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Teacher Training in ESP: A Historical Review

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown in leaps and bounds in the last decade. Apart from Engineering, Business, Law, Medicine, Aviation, etc, many other disciplines have come under the academic umbrella of ESP. However, this growth has not been adequately supported by teacher preparation. Though the first formal and established ESP training programme was started in the 1970s, yet the dearth of trained ESP teachers has been a problem for the whole world since then. In the above light, the present paper presents a historical overview of training programmes in different countries like the USA, the UK, China, Saudi Arabia, Chile, Malaysia, Thailand, Romania, Cote de Ivory, etc for ESP teachers. The article is divided into three sections: the first part concentrates on beginning of training programmes with J. R. Ewer; the second section covers the post-Munby period; and the final section focuses on research on ESP teacher training undertaken during the period from the arrival of 'post-method' era to as late as 2009. The aims and main components in the programmes are highlighted while maintaining developmental connections between them.

Key words: ESP, EST, General English, review, teacher training programme

Introduction: Teacher Training in ESP- A Neglected Need

The role of ESP teachers has been viewed as something different from that of general English teachers. ESP teachers need to be equipped with a variety of skills other than teaching methodology. Such skills may include some basic knowledge of their students' subject area (e.g., Electronics and Tele Communication Engineering, Business, Law, Aviation, etc), course designing, materials production, organizational skills, soft skills, etc. In most educational contexts, ESP is often found to be taught by teachers who may have started their career as General English teachers. Barring a few, most countries do not have well-established pre-service training programmes for prospective ESP teachers. It is really surprising that policy makers and curriculum designers have not taken ESP teacher education very seriously though demand for courses in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) has been growing very fast. Considering the fact that Ewer, the founder of first formal teacher training programme for ESP (EST) teachers started his programme in Chile in the mid 1970s, the spread of teacher training in ESP can be regarded as an unbelievably slow process. A close look at the major training programmes across the world offers a very clear picture of the whole scenario. The present paper aims at doing the same in the following three sections.

J. R. Ewer and the Great Beginning

Since ESP as a discipline began in the form of EST, the early training programmes were exclusively meant to train English teachers in engineering and technological institutions. In 1943, William Lynch talked about the problems encountered by English teachers in engineering colleges in his article 'Freshman English Responsibilities in Engineering Colleges'. But the article never mentioned the training needs of teachers. It was only in the mid 1970s when the first formal training programme was established by J. R. Ewer in Chile. Even today, most teacher educators/ trainers would agree with Ewer that a training programme for EST teachers should "at least reduce the teachers' difficulties to manageable in-service proportions and lead to a substantial improvement in the efficiency of EST courses" (Ewer, 1976). Ewer's programme at the University of Chile consisted of four areas. The first of these is concerned with "filling in the

students' conceptual vacuum." by making teachers think and understand the basic concepts about scientific texts. In the second stage "an introduction to the special language features of EST" based on "an examination and analysis of actual scientific texts" and "selected material from EST textbooks and locally produced materials" is given to the trainees. The next stage concerns methodology of teaching EST in which micro-teaching and practice teaching form parts. The last part of the programme "is devoted to a brief consideration of how to organize and administer an EST programme."

Post-Munby Times: Functional and Communicative Approaches to Training

The publication of John Munby's 'Communicative Syllabus Design' (1978) led to changes in language teaching methodology. The functional and communicative properties of language were emphasized. This movement, in turn, influenced the perception and design of language teacher training programmes across the globe. Programme designers started considering learners' needs, learning styles, preferences, etc while finalizing components for training modules. Teachers were trained and encouraged to design communicative materials that could make classes interactive.

Munby's 'needs analysis' had its immediate impact on ESP research. C. J. Kennedy (1979) proposed a communicative approach to training while advocating that ESP teacher-training programme should consider factors like "level, experience and motivation of the teacher-trainee"; the "situation for which he is being trained"; imbuing confidence in trainees; teaching them to follow a communicative approach and teach with reference to students' subject areas; provide practice in designing and using materials; and training them to use suitable methodology for ESP and text-based activities.

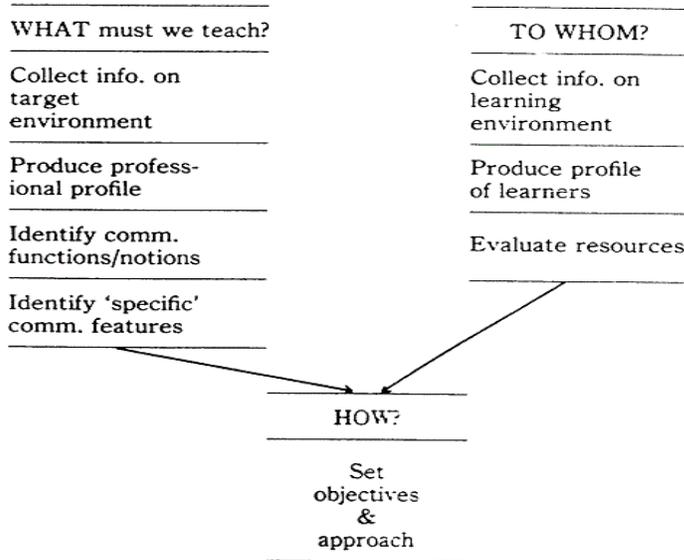
Raising a question over subject specific materials, Hutchinson and Waters (1980) refused to accept an ESP practitioner as a '*creature apart*', different from other English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals. They emphasized on exploring "the common ground between the ESP curriculum and 'General English'". It implies that they wanted ESP teacher training programmes to focus on sensitizing teachers towards the needs of their students. But the rejection of professionally and academically relevant materials does not seem to go with their suggestion of sensitizing ESP teachers towards the needs of their students in training programmes.

Pauline Robinson (1981) analyzed Ewer's programme at Chile, and reiterated the fact that ESP teacher training programmes should aim at changing the attitude of teachers towards science and 'some of the other subject specialisms'. She stated that it should be mandatory for teachers to be trained in producing "language materials from a subject specialist text" and understanding "specialist text", and doubted whether people who designed and administered ESP teacher training programmes were themselves trained in ESP (which may stand true in Indian context even today). Her idea about orientation courses may be effective even for training present generation of prospective ESP teachers with *general academic background* in materials writing and ESP teaching.

In the meanwhile, some researchers like McDonough (1984) tried to redefine the concept of training (for ESP teachers) by making its scope a little broader. He thought "'training' is intended to be taken here in a wide sense, to mean ESP programmes of whatever duration which train particular classroom skills, as well as those concerned with teacher education and preparation in general." He supported Widdowson's view that the trainees should be made "aware of the whole language teaching process and the wider pedagogic context and significance of his operations." The aim was to bring in theory and practice together to training programmes. He also emphasized that a training programme should address the teachers' needs in that particular context. He compared ESP teacher training programmes in Chile and China and revealed that there are a few similarities as well as differences, and consequently agreed with T. Trimble and L. Trimble (1983) while warning against "unthinking transfer of Ewer's course to other situations."

While designing a "minimal teacher-training for ESP" for ESP teachers in Turkey, Giuseppina Cortese (1985) gave priority to areas like "basic information on ESP; procedures for course design; criteria for evaluating course materials; criteria for selecting or establishing classroom procedures" in that. She paid attention to 'time-constraints' and stuck to providing "trainees with some usable core notions in ESP." She suggested the following model as the basis to the programme:

Figure 1: Cortese's model



Cortese’s attempt was an improved and holistic one when compared to the previous programmes. It was the beginning of the modern versions of short-term orientation or refresher programmes arranged by universities for in-service college teachers.

By 1985, a few training programmes for EST teachers had been developed on the basis of analysis of local needs of teachers. Swales (1985) maintained that such programmes could not be called *isolationist* as they might help design new programmes in other contexts. He laid emphasis on “developing realistic objectives for shorter in-service training programmes” and transfer of necessary professional skills from “more experienced to less experienced practitioners.

Swales’ view was echoed by Peter Strevens (1985) who insisted that General English teachers should seek assistance and get training from the ones with “necessary experience”. He felt there was a need to familiarize them with the “outlook and attitudes of science” and help them bridge “the gap between the learner’s knowledge of the specialist subject and the teacher’s ignorance of it.” Strevens supported the idea of including collaborative-teaching as a part of teacher training programmes.

From teacher training, the focus started shifting to training course design. Such an attempt was made by Allan Waters (1987) which, he said, “stems from work done since 1984 at King

Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Thonburi (Thailand).” The training programme consisted of the following:

- Linguistic Description and EST
- Teaching Techniques in EST
- Language and Study Skills
- Psychology of Language Learning
- Research Methods in EST
- Scientific and Technical Information
- Teaching and Evaluation in EST
- Courses and Materials Design
- Classroom Language
- EST Teaching Development
- Computer Application in EST
- Teacher Training

The programme, however, did not take into account needs analysis and the basics of language teaching in general as in many cases teachers might have no background to English teaching methodology and materials.

Like Allan Waters, Edwina S Carreon (1988) reported about an ESP programme introduced in De La Salle University (DLSU), Manila in 1975. In an extensive review on the thirteen years history of the programme, she reported that the teachers often lacked “a basic understanding of the principles of second language teaching”. The emphasis was on accepting this basic understanding as a *crucial concern* in teacher training programmes. She emphasized on “the acquisition of a solid background in basic linguistics and the principles and practices of second

language learning and teaching” and believed that such a background might lead to better teaching. In a similar context, Tan Soon Hock and Cecilia Goon Ai Chin (1988) took up a project on ESP teachers at University of Malaya to find out what teachers think about their training needs. Hock and Chin came up with four different combinations in terms of qualifications for ESP teachers, and among which they considered “content training with knowledge in applied linguistics and methodology” as *an ideal combination*. Nonetheless, they warned against overemphasis on teacher training while recommending that ESP teachers should be exposed to “sufficient amount of content” necessary for teaching the course.

A. Crocker (1981) looked into a very different aspect of training and opined “if the focus of interest in the LSP course is on outcomes, then one might expect more attention to be paid to training LSP teachers in ways of helping guarantee the achievement of those outcomes, that is to methodology in its broadest sense.” This view belongs to a transitional period when there were debates going on regarding whether there exists anything called ‘ESP methodology’, one that is different from that of General English.

In the late 1980s, there were a few ESP teacher training programmes in China. While reporting ESP research in China, Margaret Van Naerssen (1988) suggested that training programmes for teachers handling EST should “include training in small-scale needs assessment research methodology and translation of these findings into ESP course design.” This was an important development in the sense that it advocated inclusion of needs analysis and how to use it in ESP course design as parts of training.

The Post-Method Era

By 1990s, there could be seen a movement in English language pedagogy that saw problems with prescription of a particular method of teaching. During this ‘Post-Method’ era, brighter possibilities were found with using more than one method or approach in even a single class. The myth of ‘best method’ was completely rejected and teachers were encouraged to be learner and learning friendly in every possible way. This change had its effects on teacher training in ESP.

Sorin Baciu and Elena Savu (1996) took up a case study of a training programme organized by British Council at the Bucharest Polytechnic University, Romania in the year 1991. It was an in-

service programme covering “curriculum perspective, appropriate methodology assessed against classroom practice in given home teaching situations to reflections on the relationship between language study and pedagogy, content of teaching materials in conjunction with teaching strategies, etc.” Though programme consisted more or less of discrete items of *training*, there was a conscious attempt made towards training teachers and enabling them to analyze the needs of learners and preparing them in local context. The effect of post-method thinking was very evident in the approach of the programme designers.

A sound attempt was made by Peter Master (1997) to bring in the concept of *education to practice* though it was proposed by Widdowson a few years ago. While talking about ESP teacher education in the USA, Master (1997) mentioned that ESP practitioners need *content-based instruction*. According to him an ideal ESP training programme (MATESOL) should include the following:

- General TESOL training
- History and development of ESP
- Major subdivisions of ESP
- ESP skills (e.g. oral presentation, writing, reading, grammar, etc.)
- ESP materials assessment and development
- ESP curriculum
- ESP assessment and evaluation
- ESP administration
- In-depth focus in at least one area of ESP (e.g. EST, EPP, socio-cultural ESP).

(Master, 1996: p. 36 in *Teacher Education for LSP*)

Peter Master’s proposed programme took into account different aspects of teaching including specialization in one field and administration which had often been neglected. But Ron Howard’s

(1997) took it a step forward and made it more organized in the UK. The following were the components of most ESP teacher education programmes in the country:

- Text/discourse analysis
- Linguistic varieties
- Description of modern English
- Lexical studies
- Methodology
- Course/syllabus design
- Materials production
- Needs analysis
- Testing
- Classroom research
- CALL/Ed. Tech.
- ELT management
- Self-access
- Subject specialist studies
- Teacher development
- Computational linguistics
- Psycholinguistics
- Teaching literature

(Howard, 1996: p. 53 in *Teacher Education for LSP*)

Tony Dudley-Evans (1997) adopted a very different approach to teacher training. He brought together different arguments often raised during discussions on teacher training in ESP in the form of questions:

- (1) Does LSP have its own theory? Should we teach this theory if it exists?
- (2) Has LSP developed its own methodology?
- (3) How important is text analysis (genre and discourse analysis) to LSP teachers?
- (4) Is a knowledge of subject content and disciplinary culture important for the LSP teacher?
- (5) How important is an awareness of cultural differences to the LSP teacher?

(Dudley-Evans, 1996: p. 58 in *Teacher Education for LSP*)

According to him, an LSP (Language for Specific Purposes)/ ESP teacher training should concentrate on needs analysis in the context for which the students are prepared; and developing an awareness of the disciplinary culture and cross-cultural communication. In addition, the focus should be on “deficiency analysis, language audits, means analysis and genre analysis”.

Rejecting the training in special methodology, he supported training a teacher in discourse and genre analysis and added that overemphasis on any of them may lead to *prescriptive* teaching and suppression of *individual voice*.

Whereas most of the experts talked about certain common components that should be included in ESP teacher training programmes, Keith Richards (1997) tried to draw attention towards what he thought a neglected area, i.e., “the target situation of the ESP teacher”. He found the concept of training teachers with a few selected skills very *narrow* and preferred Widdowson’s (1983) idea of *education* over that. He wanted the ESP teachers to be trained in cultural sensitivity, taking up investigation into the process of learning, consideration of professional lives and beliefs of the ESP teachers, the context in which the teachers are expected work and attending individual needs of students and collaborative teaching.

It has already been discussed why ESP teacher training has been neglected in most parts of the world though the demand for such courses is increasing in leaps and bounds. In such a situation, what Tsai-Yu Chen (2000) suggested sounds valid. In a research and discussion note, he proposed self-training for ESP teachers through action research. With all the respect for the good intentions of Mr Chen, this strategy may still not work with teachers who lack vigorous motivation to grow professionally. This proposal may further be found to be impracticable in contexts like Africa and India where most ESP teachers do not have much support from management and access to self-training materials.

In a linguistically challenging context, Dr. Zoumana Kone (2007), a teacher trainer in Cote d'Ivoire managed to implement a successful pre-service training programme for General English teachers who aspired to teach ESP. Kone targeted what Tim Boswood and Alison Marriott (1993) called "the intersecting modes of professional discourse which operate in a given ESP context". The course had a modular approach and continued for twenty weeks with eight hours per week classroom schedule. The objectives of the programme were to provide the trainees with knowledge of Applied Linguistics and ESP; the opportunity to design and evaluate materials; and to teach the trainees how to evaluate materials available in the market, assess the needs of the students and design courses for them accordingly. Lectures, discussions, workshops, peer teaching, etc were the approaches used by Kone. This was one of the few ESP teacher training programmes in the world that was holistic as well as extensive in nature.

In one of the most happening places for ESP in current times, i.e., Saudi Arabia, Abdulkarim Al Nujaidi and Phil Dexter (2007) conducted a training programme for ESP teachers organized by British Council. Their focus was on the need of *subject knowledge* for teachers; *learner-centred approach*; understanding methodology; and finding *practical classroom solutions*. The training package included the following components:

- Communicative approaches – theory & practice
- Approaches to ESP & materials development
- Learner Centred vs Teacher Centred teaching

- Lesson planning and supplementing the course book
- Multi-level and Mixed Ability – challenges and solutions
- E-learning
- Classroom practices – the role of the mother tongue
- Course feedback

Meanwhile, Functional Academic Literacy (FAL) started being considered as a key to success for ESP teacher. Bekir SAVAS (2009) was perhaps the first one to make such a claim.

Emphasizing on content-based instruction, he opined that knowledge of the content areas that the students belong to is a mandatory thing for every ESP teacher. Thus, training of ESP teachers should be different from that meant for General English teachers as the later often concentrates on teaching linguistic knowledge and aim at developing in teachers “a thoughtful and intelligent way of looking at the world, a willingness and ability to learn, having some knowledge of the academic world, the ability to work well in a team, the ability to listen to and motivate his/her students, highly developed critical thinking and the ability to convey this to his/her students”. In addition, Bekir also prioritized *context, authentic materials, learner-centred classrooms, etc* (Stryker & Leaver, 1993). It may be an extremely challenging task to equip ESP teachers with the above mentioned skills in a single training programme. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the specific nature of training with an all-inclusive approach could form basis to developing more effective ESP teacher training programmes in future.

Conclusion

Researches on training for ESP teachers have not been extensive. From whatever studies have been undertaken, it can be concluded that such training is highly context-specific and time-bound, and thus, should be designed on the basis of the needs of the teachers under focus. It is impossible to cover all the teacher training programmes in ESP/ EST that have happened and been happening in the present review. The effort has been to focus on only the important developments in the field.

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