

Evaluation of Teachers' Efficacy in an ESP Context of Iranian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to study “who is more qualified to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Language teachers or Specialists in the field (content teachers)”. The main question tended to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the two mentioned groups. A null hypothesis was developed which stated; “ESP students find no difference between language teachers and content teachers”. To find the answer, a questionnaire was developed, with a high internal reliability and validity. The questionnaire was administered to 92 students in Islamic Azad University of Rasht and Lahidjan. The results from t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups. Language teachers gained better scores than subject matter teachers. It was concluded that language teachers were more qualified than content teachers to teach English for Specific purposes.

KEY TERMS: ESP, EAP, Evaluation, Specialists in the field (Content teachers), Language teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Anthony (2007) argues, in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), there has been a very long and still unresolved discussion on whether the teacher should be an expert in the target subject of the class. For example, should the teacher of an ‘English for nursing’ class have experience taking care of patients, writing research papers related to nursing or at least having an understanding of the field in general? Many specialists feel that in an ideal world, the answer to this question is “yes,” as it would enable the teacher to give students deep insights into the “what,” “how,” and “why,” of language use. Without this knowledge, it is said that a teacher of English could not properly teach the intricacies of language use in specialist subjects (Bell, 2002)

In real world, however, there are many factors that prevent experts from teaching ESP courses. First, the available experts in the field often do not have good enough English skills to teach an ESP course, which is one of the main reasons why we need such courses in the first place (Madeline, 2007). Second, field experts are often too busy with other work and classes, or are simply unwilling to teach an ESP course. Third, even if field experts are have good English skills, and are willing to teach an ESP course, they are still not language experts. In other words, they have probably rarely considered the actual language they use in the field, have little understanding of what language items will be required in the field, and know little about the strengths and weaknesses in the language skills of the students (Anthony, 2007).

There is also a controversy among the language departments and discipline specific departments in Iranian universities about who is more qualified to teach ESP (English for Specific Purposes), language teachers or specialist in the field (content teachers). The present research tries to reveal whether there is a significant difference between content teachers and language teachers and if there is, which group is more qualified to teach ESP.

1.1. Statement of the problem

English language is the lingua franca of science, technology, business, politics and media (Tsao et al, 2008). Concerning the significance of English, specially, in postgraduate studies, the need to teach ESP is completely obvious.

ESP teaching faces a self-contradictory situation. EFL teachers who are well equipped with linguistics, pedagogical knowledge, class organization as well as psycholinguistics are not familiar with the subject matter of the course, while content teachers who are completely acquainted with the subject matter are not well equipped with nuances of linguistics, pedagogical knowledge and psycholinguistics. A solution is the team teaching which has been used in foreign universities but it has not yet been applied successfully in Iran. Therefore, the present study aims to reveal which of the two mentioned contexts is the most favorable for Iranian university students.

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2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. A definition of ESP

Dudley-Evans defines ESP as follows:

- 1) Absolute characteristics:
 - a) ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learners;
 - b) ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves; ESP is centred on language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.
- 2) Variable characteristics:
 - 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;
 - 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 (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.4).

2.2. Related researches

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. A total of 423 Iranian English major (ELT) and subject-matter ESP teachers participated in the study. The results revealed that theoretically a large and wide gap exists between English major and subject-matter ESP teachers while practically this difference is very slight (Rajabi et. al, 2011, p.1).

Maleki (2008) has conducted an experiment to find out who is better qualified for the job: the EFL teacher or the specialist in the field? Forty out of sixty second-year medical students studying at an Iranian medical sciences university were randomly selected. Then they were divided into two equal classes of twenty members each. Later, the classes were assigned to two teachers: a TEFL teacher and a GP. Everything being equal, including the textbook, the course started. The two classes were taught for an entire semester. At the end of the course, two types of measures were used: an achievement test and a five-point Likert Scale. Analysis of the results showed that the EFL teacher's class scored higher in every aspect of the final achievement test, and that they expressed greater satisfaction with his class than the competing class on the Likert Scale. Therefore, Maleki strongly recommends 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 (Maleki, 2008, p1).

Ahmadi (2008) has 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. Three questionnaires were used as the tool of data collecting. 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, in all, 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 (Ahmadi, 2008, p.1).

Ahmadi and Sajjadi (2009) have conducted a survey research on "who should teach English for medical purpose (EMP)". Three questionnaires were used as the tool of data collecting. They were filled by some vice-deans, some heads of LDs, and DSDs as well as the students of some EMP English 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 EMP classes to the teachers of LDs, the majority of the heads of discipline-specialist departments (DSDs) believed that these courses should be taught by subject-specialist teachers. The students of EMP classes, in all, believed that in teaching EMP courses. LD teachers are more qualified than discipline-specialist teachers. From the six questions posed to 176 students about the different capabilities of EMP teachers, LD teachers gained 1515 positive points(out of 1920 points) while the points gained by discipline – specialist teachers was just 1331. It is concluded that students and heads of language department preferred LD teachers while heads of DSDs preferred DS teachers for teaching EMP. LD teachers should enhance their knowledge of the discipline while DSD teacher should study language and language teaching (Ahmadi, Sajjadi, 2009, p.1.).

2.3. Research question of the study

According to ESP students, which group is more qualified to teach ESP, content teachers or language teachers?

2.4. Research hypothesis

ESP students find no difference between language teachers and content teachers.

2.5. Significance and purposes of the study

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 effective teacher who produces students' learning, growth and achievement. Therefore an evaluation of ESP teachers in Iranian universities seems completely essential. The present research tries to find out which context is the most desirable one to teach ESP.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The present research was descriptive in nature. It was a survey study and collected information in a quantitative manner.

3.2. Participants

The participants were 92 students of Azad Islamic University of Rasht, and Lahidjan. Forty seven students were attending at EFL teachers' classes and 45 students were attending at content teachers' classes. They were all undergraduate students and were studying English for Specific Purposes. The students were selected at random.

3.3. Material

A 40-item questionnaire was used as the data collection instruments. 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: 1) English proficiency with 5 items. 2) Pedagogical knowledge including 17 items. 3) Organization and communication skills including 8 items. 4) Socio-affective skills including 10 items. The present researcher calculated the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for each 4 categories. The values of four categories were 87%, 74%, 80% and 89%.

3.4. Procedure

At first, a questionnaire was designed which was adopted from the Wichadee (2008), although the reliability had already been calculated by Wichadee, the present researcher calculated the Cronbach's Alpha for each 4 skills; (English proficiency: 87%; pedagogical knowledge: 74%; communication and class organization: 80%; socio-affective skills: 89%). Then this questionnaire was translated into Persian in order to get more accurate information from the students.

The questionnaire was administered to the students attending at classes of the two groups of instructors. For the first group, Language teachers, the questionnaires were given to the students of several 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 questionnaires were 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 at several Business Administration classes in Azad Islamic University of Rasht and about 30 questionnaires were received. Having received all the questionnaires, the next stage, data analysis process was started.

3.5. Data analysis

In order to analyze data, at first, Levene Statistic Test was used to make the data homogenous and then T-test was used to analyze the data.

4. RESULTS

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

Table1.Relation of English proficiency in General English teachers and content teachers-hypothesis 2

| Proficiency | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| General English teachers | 47 | 4.3968 | .47781 | .06970 |
| Content teachers | 45 | 3.9022 | .67234 | .10023 |

Table2.Result of T-test and Levene statistic test-hypothesis2

| proficiency | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig.(2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 3.317 | .072 | 4.081 | 90 | .000 | .49459 | .12120 | .25381 | .73537 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 4.051 | 79.141 | .000 | .49459 | .12208 | .25160 | .73537 |

T (critical=2.000), T (observed) > T (critical)

Regarding T-test, it can be said with 95% of certainty, that in the condition of equal variances, EFL teachers and content teachers were significantly different in English proficiency ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed). In other terms, EFL teachers benefited more English proficiency than content teachers.

Table3.Descriptive analysis of the relation of pedagogical knowledge in general English teachers and content teachers-hypothesis 2

| Pedagogical knowledge | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| General English teachers | 47 | 3.3627 | .49229 | .07181 |
| Content teachers | 45 | 2.9560 | .55667 | .08298 |

Table4.Results of t-test and Levene statistic test-hypothesis 2

| Pedagogical knowledge | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig.(2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .424 | .516 | 3.716 | 90 | .000 | .40672 | .10944 | .18930 | .62415 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 3.706 | 87.589 | .000 | .40672 | .10974 | .18863 | .62482 |

T (critical=2.000), T (observed) > T (critical)

Regarding T-test, it can be claimed, with 95% of certainty, that in the equal variances, pedagogical knowledge was significantly different in EFL teachers and Content teachers ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed). In other terms, EFL teachers benefited more pedagogical knowledge than content teachers.

Table5.Descriptive analysis of organization and communication skills in General English teachers and content teachers-hypothesis2

| Organization | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| General English teachers | 47 | 4.1820 | .55917 | .08156 |
| Content teachers | 45 | 3.7333 | .63715 | .09498 |

Table6.Results of t-test and Levene statistic test-hypothesis 2

| Organization | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig.(2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .241 | .625 | 3.594 | 90 | .001 | .44866 | .12484 | .20064 | .69667 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 3.584 | 87.373 | .001 | .44866 | .12520 | .19983 | .69748 |

T (critical=2.000), T (observed) > T (critical)

Regarding T-test, it can be claimed with 95% of certainty that, in the equal variances, the degree of organization and communication skills was significantly different comparing EFL teachers and content teachers ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed). In other words, EFL teachers enjoyed more organization and communication skills than content teachers did.

Table7. Descriptive analysis of socio-affective skills in general English teachers and content teachers

| Socio-affective skills | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| General English teachers | 47 | 3.9683 | .70497 | .10283 |
| Content teachers | 45 | 3.5022 | .77621 | .11571 |

Table8. Results of t-test and Levene statistic test-hypothesis 2

| Socio-affective skills | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig.(2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.195 | .277 | 3.017 | 90 | .003 | .46603 | .15447 | .15914 | .77292 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 3.011 | 88.277 | .003 | .46603 | .15480 | .15841 | .77365 |

T (critical=2.000), T (observed) > T (critical)

According to T-test and Levene statistic test it can be claimed with 95% of certainty that in the equal variances, the degree of socio-affective skills was significantly different comparing EFL teachers and content teachers ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed). In other words, EFL teachers had more socio-affective skills than content teachers.

As it can be observed in the tables above, there was a significant difference between Language teachers and Content teachers in all four categories, and students were more satisfied with Language teachers than Content teachers.

5. DISCUSSION

The results reject the null hypothesis which stated, "ESP students find no difference between language teachers and content teachers". The results show that EFL teachers are more qualified to teach ESP courses than content teachers according to their students. The results confirm the studies of Ahmadi (2008), Maleki (2008) and Ahmadi and Sajjadi (2009). The hypothesis can be reformulated as follow "ESP students find significant differences between language teachers and content teachers".

Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that ESP courses be taught by a Language teacher instead of a Content teacher.

6. CONCLUSION

As the results revealed, there was a significant difference between language teachers and content teachers according to their students, and the students were more satisfied with language teachers than content teachers. It can be concluded that language teachers are more qualified to teach ESP than content teachers and ESP courses should be taught by language teachers instead of content teachers.

The researcher proposes that in order to get the best results, universities can train experts in ESP teaching or use the team-teaching method, but in the cases which these methods are impractical, the language teachers will be more preferable than content teachers to teach ESP courses.

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