Corporate ESP Training: Challenges and Recommendations

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Abstract — This paper examines the challenges in corporate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training and discovers that the root of the problems is the absence of systematic criteria to design an ESP training that leads to immature course planning. It analyzes the needs analyses, course material developments, test and syllabus designs of twenty-two ESP training programs from 2002 to 2018. Finally, it gives recommendations to corporate clients and ESP training providers for improving the quality of their training programs and to researchers to advance the research on ESP training in professional settings.

Keywords — English for Specific Purposes; corporate training; needs analysis; course design; TESOL-trained ESP practitioners.

I. INTRODUCTION

With 500 million native speakers, English is used in 110 countries as an official language. Despite being the third widely-used language in the world, English attracts the highest number of learners—roughly 1.5 billion learners. It plays an increasingly important role in the developments of art and culture, science, technology, economics, politics and international relations. As a result, the demand for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training at workplace is rising.

ESP is designed for adult students learning at university and professional levels and is primarily meant for intermediate and advanced learners of English. The course content is based on the learner’s requirements and it teaches task/job specific vocabulary. For example, a tourist guide and a lawyer would use jargons with particular meaning within their specific industries that are completely different from one another.

There are at least two major benefits from taking an ESP training: faster acquisition of industry-specific contextual English and optimum application of the newly acquired language skills in work settings. ESP courses also provide a flexible and responsive approach to the client’s needs and goals which must be identified before the training begins. Ideally, the client receives individual attention from a highly qualified TESOL-trained ESP instructor.

The process of planning an ESP training for a corporate client is as follows:

- Initially, the trainer sets up a detailed interview with the client to establish the client’s specific requirements.
- In-depth needs analysis using surveys and more interviews may be performed with training participants.
- A placement test is taken to establish their English levels.
- The trainer designs the course outlines and method of instruction and select the course materials in consultation with the client.

Unfortunately, there has not been much research on what is happening with ESP classes outside university settings. The author hopes corporate ESP training should be brought into focus and provide a balance to the university orientation which we currently see abound in ESP research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify challenges of ESP training preparation in professional settings and give recommendations to corporate clients and training providers.
II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the paper summarizes some theories of methods and components of ESP course design.

Putting together participants with common denominators in the same class is the first step to ensure that an ESP training will be successful. An ideal ESP class is made up of a group of language learners who have the same task, the same position, the same profession, the same department, the same company or the same language level (Huhta, 1997) [3]. In addition to that, designing an ESP course for learners with low level of English would be very challenging. In this situation they are recommended to upgrade their English skills before getting to grips with the ESP course.

Needs analysis must be conducted before the class begins to collect a wide range of information about learners. Therefore, needs analysis allows ESP practitioners to make decision on the type of the course, syllabus, materials, methodology, tests, and evaluation (Razika, 2017) [6].

A. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has become the cornerstone in ESP. The results of needs analyses can be used in course design for setting realistic goals, limited, specified contents, shorter training times and learning methods.

Data collection methods are used by ESP course designers in order to determine the aims and objectives of learning a language, skills needed, and the situation where language is used. For that, Jordan (1997) [4] lists thirteen data collection methods for NA as follows:

- advance documentation
- language test (at home and/or on entry)
- self-assessment
- observation in class; monitoring
- class progress test and error analysis
- surveys, questionnaires
- structured interviews
- learners’ diaries and journals
- case study
- end-of-course test
- evaluation feedback
- previous research
- follow-up investigation

In today’s concepts of needs analysis, there are six most common data collection methods: questionnaires, analysis of authentic spoken and written texts, discussions, structured interviews, observation and assessments.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (2009) [2] suggest eight components of needs analysis to estimate the learners’ strengths and weaknesses (in language, skills and learning experiences) as well as to define the target situation and environment of studying ESP in five major areas:

- target situation analysis (TSA) and objective needs analysis (ONA), e.g. tasks and activities learners will use English for;
- linguistic analysis (LA), discourse analysis (DA) and genre analysis (GA), i.e. knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situations;
- subjective needs analysis (SNA) which is similar to learning-situation analysis, e.g. factors that affect the way the learners learn, their previous learning experiences, reasons for enrolling in a training and expectations;
- present situation analysis (PSA) to identify learners’ current macro- and micro-skills, attitudes towards English and towards language learning; language knowledge and language performance;
- means analysis (MA) to accommodate a language course to local situations and is related to the feasibility and practicality of the language course. MA should provide information about the environment where the course will run.

B. Course Materials

The results of needs analysis are used to choose topics strictly related to the client’s industry, or in the case of exam preparation the materials will most likely follow the areas covered by that examination. This helps the teacher select the proper teaching materials in order to meet the immediate needs of the students. (Medrea & Rus, 2012) [5].

Moreover, course participants can provide the trainer with authentic materials, such as email conversations, presentation materials and reports, so that s/he can recycle them into course materials. If the students are preparing for a specific exam, the materials selection has to follow the areas covered by the exam.
C. Evaluation

ESP test takers should be engaged in a variety of English tasks which is similar to the student’s real-life language use. The more authentic a task or test is, the more probable it is for the test taker to carry out the task in the same way as he/she would perform it in the actual professional settings.

Tranvik (2008) [7] suggests, “ESP tests are related in content, themes and topics to particular disciplines, and involve a higher degree of language specificity.” Lexical, semantic and syntactic characteristics of technical language enable practitioners of a particular academic, professional or vocational field to convey meanings more specifically.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) [1] identify authenticity of task, reliability, validity, practicality and economy as the most important factors that affect the quality of a test.

III. ESP CHALLENGES

This research is based on an ESP trainer’s teaching experience, notes and supporting documents collected from 2002 to 2018. It examines four prerequisite components for designing an ESP training program, namely: needs analysis (NA), course materials (CM), evaluation (Eva) which is divided into Diagnostic Test (DT) taken before the training starts and Final Test (FT) or summative test taken at the end of the training, and syllabus design (Syl).

As shown in Table I, any one of three parties is responsible for each component of the pre-teaching preparation; these parties are English training provider (P), corporate client (C) and an ESP trainer (T).

18 out of 22 training programs are organized by 11 corporate ESP training providers (labelled P in the second column). Written in pseudonyms to protect their identities, these training providers are ES, BD, TR, UN, VZ, LB, EC, LI, EL, GS and CL.

Four training programs are organized by the trainer alone. The corporate clients in #1, #3, #4 and #16 contact the trainer directly.

All of the four components—needs analysis, course materials, evaluation, and syllabus design—are analyzed in terms of who is responsible to create, select, develop, share or provide them and how they are done.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Training Program, Year, Industry</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Eva DT</th>
<th>FT</th>
<th>Syl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Business English, 2018, body shaping</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Business English, 2018, palm oil</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>English for Maritime Engineering, 2018, engineering consultancy</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>English for Journalism, 2018, news media</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>BD</td>
<td>Business English, 2016, telecommunication</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Business English, 2016, milk/beverage</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>English for Hospitality Industry, 2015, shopping mall</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>English for Frontline Officers, 2015, apartment and hotel</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>English for Teaching, 2014, education</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>English for Teaching, 2013, education</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>TOEIC Preparation, 2013, aviation</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>VZ</td>
<td>TOEFL Preparation, 2012, Ministry of Trade</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>English for Mining, 2008, petroleum</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Business English, 2007, tours and travel</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Business Conversation, 2005, court</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes, 2006, government bodies</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Business English, 2006, pharmacy</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Business English, 2005, highway</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Business English, 2002, drinking water supply</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only a few training providers perform needs analyses but they do not share the results with the trainer. Some of them believe that a thorough needs analysis is not necessary because the client’s expectations are obvious from the name of the training program. For instance, the objectives of a Business English training program would be to make the participants fluent in telephone conversations and email writing.

Needs analysis is usually conducted by the marketing staff of training providers by means of interviews with the clients, in this case, managers or HRD staff instead of the training participants. Most of the marketing staff, managers and HRD staff are graduates of university degree programs that are not related with TESOL, such as Management, Business Administration, Finance, Law and Psychology.

Therefore, misconceptions about English pedagogy (or TESOL) abound. A corporate client (in #2) has a firm belief that over 20 participants with different work tasks and varied proficiency levels can enrol in the same 16-hour Business English class with the hope of speaking English fluently once the term ends. One company requests to get their Business English skills assessed or diagnosed using TOEFL as a placement test (in #1). Many believe that Business English training can cover all skills that they need to learn when in fact a more suitable ESP program for them is English for Front Officers or English for Secretary. The marketers of English training providers have almost always succumbed to the clients’ wishes. The TESOL-trained instructor has never been invited to collaborate or give her opinions on these matters.

In #1, #4 and #16, the clients did not give the trainer time to conduct needs analysis, because they wanted to begin the training programs as soon as possible.

In terms of course materials, two ESP training providers (ES and TR) used the same Business English course materials to cater to clients from different industries.

All training providers use TOEFL paper-based institutional prediction test or TOEIC prediction test as a diagnostic test (i.e. placement test) before beginning training programs, but they do not use the same kind of exam as the final/summative test. The trainer has to create final test materials based on what she has taught.

Course syllabi are not always available due to time constraint and the training provider’s decision to use the course textbook’s well-developed table of contents as a syllabus.

Overall, there are two ubiquitous components in each ESP program: course materials and evaluation (both pre-test and final test).

IV. DISCUSSION

Out of 22 training programs, only two (#3 and #5) are deemed ideal in that the trainer was given enough time and freedom to design and conduct needs analyses, develop course materials, create test materials and design the syllabi. Moreover, the needs analyses of both programs discussed all the eight components of needs analysis mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework.

In TABLE II we see that many ESP programs organized by institutional training providers are not preceded by in-depth needs analysis.

Even though the training providers always conducted a placement test (in the forms of TOEFL or TOEIC) prior to training to tick off LSA in their need analysis, the test materials that they used were irrelevant to the specific jargons and language skills needed for their clients’ industries. Thus, we can say that their choice of testing material is a violation of construct validity since the tests did not measure what they were intended to do.

Due to this inadequacy (only one out of eight components was included), it can be concluded that needs analysis was not performed by many of the training providers. This is a sign that their courses were not built on a very solid base.

V. MULTI-FUNCTIONAL TRAINER: A REAL EXAMPLE

In this ESP training, an autonomous trainer is in charge of everything from identifying learning needs based on needs analysis, developing course and test materials, designing class curriculum, teaching the classes to evaluating the learners’ progress. The program—English for Maritime Engineering—is currently taking place in the Jakarta branch office of an international engineering consultancy firm with headquarters in Netherlands and offices in 32 countries in five continents.

A needs analysis was conducted as the basis for tailoring an ESP curriculum. This included
interviews and collecting work samples, such as email conversations and short excerpts of technical reports.

The trainer held individual interviews in English with each of the training participants to collect audio data of their spoken proficiency and to analyze all eight components of needs analysis proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (2009), including what they needed to learn, the skills they were lacking and their personal and professional objectives for taking the course. The trainer also interviewed the manager to inquire more information related with English usage in his work environment, the present situation at work and his expectations from the training.

The course participants’ work samples—due to their authenticity and relevance—were used in place of what has been commonly used as a placement test, i.e. TOEFL PBT or TOEIC prediction test. The work samples were useful to identify common error types and were used as a reference to develop course materials, test materials and syllabi. Table III is one of the results of the needs analysis.

Technical report writing and poor attendance (due to obligatory business trips out of town) have been the major challenges so far. A problem came up when there was an immediate need for technical report writing, despite the fact that the training participants had not fully understood how to construct passive sentences in English let alone tidbits of English grammar. This obstacle inspired the trainer to modify the content of the syllabus which would be geared towards error reduction by correcting common mistakes in their past technical reports and using the genre-based approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Level</th>
<th>Profiles</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic (General English)</td>
<td>1 secretary</td>
<td>Reading, speaking, writing, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 technical drafters</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 technical drafters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate (A)</td>
<td>4 engineers</td>
<td>Reading, speaking, writing, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate (B)</td>
<td>1 oceanologist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 economist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 engineers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI. Recommendations

Here are some practical checklists that researchers, corporate clients and training providers can use to improve ESP training programs.

Corporate clients (managers and HRD staff):
- must allow ample time for ESP training provider to create, conduct and interpret needs analysis prior to course design;
- must ensure that each component of needs analysis and language testing is included or performed by training provider and trainer;
- must take part in designing course outline together with ESP training provider and ESP trainer;
- should continuously monitor the progress of training participants;
- should monitor the performance of ESP trainer and give suggestions when necessary;
- should ensure that syllabus, materials, evaluation, teaching methods and classroom instruction are parallel with the objectives of the training expected by the management;
- should evaluate the training outcomes: have the training participants achieved the company’s objectives? Check whether the outcomes are worth the investment.

ESP training providers:
- need to hire needs analysts or TESOL-trained/certified ESP practitioners that can create and translate information in needs analyses;
- should make time to conduct a thorough needs analysis with each corporate client;
- must disclose all information in the results of needs analysis with trainer(s);
- should create course syllabus together with trainer;
- must tailor course design for each corporate client together with trainer;
- must select or create test materials related with the client’s job, in consultation with trainer;
- must select appropriate course materials for each corporate client, in consultation with trainer.
Researchers:
- are advised to conduct similar research projects in other big cities throughout Indonesia;
- are recommended to research how long new skills are maintained after the training ends;
- should conduct research on corporate clients as to what ESP course they think they need and what ESP course they actually need based on some assessments;
- should measure ESP clients’ satisfactory levels based on the trainers’ educational and professional backgrounds.

VII. CONCLUSION

The underlying issues with some ESP training programs in Jakarta are that there is lack of coordination between trainers/instructors and clients in the course planning stages, irrelevant test and course materials, as well as underdeveloped needs analysis and course syllabus.

TESOL-trained ESP instructors must be allowed to participate in course planning which is negotiated between the clients (managers, HRD and course participants) and the ESP training providers (marketers, needs analysis specialists, curriculum designers and course material developers).

REFERENCES