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# The Role of the ESP Teacher

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**Abstract** The present paper will first of all focus on the literature which approaches issues such as the difference between a General English teacher and an ESP teacher, ESP materials, syllabus, course design and evaluation. Then, emphasis will be placed on the importance of a fruitful collaboration between the ESP and the specialist subject teachers. Next, there will be provided an example of the cooperation between the Maritime English teacher and the Seamanship fundamentals one in point of needs analysis, syllabus and course design. Mention will also be made as to the kind of specialist subject knowledge the ESP teacher is required to avail. Finally, we will conclude our paper with own opinion on the role of the ESP teacher.

## 1. Introduction

The origins of ESP date back as far as the end of the Second World War which meant a worldwide boost in science and technology engendering a demand for a common international language. Due to the economic power of the United States in the post-war period, this role was attributed to English. Therefore, there emerged a shift in point of the purposes and needs for acquiring the English language. Developments in linguistics and educational psychology also contributed to the expansion of ESP in tertiary education institutions. Furthermore, the contemporary globalization contribute to the diversification of ESP courses tailored to the learners' vocational or professional needs. The shipping industry nowadays employing multinational seafarers and shore personnel, places a serious pressure on MET (Maritime Education and Training) institutions to adjust and harmonize their syllabuses to meet the IMO (International Maritime Organization) and STCW (Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping) Convention requirements concerning competences to adequately use Maritime English on board ships and in ports. Here comes the role, a very important one, of the ESP teacher.

## 2. General English versus English for Special Purposes

This is a very frequently debated issue. Is there indeed any difference between the two types of English, GP and ESP? Studies prove that there is. The former, addresses learners who study English because it is a curriculum subject, to gain more prestige, well- rounded education or merely to be able to communicate with foreign people in various situations. The latter, is targeted to learners who have vocational or professional needs. As a consequence, the needs analysis stage in designing the syllabus and course support is very important. A needs analysis form is filled in by the ESP learners who decide what topics and language skills would be useful in their profession. According to Hutchinson [1]

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. ESP teachers need to understand basic principles of the subject matter and also need to get familiar with a particular jargon. A Maritime English teacher, for instance, should know the main parts of the ship like bow, stern, forecastle deck, etc. He/she has to be able to resort to analogies between the General English terms and the Maritime English ones. For example, on board ship we use terms like bulkheads for walls, portholes for window, decks for floor, starboard side for the right side of the ship, portside for the left side of the ship, fore and aft for along, athwartships for across, amidships for in the middle of, etc.

### **3. The Roles of the ESP teacher**

According to Strevens [2] “The methodologies of ESP conform to the same model of the language learning/teaching process as does any other form of language teaching. That is to say, the basic teaching activities are these:

- Shaping the input
- Encouraging the learner’s intention to learn
- Managing the learning strategies
- Promoting practice and use”

Therefore, the ESP teacher, first and foremost, but beside this role he/she assumes various other roles. Since they teach learners for specific target situations, a needs analysis should be carried out. An ESP Maritime English teacher would discuss with his/her students about the particular situations they will have to use Maritime English. They would probably mention: communication between multinational crew members on board ship, communication with other ships via VHF radiotelephone or with Vessel Traffic Services. Emergency situations require the sending of special messages like Mayday for distress, Pan-Pan for urgency and Securite for navigational and meteorological warnings. After deciding on the various areas Maritime English would be used, prioritizing the skills is the next stage of the analysis. Since there is a lot of communication both on board ship and on shore, listening and speaking skills are very important as well as vocabulary, the terms used on board ship being different from the General English ones, i.e. galley which means kitchen. How much reading would they need? They would need some reading strategies for being able to extract useful information from nautical documents or instruction manuals. What about writing? They will have to enter data into the log book or draw up reports or write short e-mails.

Other two important roles of the ESP Maritime Teacher are those of a syllabus designer and materials developer. After completing the needs analysis, the ESP Maritime teacher, in collaboration with the subject matter teacher decide on the syllabus topics and supporting materials.

From own experience, the collaboration with the Fundamentals of Seamanship teacher resulted in a comprehensive on-line course tackling the main topics taught at the specialist discipline. By harmonizing the Maritime English course topics with the subject matter ones, the acquisition of the terminology specific to the maritime context has become more accessible to the students. The topics taken over from the subject matter course are: Ship structure, Ship’s Dimensions, Directions, Standard Wheel and Engine Orders, Ground Tackle, Different Types of Rope, Life saving appliances and Firefighting. The idea behind adjusting the ME course content to the subject matter one is to facilitate the comprehension and acquisition of the new terms.

### **4. Conclusion**

From own experience, I can assert that the Maritime English teacher plays various roles. He/she is a facilitator, a researcher into the professional needs of his/her learners, a syllabus designer and eventually a materials developer. The collaboration with the subject matter teacher is essential for both syllabus design and materials development. A Maritime English teacher may use the students’ experience at sea to add up new topics expanding in this way the course database.

### **Reference**

- [1] Hutchinson T and Waters A. 1987 *English for Specific Purposes A learning-centered approach*, CUP p.6
- [2] Strevens, P. 1988 *The learner and teacher of ESP*, in Chamberlain and Baumgardner p.44

