TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP): A STRATEGY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Given the role the English language plays around the world as a lingua franca, official language and second language of many countries of the world, there has been an increasing demand to learn the English language. Consequently, a great deal of challenges faces teachers of the English language in trying to cope with the obvious increased demand in the process of teaching the learning. Considering also that individuals, organization and nations need to be involved in human resources development in a globalised world, there becomes the need to adopt a strategy in the teaching and learning of the English language that would be quicker, economical and efficient to meet the language needs of learners. This paper therefore, explores teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a strategy for human resources development.

Language is central to everything man does and serves to fulfill his communicative needs. The role of language, especially the English language in the globalization process is quite tremendous. The English language has by international treaty become a world language, a lingua franca of some sort. It is extensively used as a second language and an official language in many countries of the world and has become the “world’s most commonly taught foreign language” (Uzoezie, 1992). This is a direct consequence of the demand to learn the English language. Most people around the world learn the language for its utilitarian purposes, the function the language serves them in their socio-economic activities. There becomes the need therefore, to teach a functional, purposeful and context-based English language to such people. General English language teaching therefore becomes somewhat a waste of time, energy and
English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes subsequently referred to as ESP in this paper is a child of circumstance birthed out of particular needs of people. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1981). These needs according to them are borne out of the massive increase in scientific, technical and economic activities the world over. Moreover, linguistic analysis have shown peculiar linguistic features for different linguistic groups learning the English language as well as differences between spoken and written English both in context and otherwise. English for Specific Purposes therefore, is aimed of analyzing the linguistic features of a particular area of life’s endeavour and incorporating such features in teaching the learners the English language. This prompted Lorenzo (2005) to add that ESP concentrates more as language in context than on teaching grammar and language. In addition, developments in educational psychology have shown that learning is more effective if it is learner-centered. The needs of the learner, his interests, activities, age and the relevance of the content go a long way to motivate him/her for effective learning. ESP therefore, is a model of English language teaching that is relevant to the needs of the learner. Umera-Okeke (2005) in keeping with this view stated that for the fact that the learners know specifically why they are learning a language is a great advantage on both sides of the process. The learners are therefore, motivated and this enables the teacher to meet learners’ needs and expectations more easily. ESP looks at the purpose for which the students need to learn English, ie for occupational or for study purposes. (Strevens, 1977 and Coffey, (1985))

Characteristics of ESP

Strevens (1988) defined ESP by identifying its absolute and variable characteristics. He made a distinction between four absolute and two variable characteristics:

I. Absolute Characteristics

ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

a) designed to meet specifies needs of the learner;

b) related in content to particular discipline, occupation and activities;

c) centered on language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics etc; and analysis of this discourse;

d) in contrast with general English.
II. Variable Characteristics
   ESP may be but is not necessarily:
   a) restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);
   b) not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

   Dudley – Evans and St. John (1997) modified the definition of ESP to include the following characteristics:

I. Absolute characteristics
   a) ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
   b) ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
   c) ESP is centred on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

II. Variable characteristics
   a) ESP may be related to or designed for specific discipline;
   b) ESP may use, in specific teaching situation, a different methodology from that of general English.
   c) ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at the tertiary level or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at the secondary level.
   d) ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;
   e) Most ESP assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

   A summary of these characteristics shows that ESP courses are carried out for a group of people (students and workers) from one area of human endeavour. It is Business English for business people, Technical English for technicians, Scientific English for scientists, Medical English for medical practitioners, Aviation English for aviation workers, etc.
   ESP therefore, is a learner – centred approach to teaching English as an additional language which focuses on developing English communication skills in a specific discipline.

General English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

There is the need to establish the relationship between ESP and ELT to underscore the relevance of ESP in human resource development. Robinson (1991)
described ESP as a type of language teaching that is goal-oriented in terms of learning. Similarly, Coffey (1985) opined it as a major part of communicative language teaching in general. For these reasons, ESP is seen as an approach to language teaching. This assertion is in consonance with Hutchinson and Waters (1981) who noted that ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning. They further trace the relationship between ESP and ELT in an ELT tree. From the top of the tree, ESP courses are seen: Legal English, Aviation English, etc. Just below this level are two main types of ESP; English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). These types are not distinct in that people can work and study at the same time. The next level down, there is a general distinction of the learner’s area of specialization resulting in three major categories; English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business Education (EBE) and English for Secretarial Studies (ESS). Below this, ESP is seen as an offshoot of English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) which in turn took off from general English Language Teaching, (ELT), a branch of language teaching. At the root of all these is the need to learn and communicate. This analogy points to the fact that ESP is an approach to language teaching. It is however, not a matter of teaching specialized varieties of English or teaching science registers for science students, etc. It is neither a particular kind of language or method nor even a particular kind of teaching. ESP is not a particular language product but an approach to language teaching directed by specific and apparent reason for learning.

Human Resource and Human Resources Development (HRD)

Human resources is sometimes used synonymously with human capital, manpower, labour, workforce or simply, people; Human capital however, is narrower in perspective in that it is the knowledge the individual embody and can contribute to an organization. Elwood and Trott (1996), however, saw human resources as having two related interpretations depending on context. The original usage derives from political economy and economics where it was traditionally called labour one of the four factors of production. This refers to the individuals within a firm or agency, and to the organization that deals with hiring, firing, training, and other personal issues, typically referred to as Human Resource Management (HRM). This is a term, according to Elwood and Trott that refers to managing human capital, the people of an organization. The concept has moved from traditionally administrative function to a strategic one that recognizes the link between talented and engaged people and organizational success. It focuses on the recruitment of, management of and providing direction for the people who work in the organization’s workforce. Human resource management is responsible for attraction, selection, training, assessment, compensation and rewarding training and development, etc.
Human Resources Development (HRD) is somewhat similar to Human Resources Management (HRM). Human resources development is part of human resources management; an offshoot of some kind. It is a framework for the expansion of human capital within an organization through the development of both the organization and the individual to achieve performance improvement (Elwood and Trott, 1996). This is hinged on the fact according to them, which the capacities of individuals depend on their access to education. Therefore, human resource development is the integrated use of training, organization and career development efforts to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness. HRD develop the key competencies that enable individuals in an organization to perform current and future jobs through planned learning activities. It ensures a match between individual and organization needs. Human resource development as a process encompasses the following:

1. training and development, i.e. the development of human expertise for the purpose improving performance.

2. organization development, i.e. empowering the organization to take advantage of its human resource capital.

The objective of human resources development is to foster human resourcefulness through enlightened and cohesive policies in education, training, health and employment. Human resources development is a combination of training and education in a broad context of adequate health and employment policies that ensures the continual improvement and growth of the individual, the organization, and the national human resourcefulness. (Nadler 1984 in Nunan, 1988). Within a national (and international) context, it becomes a strategic approach to intersectoral linkages between health education and employment. HRD see employees as an asset to the enterprise whose value will be enhanced by development. According to Elwood and Trott (1996) the primary focus of HRD is on the growth and employee development. They further stated that in this sense, HRD treatment can be in-room group training, tertiary or vocational courses or mentoring and coaching by senior employees with the aim for a desired outcome that will develop the individual performance. At level of national strategy, it can be a broad intersectoral approach to fostering creative contributions to national productivity. At the organizational level also, HRD programme will prepare the individual to undertake a higher level of work, an “organized learning over a given period of time, to provide the possibility of performance change” (Nadler, 1984 in Nunan, 1988). In this regard, HRD focuses on the organization’s competencies at the first stage, training, and then developing the employee, through education, satisfying the organization’s long-term needs and the individuals’ career goals and employee value to their present and future employers. HRD entails developing the human resource of an enterprise by ‘attaining or upgrading the skills and attitudes of employees at all levels in
order to maximize the effectiveness of that enterprise. Development occurs to enhance the organization’s value, not solely for individual improvement. Individual education and development is a tool and a means to an end, not the end goal itself (Elwood and Trott, 1996).

**ESP and Human Resources Development**

Human resources management and development are core issues that hinge on professionalism and productivity. In a globalised economy as we have, the human capital base of any organization is drawn from people of different linguistic background, hence, the use of a common language, a *lingua franca* especially the English language is such situations. Our world is truly one of distinction and diversity of profession, nationalities, languages and sexes. Against the backdrop of the status and function of the English language as a world language used in different facets of life’s endeavours in many countries of the world, ESP could be adopted as a strategy in the training and development of human resources the world over.

Esp is a major activity around the world today involving education, training and practice and drawing upon three major realms of students/participant specialist areas of interest. These learners need to use the language both for occupational and other communicative purposes. Therefore, adopting the criterial of need-analysis and target-analysis which ESP adopts in teaching learners become paramount. These needs are first and foremost explained in terms of study or job requirements (Widdowson, 1983) or what the society at large regards necessary or desirable to be learnt from a programme of language instruction (Mountford, 1981 in Nunan, 1988). This is the objective of human resources development Beyond the needs analysis consideration, there is also that which is closely related to needs analysis; target situation analysis. This entails identifying the target situation; i.e., the situation which the learner would use the language they are learning and going on to conduct language/linguistic feature analysis of the target situation for the learners. Consequently, in the training (pre-service and in-service) and development of teachers; bankers, technicians, medical practitioners, ESP conduct these analysis for maximum productivity and effectiveness on the part of the learners (human resources).

**Conclusion**

This paper has examined the role of the English language as a world language and has argued that the obvious increasing demand for the use of the English language has posed great challenges in the teaching and learning of the English language. This paper has also argued that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) could be adopted as an approach to the teaching of the English language especially for human resource management and development. English for Specific Purposes as a strategy for human resources management and development is purposeful, goal – oriented, time-saving.
economical and result-oriented in the development and management of human resources

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, this paper turns the search light in our tertiary institutions where the English language has dual functions. It is taught to first year students as a compulsory course to equip them in acquiring the much needed communicative competence in the use of the English language, especially in a second language situation as found in Nigeria. It is also a medium of training these set of students in their chosen discipline. These first year undergraduate students need the English language for different purposes given their different academic inclinations or disciplines.

Therefore, the general English Language teaching given to them amounts to a waste of time, resources and energy. One important feature of ESP is that it makes use of needs analysis in teaching a group of students. This paper therefore, suggests that needs analysis be conducted in our different tertiary institutions to ascertain the purpose for which the English language is learnt by a group of students. The paper suggests for instance, that science English be taught to science students with strong emphasis on the branch of science in question, and that English for Business Purposes be taught to those in Accounting, Secretarial Studies, Banking and Finance, Marketing, Economics, etc., with the content delimited to the branch in question. It is only in such scenario where English is taught for specific purposes that that we can boast of effective human resource development/ training.

References


