

A Survey on the Efficiency of ESP Teachers in Iranian Universities

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Abstract

The present research was conducted to compare the efficiency of 3 groups of ESP instructors: content teachers, language teachers, and professional ESP teachers. The main question was aimed to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the 3 mentioned groups of ESP teachers and if there was, who was more qualified to teach ESP. To find the answer, a questionnaire was developed by the researchers, with an acceptable reliability and validity. The questionnaire was distributed to 135 students in several universities. The obtained results revealed that there was a significant difference between the 3 groups of teachers. Content teachers gained the least score, while language teachers and professional ESP teachers were located in the same subset and gained the highest score. It was concluded that language instructors and professional ESP teachers were more qualified to teach ESP.

Key terms: ESP, EAP, evaluation, content teachers, language teachers, professional ESP teachers

Introduction

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 4) define English for specific purposes (ESP) as courses having several absolute and variable characteristics. Absolute characteristics include: (a) ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner, and (b) ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves; ESP is centered on language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. On the other hand, variable characteristics consist of: (a) ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines, (b) ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English, (c) ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation; it could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level, and (d) ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

The teaching of ESP has generally been seen as a separate activity within English language teaching (ELT), and ESP research as an identifiable component of applied linguistic research. Dudley-Evans and St. John argue that for some of its teaching, ESP has developed its own methodology, and its research clearly draws on research from different disciplines in addition to applied linguistics (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

As English is increasingly accepted as the “lingua franca” in different areas of profession internationally, many learners of English want to learn the language specifically in their particular fields. As a result, the demand for ESP is growing rapidly, particularly in EFL countries where English is used for instrumental goals. To jump on the bandwagon of globalization, English learners need to possess a good command of English. That explains why more and more colleges and universities around the world have been attempting to improve the English performance of their students. To that end, the ESP approach seems to provide a

promising substitute to the much criticized EGP (English for General Purposes) practice (Tsao, 2008).

Good and qualified teachers are vital for efficient functioning of educational systems and for improving the quality of learning. Research supports this notion that a good teacher and actions to be taken on his part in the classroom play a vital role in triggering effective and efficient learning on the part of the students (Markley, 2004). Teachers also have a fundamental role in their learners' academic achievement and their quality can highly influence student outcomes (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijse & Robinson, 2004; Lasley II, Siedentop & Yinger, 2006; Rockoff, 2004).

English language teachers are by no means an exception and their vital role in effective language learning cannot be ignored. Special attention must be paid to this link between teachers and learners in countries like Iran where language learning occurs chiefly in formal classroom situations (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007), and teachers as the main source of language input to students, impinge directly on their learning experiences (Babai Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009).

Although successful teachers in general may share some characteristics, there are certain qualities that fluctuate among them depending on the subject matter they teach. Some researchers argue that it is the nature of the subject matter that makes language teachers different from teachers of other fields (Hammadou & Bernhar, 1987). Some others even go beyond this and claim that miscellaneous subject matters are not the only distinction between teachers of various subjects (Borg, 2006). Rather, a teacher's beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions about teaching and teacher efficacy boil down to the way he/she understands and organizes instruction (Chakon, 2005). It is also important to investigate the perceptions of learners about learning and teaching. Their beliefs about language learning seem to have obvious relevance to understanding their expectations of the course, their commitment to the class, as well as providing them with the opportunity to be successful and satisfied with their language learning program (Horwitz, 1988). Moreover, investigation of the student beliefs about different behaviors in the language classroom is beneficial in informing teachers about different types of learners that need to be catered for (Babai Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Cotterall, 1999).

There are three kinds of ESP teachers in Iranian universities: EFL teachers, content teachers, and professional ESP teachers. There is an unresolved debate on which of the three types is the most effective one in this context. Many studies have already been conducted to compare EFL teachers and content teachers, like Maleki (2008), Rajabi, Kiani, and Maftoon (2011), but there are few studies which have compared EFL teachers, content teachers, and professional ESP teachers, such as Sherkatolabbasi (2012). The present research attempted to reveal which type of the three ESP teachers was more preferred by ESP students.

Literature Review

Rajabi et al. (2011) in a research intended to compare and contrast Iranian English major ESP instructors with their subject-matter counterparts in terms of their beliefs and classroom practices in ESP classes. The results revealed that theoretically a large and wide gap existed between English major and subject-matter ESP teachers while practically this difference was very slight (Rajabi, et. al, 2011).

Maleki (2008) conducted an experiment to find out who was better qualified for the job: the EFL teacher or the specialist in the field. Analysis of the results showed that the EFL teacher's class scored higher in every aspect of the final achievement test, and students expressed greater satisfaction with EFL teacher's class than the competing class. Therefore, Maleki strongly

recommended that ESP courses be taught by EFL teachers rather than specialists in the field and those specialists interested in teaching English should attain the necessary qualifications.

Ahmadi (2008) conducted a research about who should teach ESP. This research was conducted to study the views of the heads of language department (LDs) and the heads of discipline-specific departments (DSDs) as well as those of students in some ESP classes in six medical universities during the academic year 2006-2007. According to the data gathered, though most vice-deans and almost all heads of language departments (LDs) tended to assign ESP classes to the teachers of LDs, about 50% of the heads of discipline- specialist departments (DSDs) believed that these courses should be taught by subject-specialist teachers. The students of ESP classes believed that in teaching ESP courses, LD teachers are more qualified than discipline-specialist teachers. From the six questions posed to 176 students about the different capabilities of ESP teachers, LD teachers gained 1515 positive points while the points gained by discipline-specialist teachers was just 1331.

Sherkatolabassy (2012) compared three kinds of ESP teachers, and concluded that professional ESP teachers are the most effective ESP teachers and content teachers are the least effective ones, according to their students.

All in all, due to the significance of ESP especially in countries like Iran in which English is mainly used for academic purposes, the importance of evaluating contexts in which ESP is taught is completely obvious. As Wong (2011) mentions, it is the efficient teacher who generates students' learning, growth and achievement. The controversies referred to above provided incentive for the present researchers to pose the following research question and try to find an answer to it: Is there a difference among the three groups of ESP instructors at Iranian universities, including content teachers, EFL teachers, and professional ESP teachers, in terms of their efficiency?

Correspondingly, the following hypothesis was formulated to be tested by the results of the study: No significant difference can be found among the three groups of ESP teachers at Iranian universities including EFL teachers, content teachers and professional ESP teachers, regarding their efficiency.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were 47 students attending EFL teachers' classes, 45 students attending subject matter teachers' classes and, 43 students attending professional ESP teachers' classes. They were taking an ESP course as a required course as part of their B.A. program, and they were studying at several universities in the north of Iran.

Material

A 40-item questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. Its validity was confirmed by 3 experts in applied linguistics. The internal reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha method. The questionnaire consisted of 4 different parts: (a) English proficiency with 5 items, (b) pedagogical knowledge including 17 items, (c) organization and communication skills including 8 items, and (d) socio-affective skills including 10 items. The present researchers calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the 4 subsections; the values of four parts were 87%, 74%, 80% and 89%.

Procedure

At first, a questionnaire was adopted from Wichadee (2008). The validity of the questionnaire was checked by several experts in the applied linguistics. Next, the internal reliability of the questionnaire was calculated through a pilot study. When the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were assured, the next step began. The questionnaire was distributed to the students attending classes of the three groups of instructors. For the first group, EFL teachers, the questionnaires were given to the students of two classes in Islamic Azad University of Rasht who were taught by EFL teachers and 47 questionnaires were received.

For the second group, content teachers, the questionnaire was sent to some students of Islamic Azad University of Lahidjan via their e-mail and 15 questionnaires were received. Also the questionnaires were given to the students attending a management class in Islamic Azad University of Rasht and about 30 questionnaires returned.

And finally, for the third group, professional ESP teachers or language teachers teaching in English department of a specific faculty, the questionnaires were given to the students of medicine in the University of Guilan and 43 questionnaires were received. Having received all of the questionnaires, the researchers analyzed the data through using SPSS. In order to analyze data, one-way ANOVA, and Tukey post hoc test were used.

Results

After the data were analyzed by SPSS software, the following results were obtained.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Comparing the Efficiency Scores of the Three Groups of Teachers

Teachers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
General English teachers	47	3.81	.47	.069	3.67	3.95	2.80	4.82
Content teachers	45	3.36	.51	.076	3.21	3.52	2.25	4.43
Professional ESP teachers	43	3.71	.39	.060	3.59	3.83	2.95	4.65
Total	135	3.63	.50	.043	3.54	3.71	2.25	4.82

The mean scores obtained for the three groups of teachers were different from one another. To find out whether the differences among the mean scores were statistically significant or not, the *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column in the ANOVA table should be checked.

Table 2. ANOVA Results Comparing the Efficiency Scores of the Three Groups of Teachers

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	5.05	2	2.52	11.60	.000
Within Groups	28.71	132	.21		
Total	33.76	134			

According to the results of ANOVA, there was a significant difference between instructors in the three groups, considering their efficiency ($p < 0.05$). The Tukey post hoc test below shows where the differences among the three groups of teachers lay.

Table 3. Tukey Post Hoc Test Results Comparing the Efficiency Scores of the Three Groups of Teachers

	<i>N</i>	Subset for alpha = .01	
		1 ^a	2 ^b
Content teachers	45	3.3667	
Professional ESP teachers	43		3.7157
General English teachers	47		3.8154
<i>Sig.</i>		1.000	.570

On the basis of Tukey HSD test, the EFL teachers and professional ESP teachers were in the same subset, but content teachers were placed in a different subset. A quick look back at mean scores in the descriptive table above shows the superiority of EFL teachers and professional ESP teachers to content teachers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research question investigated the issue of whether there was a difference among the three types of instructors including language teachers, content teachers, and professional ESP teachers as well as teaching efficiency was concerned. Then a null hypothesis was proposed stating that there was no difference among the three groups of ESP instructors as far as teaching efficiency was concerned.

ANOVA results showed with 99% of certainty that there was a significant difference among ESP instructors; Tukey HSD test revealed that content teachers enjoyed less efficiency than language teachers and professional ESP teachers. Thus, it could be said that the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the hypothesis can be reformulated as follows: There is a significant difference among the three groups of ESP instructors including, EFL teachers, content teachers, and professional ESP teachers, according to their students' views regarding their efficiency.

The result of this study is in accordance with Maleki (2008) and Ahmadi (2008), who believe that there is a significant difference between EFL and content teachers. The result is also in harmony with Sajjadi and Ahmadi (2009). They conducted a survey study in which the students of ESP classes were found to believe that the EFL teachers were more qualified than content teachers to teach EMP. The result is also in accordance with Sherkatolabassy (2012) who revealed that there was a significant difference among the three groups of ESP teachers.

As the results revealed, there was a significant difference among the three types of ESP teachers, and professional ESP teachers and EFL teachers were better ESP teachers than content teachers, according to their students.

On the basis of the results, it can be claimed that language teachers are more efficient and more qualified than content teachers to teach ESP, according to students. Besides language teachers are better equipped with skills like pedagogical knowledge, organization and communication skills, and socio-affective skills, and they generally enjoy more English

proficiency. Therefore, it is suggested that ESP be instructed by EFL and professional ESP teachers, rather than content teachers.

Compared to content teachers, EFL teachers have one disadvantage. EFL teachers are not thoroughly familiar with subject-matter of the course. In order to compensate for this shortcoming, the authors suggest two solutions: first, team-teaching with a content teacher may be an appropriate solution; secondly, like many famous universities around the world, Iranian universities can train M.A. and PhD holders in the field of ESP.

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Appendix

Questionnaire:

Please score from A to E

A= strongly agree, B= agree, C=average, D=disagree, E=strongly disagree.

English proficiency:

- 1) Our instructor reads, writes, speaks and understands spoken English well.
- 2) He knows English vocabulary well.
- 3) He has good knowledge of English grammar.
- 4) He possesses extensive culture comprehension.
- 5) He has excellent accent and pronunciation.

Pedagogical knowledge:

- 6) He focuses on learning outcomes and growth, not content taught.
- 7) He uses various materials including video, audio and multimedia.
- 8) He promotes communicative language learning through activities, discussion and sharing ideas.
- 9) He creates and maintains good classroom atmosphere.
- 10) He motivates students by supporting their self-efficacy (ability to succeed).
- 11) He assesses what students have learned rationally.
- 12) He provides opportunities for students to develop language skills through working in pairs or groups.
- 13) He lets students have some control over learning process.
- 14) He promotes the students to learn English outside the classroom (for example watching UBC programs)
- 15) He avoids direct criticism of students when they make errors.
- 16) He praises students for good ideas or for their effort.
- 17) He teaches subject matter in ways that are accessible to all learners.
- 18) He provides constant feedback.
- 19) He speaks English in the classroom
- 20) He teaches English in the classroom rather than the subject (for example: science, computer & the like)
- 21) He translates the texts into Persian
- 22) He defines the new specific terms in Persian

Organization and communicative skills:

- 23) He prepares the lesson well.
- 24) He presents the content in a well-organized way.
- 25) He stresses most important points.
- 26) He uses easy language to aid students' understanding.
- 27) He speaks clearly.
- 28) He varies the speed and tone of voice due to certain situation.
- 29) He uses non-verbal behavior to solicit students' attention and interest such as speaking in an expressive way, moving, gesturing with hands or arms, maintaining eye contact, smiling etc.
- 30) He manages the time of the class well, and he does not waste the time of the class.

Socio-affective skills

- 31) He has interest in students (for example; address students by name)
- 32) He is helpful to the students in and outside classroom.
- 33) He alleviates students' anxiety in classroom.
- 34) He listens to the students' point of view.
- 35) He is approachable and friendly.
- 36) He is patient.
- 37) He has good sense of humor.
- 38) He treats students fairly and equally.
- 39) He creates a sense of mutual respect in the classroom
- 40) He is good-tempered in the classroom.

