

Title:

Who should teach ESP?

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1: Abstract

The fact that who is more qualified to teach these ESP courses has long been the cause of argument between the heads of language departments(LDs) on one side and the head of discipline-specific departments(DSDs) on the other side. This research was conducted to study the views of both sides 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 ,L D 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.

Key words: Iran; Medical Universities; Teaching ESP; ESP Teachers

Abbreviations: LD=Language Department ; DSD=Discipline-Specialist Department

1:Introduction:

In Iranian medical universities, in the curriculum of most disciplines ,at all levels, in addition to one 3-credit general English course , at least one 3-credit ESP course has also been included .But the fact that who is more qualified to teach these ESP courses ,the teachers of language departments(LDs) of the universities or those of discipline-specific departments (DSDs), has long been the cause of argument between the heads of these two departments. This research was conducted during the academic year 2006-7 and aimed at studying the views of :

- * The heads of language departments about above-mentioned problem.
- *The heads of discipline-specialist departments about the same problem.
- * And also the students attending ESP classes about their ESP teachers.

2:Method and material

This descriptive study was conducted in the form of a survey .Three questionnaires were designed and used to gather the data needed .The first questionnaire that was sent to the vice deans for academic affaires of the six small and large medical universities, contained questions on the type and number of ESP course credits offered and the teachers of these courses .The second questionnaire was sent to 42 faculty members of the universities studied, including 8 vice deans , 20 heads of DSD,10 heads of LD and 4 discipline-specialist teachers in charge of teaching ESP classes .It was used to reflect the views of these faculty members on the main question of the study: Who is a qualified ESP teacher? The third questionnaire that was distributed among 176 students of eight ESP classes majoring in the fields of dentistry, nursing ,food science ,food technology and optometry had some questions

on the general characteristics of their ESP course, ESP coursebook, linguistic and pedagogic competence of their ESP teachers and some aspects of his/her teaching methodology .

It should be mentioned that from 8 ESP classes studied ,four were taught by LD teachers each one holding a master degree in English(TEFL), and the four others by teachers of DSDs with either a Phd. degree(one teacher) or a master degree in the students' field of study. Six of these classes were at undergraduate level and the two others included the students of Dentistry .

3 : Findings :

a: The data collected by the first questionnaire were all arranged in table one. According to these data , in all , 224 credits of different ESP courses had been offered in the six medical universities studied during the second semester of the academic year 2005-2006. From this number , 76.5% (171 credits) were taught by the teachers of LD, and the rest (23.5% .or 53 credits) by discipline-specialist teachers.

b : The data obtained by the second questionnaire reflecting the views of 42 faculty members with different occupational positions were classified in tables 2,3 and 4. According to these tables ,while most of the vice deans for academic affairs believed that ESP courses should be taught by LD teachers (table 2) ,the majority of the heads of DSD had expressed an opposite view (table 3).They strongly favoured the teaching of the ESP courses by discipline-specialist lecturers .The heads of LDs ,on the other hand, almost unanimously stated that , ESP courses, at all levels, should be taught by LD teachers (table 4) .

c: From among the responses of 176 students of eight ESP classes to the questions on teaching and pedagogic abilities of their ESP teachers (questionnaire 3), those which were convertible into quantitative points were first converted and then arranged in table 5 .

Table 1 :

Number of ESP course credits offered in each of the six medical universities studied during the academic year 2005 – 2006

medical universities studied		Shahid- Beheshti Medical University	Tehran M.U.	Shiraz M.U.	Zanjan M.U.	Ahvaz M.U.	Boosherhre M.U.	Total number of course credits
number of ESP course credits offered by each university		91	77	36	6	8	6	224
Esp course credits taught by Discipline-Specific teachers	number	27	20	—	—	—	6	53
	percentage	30%	26%	—	—	—	100%	23.5%
ESP course credits taught by Language Department teachers	number	64	57	36	6	8	—	171
	percentage	70 %	74 %	100%	100%	100%	—	76.5%

Table 2 :
Responses of 8 vice - deans
for academic affairs to
questionnaire no:2

Teachers of level of Students	who should teach ESP courses ?	
	Language Department (LDs)	Disciplin e- Specialist Departments (DSDs)
Undergraduate student	3	6
Postgraduate student	6	2
Medical student	5	4
total	14	12

Table 3 :
Responses of 24 heads and faculty
members of Discipline -Specific
Departments (DSDs) to the questionnaire no :2

teachers of level of Students	who should teach ESP courses ?	
	Language Department (LDs)	Discipline - Specialist Departments (DSDs)
undergraduate students	12	16
Postgraduate students	6	18
Medical studen ts	10	14
total	28	48

Table 4
Response of 10 heads of LDs
to the questionnaire no: 2

teachers of level of students	who should teach ESP courses?	
	Language Department (LDs)	Discipline- Specialist Departments (DSDs)
undergraduate students	8	2
Postgraduate stuentns	10	—
medical students	10	—
total	28	2

Table 5:
Points given by the students to the teachers of their ESP classes

No : of questions in the questionnaire	Points obtained by Language Department teachers	Points obtained by Discipline-specialist teachers
9	219	150
10	204	189
11	280	245
12	287	246
13	275	263
15	250	238
total	1515	1331

4. Discussion .

a :Although most of the vice-deans and almost all the heads of language departments had tendency to assign the teaching of ESP courses to the teachers of LDs ,the majority of the heads of DSDs believed that these courses should be taught by discipline-specific teachers (tables 2-3-4) .. They argued that, " in teaching of ESP courses at all levels, discipline-specialist teachers with an adequate mastery on English, are more competent than LDs teachers since they are much more familiar with the technical terms and topics of the students` field of study." They added, " The most important aim of ESP courses is to help students understand the specialized texts of their ESP textbooks , and as there are many technical terms, notions and topics in these texts, they should be taught by the teachers of the same specialty and not by LD teachers who are not sufficiently familiar with those terms and topics" However, they admitted that "The unawareness of these teachers of English language grammar , suffixes, prefixes..... is one of their demerits. "

b: The heads of English departments expressed an entirely different view. They believed that, " in all ESP courses, it is the language that must be taught and not a specific subject , and since language teaching is a kind of science and has its own specific knowledge and principles such as teaching methodology , language testing , phonology , sentence and vocabulary structure , grammar , etc., every language teacher must be adequately aware of these basic principles." They added, " just being fluent in English is not the only requirement for being a competent ESP teacher. Discipline-specific teachers , even with good mastery on English , as they are unaware of these principles, most often fail to teach the language well, they just translate the texts" As for teaching ESP courses to the students of higher academic

levels , they stated that teaching these courses to postgraduate students, and the students of medicine, dentistry and pharmacology should go beyond the teaching of just a number of technical terms and notions. At these levels, though specialized texts are the only medium of language education , ESP teachers should emphasize on improving the students' linguistic skills such as speaking and writing; and as teaching these skills falls within the scope of LD teachers' tasks, these courses therefore can and should be preferably taught by them .As regards undergraduate ESP courses, 90% of the heads of LDs believed again that teaching of these courses too should be assigned to LD teachers (table4) , the other 10% stated that as at these levels, students need to learn some technical terms and notions relevant to their field of study , discipline- specific teachers are more competent in this regard. The heads of LDs, off course, admitted that, "Teachers of language departments, in order to facilitate their success in ESP classes, need to acquire some subject knowledge of their students' field of study."

c: Students of ESP classes too, on the whole , preferred LD teachers to the teachers of discipline-specific departments . For example, in answering the 10th question of the questionnaire no:3 , "Are the difficult grammatical points of your ESP textbook explained in class ?" , the students of the four ESP classes taught by the teachers of (LD) granted , in all , 204 points to their teachers , while in the four other ESP classes , the discipline- specific teachers in charge of teaching these classes gained only 189 points (table 6) .Or , in answering another question (Q.12) : " How do you evaluate the knowledge and fluency of your teacher in English ? " , teachers of LD gained 287 points while the points given to discipline-specific teachers was 246 (table 4) .Even in answering a question about the degree of the teachers' subject knowledge(question

no:13), the students granted 275 and 263 points to the teachers of LD and DSD respectively (table6), and thus implied that , the LD teachers' knowledge of the subject matter of specialized texts not only matches that of discipline- specific teachers but may also slightly surpass it . This can indicate that the teachers of LDs before teaching any specialized text , try their best to acquire enough knowledge of its subject-matter and technical terms in order to avoid any misunderstanding of the content of the text . It can also indicate that the discipline-specific teachers in charge of teaching ESP courses perhaps do not always have the same specialty as their students do and therefore are not adequately aware of the subject content and technical terms of the texts being taught. For example an ESP course of Public Health students may be assigned to a teacher specialist in Occupational Health , just because he/she is good at English and his/her specialty relates , in some ways , to Health . Regarding the other questions of the questionnaire no: 3 , teachers of LDs kept their superiority in points over discipline- specific teachers (table 6) so that from the six questions posed to 178 students about different teaching qualities and capabilities of ESP teachers , the points gained by the teachers of LD amounted to 1515 , while the points given to discipline-specific teachers was just 1331 , suggesting that for the students of ESP classes learning the meaning of just 30 or 40 pages of specialized texts , during their course is much less important than learning the skills they need to read and comprehend ESP texts and to use those skills in reading medical texts during and after their medical studies.

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