Reading Under the ESP Approach

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Abstract

This paper contains the theoretical support necessary to develop the project "*Reading as a pedagogical resource in specific areas*". The purpose is to implement reading under the parameters of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) through the communicative approach, at USTA (Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja), with a group of students of V level of English, who read topics of their own field of study; acquiring specific vocabulary and information as well as improving in the use of English as a foreign language, work which is verified by researchers through oral and written practice.

Keywords

Communicative approach, ESP, specific reading.

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Lectura bajo el enfoque del ESP

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Resumen

Este escrito contiene el soporte teórico necesario para desarrollar el proyecto "La lectura como recurso pedagógico en áreas específicas". El propósito es analizar la implementación de la lectura bajo los parámetros de ESP (Inglés con Propósitos Específicos) a través de un enfoque comunicativo en la Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja, con un grupo de estudiantes de V nivel de Inglés, quienes leen temas de su propio campo de estudio, adquiriendo vocabulario e información específica al igual que progresan en el uso del inglés como lengua extranjera, trabajo que es verificado a través de reportes orales y escritos presentados por los estudiantes.

Palabras clave

Enfoque comunicativo, ESP, lectura específica.

Justification

The society evolution has direct relation with educative processes and it is the base of the development in the social, economical, cultural, scientific and technological fields. One way to contribute with these procedures is research because it lets the growth and progress of education in the way to construct knowledge in the personal, local, national and international levels.

With the project of bilingualism in our country, English has gained an essential position in schools and universities in Colombia; at the same time, it makes teachers face this new trend with research as the main tool to look for new ways of education.

The Santo Tomás University, Tunja, offers 5 levels of English to the different programs, except law which has 9; the first 4 ones are focused to work general English contents and the 5th one develops reading. Looking at the students᾽ necessities in learning English, we point out that they need to reinforce in reading topics of their own field of study which is named English for Specific Purposes (ESP), specially in the last level, because this is the opportunity to get real knowledge, useful for students᾽ development as professionals.

Based on the previous information, we propose the implementation of ESP through reading under the principles of the communicative approach; thus, students gain in the acquisition of knowledge of their own field of study and at the same time improve their use of English as a foreign language.

We consider the following topics to support the project: Reading in the field of English for specific purposes (ESP), communicative approach through reading, language acquisition in English as a foreign language and the reading process.

Reading in the Field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP Definition and Background

The English learning processes have been changing according to students᾽ needs; consequently ESP is the result of this change, it was born because advanced and adult learners felt the need to acquire knowledge of their own fields of study taking into account that English has been an important language in disciplines such as engineering, architecture, computer science, health, precision instrument, environment protection, accounting, and economics, among others.

ESP could be described as a specific branch of English focused to train students in specific areas, or as Laurence Anthony (1997: 1) points out: "English can be used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocation or professional purposes", which represents the students᾽ needs. At the same time other researchers as Dudley-& St John, M., (1998: 2) say: "ESP should be seen as simple as an "*approach*" to teaching, or an "*attitude of mind*""; which is similar to a conclusion made by Hutchinson, T., Walters, A. (1987: 19) who states, "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."

Teachers have been working with ESP from the early 60᾽s, as a need for people after the second world war in the way to specialize people in different areas, thus it has been

growing in universities such as Birmingham and Aston at UK and Japan. ESP has had good reaction in universities around the world, where it generated the interest to do the first conference on English for Specific Purposes, held on the campus of Aizu University, Fukushima Prefecture, in 1996; other researchers as Minci, I. H., Demirel, O. (1999: 82) declare about the work with ESP after 70s: "New developments were introduced in Educational Psychology, increasing emphasis on importance of learners' needs, interests, motivation, relevance of what and how they were learning." Thus these processes enriched the pedagogy for teaching English and opened new tendencies of learning.

On another hand, Gatehouse, K. (2001: 2) identifies three aspects that influenced the origin and growth of ESP: "the demand of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics and focus on the learning." Which show the expansion of science and technology at United States and its control over the world, teaching English evolved in the way to look for new possibilities; Hutchinson, T., Walters, A., et al. (1987) point out that a meaningful discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary according to the particular context in which it is used. This assumption permits us to understand the origin of ESP as the necessity of learners to explore specific contexts, motivated by different needs and interests.

ESP Characteristics

After analyzing the definitions and characteristics of ESP, writers as Strevens (1988) defined absolute and variable characteristics; but Dudley-Evans & St John, M., et al. (1998, pp. 4-5), in the Japan Conference of

ESP, presented some modifications of the last definition:

Absolute Characteristics

• ESP is defined as the learners' specific needs.

• ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline, it serves.

• ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills discourse appropriate to the class development.

Variable Characteristics

• ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.

• ESP may be used in specific teaching situations, different from the general English.

• ESP is likely designed for adult learners, professional work situations, and university or secondary school levels.

• Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it also can be used with beginners.

Finally specialists in teaching, use an ESP approach as base in their syllabus, taking into account the learners' needs or their reasons for learning and also their own personal specialized knowledge, using English for real communication. AT the same time it's necessary to have in mind the *types of ESP* in order to analyze the most appropriated according to the situation and context of students, which is point out in Carver, D.'s (1983) classification:

- English as a restricted language

- English for Academic and Occupational Purposes

- English with specific topics

English as a Restricted Language. It means that teachers have to take care to present students just the necessary language patterns needed for the topic students are going to work; for example if they are going to work about family members and relationships; the vocabulary and expressions have to be totally related with the topic. Thus the language is restricted focuses to the topic.

English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. It was created as a need for people who work; they are also identified: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Hutchinson & Waters et al, (1987), proposed three branches: call

a) English for Science and Technology (EST).

b) English for Business and Economics (EBE).

c) English for Social Studies (ESS).

As we can see, this classification is done by the conditions given in the workplace in the way to have more tools for education. About it, Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. et al. (1987) say that an effective syllabus must attempt to overcome the lacks of the educational system under which they are operating.

English with Specific Topics. It makes emphasis in the purpose of particular topics and is specially applied for postgraduate rea-

ding studies, Gatehouse, K. et al, (2001, p. 4) manifests: "This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions". Therefore this kind of language is prepared in the way to be applied in a functional way to people who need it for their future as professional form example Minci I. H., Demirel, O. et al (1999, p. 82) from Kınkkale University and Hacettepe University developed an ESP reading curriculum and one of their goals was: "to choose or prepare a functional and practical ESP reading material for the students in where they will have the opportunity to gain both general reading skills and the knowledge of the English terminology related to Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry" This study was developed with architecture and engineering students who gained acquisition of general and specific knowledge items in mathematics and English language.

ESP as a Communicative Approach Through Reading

The communicative approach is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn to use the language. Hutchinson and Waters et al. (1987, p. 25) says "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".

Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations integrated to the need of communication. The teacher sets

up situations that students are likely to encounter in real life, creates the appropriate environment in order to stimulate tasks that permit students to be the protagonists of their own learning, with activities such as conferences, preparation of papers, reading, note taking and writing. Berns (1984:10) comments: "The real-life simulations change daily. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics." Of course the teacher can also take into account the disciplines of students to guide the activities.

Hart, G. (2007). Proposes some basic principles for the language learning approach in use today:

Teachers᾽ Basic Principles

- A teacher's main role is a facilitator and monitor rather than leading the class. In other words, "the guide by the side" and; in this point Jin, L., Singh, M., Li, L. (2005:7) manifest according to their own research experience: "The teachers' task in class is to help students understand the discourse structure of what they were reading. This is an efficient way to understand the reading of materials and get the main ideas"

- Lessons are built round situations/ functions practical and authentic in the real world e.g. asking for information, complaining, apologizing, job interviews, telephoning, etc.

- Activities set by the teacher have relevance and purpose to real life situations – students can see the direct benefit of learning.

- Authentic listening and reading texts are used more often, rather than artificial texts simply produced to feature the target language.

- Use of songs and games are encouraged and provide a natural environment to promote language and enhance correct pronunciation.

- Feedback and correction is usually given by the teacher after tasks.

Additionally, while reading there are some processes the teacher has to enhance such as the top-down and bottom-up which occur at the same time. In **bottom-up** processing, learners solve problems relevant to language knowledge themselves, in this point, Murcia and Olshtain (2000:7) say: "Teachers gradually introduce knowledge about cohesive devices and reading strategies which influence their reading habits." In **top down** students get information from reading based on their previous knowledge of their daily life or from their schemata.

Learners' Basic Principles

- Learners are often more motivated if they have the possibility to communicate through different lessons or themes.

- Learners practice the target language a number of times according to their own capacities and needs.

- Language is built individually by students based on their own work experience.

- Learners interact with each other in pairs or groups.

- In the accuracy stage, learners are corrected at the end of an activity to ovoid the interruption of their thought process.

Another important aspect to take into account during developing ESP reading under the parameters of a communicative approach is *the material* because it is the teachers' main resource; in this way, before starting a project like this, it is necessary to make a good collection of materials; it could be composed by specialized books, articles, and web side pages among others. Jones, G. (1990, p. 89) proposes: "The only real solution is that a resource bank of materials has to be available to all ESP instructions". However there is the possibility that teachers create their own materials, according to their experience and as part of their growing as teachers.

Real texts are always suggested because they are rich in contents and it is usually done based on real experiences and investigation, thus Jin L., SinghM., Li L., et al. (2005, p. 19) suggest "Teachers may help students to access authentic English language materials that could be from internet, international newspapers and magazines in order to provide students with authentic reading materials. Such materials offer students insight into other nations, people, cultures and everything relevant to language." So these materials permit students to evidence and improve their background knowledge.

Another important aspect is that through communicative approach, teachers help students to develop *autonomy*, they frequently practice speaking in the classroom through communicative exercises, but previously practice the other abilities (listening, reading and writing) in order to get the input and re-organize his own thinking and knowledge, Larsen-Freeman (1986:22) argues: "Because of the increased responsibility to participate, students may gain confidence in using the target language in general. Students are more responsible managing their own learning." It makes of this approach, a good option to work with students of all levels and subjects; at the same time Carver, D. (et al., 1983, p. 134) states: "The learners must have a certain degree of freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study, also there must be a systematic attempt by teachers to teach the learners how to learn by teaching them about learning strategies." Nowadays it is necessary to motivate students to work for their own in the way to acquire information through new technologies, because with means of communication as the Internet they have all in their hands to access information according to their needs.

Reading Under the Parameters ESP

Reading is taken under the parameters of ESP because this is our field of study, so authors such as Anthony, L., et al. (1997, p. 5) says "The mayor quantity of information that a person receives is through reading, which is useful to improve the vocabulary and the rhetoric forms used in people's profession. Nowadays, reading has been the base of the curricula of ESP" The goal of reading is to get information you need for specific or personal purposes, thus, reading comprehension evolves understanding and decoding a text or constructing through a process.

The Reading Process

Additionally, reading in ESP, following the parameters of the communicative approach

requires the usual - **pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading** –activities:

* Pre-reading activities prepare students to do an efficient reading, it is related to students' background which facilitates comprehension. Lebauer (1998:5) points out: "Pre-reading activities can lighten students' cognitive burden while reading because prior discussions will have been incorporated." So, teachers have to enhance pre-reading activities as a useful habit in students to do an efficient reading.

Estes (1999) proposes that teachers need to guide pre-reading in the way to clarify some vocabulary, key concepts and appropriate conceptual framework which is explained during the reading activity. Additionally, Estes, et al. (1999, p. 25) states: "The teacher can make explicit links between prior knowledge and important information into the text." task that facilitate students' acquisition of new knowledge.

If students are conscious about what they are going to read, or what do they want to know after reading; they are going to be able to guide themselves along reading, this processes permit them to focus their attention in the purpose of reading; Brown (2001) considers the following types of reading skills.

Skimming: fast reading to get the main idea.

Scanning: fast reading to get specific information.

Extensive reading: Reading longer texts, often for pleasure with emphasis on overall meaning.

Intensive reading: Reading short texts for detailed information.

The previous skills are useful, specially for students who are studying a foreign language because they feel the urge to look up every word they don't understand and to pinpoint on every structural aspects they see unfamiliar, in this way, they can have a global view of the text which facilitates their process of understanding and have priority of the information.

As well in Jin L., Singh M., Li L., et al. (2005, p. 9) research, they implemented previous discussions in order to stimulate the reading process, so they evidence: "In order to make students familiar with the topic they were going to read about, group discussion, pair work and individual presentation were arranged *before reading* to make sure that everyone took part in the interaction."

Teachers' experience in reading processes show that before reading there is a short period of time which has to be used in good way in order take advantage of meaningful activities encouraging students to read. Thus, Steinhofer, H. (1996:2) states "The tips mentioned in pre-reading will not take a very long time to carry out. The purpose is to overcome the common urge to start reading a text closely right away from the beginning."

* During-reading students carry out an active reading with activities such as arguing, summarizing, questioning, evaluating and comparing the text with the personal experience. While these activities it is necessary that teachers avoid the use of dictionaries and encourage students to work in the strategies given (mentioned before) in order to do a faster and meaningful reading practice.

Ur, P. (1996), proposes the use of the following strategies while reading:

Making predictions: it helps students to predict what the text is about in order to integrate knowledge that facilitates the comprehension.

Making selections: Readers have to identify relevant information into the text such as people, places, dates, principal events, among others. At the same time they have to learn how to identify not meaningful information into the text that disturbs their attention.

Integrating prior knowledge: The schemata that have been activated in the pre-reading section should be called upon to facilitate comprehension.

Re-reading: Sometimes it is necessary to re-read the text in order to emphasize in relevant information.

Making use of context or guessing: Readers should be encouraged to analyze the context to guess the meaning of unknown words.

Breaking words into their component parts: The analysis of words composition helps to guess the meaning of words, contributing to understand easily the text. Jin L., SinghM., Li L. (et al., 2005, p. 7) implemented this technique in their research: "In reading class students were supposed to recognize the *discourse structure* and the outline of the passage so as to get a better understanding of the global structure and content."

Reading in chunks: To read groups of words together facilitates the speed and understanding.

Paraphrasing: it helps to interpret and verify information.

Monitoring: monitoring or evaluating understanding helps to verify the goals of reading.

* After-reading. It depends on the purpose of reading and the type of information taken out. Barnett (1988: 5) remarks: "post-reading exercises first check students' comprehension and then lead students to a deeper analysis of the text." Finally, reading has to accomplish the function to get new knowledge, consequently, there are some activities which are useful to verify and internalize the information:

Group discussion helps students focus the information they did not understand.

Summarizing (oral or written) permits students to point out the main information from the text.

Questioning (oral or written) helps to identify relevant information and to clarify doubts. This activity was done in Jin L., Singh M., Li L., et al. (2005, p. 10)'s research, so they show: "Teachers asked questions about the passage to get feedback from the students after these reading activities. All activities were organized to see that students participate actively in all interactions and eventually improve their overall English language ability." This is a very useful technique teachers usually do to conclude reading.

Filling charts is useful to point out relevant information and visualize the whole text.

Completing a text permits students to go beyond the text with their own understanding.

Listening to or reading other related materials help students to complement the information and have a wide view of the topic.

Role-playing, this activity, guided by the teacher, permits students to appropriate knowledge.

Furthermore d*uring the reading process, students can practice reading aloud or silent reading, really they can choose what they want but the teacher can guide both in order to have specific advantages, for example reading aloud permits not only understanding the text but also practicing* proper pronunciation, spelling (if necessary) and punctuation, Kavaliauskienė, G. *Role (2003:3) points out about it: "*Reading aloud trains listeners to cope with indistinctly pronounced words, fast speed of reading, unfamiliar sound-combinations, lexis and collocations."

On another hand, silent reading permits students to have confidence with the text where they search out the most important information from the text according to their personal interests; additionally, silent reading allows students to be faster and also they can develop this kind of reading wherever they want without interrupting other people.

Teaching Reading

Traditionally, the purpose of learning to read in a language has been to have access to the literature written in that language. In language instruction, reading materials have traditionally been chosen from literary texts that represent "higher" forms of culture.

This approach assumes that students learn to read a language by studying its vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, not by actually reading it. In this approach, lower level learners read only sentences and paragraphs generated by textbook writers and instructors. The reading of authentic materials is limited to the works of great authors and it is often reserved for upper level students who have developed the language skills needed to read them.

The communicative approach to language teaching has given instructors a different understanding of the role of reading in the language classroom and the types of texts that can be used in instruction. When the goal of instruction is communicative competence, everyday materials such as train schedules, newspaper articles, and travel and tourism Web sites become appropriate classroom materials, because reading them is a way where communicative competence is developed. Instruction in reading and reading practice become essential parts of language teaching at every level.

Reading Purpose and Reading Comprehension

Reading is an activity with a purpose. A person may read in order to gain information or verify existing knowledge, or in order to critique a writer's ideas or writing style. A person may also read for enjoyment, or to enhance knowledge of the language being read.

The purpose for reading also determines the appropriate approach of reading comprehension. A person who needs to know whether she/he can afford to eat at a particular restaurant needs to comprehend the pricing information provided on the menu, but does not need to recognize the name of every appetizer listed. A person reading poetry for enjoyment needs to recognize the words the poet uses and the ways they are

put together, but does not need to identify main idea and supporting details. However, a person using a scientific article to support an opinion needs to know the vocabulary that is used, understand the facts and cause-effect sequences that are presented, and recognize ideas that are presented in it.

Second Language Acquisition and Reading

Researchers have been investigating in the role of reading, as one source of input, in language learners' vocabulary development, also to examine whether learners incidentally acquire and retain unknown vocabulary as a result of reading and the effect of the text vary with the frequent exposure. In our specific experience learners are exposed to unfamiliar words during reading. Vocabulary acquisition and retention is represented in productive and receptive knowledge gain.

Second language acquisition or second language learning is, among other things, not totally unlike first language acquisition. A theory of second language acquisition includes an understanding, in general, of what language is, what learning is, and for classroom contexts, what teaching is. *Second language acquisition* refers to what the learner does; it does not refer to what the teacher does. *Second language acquisition research* studies the psychology and sociology of the learning process. Sometimes the terms *acquisition* and *learning* are not treated as synonyms and are instead used to refer to the subconscious and conscious aspects of this process respectively.

One of the most controversial theoretical perspectives is found in a set of hypotheses about second language learning which

were made by Krashen (1982) Krashen's hypotheses have had a number of different names. In the earlier years it was named the *Monitor model* or *Acquisition Learning Hypothesis* which was the most popular.

In describing the Monitor Model, Krashen (1988) claimed that adult second language learners have two means for internalizing the target language. The first is *acquisition which is* a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language, not unlike the process used by a child to pick up a language.

The second one is a *conscious learning process* in which learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process. The *Monitor* is an aspect of this second process; it is used to do alterations or corrections as necessary. Krashen (1982:47) claims "influence in second language performance is due to what we have acquired, not what we have learnt", statement which is related to the people's conscious and unconscious process of learning.

Some foreign language reading specialists such as Carrell, P.L., Devine, J., & Eskey, D.E. (Eds.). (1988) view reading as an interactive process. The reader interacts with the text to create meaning, the reader's mental processes work together at different levels.

Hosenfeld, (1979) says that the level of reader is determined by how well he carries out the following aspects: interest level in the text, purpose for reading the text, knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, awareness of the reading process, and level of willingness to take risks, and in the interaction with the text it is important to take into account: text type, structure, syntax, and vocabulary.

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