



Key issues in English for specific purposes in higher education

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Increasing globalization and the widespread acceptance of English as the lingua franca of international politics, business and technology have led higher education institutions in many non-English speaking parts of the world to embrace English as the medium of instruction (EMI). Since language use in any domain is characterized by its distinctive vocabulary, genre, register and discourse, there has been a corresponding growth in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to equip learners with the English they need to function in their particular context. However, there are concerns regarding the state of ESP instruction—the quality of the programmes on offer, their implementation, the availability of suitable materials, teacher competence, etc.

The volume under review is a collection of eighteen essays on key issues and challenges in ESP. The three dozen contributors are drawn primarily from the fields of applied linguistics, ELT, foreign languages, teacher training and the education departments of universities from around ten countries, mostly European. Over a third of them, including the two editors, are based in Turkey. Many of the essays in the volume are small scale research studies based on the surveys of students and teachers. Some contributors have described their approach and experiences in dealing with particular challenges and elaborate how these can be of use in other settings. The essays have been divided into four sections.

Section I has four essays on “Materials design and development in ESP”. On the basis of their interviews with seventeen ESP/EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teachers at two Spanish universities, Basturkmen and Bocanegra-Valle conclude that ESP courses need to focus on specialist vocabulary and discourse features of language use in the specific discipline, and incorporate authentic texts and tasks. Stoller and Robinson demonstrate how this has been done in their ESP course for chemistry students at Northern Arizona University, USA. Quero and Coxhead, through their work on the undergraduate “English for Medical Purposes” course at Spanish medium universities in Venezuela, use a corpus-based approach

to show how high frequency discipline-specific word lists can be incorporated in ESP courses. Using the same approach, Farhady et al. discover—contrary to common perception—a significant commonality of grammatical structures across a broad range of disciplines, at least in the initial stages of ESP instruction. This leads them to propose a list of sixteen structures that can be introduced at the start of these courses.

The contributors in the second section of this volume are concerned with the low profile of ESP teachers in academia (since ESP is seen as merely serving other subjects), the absence of avenues for their professional development, and the challenge posed by their lack of in-depth knowledge of the disciplines their students belong to. The contributors suggest collaboration with the subject teachers as a way to redress some of these problems. Norton advocates an approach called “Lesson Study” while Stewart recommends a model titled “Collaborative Interdisciplinary Team Teaching” to facilitate such collaboration. Mede et al., on the basis of their research on a Civil Aviation Cabin Services programme of a private university in Turkey, emphasize that ESP teachers should be given professional knowledge through training programmes.

Er and Kirkgoz, in the first essay in the next section of the book titled “Curricular Issues in ESP”, also advocate continuous teacher education to deal with the lack of subject matter expertise which is a major challenge for ESP instructors teaching the “Aviation English for Cadets” course at the Turkish Air Force Academy. Through their own experiments in two Japanese universities, Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson describe how teachers have negotiated government policies that promote EMI in universities in ways that are practically aligned with the realities of student and teacher language proficiencies through the use of “translanguaging”. Translanguaging involves the use of two languages (in their case, English and Japanese) in pedagogic contexts. A survey of ESP courses at two state run universities in Turkey and Latvia, leads Celik et al. to the dismal conclusion that little more than basic English instruction is being delivered in these settings.

In the final section of the volume—“ESP, CLIL & EMI”—the opening essay by O’Dwyer and Atli similarly casts doubts on the EMI policy in Turkey because the authors find teacher training, curriculum development, course delivery and assessment in Turkish universities to be riddled with problems. On a different note, Dearden disputes the view that EMI has made English language teachers redundant. She contends that these teachers are needed for the successful delivery of EMI because they can support students with EAP and ESP, monitor and communicate students’ language levels to EMI academics, provide language

support to these subject specialists and share interactive pedagogy skills with them. The volume concludes with Staub's essay, in which he asserts that the crowding of the marketplace of EMI higher education has made quality assurance of EAP programs a necessity. He also demonstrates how a reduced structure of the widely accepted Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) can be used for the evaluation of an EAP program.

This volume has much to offer, not just to ESP practitioners but also to teachers of general English in India. In fact, we can readily identify with many of the problems highlighted by the contributors in ESP settings in places such as Turkey – poor institutional planning and management, overcrowded classrooms, students' lack of basic English skills, mixed ability classes, lack of appropriate materials, inadequate teacher training etc. The introduction of papers such as "Academic Writing", "Business Communication" and "Technical Writing" at the undergraduate level in general degree programmes in our universities shows the influence of ESP. However, this volume leads us to reflect that much needs to be done in the area of course design, material development and teacher training if our ESP courses are to do justice to their names.

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