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The Teacher's Roles in ESP Reading and Writing Lessons

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Abstract. The two protagonists of a learning educational process, i.e. the teacher and the learner, have triggered various discussions regarding the extent of each one's importance in the classroom. There are clearly many striking differences in the teacher's roles in a traditional ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classroom compared to a modern one. The first part of this paper deals with theoretical issues regarding the teacher's roles in ESP reading and writing lessons, emphasizing the positive influence of modern methods and activities on students' learning. The second part of the paper aims at investigating the adequate strategies, methods, procedures and activities in ESP reading and writing lessons and their efficiency in improving the learners' language skills.

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning is a dynamic process in which many elements interact to make this act possible and successful. One of these factors is represented by the roles that teachers play in class, depending on the lesson, course or seminar plan and the activities they carry on. For instance, teachers sometimes lead the class, organize students and monitor them. In order to enhance the students' skills, teachers should be aware of the attitudes shown towards the students' performance in different moments of the class.

There are clearly many differences in the teacher's roles in a traditional model classroom compared to a modern one. For instance, in a traditional class management pattern, the teacher is in control of every classroom interaction, while in a modern learning environment, student-student interactions are dominant. Moreover, in a traditional classroom, the teacher tends to do all the talking, the students' speaking time being less than the teacher's; thus, students get bored and demotivated in learning English. On the other hand, in an English learning classroom, where the teacher uses innovative techniques and methods, there is a simultaneous interaction between the students who can discuss different views in pairs or groups, involve themselves actively in task solving and have enough time to express their points of view on various topics. Nowadays, English classes have become increasingly challenging as English is not only a mere foreign language, but a *lingua franca* that bridges cultures and nations, across Europe, in particular (see Nădrag and Botezat, 2010), and across the entire globe, in general.

2. The teacher's roles in reading lessons

As it is well known, reading is very important, especially when students need the English language in order to read certain materials for their own purpose, such as documentation in various fields of study. In this case, English for specific purposes – ESP plays a significant role because "specialized terminology is extremely necessary during activities in very different fields, as it is needed for performing accurate communication" (Nădrag, 2016: 36). It is noteworthy that reading should not be

separated from writing, since these two skills are interconnected in various activities such as summarizing a material, extracting the main ideas or note making.

In a study suggestively entitled "Teaching the Receptive Skills", Katalin Monas (2003) explained the importance of this topic by referring to the fact that a shared experience among many researchers and teachers of second languages is that students are generally able to ask foreigners questions but are not able to understand their answers. Students may actually need to read for their work or study, or they want to read for pleasure. In each case, the process needs to be as easy as possible for them. Exercises focusing on receptive skills allow the study and practice of grammar, pronunciation, punctuation, vocabulary – especially since vocabulary acquisition plays a key role "in the recent theories of second language teaching" (see Chirobocea and Popescu, 2013: 67); in their turn, reading activities can trigger conversation and discussion.

According to specialists in the field, there are six skills that are essential in the development of reading, i.e. predictive skills, extracting specific information (scanning), getting the general picture (skimming), extracting detailed information (such as the writer's attitudes or opinions), recognizing functions and discourse functions (in connection with the organization of a given text), deducing meaning from context (see Harmer, 1991; Nunan, 1989). In order to develop the above-mentioned skills in the ESP classroom, the teacher can use various activities and techniques such as alternating between authentic and non-authentic texts, asking students what they want to read or giving them more options, making the purpose of reading activities explicit to students, varying the purpose of reading activities.

When teaching reading skills, the teacher's role is that of trainer, aiming to develop the students' ability to read fluently, without any help. Moreover, the teacher should become a facilitator, by bringing texts suited to the students' goals and interests, and also by introducing and practicing the appropriate techniques (see Mărunțelu and Dumitrașcu, 2005). Furthermore, the teacher should take into account skills and activities such as reading texts with comprehension, using various reading styles, learning through reading, reading critically.

Across time, reading practice captured the methodologists' attention; thus, many approaches have been developed in this field. The most important ones are top-down processes (focused more on the overall meaning of a text, anticipating the content, guessing, increasing reading speed, practicing skimming, pre-reading discussions, reading within a topic, extensive reading, silent reading, little practice in intensive reading) and bottom-up processes (professing the importance of lower-level processes in reading). Teachers are advised to engage their students in activities that combine top-down and bottom-up strategies, such as discussing the topic of a text before reading it, focusing on the students' expectations, eliciting the connection between the references in a text and real situations, well-known by their students.

In this regard, White and Arndt (1991) suggested three stages and a general procedure for a reading lesson, made up of three stages; it is noteworthy that in each stage the teacher plays different roles. The first is the pre-reading stage, where teachers are organizers, giving clear instructions to their students. In the while-reading stage, teachers are observers, restraining themselves from interrupting the students' reading and observing their progress; they are also prompters, by telling students to notice language features in the text, or controllers, by directing students to certain features of text construction, clarifying ambiguities and making them aware of the text structure. In the post-reading stage, students are granted the opportunity to consolidate and reflect upon their reading, the teacher being a feedback organizer. The teacher should also be supportive when encountering any negative feelings, which students might have about the process, in order to sustain motivation.

3. The teacher's roles in writing lessons
As far as writing is concerned, Olshtain (2001: 231) states that besides being a communicative skill of vital importance, "writing is a skill which enables the learner to plan and rethink the communication process", providing the students "with the opportunity to focus on both linguistic accuracy and content organization".

In his turn, Raimes (2002: 309) asserts that "writing consists of many constituent parts and we need to consider which ones will be the most important for a course: content, organization, originality, style, fluency, accuracy, or using appropriate rhetorical forms of discourse". Therefore, in order to tackle them all, teachers should set priorities, having in view their students' needs.

In an article entitled "English Learners and Writing: Responding to Linguistic Diversity", Scarcella (1997: 27-33)mentions nine guidelines that teachers should take into account when teaching writing: "Respect students' language and culture", "Give students lots of comprehensible English input", "Check to make sure that the students understand", "Encourage students to use language purposefully", "Provide writing tasks at the appropriate level for English learners", "Allow students to choose their own writing topics and tasks", "Provide comprehensible, constructive feedback", "Grade fairly", "Build a climate of trust in which students feel free to try out new linguistic behaviors".

There are three ways of approaching writing such as focusing on form, on the writer or on the reader. Moreover, these three perspectives have determined different approaches to writing. The first one is the text-based approach, where the teacher acts as a controller, either by presenting students a model text and by asking them to imitate or adopt it or by giving them the opportunity to choose the content, but the form is given (guided/parallel writing). The teacher may also be a motivator, by encouraging students to make as much effort as possible for maximum benefit, by giving them the freedom of writing (free writing activities), i.e. asking them to write narratives based on pictures, describe someone, write an answer to a letter, write reports on the books they read or write essays on different topics. The process approach (writer-based approach), which focuses on how a text is written, is learner-centered and emphasizes the importance of a recursive procedure of pre-writing, drafting, evaluating and revising, the teacher being a facilitator and a provider of input or stimulus, facilitating the exercise of writing skills and drawing out the learners' potential (Hyland, 2003). The teacher may ask students to hand in multiple drafts of a work, which they revise after discussion and feedback (the teacher thus becomes a reader) (White and Arndt, 1991: 2). This process consists of stages such as generating ideas (pre-writing); writing a first draft with an emphasis on content (discovering the meaning/ the author's idea); the second and the third draft revise ideas and are focused on the communication of those ideas. As far as the genre approach is concerned, it is reader-based and focuses on the way in which writers and texts interact with readers, viewing writing predominantly linguistic. Moreover, greater emphasis is placed on the social context in which writing is produced and "on the interactive collaboration between teacher and student, with the teacher taking an authoritative role or a supportive one towards the learners as they move towards their potential level of performance" (see Badger and White, 2000: 157-160).

In a writing lesson, the teacher is also a feedback provider, by responding positively and encouragingly to what students have written. Moreover, according to Tribble (1996), the teacher can play different roles in feedback, i.e. audience (listening to the students' ideas and indicating whether the author's point is clearly formulated), evaluator (giving feedback on the strengths and weakness of a text, helping students improve their performance), examiner (indicating the degree of task achievement by grading students) and assistant (participating in the students' learning of the language).

4. Research on teacher's roles in developing reading and writing skills in learner-centered ESP seminar

This section represents the applicative part of the paper, dealing with a pedagogical research on the ESP teacher's roles in learner-centered reading and writing seminars. The research is based on the following hypothesis: the teacher's roles are more efficient in developing the students' reading and writing skills in the acquisition of ESP in a student-centered classroom, rather than those in a teacher-centered classroom.

The methods employed in this research are the experiment (which gave us the possibility to propose, apply and assess the hypothesis, in order to optimize education, design solutions and include them into the teaching practice, after having tested them) and the psychological observation (which

helped us verify the accuracy of certain assumptions). In our research experiment, there are three categories of variables: independent (introduced by the experimenter and the experiment will influence the performance), dependent (changes generated by the experiment, measuring and explaining) and intermediate (which determine the functional relationship between independent variables and dependent ones).

This research consisted of the following steps:

- gathering the scientific material in order to establish the theoretical and methodological background regarding the teacher's roles in modern ESP classes;
- identifying the adequate teaching strategies able to develop the students' interest in learning ESP and developing their reading and writing skills;
- developing the ESP learning unit (focused on reading and writing skills);
- splitting students into a control group and an experimental group;
- applying an initial test in order to determine the students' level of English language acquisition;
- the teaching process (based on the learning unit), using student-centered methods and techniques with the experimental class and teacher-centered methods and techniques with the control class;
- applying a final test, comparing the students' achievement (student-centered vs. teacher-centered approaches) and determining the effectiveness of the learning unit based on the student-centered approach.

Two heterogeneous intermediate-level groups of students enrolled at the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences (majoring in Public Administration), first year of study, were chosen for this experiment, i.e. an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group consisted of 14 students, while the control group consisted of 15 students; all students were aged between 19 and 21 years old.

Before the teaching stage, an initial test was applied to both groups, in order to determine the students' level of English language acquisition, in terms of reading and writing skills. The results of this test revealed the following data (see Table 1):

Table 1. Initial test: average grades.

Experimental group	Average grade: 71.68
Control group	Average grade: 70.61

The table shows that the two groups were almost equal in terms of English language acquisition (i.e. students had a similar starting point). The initial test also showed that the intellectual possibilities of the subjects varied from low to very high. That meant that a set of differentiated (and sometimes individualized) activities had to be designed, in order to adapt to each intellectual level. Moreover, this initial test revealed several important aspects in terms of the students' reading and writing skills. For instance, although students did not encounter major problems when reading a text in order to identify the correct information, they had some difficulties when they had to identify certain words in the context and match them with their meanings. Moreover, students had some major problems with personal written production, i.e. they encountered great difficulties in producing more complex sentences. Consequently, when designing the ESP learning units, several aspects had been taken into consideration, such as: more exposure to authentic texts, vocabulary practice by using certain types of exercises that determine students to learn words in context in an attractive way, more grammar (morphology and syntax) and writing exercises.

Along the whole experiment, both classes had the same teacher and syllabus. However, for the experimental group, learner-centered strategies and activities were designed in reading and writing

lessons, with modern teacher roles, such as prompter, investigator, tutor, participant, monitor and diagnostician. As far as the control group is concerned, traditional methods and techniques, with traditional teacher roles (i.e. controller, input provider, corrector of errors) were employed.

The ESP teaching units dealt with the following topics: "General Considerations on the British Legal System", "General Considerations on the American Legal System", "The British Government" and "The American Government". In order to be successful with the chosen reading and writing materials, the following requirements were taken into consideration: the chosen subject should be representative for the whole class; the analysis should be thoroughly performed; the whole group of learners should be acquainted with the reading and writing topics, and real life situations should be generated. Some reading and writing materials were created entirely to illustrate a certain idea, or were based on actual information; they were based on real information and consisted of newspaper articles, abstracts, statistical data, quotations from documents, photos.

We also decided which activities and strategies should be employed in the traditional and modern (student-centered) reading and writing lessons. For the ESP student-centered lessons, the following techniques were applied: giving clear guidelines; practicing decision making; using technology and teaching aids to enhance learner-centered activities (see Nădrag and Soare, 2013); allocating time for learning while performing tasks; allowing learners to teach learners; using continuous assessment. Flexibility was encouraged by continuously adapting to new requirements, challenges and to the students' special needs; for this purpose, we also varied the teaching styles and kept up to date with new techniques to keep students interested. Moreover, in order to make the learning experience more relevant, students were provided with real life educational materials and problem-solving situations. They were involved actively in reading and writing activities (by asking questions, having discussions, referring to their own experience, encouraging the interaction between class members). Trial-and-error learning and problem solving were also emphasized by creating an atmosphere that allowed students to learn also from their own mistakes and by encouraging them to select the best solution to a problem under a given set of circumstances. The students' acquisition of the English language was permanently monitored; in order to avoid boredom and maintain the students' interest alive, a variety of exercises was used: problem solving, mind mapping, class vote, skimming for the gist, predicting the topic as group or pair-work activities, self-assessment, peer-assessment and writing letters, opinion essays and argumentative essays. Students were also asked to bring samples of written articles from newspapers or magazines. They had to vote for the most interesting written articles that would serve as materials for the reading and writing exercises.

These activities also required different forms of organizing the students so that they could interact with each other. Thus, they worked in pairs or in small groups, but also individually, to control not only their progress but also to give them the opportunity to internalize and reflect on the newly acquired information and to build self-confidence and independence.

As far as the control group is concerned, we employed traditional techniques and strategies typical of the Direct method, the Grammar-translation method, the PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production) method and its alternatives: translation exercises – which are efficient only if used pertinently, with specific goals (see Chirobocea, 2018), reading comprehension questions, exercises focused on the provision of synonyms or antonyms, fill in the blanks exercises, using words in sentences, reading aloud, cue-response drills, paragraph writing.

The final test (which was the same for both groups) was given at the end of the teaching stage (which lasted four weeks) and it was aimed at establishing whether there is any difference in the English language acquisition of the experimental group, compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Final test: average grades.

Experimental group	Average grade: 78.40

Control group	Average grade: 71.38

The results of the final test revealed a difference of approximately 7 points between the two groups, in the acquisition of reading and writing skills (in ESP). The students from both the experimental and the control group evolved in terms of their reading comprehension skills (the average of the experimental group increased by 6.54 points and the average of the control group increased by 0.77 points). It is noteworthy that the experimental group differentiated itself from the control group; some students still have problems with identifying the meaning of certain words, but the students from the experimental group showed significant improvement in this area. Although most students improved their writing skills, still there are some problems with verb tenses and writing complex sentences in an essay (especially as far as the control group is concerned). Therefore, practicing reading for comprehension, more exposure to authentic materials, more sentence writing and grammar exercises are recommended.

The difference between the average grades obtained by the experimental group in the first and final tests is quite small. However, it is noteworthy that this evolution took place in only one month (which is a short time span). If correlated with the time span of the experiment (i.e. an increase of 6.54 points in only one month (two hours per week), as far as the experimental group is concerned), the results reveal their true value. Moreover, although the improvement showed by the experimental group does not seem spectacular, any progress is a big step forward. Therefore, teaching students by student-centered approaches proves to be more efficient rather than teacher-centered approaches, validating thus our research hypothesis.

5. Conclusion
In order to build strong reading and writing skills, students need to engage in as much active practice as possible. Therefore, a change should be made in the way teachers approach the entire teaching and learning process.

Nowadays, the focus of instruction should be on the leaner. This experiment proved that not only did the students from the experimental group learn better, but the rate of proficiency was also higher than that of the control group. A student-centered approach, with modern teacher roles, provides many advantages, such as adequate and increased exposure to language, to interesting material, in a relaxed and tension-free learning environment. In addition, students are more motivated to learn ESP and become more confident in using the target language in different challenging contexts. They become more aware of what they are learning by having the opportunity to get involved in the learning process. It is also noteworthy that the teacher's main task is not only to acquaint students with information but also to encourage them to use that information in an appropriate way, in the real world.

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