkmen

English for specific purposes (ESP) refers to the field of language teaching that aims to support learners with the linguistic needs of their study or work area, and research into language use in work or study areas. ESP instruction does not aim to develop a general linguistic competence but rather to develop the particular set of linguistic competencies that will enable learners to enter or make progress in their chosen field of study, such as economics, profession, such as accounting, or occupation, such as tour guiding. For example, instruction in English for Accounting might include a focus on the technical vocabulary and written genres used in the profession, such as financial reports. ESP instruction often groups learners in relation to their roles in target settings. For example, in teaching an English for the Heath Care sector program, learners might be divided into their specialisms, with one group receiving instruction in English for nursing and another group receiving instruction in English for pharmacists.

Needs analysis is a key course design process in ESP. Needs analysis is both a pre-course design procedure as well as a procedure used in course refinement to ensure the continuing relevance of instructional content. Analysis is typically made of communication in the target situations that learners face or will face in their study or work domain (target situation analysis, TSA) and the learners' current level of linguistic competencies in relation to the level needed for successful participation in the target situation (present situation analysis, PSA). In addition, analysis may be made of learner subjective needs and the teaching situation. The latter may include analysis of the teachers' knowledge of ESP, for example. Questionnaire and interviews are typical data collection techniques, but often these are supplemented with other techniques. For example, job shadowing might be used in a TSA in order to gain an understanding of the types of communicative events and demands related

H. Basturkmen (✉)
Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: h.basturkmen@auckland.ac.nz

to a specific role in an institution, and performance tests might be used in PSA to gauge how much learners already know and can do in relation to a particular key task in the target situation.

Although it is possible to teach ESP to learners with beginners' levels of English proficiency, most ESP courses are for learners with intermediate or advanced levels of English proficiency. Learners are most often adults or young adults. A fundamental assumption is that learners will find ESP instruction motivating because it integrates language teaching with contexts, texts and activities from their work or study area of interest. ESP courses can be devised for pre-experienced learners, that is, learners with little or no experience of the target setting, during-experience learners, who are taking the ESP course at the same time they are working or studying in a specific field and post-experience learners, who have experience of working or studying in a field but are no longer doing so.

The Research Questions

1. How do the language learning needs of pre-experience and during- or post-experience ESP learners compare in any given setting?
2. How motivating do learners find ESP courses?
3. How do learners perceive their own language learning needs for any given target setting?
4. What are the relative values of different needs analysis techniques?
5. What is the technical vocabulary of any given workplace?
6. What kinds of knowledge and teacher education do ESP teachers require?
7. How do ESP teachers collaborate with subject specialists?
8. To what extent does ESP teaching draw on learning activities and tasks from target study and work areas?
9. In what ways can ESP instruction support learners in exploring their own needs and language use in target settings?
10. How do teachers draw on findings from needs analysis in ESP curriculum development?

Suggested Resources

Gollin-Kies, S. Hall, D.R. & Moore, S.H. (2015). *Language for specific purposes*. **Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan**.

Language for Specific Purposes is an up-to-date, general introduction to ESP. It traces the history of ESP and describes current trends in teaching and research. The book has four main parts. Part One provides an overview of key concepts and issues in the field and identifies a number of trends that impact on the development of

ESP. Part Two concerns ESP teaching. Part Three concerns ESP research and it provides information about research as well as summaries of studies on particular topics, such as, case studies in needs analysis. Chapter 12 suggests a range of research projects that readers might wish to pursue and for each project outlines a research question, problem and research procedure. Part Four lists key literature, online sites and associations relevant to the interests of ESP researchers and practitioners.

Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes.* **Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan**.

This book examines how teachers devise ESP courses. The first part of the work examines three topics in course design, analyzing needs, investigating specialist discourse and developing a curriculum, with reference to the ESP literature. The second part reports four cases studies that were based on interviews with course developers. In the interviews, the course developers, who were highly experienced ESP teachers, were asked about the processes and procedures they had used in developing a particular ESP course. Two of the cases are work-related (an English for medical doctors' course and an English for new police recruits course) and two of the cases are study-related (an academic literacies course in Visual Communication and an English for thesis writers course). The case studies bring to light the steps the teachers had taken to develop their courses as well as the rationale behind their decision-making.

Brown, J. D. (2016). *Needs analysis and English for specific purposes.* **London: Routledge**.

This work provides a guide to the theory and practice of needs analysis in ESP. It provides practical tools and a stage-by-stage process that teachers can use. Part One, Getting ready to do an ESP needs analysis, provides definitions, introduces the various type of analysis that can be conducted and discusses how to select and sequence data collection procedures. Part Two, Doing the ESP needs analysis, focuses on strategies for collecting data and ways of analyzing and interpreting data. Part Three, Using the needs analysis results, discusses how results can be used in curriculum design and provides guidance on how to report a needs analysis project.

Serafini, E.J., Lake, J.B. & Long, M.H. (2015). Needs analysis for specialised learner populations: Essential methodological improvements. *English for Specific Purposes, 40*, 11–26.

This first part of the article critically examines research methodologies and the development of research design in needs analysis in ESP by means of an analysis of reported needs analysis studies in two periods of time, 1984–1999 and 2000–2014. For each period, the authors identify positive trends or improvements and less positive trends in the design and reporting of needs analyses. This provides a close analysis of developments and highlights limitations in methodologies. The second part of the article reports a needs analysis study conducted by the writers to

investigate the English language needs of non-native English speakers working in a national research institution in the US. The study illustrates methodological rigor in ESP needs analysis research design and reporting.

Kirkgöz, Y. & Dikilitaş, K. (Eds.) (2018). *Key issues in English for specific purposes in higher education.* **Switzerland: Springer**.

This volume provides a set of research–based studies on ESP in higher education settings in a diverse set of contexts. It aims to shed light on the range of ESP-related practices and issues at this point in time. In the opening chapter, the editors provide background information about the current situation. They describe how ESP has become a fast track area of growth due in large part to the increasing prevalence of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) globally and they distinguish key terms, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and EMI. The first main part of the book includes studies related to ESP materials development, the second part studies concerning ESP teacher development and the third part studies concerning curricular issues. The final part of the work focuses on perspectives of ESP, CLIL or EMI in different countries.

Helen Basturkmen teaches on the MTESOL program at the University of Auckland, where she convenes courses on ESP and Discourse Analysis. Her research describes language use in specific settings and draws on discourse analytic approaches. She also conducts research into the design features of ESP/EAP instruction. Her articles regularly appear in international journals, including *System, Language Teaching, The Modern Language Journal, Applied Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes Journal, Journal of English for Academic Purposes, Language Awareness, Language Learning and TESOL Quarterly.* She has written two books on ESP (Routledge, 2006; Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and edited the four-volume work English for Academic Purposes in the Critical Concepts in Linguistics Series (Routledge, 2015).