



The specificities of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in a foreign context: a case study of Senegal

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Abstract

English is the leitmotiv language used in international communication and in all the three major sectors (primary, manufacturing and service), private or public. The crucial need for English betokens its spread across the world through ESL and EFL programs. ET pertains to a host of controversial approaches that have fueled the academic debate from educational course designers, teachers and learners, especially in EFL context. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is subject to many errors and trials regarding the common consensus of a teaching approach. On the one hand, this paper addresses the stakes and advantages of one of the most practical approaches in use of ESP i.e., the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. On the other hand, it comprehensively studies Senegal as a French instructional language context versus a growing need of English for General Purposes (EGP) and ESP in ESL/EFL context, to say nothing of the effect of “contamination” LV1 springs up in the teaching approach.

Keywords: approach- communication- English, language- ESP- context

Introduction

English is used as the vehicle of social, cultural and economic enhancement across the world. In international conferences, trades and exchanges, experts' resort to English to communicate and reach agreements. Given its unquestionable role and importance, the English Language Teaching ELT is fully engrained in the curricula of many junior high schools, high schools, colleges, universities and vocational schools, especially in French-speaking countries like Senegal where English is taught as a foreign language, along with the French instructional language and a host of native languages. (Nazim & Hazarika, 2017) ^[14]. In today's globalized world, the significance of English has grown immensely. This significance has increased manifold in countries where English enjoys the status of English as a foreign language (EFL). It is no longer confined to academic circles only, but has expanded itself to commerce, business and personal communication of people in the EFL-context countries. Communications, both academic and non-academic, and sharing of ideas are overwhelmingly done through the medium of English in the present global scenario. This is a consequence of the fact that this language has the highest and most effective penetration among all countries of the globe, the majority of these countries being EFL specific. Thus, English for Specific Purposes ESP, one of the chief components of ELT, is at the 'bedsides' of learners from all walks of life and fields with the sheer objective to give the learner a hoist up in their communicative skill. Given the diversity of learners' inclinations and their “know- how” at the target field applied to English, an appropriate methodology or approach is essential for the ESP practitioner to meet their expectations. (Javid, 2015) ^[8] ESP practitioners have a challenging task because they are not in the position of being the 'primary knower' of the carrier content and

in most of the cases ESP learners may know more about the content than teachers do.

This justifies the choice we make on the Communicative Language Teaching, CLT, as a learner-centered and ecliptic approach ESP practitioners use to study its efficacy and efficiency in the Senegalese EFL context.

1. Contextual framework

With Globalization, English becomes a prerequisite in modern days (Enesi, Vrapı & Trifoni 2021: 214) ^[6]. A study of English is a priority nowadays with globalization and standardization. It is important, especially, when someone is searching for a job or travelling the world participating in international conferences or meetings, etc. The Senegalese language learning environment is an EFL context. On the one hand, there is a diversity of native languages. On the other hand, there is the inking of French as an institutional foreign language, and other European languages. But even though there is historic blend with the French language, the teaching of English is fully engrained in the Senegalese educational system, from junior to higher level of studies, to say nothing of its implementation at kindergarten. ELT, in the case of Senegal, is manifold components, but for the sake of clarity we will focus on English for Specific Purposes ESP and, if need be, discuss the tenets of English for Other Purposes EOP. If we agree that teaching is defined within a set, a particular context and calibrated approach, we will ultimately corroborate to the idea of questioning the CLT approach or method applied to ESP in the Senegalese context for its adequacy and pedagogical relevance. This is all the more important as English for General Purposes practitioners, in Senegal, generally exert to align their teaching methods with the linguistic basics that abide by the national syllabus or curriculum whose ultimate objective rests on the

exam's outcome.

2. Theoretical background

The main objective of education in general and higher education in particular is to equip students with the communicative language skill they need in their occupational milieu. The Teaching of English in the Senegalese's context is fully enshrined and enacted in the 1991's Law Orientation on Education. It both prioritizes the communicative skill of the learners, at secondary level, and the balance between the professional requirements and the English language in use in business relations in higher education. (Loi d'Orientation, articles 13 and 16). The above-mentioned demands evidence the 'necessity' of English in the Senegalese educational system agenda, especially the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. In fact, the necessity of English as an international language is a historical reality. This educational authorities' concern is intrinsically in line with the dharma and origin of the teaching of ESP in EFL context. The work of Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, "English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centered Approach", at this level, is paramount in contextualizing the teaching approach of ESP. The two theorists' conclusion on the origin of ESP is three-corned:

- First: The impact of the industrial revolution; (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 6) ^[7] The end of the second world war in 1945 heralded an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on international scale. This expansion created a world unified dominated by two forces, i.e., technology and commerce, which generated a demand for an international language. [T]his role fell to English.
- Second: the displacement of purpose regarding the linguistic teaching of English; (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 7) ^[7] Traditionally, the aim of linguistics had been to describe the rules of English usage that is, grammar. However, new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal feature of language usage to discovering the way in which language is actually used in real life communication.
- Third: centeredness on the learner; (Hutchinson and Water, 1987: 8) ^[7] Learners were seen to have different needs and interests, which would have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning.

Given E.L.T evolves according to the undercurrent socio-economic context, Belcher comes up with a four-corned theory to add up to the three- above mentioned ones. On the one hand, Belcher (2009) ^[2] contends that "First and foremost (before, during and after instruction) finding out what learner needs are"; on the other hand, he insists on "developing or adapting materials and methods to enable needs-responsive instruction". In their book, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*, Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo S' John hinge on the world's historic 'felt' needs of English in their theory and its 'innovative' teaching approach. (Dudley-Evans and, 1998 :1). The study of languages for Specific Purposes has had a long and interesting history going

back, some would say, back to the Roman and Greek Empires. Since the 1960s ESP has become a vital and innovative activity within the Teaching of English as Foreign or Second Language. Thus space, time, context and the learner's needs have always held a great impact on the approach or method in use in teaching ESP. Basically, the technological and industrial revolution have provoked the crucial need of English as an international language which deconstructs the linguistic-based purpose of teaching English for a communicative perspective centered on the learner's need. The focal point of the learner's need validates the host of teaching methods or approaches ESP practitioners apply to their teaching. This unquestionable reality lends credence to analyze the efficacy of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the teaching of ESP.

3. What is ESP ?

One of the specificities of ESP is its typical 'sensitivity' and concern regarding the learner's needs. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes in a foreign language context can be differentiated from English for General Purposes in that the former are more directed towards the immediate professional or academic demands and applicable situations (Laborda & Lidzler, 2015: 40). To Basturkmen (2006) ^[1] ESP has been conceptualized as a field that helps learners become accepted members of a community of professionals. He coins five macro- objectives for ESP :

1. To reveal subject- specific language use;
2. To develop target performance competencies;
3. To teach underlying knowledge;
4. To develop strategic competence;
5. To foster critical awareness

Javid (2015) ^[8] comes back to Pauline Robinson's definition of ESP (1980) and contends that "ESP is the teaching of English to the students who have specific objectives and purposes which might be professional, academic, scientific etc. Whereas Mackay and Mountford (1978) ^[12] summarize it as the teaching of English for "clearly utilitarian purposes". These definitions are congruent with that of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ^[7] who agree that ESP is based on designing courses to meet learners' needs. More importantly, Dudley-Evans and John (1998: 4-5) provide a more descriptive definition of ESP based on variable and invariable characteristics:

Absolute characteristics

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learners;
- ESP makes use of methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves.

Variable characteristics

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a general methodology from that of general English;
- 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;

- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students (adaptability with the Senegalese context).

4. The classification trees of ESP

Before we delve deeper in our analysis, it is important to decipher the relationship that lies therein between ESP and E.L.T. We agree that ELT pre-exists ESP, the same it does before English for General purposes and all the other EL branches. More still, the multi-faceted purposes of E.L.T is noticeable in ESP as it is ultimately stratified by many sub-classes depending on the learner’s inclination to the English language usage. That is to say, the learner’s purpose for learning English has always been theoretically indicative of the applicability of the typical English to the situational purpose. Thus there is a plurality of ESP disciplines that spring up with the whole range of specific demands and in whatsoever specialism, David Carter (1983) [4] and Hutchinson & Waters (1987) [7] simplify ESP courses into three types:

Table 1

Types of ESP	Language Purpose
English as a restricted language	Language used by hotel waiters, air-traffic controllers, tele-communication, tourism,
English for academic and occupational purposes	Branch: 1. English for Science and Technology (EST); 2. English for Business and Economics (EBE) 3. English for Social Studies (ESS)
English for specific topics	Participating in conferences; Doing research (in any field); Working in foreign affairs or institutions

The first type of ESP is restricted to the language hotel and tourist workers, air-traffic controllers, tele-communication agents, aeronauts, etc. The second type of ESP is for Academic and Occupational Purposes. It is stratified by three sub-branches:

- English for Science and Technology (EST)
- English for Business and Economics (EBE)
- English for Social Sciences (ESS)

It is important to note that, each of the above-mentioned disciplines of ESP is subdivided into two branches: EAP and EOP.

The third type of ESP is English with specific topics. That type of ESP focuses more on the specific communicative skill of the learner, i.e., to provide them the language tips they can use to participate in conferences, or carry out research and work at a higher international level of foreign affairs, resort to the English language and push back the language barrier.

6. Needs analysis as key feature of ESP

Needs analysis is the most typical characteristic of ESP, it is generally regarded as criterion or key feature of ESP which is formerly and exclusively focused on targets or end of course requirements. It usually takes account of learners’ initial needs, including learning needs. As a criterion of ESP, needs analysis serves three main purposes; first, it provides a means of

obtaining wider input into the content, design and implementation of a language program. Second, it can be used in developing goals, objectives and contents. Third, it serves as a means of evaluating an existing program (Richards, 1996) [15].

Hutchinson & Waters (1993) make a clearer distinction of two needs: target needs and learning needs.

Target needs deal with what learners need to do in the target situation. Target needs include three useful terms that are: necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities are the type of need which is determined by the demands of the target situation. It means that what learners have to know is how to function effectively in the target situation. Lacks are gaps between the target proficiency and the existing proficiency of learners. Lacks can be organized only after teachers or course designers already know the needs of learners. Wants concern with the awareness of needs that typify the ESP situation. Awareness is a kind of perception which may vary according to one’s viewpoint. When learners have a clear idea of the necessities of the target situation, and already have a particular view of their lacks, they do not automatically suit with the perceptions of other interested groups like teachers, course designers or sponsors. Therefore, ideal wants must reflect all the groups interested in implementing ESP courses.

Learning needs refer to what knowledge and abilities learners will need in a target situation. If the starting point in ESP is called “lacks” and then necessities and wants, the way to go from the starting point to the latter is called learning needs.

Their needs will determine the specification of syllabus content including considerations on such things as language skills, structures, functions, notions, topics, themes, situations, and interlocutors. (Sandor, 2017: 4) [16]. All in all, what ESP methodology experts seem to agree on is that, ESP course design starts with the analysis of the needs of the learner with regard to the types of situations and contexts in which they are likely to use the language, and this clearly distinguishes ESP from GE (Chibi, 2018) [5].

7. The CLT approach

ELT does not occur without a context or goal. This implies the teacher, as well as the learner. whether teaching EGP or ESP, the notion of purpose and goal should be fully embedded and sound in the teacher’s mindset for a sake of motivation and course good implementation. Butler (2007 :573) [3] suggested that achievement goal theory is also suitable to describe teacher motivation and explain its consequences, founded on the notion that schools and classrooms not only constitute achievement contexts for students but for teachers as well. “Teacher Goal Orientation” (TGO) is essential, the way Learner Goal Orientation is. In the ESP teaching context, the LGO is comparable to the needs for learning the language. Once again, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) [7] differentiate between two types of needs. The first one is target needs, which refer to what students are required to do in the target situation. Target needs can be further divided into three classes. The first class refers to *necessities*, which means what students have to experience in order to perform in the target situation. The second class is *lacks*, which refers to the gap between what students already

know and what is needed in the target situation. Finally, *wants*, which is used to refer to what students feel they need. (Mouhamed, A. S. E., & Nur, H.L.M, (2018) ^[13]. Given the prime importance for the ESP practitioner to dissect and glean information emanating from learner's needs analysis, this stage becomes, thus, prior to the conception of the syllabus, lesson planning, methodology and evaluation for ESP courses. The aforementioned stages are all synchronously done, once the practitioner is done with examining, extensively, the learner's learning concern. For the sake of centeredness on learners' needs, an ecliptic teaching/learning method is generally used for ESP courses. In actual facts, that is what evidences the pervasive usage of CLT approach in the ESP courses procedures. The basic concept of CLT is to develop students' communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) ^[9] by providing real-life situations that initiate communication.

With a CLT approach, the teacher does not act as a mere instructor. Rather, he functions as a prompter, facilitator, monitor course in the classroom set to enhance the learner's communicative performance. Whatever efficient and common CLT might be in ESP in the Senegalese context, there are many challenges inherent to its "foreign" specificity that ranges from the teachers' lack of suitable materials that meet the CLT approach, the lack of learners' motivation to indulge in communicative activities and the lack of digital technologies in some classrooms, especially in remote areas, to say nothing of teachers and learners' poor computer-literacy.

8. Recommendations

Basically, ESP is a challenging teaching/ learning process which firstly targets teachers, learners and other exogenous factors that call for the responsibility of educational authorities and the teaching environment itself. As regards the ESP teachers, the inefficacy of the ESP course implementation is chiefly due to an inaccurate methodology. Thus, as a practitioner, he firstly needs to nurture a close relationship and a thorough investigation with the learner, void of any glare of ambiguity, based on needs analysis, that will yield faithful pull factors of the learner's motivation to learn English, in relation to their domain. At this stage, the learner is, as well, strongly required to provide exhaustive information about their true inclination to learning English. Beyond the paramount importance needs analysis is for the ESP practitioner, he/she is expected to define the fittest approach and syllabus that align with the learner's needs he/she will necessarily vehicle through a holistic approach that really integrates the four skills of ELT and enhances the use of English in a real professional context. In this respect, the focus on the Audio-Lingual Method and CLT as the unique approaches in teaching a foreign language and implementing ESP courses is surely questionable. Rather, the ESP practitioner has to resort to other approaches, like the electric approach, that is woven with the existing methods and techniques, in real life situation for the sake of communicativeness. More interestingly, the educational experts should opt for a critical orientation on the permanent quest of developing research on ESP material development as providing textbooks and technologies in line with the country's

situational context of teaching ESP that will inevitably boost motivation of teachers, as well as learners, to bear out results.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the teaching of English, especially ESP, is far from being an easy task. It remains even tougher in a francophone country, like Senegal, where English is ranked behind the French and other various native languages that are intertwined in everyday communication. Thus the EFL context impedes the efficacy of the ELT because of the "contamination" factor of the aforementioned languages and the realities of the social milieu that ultimately pull down the good implementation of the teaching/learning process. This fact is even more visible at the higher level of studies and work environment where learners are more objective and demanding regarding their need to learn the English language which must be justly tailored to the professional expectations. Given the stakes, the ESP practitioner has a challenging role, as he/she is expected to take into consideration the vocational needs of the learners, the language barrier, emanated from the context in which it is taught, the efficiency of ESP textbooks, and the lack of materials in his/her courses. Beside the preliminary task of needs analysis and tailoring the teaching course to the EFL context and required materials, what stands out as paramount to make the implementation successful is the proposal of a wholesome syllabus and a holistic method and technique to convey the course in order to meet the Learner Goal Orientation that necessarily should align with the Teacher Goal Orientation, for the sake of communicative purposes.

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