

ESP in Thailand: Practical English Training for Professionals

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1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is very practical for professional training. This is because ESP, of its very nature, according to Dudley-Evans, (1998), (1) is designed to meet the specific needs of a particular group of learners; (2) makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; and (3) is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. Dudley-Evans, (1998, p. 4-5) also makes the nature of ESP clearer by listing other characteristics as follows:

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English;
3. 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 for learners at secondary school level;
4. ESP courses are generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.

Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of language systems, so learners do not need to learn General English if they are qualified enough.

1.1 Classification of ESP

ESP is focused on particular groups of learners, so ESP can be divided based on types of academic and professional areas (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). (See Diagram 1.) Though English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) are in different categories, both can occur concurrently because people can work and study at the same time or students can use the target language when they start their jobs (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). In Thailand, ESP can be classified into EAP (developed and offered at Mahidol University) and EOP (arranged by the English Language Development Center). See examples in Diagram 1.

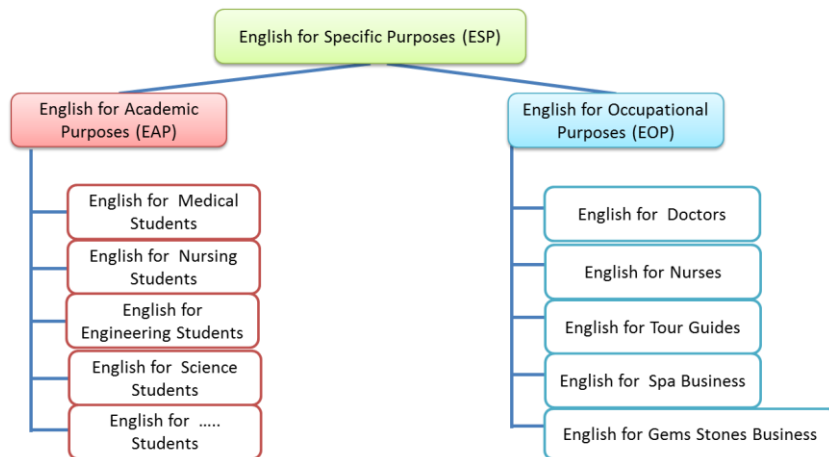


Diagram 1: Classification of ESP in Thailand by professional area

1.2 ESP Syllabus Development

The ESP syllabus should be developed systematically and scientifically based on the results of a needs analysis which to determine the goals and objectives of the language learners. Then ESP teachers select and sequence ESP materials, activities, and tasks which are suitable for those learners and matched to their needs before using them in class, employing various and appropriate language teaching methods and techniques. On-going ESP courses must be evaluated periodically so the courses can be improved and all stakeholders can be sure that ESP courses are efficient. In reality these four elements are interdependent (Dudley-Evan & St John, 1998). (See Diagram 2).

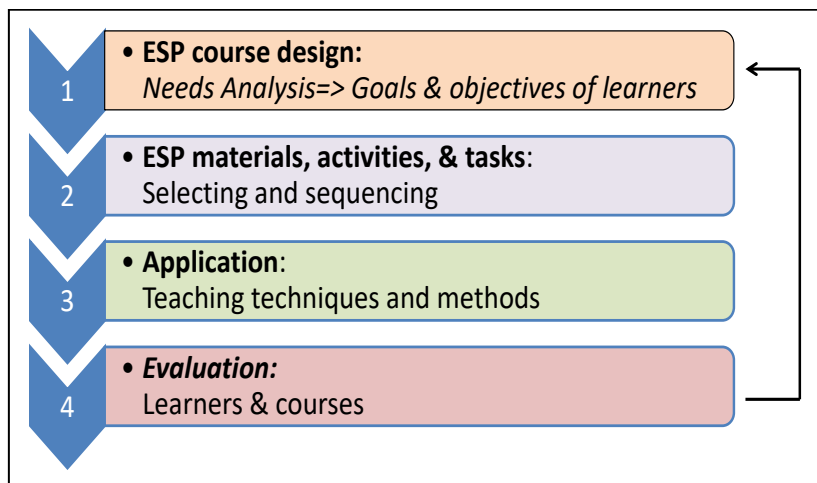


Diagram 2: ESP Syllabus Development

1.2.1 ESP Course Design

To develop an ESP syllabus, a needs analysis must be conducted first, so students' needs both for learning and for situations in which the target language will be used can be discovered, together with language or linguistic features which learners will use and their reasons for learning (Basturkmen, 2010, Hutchinson & Water, 1988; Jordan, 1997). These two categories are called academic needs and job needs, learner-centered needs and target-centered needs (Bloor, 1984), learning needs and target needs, present situation needs and target situation needs. The results of the needs analysis together with language descriptions and learning theories need to be considered. Results of the needs analysis will reveal information about the learners in terms of who, why, where, or when which learners will learn or use their target language (Hutchison & Waters, 1988; Jordan, 1997).

At present, needs analysis has been classified into three types: deficiency analysis, strategy analysis, and means analysis (Jordan, 1997; West, 1998), the focus on learners' needs is similar to that of the past, but the factual information elicited is more specific. A *deficiency analysis* investigates strengths and weakness of learners before starting their language course. A *strategy analysis* explores how learners wish to learn, so methods of learning (styles and strategies) and teaching (techniques, materials, activities, and tasks) are investigated. Through this, how learners learn their target language efficiently can be discovered. A *means analysis* examines the teaching environment of the language course, so the constraints and opportunities of the ESP journey will be discovered and a suitable teaching environment can be offered.

Apart from needs analysis, two elements, language description (language issues or subject-specific English) and learning theories (or study skills), need to be considered in designing ESP courses (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1998; Jordan, 1997). *Language description* is the way language is presented for the purpose of learning such as “structural”, “functional”, or “notional”. At the same time, “form”, “function”, and “sociolinguistics” need to be included in designing ESP courses. Importantly, the purpose of ESP courses is to train students to be able to communicate, so a variety of language in particular contexts must be presented. Thus, some ESP researchers have analyzed target language and have used the results of discourse (rhetorical) analysis to develop their ESP courses. *Learning theories in ESP* refers to “how people learn language” (Hutchison & Waters, 1987, p. 31). Researchers have described language learning strategies used by ESL and EFL learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Learning strategies are “specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more effective, more self-directed, more enjoyable and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p.8). The relationship among these three analyses is presented in Diagram 3. Bruce (2011) suggests putting theories of discourse and of language teaching and learning into the stage of formulating aims and objectives and selection and staging of course content.

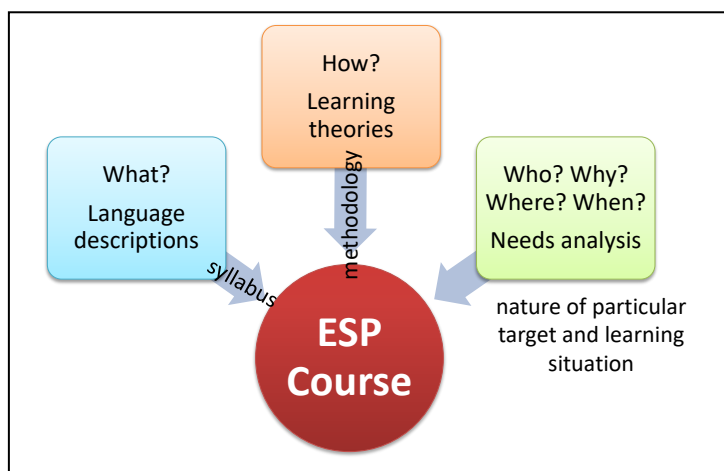


Diagram 3: Factors affecting ESP course design
Source: (Hutchison & Waters, 1987)

1.2.2 ESP Materials

ESP teachers may select, adapt, or develop materials which they will use, and they have to evaluate these materials before using them with students. Selecting existing materials according to criteria specified is the most convenient choice. ESP teachers have to define both subjective (materials requirements) and objective (materials being evaluated) criterion for analysis. (See example of analysis in Table 1.) Then they must match their criteria with the proposed book (How far does the material match the needs?) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). (See examples of subjective and objective analysis in Table 1.)

Table 1 Example of subjective and objective analysis

Subjective analysis	Objective analysis
<p>3A What kind of language description do you require?</p> <p>Should it be structural, notional, functional, discourse-based, some other kind, a combination of one or more of these?</p>	<p>3B What type(s) of linguistic description is/are used in the materials?</p>

Source: (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998, p. 100)

To adapt or develop ESP materials, ESP teachers need to consider guidelines and a model of materials design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998). Guidelines for materials design are as follows: (1) Materials must stimulate learning, i.e. interesting texts, enjoyable activities, using the existing knowledge and skills of learners, and coping contents by teachers and learners. (2) Materials help to organize the learning process. Thus, ESP developers organize clear and coherent units and produce materials which are systematic and flexible, so learners will work creatively, experience variety, and use high-order thinking skills. Tasks must be graded from easy to difficult or simple to complex. Teachers can use new techniques with these ESP materials. (3) Materials provide models of correct

and appropriate use, so the discourse of specific fields--medicine, engineering, or sports science—should be analyzed and used for each group. The materials design model consists of input, content focus, language focus, and task. *Input* may be texts, dialogues, video recordings, diagrams, or any piece of communication data (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 108). The purpose of input is to stimulate learners to focus on their learning. *Content focus* should be specific to particular groups of learners, so learning will be meaningful. *Language focus* enables learners to analyze and synthesize the language which they are learning, so they have the “chance to take the language to pieces, study how it works and practice putting it back together again” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998, p. 109). Textual grammar, “the use of items of grammar and syntax as integrated features of text” (Bruce, 2011, p. 84) should be used because the context helps students to understand more easily. A *Task* is designed and learners use it for the purpose of communication, which is the ultimate goal of language learning. To evaluate teaching materials, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggest grading materials and methodologies as well as using multimedia or high-technology materials for teaching ESP. Bruce (2011) suggests investigating the different aspects of discourse according to subject matter, by collecting texts and data using three different approaches--ethnographic, genre-based, and corpus linguistics--because texts and contexts are related and provide meaningful information (Widdowson, 2004).

Application

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) stated that “*There is no best way*; all techniques and methods are responded to a particular situation” (p.187). Applying ESP courses, teachers need to focus on a learning-centered methodology (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998). Learners must be encouraged to use background knowledge to understand, learn, and use new information, so the process of second language learning can be developed. Opportunities must be provided for learners to use the target language both in class and in real situations, so learners must do both psycho-motor activities and language learning activities because language learning is an active process. Learners must be able to make their own decisions about learning the target language. A balance between the conceptual/cognitive capacity and the linguistic level of the learners must be achieved, so learners can develop their target language as they did their first language. Learners’ existing communication strategies must be exploited so that they can learn the target language since learners know what communication is and how it is used. A positive attitude towards the language and towards language learning must be developed among the learners by arranging fun, enjoyable, interesting, and meaningful activities and tasks. Learners must think and build relationships within their groups while they are the learning target language. A problem-solving approach to solving language problems should not be used; learners should fit the new language into their matrix of knowledge and language learning. Finally, although the process of language learning may not be systematic, communication is a system so it is important that learners must internalize what they learn.

1.2.4 Evaluation

ESP courses need to be evaluated in terms of both learners and the course itself (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998).

Learner assessment reflects student's performance as well as the syllabus, activities and tasks, teaching, and tests. Assessment is classified into three types: placement tests, achievement tests, and proficiency tests, based on the purposes and functions of the tests. *Placement tests* are used for placing the students into the most suitable course based on student's needs and the tests are usually done before the course starts. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest that if "students are already proficient, no further tuition is required" (p. 146). These tests should reveal both what the learner's lack and what the potential for learning will be in the ESP course. *Achievement tests* are used for indicating how well the students have kept up with the syllabus and students may be tested at any time during the course so these tests are called teacher-made tests. *Proficiency tests* are used for assessing the ability of students to cope with the demands of a particular situation. In testing the communicative competence of learners, language knowledge and strategic competence must be emphasized (Douglas, 2000).

Course evaluation should be done continuously to determine if the existing ESP course satisfies the educational needs of the learners. In constructing an evaluation of the course, these four questions must be answered: "What should be evaluated? How can ESP courses be evaluated? Who should be involved in the evaluation? When (and how often) should evaluation take place?" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998, p. 152). Teachers may ask themselves whether the ESP course fulfills the needs of language learners in terms of learning and using language. If the answer is "No", teachers may explore the problems which "may be in the syllabus, the materials, teaching and learning techniques, the testing procedures, logistical/administrative arrangement, or the course evaluation system" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1998, p. 153). Information regarding the ESP course should be gathered from learners, ESP teachers, course sponsors, and former students. ESP courses may be evaluated during the first week, at the middle, or at the end of the courses.

Bruce (2001) states that developing ESP courses requires competent teachers because developers need to have competency relating to academic practice, which includes (1) academic contexts, (2) differences among disciplines, (3) academic discourse, and (4) personal learning, development, and autonomy. Moreover, ESP teachers need to have competency in working with EAP students because ESP teachers need to be able to (1) find and analyze students' needs and use the results of needs analysis to start their ESP courses, and (2) develop critical thinking skills and autonomy in their students. The other two competencies are related to curriculum development and program implementation.

Conclusions

ESP courses are efficient because they are designed to meet the learners' needs. Thus, needs analysis must be done before the goals and objectives for learners and learning are established. Then content, activities, and tasks are carefully selected and graded before use in the classroom. Finally, appropriate tests and evaluations must be done in order to improve the on-going courses. Thus, ESP teachers must be competent.

2. ESP in Thailand

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Thailand was first offered by the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, starting about four decades ago. ESP courses correspond to the mission and practice of this university, which is science-oriented (health sciences in particular, such as medicine, dentistry, medical technicians, pharmacy, science, physiotherapy, radiotherapy, public health, and nursing). ESP courses were developed to meet the specific needs of these bachelor level students. Later, the Department established a Master of Arts (MA) Program focused on *English for Science and Technology*, and the first group of graduate students completed their program in 1978. Therefore, this paper will describe ESP course development at one university in Thailand, namely Mahidol University, and the development of ESP in Thailand.

2.1 Developing ESP courses in Thailand

First, in this section, the development of ESP in one university will be explained. Then large changes in ESP teaching and learning will be described. Finally, suggestions will be provided.

Between 1984 and 2004, ESP courses for particular groups of learners at Mahidol University were provided; the courses were developed based on present situation needs and target situation needs. The needs of two groups of students--medical and nursing—who were majority were ascertained. The results revealed that the language skill which students used most was reading, followed by writing and listening; speaking was the least-used skill. Then the results of the needs analysis were used in designing the ESP courses.

Learners: Target learners consisted of about 3,500 first-year university students at Mahidol University. They were grouped according to their fields of study and according to their proficiency in English. The high ability group consisted of medical students. The second group comprised dentists, pharmacists, medical technicians, science students, environmental studies students, physiotherapists, and public health students. The third group included engineering students; and the last group was nursing students. The purpose of categorizing students into four groups was to meet students' needs and to facilitate course management and administration. Students were divided into groups of 45-55 in each class.

ESP Courses: The course description for each of these English courses for the four groups was the same, but in reality, the differences among the four courses were in contents and in level of difficulty. The objectives for the courses were to help students to be able to read their English textbooks for their further studies. The courses also included writing and listening, but little was done for developing speaking skills. Students learned reading strategies during the first month. Then for three months, they learned language functions which they would face when they read their English texts in their second year or later. (See topics of course instruction in Diagram 4). Students learned critical reading strategies and critical thinking from reading in their second semester. In 2002, medical teachers from the Faculty of Medicine, the parent organization, called for teaching English for communication to their medical students so the course was arranged by using a situation-based approach. English native speakers were recruited to teach one hour a week in this course.

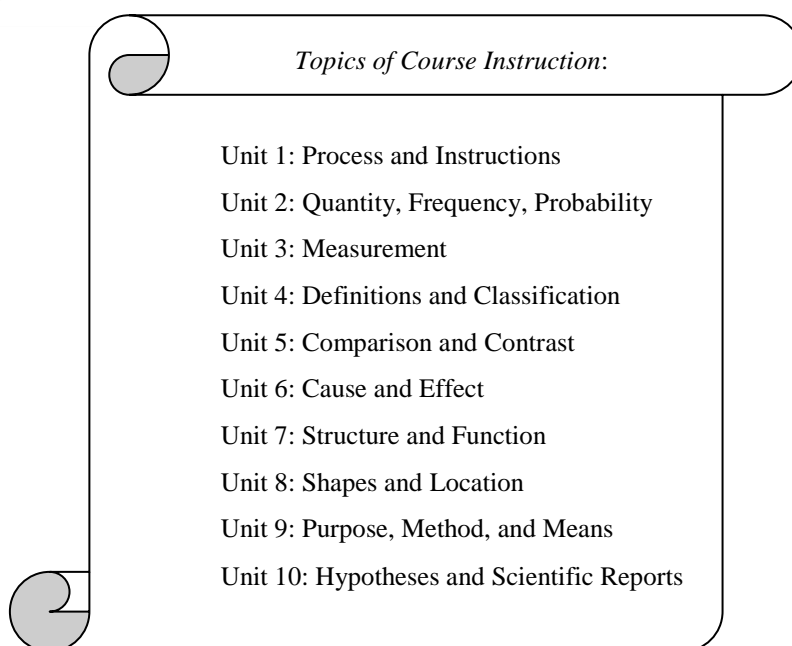


Diagram 4: Reading and Writing for First Year Medical Students, Mahidol University, 2004.

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

ESP Materials: Teachers developed the ESP teaching materials by themselves, and authentic materials were carefully selected and sequenced for use as examples of language forms and to serve as the basis for activities and tasks. The structural and functional approaches were emphasized as well as communicative English. The materials design model consisted of input, content focus, language focus, and task, based on Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Input included texts, dialogues, diagrams, and pieces of communication data. Most inputs were questions, small tests, new vocabulary, or new sentence structures. These inputs encouraged learners to focus on particular aspects of the language and provided background knowledge for their learning. The content focused specifically on particular groups of learners, and content provided meaningful communication. Thus, medicine-related content was selected for medical students, whereas, science-related content was selected for science students. The language was broken into pieces for students to analyze and synthesize, so they could study how it worked and practice it before putting it back together again. Tasks were placed before the end of each unit, so students used the language they had practiced and learned in communicating with their friends or teachers. (See examples below.)

Examples of Materials: English for Medicine

Input: Three types of input are presented to motivate students to focus on each chapter. The first section is “Word Study”, the second is a diagram or a picture related to the language focus in each chapter, followed by questions and answers.

Actions in Sequence: Instruction & Process

Section A: Word Study

Exercise: *For each of the following, circle the letter of the word or words which give the meaning of the underlined item.*

1. Before the students in the English class began to work on the communicative activity question, they were marshalled into five groups with three students in each group.

- a. instruction c. arranged in proper order
b. helped by each other d. pushed

Excerpt 1

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

Excerpt 1: The purpose of this activity is to introduce new words which students will face when they read the texts in each unit. Students learn new words and know their meaning and function, so students will be familiar with these new words and find texts easier to comprehend. Thus, teachers select about 10-12 words from the reading passage to construct this activity. To further increase students’ background knowledge before getting into the language focus and tasks, one or two more inputs are presented. (See Excerpt 2.)

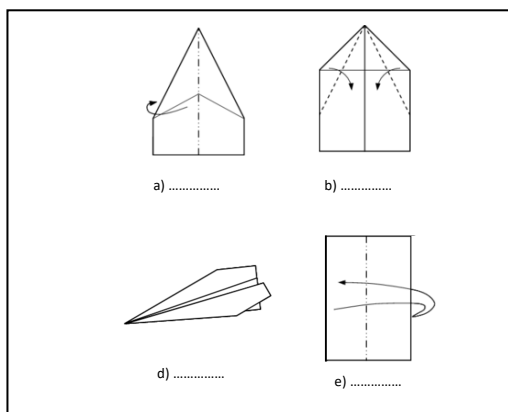
Section B:

Part I: Input

Exercise One

(A) The diagram below shows you how to make a paper dart. Number the diagrams in the correct order, starting from the first to the final stage.

A paper dart



(B) Now below are the instructions which accompany the diagrams. Rearrange them into appropriate order by numbering them.

_____ Throw the dart with the point forward.

_____ Lift the wings to make them horizontal.

_____ Fold back the same corners again.

_____ Take a piece of paper, about 30 centimetres by 20 centimetres, and fold it _____ lengthwise down the middle.

_____ Fold back the same corners to the middle fold.

_____ Fold back the same corner at one end to the middle fold.

Excerpt 2

Pictures adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper_plane

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

Excerpt 2: Teachers bring their students closer to the main focus of the unit, which is language used for giving instructions or commands. This pattern begins with *Infinitive Verb + Noun*. Students learned this pattern when they were in high school, but now they learn this pattern in a new context, which is medicine or nursing. Moreover, in the language focus section, sequence markers are explicitly given in the context, so the process context is clear for students and they know which step happens first, after, or last.

Content focus: The content selected for use in each unit depended on the language focus and field of study. For example, if Unit 7 deals with “Structure and Function”, then a language focus which is related to structure and function is presented and it needs to be related to the medical field. Content was graded from easy to difficulty, simple to complex, and shorter passages to longer ones. (See Excerpt 3.)

Language focus: Both functional and structural approaches were used in the language focus section. Now students analyze and synthesize the language which they learn, so they take the language to pieces, study its function and practice composing sentences. (See Excerpt 3.)

Whole (noun or noun phrase)	Verb Phrase	All parts must be named (noun or noun phrase)
Subject	consist of be composed of be made up of comprise	Object
<p>A cigarette <u>consists of</u> tobacco, paper, and a filter.</p> <p>The respiratory tract <u>is composed of</u> the nose, the mouth, the pharynx, the trachea, and the lungs.</p> <p>The pharynx <u>is made up of</u> the nasopharynx, the oropharynx, and the laryngeopharynx.</p> <p>One week <u>comprises</u> seven days.</p> <p>Excerpt 3, p. 113</p> <p>Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). <i>Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students</i>. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.</p>		

Excerpt 3: After students are familiar with new vocabulary and sentence patterns which are given in the language focus section, students see that the language is broken into small pieces according to their use in the sentence (Subject-Verb-Object).

Task: Two types of tasks are offered for students: writing at the sentence level and reading comprehension. To practice writing sentences using the pattern in the language focus students learn in each unit, information is given and students use it to construct sentences. Two tasks from Unit 6: Cause and Effect are shown below. (See Excerpt 4.)

D. Write cause and effect statements using the data given and the word or words in quotation marks.

1. Use “cause”

A: Polluted air has been inhaled constantly.

B: The incidence of lung disorders has increased.

10. Use “be due to”

A: X-ray technicians have been excessively exposed to radiation.

B: Leukemia has occurred among many of them.

Excerpt 4, p. 100

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

Excerpt 4: Students use the knowledge which they have just acquired to practice writing. This writing is done in class, so they can ask the teacher if they do not understand.

Students have the chance to practice a lot of reading comprehension because three reading passages are provided in each unit, selected from authentic materials such as textbooks, ABC News, CNN, *Scientific American*, or a local newspaper. The length of the reading texts is about 500-800 words. Then teachers constructed exercises for each passage, and these exercises covered guessing the meaning of words from context, referent terms, answering comprehension questions, finding main ideas or details, responding to inference questions, and completing a diagram. Most are multiple choice questions. (See Excerpt 5.)

Reading Passage 2

High-tech help for deaf kids
Singapore subsidises “bionic ear”
for the hearing-impaired
Alexaolesen, Singapore, AP
1 Bangkok Post, October 2, 2002

5 At lights-outs for three years-year-old Naomi Koh, her mother tiptoes into her room and takes the magnetic receiver off her skull, cutting her radio connection to the world of sound.

By day, the little girl hears very much like the other children in her pre-school class, even though she was born profoundly deaf, or with less than 20 percent normal hearing ability. With the help of a cochlear implant, sometimes referred to as a “bionic ear”, she has learned to hear and speak.

.....

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A. Read the passage “High-tech help for deaf kids” and choose the best answer for each question.

1. By what means can Naomi Koh learn to hear and to speak?

- a. with a bionic ear c. with sign language
- b. with a hearing aid d. with television captions

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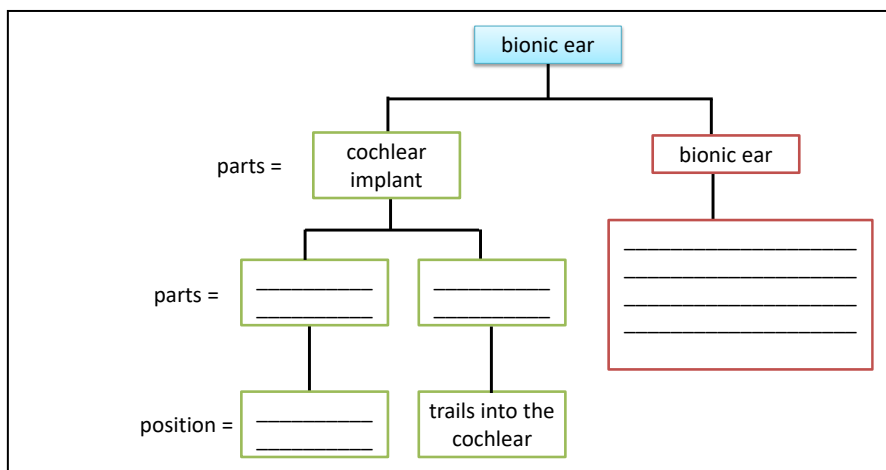
.....

9. What does “some of them” refer to in lines 42 and 43?

- a. auditory specialist c. deaf adults
- b. hearing aids d. implants

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

B. Read the passage “High-tech help for deaf kids” and complete the following diagram.



Excerpt 5, p. 123-125

Source: Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University (2003). *Reading & Writing Skills for First Year Medical Students*. Bangkok: Rittisri Printing.

Excerpt 5: Students read a long text and check their comprehension by doing exercises. Some of these reading texts and excises are taken from old examinations written by teachers. A diagram is provided for students to synthesize what they comprehend from their reading texts because the reading texts are rather long. Students should find key information and be able to recall it when they want to use it.

Methodology: Teachers had the freedom to select or combine teaching techniques and methods for teaching their students in class. Moreover, the materials themselves lead teachers to a learner centered and learning-centered methodologies. I myself combined teaching techniques and methods in my teaching. For example, apart from learner-centered and learning-centered methodologies, I used knowledge sharing, social responsibility, and constructivist approaches in my course by using project-based learning or games and simulation for learning. The core value of the university, Thai educational policy, and new trends in learning were also considered and integrated in my teaching. One of my projects: *Sharing English Knowledge to Communities* is provided as an example. (See diagram 5.)

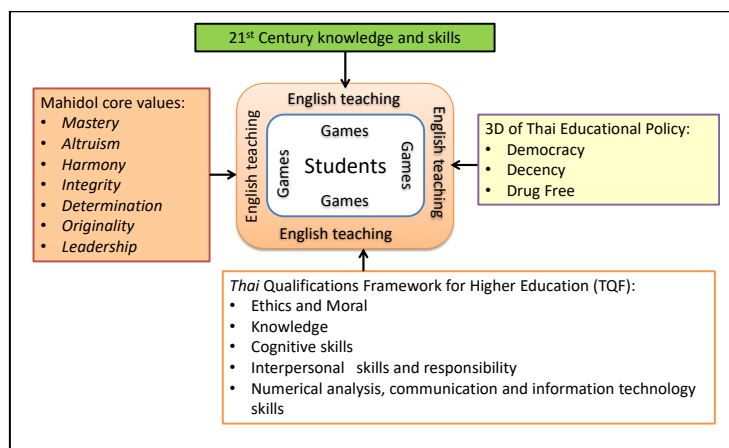


Diagram 5: Sharing English Knowledge to Communities project

Source: Department of English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Sharing English Knowledge to Communities, 2010-2015.

At the beginning of the course, I explained the purposes of this project to my students which was to apply their English knowledge and skills by using language games and used these games with primary students in schools around the university. By doing this project, Mahidol University students had the chance to share their knowledge and kindness in schools and with students who were behind and lacked educational opportunities. Students were scared because they had never taught others formally before. I persuaded, encouraged, and empowered my students by splitting the tasks into small chunks and assessing them every week before starting to use the games in schools. First, students were divided into a group of two or three. They chose skills and a topic they wanted to use in their games. After they designed their games, they wrote them down and submitted the games and an explanation to their teacher. The teacher suggested improvements for their games. Students made the corrections and prepared materials which they would use in their games and they trialed these games in class. The teacher and their friends provided comments and suggestions. The designers of the games improved their games before using games in schools. After students finished playing games in schools, both the teacher conducted a debriefing with the students in order to learn what they had learned from this project and to improve games (Department of English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, 2010-2015).

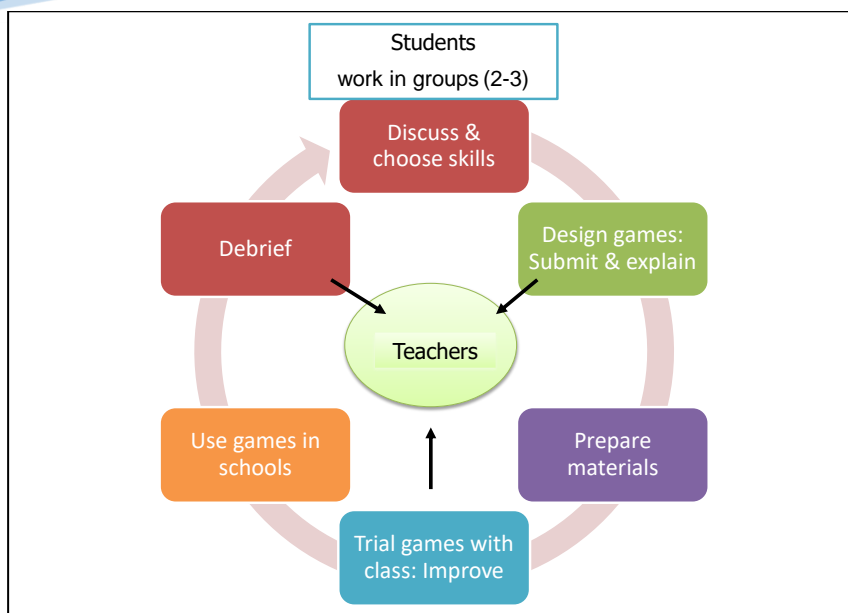


Diagram 6: The process for designing and implementing tasks

Evaluation: Traditionally, only learner assessment and achievement tests have been used to assess student proficiency at Mahidol University. The tests include mid-term and final examinations. The tests assess knowledge of the content and ability to do exercises based on the textbooks which students have studied. Teachers write new tests and some use parts of old tests. This consumes time and energy on the part of teachers. In 2003, the Department was challenged by high officials in the administration to answer the question “How do they know students have learned English what was taught by the Department and that students have progressed, not deteriorated in their knowledge of English?” To prove this, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted before and after the English for medical student courses. Moreover, the teacher-made tests were correlated to a standardized test. The results showed that medical students gained statistically significant higher scores after they completed their English for medical student course. Moreover, the teacher-made tests correlated to the standardized test in a statistically significant manner. In 2009, the Office of Higher Education required all universities to conform to the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd) which is used to evaluate curricula and courses (The Office of Higher Education, 2014).

To summarize, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is very practical for professional training. This is because ESP is designed to meet the specific needs of a particular group of learners, such as doctors, engineers, scientists, or nurses. The methodology and activities used for developing English competency and proficiency correspond to the learners’ practical requirements. Specifically, language selected for teaching is appropriate to activities and tasks in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre. Therefore, these professionals practice and learn the English which they need to use in their careers.

2.2 Developments in ESP in Thailand

Two events have caused changes in ESP in Thailand. The first was caused by a change in government policy and the other resulted from the setting up of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which will happen in 2015.

Academic Developments: Senior Thai English teachers and scholars were appointed by the Thai government to reform English teaching and learning in Thailand and to establish educational standards. One of these concerns resulted from the establishment of many private universities and from the upgrading of about 75 teacher training colleges to university status. The scholars proposed that the government require all universities to teach general English (three credits) in the first semester before providing EAP or EOP (three or six credits, with a preference for six) in the next two semesters. This caused problems for older universities, especially Mahidol University, where English courses accounted for only a total of six credits, because one ESP course had to be excluded. Much feedback was given to the government, but no response was received. At the same time, high-ranking university administrators forced the Department to change the syllabus to focus on writing skills. Thus, a new English course syllabus had to be developed. In so doing, ESP characteristics disappeared from the current English courses.

Occupational Developments: Thailand will enter the AEC in 2015 and English will be used as the official language of this organization. Evidences have shown that the English proficiency of Thais, as compared to others in the community, was rather low. The community requirement for mobility among eight professional groups (medical, dentistry, nursing, engineering, architecture, surveying, accounting, hotels and tourism, and the food and beverage industry) means that individuals in these groups will be able to migrate and be employed in any ASEAN country (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2013). These employees need to have a high level of English. Thus, the government set up the English Language Development Center (ELDC) of the Ministry of Education in 2003 to help Thais to learn to communicate in English (<http://www.eldc.go.th/>).



Source: The English Language Development Center (ELDC), the Ministry of Education, Thailand [http://www.eldc.go.th/](http://www.eldc.go.th/Picture: Boodprom, C. et al. Khonkan University. (home.kku.ac.th/phanch/5web.ppt)

The ELDC saw the importance of training workplace personnel to communicate in English competently because of globalization and of being part of the AEC. The ELDC planned carefully and comprehensively for the development of English skills among Thais. *First*, the ELDC selected 25 occupations for specific training. *Second*, the ELDC set four standards for English for occupations. The first two concern language skills used in the workplace, while the last two concern understanding and using nonverbal communication appropriate to the audience, purpose, setting, and culture. *Third*, the ELDC opened up opportunities for all English teachers in Thailand to develop ESP courses for these 25 occupations. English for Caddies, English for Drivers, English for Spa Owners/ Managers, and English for Hair and Beauty Salon Staff are examples. *Fourth*, the ELDC provided guidelines for establishing ESP training centers. University teachers designed courses and wrote textbooks and produced teaching materials for these professions. These were completed successfully. Those courses are available from the ELDC website. Companies or individuals can download and use them for teaching and learning as desired. Educational institutions could use ELDC programs free of charge to train interested people. Learners were happy to learn English which was relevant to their occupations and they were more confident it. ELDC also produced English Teaching Program called “Yes, you can” and broadcast on the TPBS Television. Moreover, ELDC arranged a web-board for question and answer about problem of using or learning English. Regretfully, the ELDC did not receive further funding and it had to close in five or six years later (<http://www.eldc.go.th/>, 2003).

The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Education Pillar Symposium on English for Specific Purposes: Collaboration and Innovation Conference was held in Bangkok, 3-4 June, 2014. The purpose of this conference was to encourage LMI and ASEAN countries on ESP because ESP is central to increasing the ability of professionals to communicate efficiently in English. Experts and scholars from LMI and ASEAN countries will design and deliver high-level professional skills development programs that integrate Information and Communication Technology in multiple learning modalities and can be shared across LMI borders (Lower Mekong Initiative, 2014a, 2014b).

To conclude, in the past, dating back to 1970, ESP was mostly taught for university students in Thailand, and Mahidol University was considered the first and the best place for ESP practice. A needs analysis of these students was conducted, and the results revealed that students needed reading and writing most for their further study. Then materials and activities were selected and designed to meet the needs of the students in the various disciplines and sequenced according to level of difficulty to provide continuity. After teachers trialed, and improved these materials, they used them in their classes. Only informal evaluation was done after implementation. Students reported that they used what they learned in English classes most in their second or later years.

Discussion and Suggestions

I will discuss three issues: learners, language description, and methodology, as well as provide suggestions in this section.

Learners

Opportunities, Motivation, and Use: Students from high socio-economic status families have a better chance than those who are from remote provinces and border areas to learn, especially to learn English. Students study general English in K-12 or grade 4-12 for an hour a day. Some learn more because they have extra classes or go to tutorial schools.

Nowadays, television, the Internet and smartphones are widespread, so students all over country can learn from resources both in-class and out of class. What to do next? Two key factors need to be considered to increase the English ability of Thais: motivation and use. Motivation is the key factor for enabling Thai language learners to learn English. Learners should see the importance of using English and set their goals and find ways to use and learn English. Even though 500 World Class Standard Schools for the basic education level (K-12) have been established with the purpose of using English as a means of communication in class, and students have the chance to use English, this is not sufficient. The same efforts should be used at other levels as well, such as vocational schools or universities, because the more learners use the target language, the more they learn and become competent. This will provide students with the have basic knowledge of the language system, which is essential for their study at a higher level.

Challenges and Solutions: The issue of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is one challenge forcing Thai students and adults to master English communication skills. The Thai Ministry of Education has developed a policy, and provided guidelines and practices for developing the English communication skills of Thais; the developments of English teaching in higher education in 2005 and the ELDC are examples. Educators opposed the former because they thought that universities should maintain the right to manage learning and teaching in their own institutions. This is because each institution is different in terms of students and learning and teaching environment. Faculty members state that they know their students and learning and teaching environment better than outsiders, so they can provide English courses which are suitable for their students. Though a high level of disagreement was communicated to the government, high-ranking administrators in each university forced the language departments to conform to the government policy. However, about 10 years later, the government called for ESP to be taught at the higher education level and for professions. *The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Education Pillar Symposium on English for Specific Purposes: Collaboration and Innovation Conference 2014* is evidence. The ELDC provided EOP according to the government strategy, but the government vision may have been blurry or be short-sighted, so the ELDC lost its funding in 2011 and had to close. Resources such as ESP courses and tests on its website have disappeared. This illustrates the failure of the government. Therefore, to prevent this vicious cycle, research on ESP must be conducted on an on-going basis so the results can be used for the strategic administration of ESP or ELT.

Language description

Teachers realize that content is an essential part of ESP. Thus, authentic materials are used for developing teaching materials. *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*, written by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), has been used as a guide. Language functions are taught in the context of each discipline. Language is presented in “structural” and “functional” formats. Also, “form”, “function”, and “sociolinguistics” are included in designing ESP courses. The varieties of language used in particular contexts are presented, so students are familiar with different language registers. Now language is displayed using various technology formats such as emails, blogs, websites, e-databases, or You Tube, so ESP teachers may consider these new developments when developing their ESP materials.

Methodology

Teachers recognize that there is no one best method in English teaching, so teachers combine methods in their teaching. Moreover, the core values of each university and trends in teaching in the 21st century have been incorporated into curriculum design with the intention that students will be able to: (1) internalize morality and ethics in their professions and daily life, (2) gain knowledge of what they learn and use it in their future careers, (3) think critically and intelligently so they will be autonomous learners, (4) build interpersonal skills and acquire responsibility by working on tasks with their peers, and (5) develop their numerical analysis, communication and technology skills. These qualifications can be obtained by using task based approaches, such as projects or games and simulations.

To conclude, three elements—learners, language description, and methodology—need to be considered when designing, developing, and implementing ESP courses. The learners must be the center of the courses, so language description and methodology can be selected appropriately.

Conclusion

ESP is designed for particular groups of learners to meet their specific needs. ESP was taught at Mahidol University in the past. The English Language Development Center encouraged teachers to develop more practical ESP courses for occupational purposes in Thailand. From my long experience in teaching ESP, ESP teachers need to have the freedom to organize ESP courses for their students. Students should not be experimental subjects, so any change must be carefully considered and based on scientific proof. Language description and the methodology selected for use by ESP teachers are characteristics of good practice among ESP teachers.

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