

Designing Customized ESP Materials: Principles, Procedure, and Practice

Meera Srinivas

Abstract

Should ESP practitioners choose commercially published materials or design tailored materials to cater to the needs of a specific group of learners? The issue has been widely discussed in the literature, as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses focus on the needs of learners in specific language contexts. While they are not mutually exclusive choices, the paper argues that the notion of ‘specificity’ that is at the core of ESP courses warrants the use of materials that are well-aligned to the needs of the learners and the learning objectives, and this is best achieved through customized materials using authentic sources. The paper presents a principled framework for designing customized ESP materials and exemplifies it through analysis of sample units to provide practical guidance to prospective ESP course designers and practitioners.

Keywords: specificity, tailored materials, learning needs, learning objectives, ESP courses

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a ‘materials-led movement’ as materials development is an indispensable element of ESP practice. ESP courses are taught to specific communities of learners with highly specialized language needs in specific professional and academic contexts through tailor-made instructional materials that provide the language source, support, stimulus, and motivation for learning. Materials are thus the cornerstone of ESP instruction and act as “the