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Investigating Teachers' Views and Perceptions about the learning needs for designing an ESP Training Course for Sudanese Military Staff

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Abstract

This study aims to suggest a learner-centered approach to developing an ESP courses for Sudanese Military Staff .The study adopted the descriptive analytical method, the researcher collected data by using a questionnaire for (30) Sudanese University teachers. To analyze the data, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese Military Staff lack sufficient training in English that they need at the work place. In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that teachers should use a learner-centered approach to developing an ESP course for Sudanese Military Staff , needs analysis process should be conducted before starting any English course to find out the actual needs of the Sudanese military staff, furthermore, the study recommends using authentic materials to help trainees use and master real and live language.

Key words: learner-centered approach - Sudanese Military Staff-ESP

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى اقتراح نهج يركز على المتعلم لتطوير دورات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة للعسكريين السودانيين , استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي و جمع البيانات بواسطة الاستبانة التي وزعت علي (30) معلماً للغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات السودانية, استخدم الباحث برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعيه لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن العسكريين السودانيين ينقصهم التدريب الكافي في اللغة الإنجليزية التي يحتاجونها في مكان العمل . بناء على

تلك النتائج فإن الباحث يوصي بأنه ينبغي على المعلمين استخدام نهج يركز على المتعلم لتطوير دورات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة للعسكريين السودانيين و ينبغي اجراء عملية تحليل الاحتياجات قبل بدء أي دورة في اللغة الانجليزية لمعرفة الاحتياجات الفعلية للموظفين العسكريين السودانيين . علاوة لى ذلك, توصي الدراسة باستخدام مواد حقيقية لمساعدة المتدربين على استخدام اللغة الحقيقية والحية واتقانها.

الكلمات المفتاحية : نهج يركز على المتعلم- العسكريين السودانيين -دورات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة.

1.Introduction

The question of ESP mastery can be a very challenging issue especially if the language is mostly unfamiliar, specific or complex to EFL learners as in all fields, the need for English for specific purposes (ESP) language learning and teaching has increased rapidly. It is now widely accepted that English language has become the language of international communication. The widespread need for English as a second or foreign language puts a great pressure on the educational resources of many countries. ESP courses require specific language and skills that are related to communities of practice and disciplines. According to Jordan (1997)the proficiency in ESP depends on the knowledge of its vocabulary possessed by EFL learners hence there has been a worldwide growth in demand for English for Academics courses .

Hayati (2008) remarked that ESP courses are being offered without advanced planning in course design, systematic needs analysis, teacher education, time, textbooks, and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs.

2. Statement of the problem

Knowledge of English language plays an important role for military staff to effectively communicate and provide help in time and properly. So English could have a great effect on the level of the military staff performance. From the researcher's experience in teaching English he noticed that Sudanese military staff doesn't receive any type of training in specialized

courses of English for military purposes. So, fluent and effective English communication is hardly met particularly the special terms needed by military staff in specific situations. As English is important for military staff in order to communicate effectively, good listening and speaking skills minimize the misunderstanding in basic conversations. At the same time, these skills initiate positive impression and help them to achieve and handle their job properly.

3.Objectives of the Study

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To highlight the causes of the lack of sufficient training of the English that Sudanese military staff need at the work place.
2. To suggest some suitable solutions to overcome Sudanese military staff's language needs.

4. Questions of the Study

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. What are the causes of the lack of sufficient training of the English that Sudanese military staff need at the work place ?
2. How can teachers help Sudanese military staff to improve their language skills?

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Lack of sufficient training of the English that Sudanese military staff need at the work place can be attributed to different factors.
2. Teachers can help Sudanese military staff to improve their language skills by raising their awareness about the importance of English skills for learning

in general and providing them with learner-centered approach to developing an ESP course frame work for Sudanese Military Staff.

6. Significance of the Study

This study investigates teachers' views and perceptions about the learning needs for designing an ESP training course for Sudanese military staff . Awareness of the factors that can contribute to the problems under investigation would benefit the following groups:

1. Sudanese Military staff can identify their problems and be aware of the factors that can contribute to their difficulties; when learners know something about their own difficulties, they will be able to apply the right strategies and techniques and become better language learners.
2. ESP teachers will have better understanding of their students' difficulties and examine their own teaching methods, techniques and materials accordingly; when teachers are aware of their students' difficulties, this will help them to guide students to overcome some of their problems and design materials that suit the level, interest and the needs of the students.
3. The study shall also form a point of departure for syllabus designers and material writers to make further improvement in ESP teaching materials.
4. Researchers who are interested in ESP research to use the findings of the study as a basis for further study in the area. The study will also contribute to the existing literature in the field of teaching and learning ESP.

7. Limits of the Study

This study investigates teachers' views and perceptions about the learning needs for designing an ESP training course for Sudanese military staff during the academic year (2022-2023).

8. Methodology of the Study

As has been mentioned, the purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' views and perceptions about the learning needs for designing an ESP training course for Sudanese military staff ,to achieve this goal and in an attempt to answer the study questions, data has been collected through using a questionnaire which was administered to (30) professional Sudanese university teachers who have long experience in teaching English and doing research in English. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

9. Definitions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for specific purpose (ESP) has been defined by a number of scholars and each definition has contributed to bring people to a workable definition which seems to be yet unreachable. Some Scholars defined ESP in terms of what it is not rather than in terms of what it really is.

Mackay and Alan Mountford (1978:2) define ESP as the teaching English for "clearly utilitarian purpose". The purpose they refer to is defined by the needs of the learners and this purpose is varying since it could be academic, occupational, or scientific.

Dudley Evans and St John (1998) define ESP in terms of its absolute and variable characteristics by modifying Strevens' original definition of ESP .

Hutchinson and Waters define ESP as an approach to language learning not as a product. They state that ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology. They stressed that ESP is an approach to language learning in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning. They provide more detailed definition for ESP in terms of what ESP isn't. They claimed that ESP is not a matter of teaching

specialized varieties of English. In their assumption they stated that using a particular form of language does not mean these forms vary in its kind from other forms. they mentioned that there are some features of language they are likely to meet in the target situation, but this" *should not be allowed to obscure the far large area of common ground that underlies all English use, and indeed , all language use*" Hutchinson and Waters(1987:18). They provide more definitions in terms of what ESP isn't , first "ESP is not just a matter of Science words and grammar for Scientists, Hotel words and grammar for Hotel staff and so on." (ibid, p.18). Second ESP is not different in kind from any other form of language teaching. Efficient methods of learning should be applied even though the contents are different. Despite the fact that the content may be different, there is no reason to suppose that the processes of learning should be different from that exist in General English. Furthermore Pauline Robinson (1991, pp. 2-3) defined ESP depending on three different points; students goal from learning and they needs and finally their age (she stated that they should be adult).

Dudley-Evans and St John mentioned that each of Strevens , Hutchinson and Waters, Robinson's definitions have validity and weaknesses, they thought Strevens' definition is much comprehensive but, referring to content as an absolute characteristic could be confusing since it may confirm the false impression that ESP is always and necessarily directly related to subject content. They have postulate a revised definition of absolute characteristics. They agreed in some areas with Strevens like; the designing of ESP course should be according to what students need and the appropriateness of the language and that the content should be related to the occupations and activities.

10. ESP Course Design

Course design refers to the planning and structuring of a course to achieve the needed goals. It is the outcome of number of elements: the result of the needs analysis, the course designer's approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials (Robinson: 1991). In the same vein, Hutchinson and Waters (1987:65) have defined a course as “An integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge.”

Munby (1978:2) ESP courses are: “*Those where the syllabus and the materials are determined by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner.*” This means that the identification of learners' needs is the first step upon which the ESP course is going to be designed.

Thus, the ESP course takes into consideration not only the subject area of the learners, but also the lexical, semantic and structural aspects of the language characteristics of that specialized area.

The following questions as per Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:145) should be responded to before starting course designing process:

1. Should the course be intensive or extensive?
2. Should the learners' performance be assessed or non-assessed?
3. Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?
4. Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities? Or should it be as facilitator of activities arising from learners expressed wants?
5. Should the course have a broad focus or narrow focus?
6. Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study? Or experience?
7. Should the materials be common-core or specific to learners study or work?

8. Should the group taking the course be homogenous or should it be heterogeneous?

9. Should the course design be worked out by the language teacher after consultation with the learners and institution, or should it be subject to a process of negotiation with the learners?

Hutchinson and Waters have considered some questions as well that should be responded to in the initial stage in the process of designing ESP course, beyond these questions laying the core elements they consider important for designing ESP course;

The questions are:

- Why does the student need to learn? (needs analysis)
- Who is going to be involved in the process? (needs analysis)
- Where is the learning to take place? (needs analysis)
- When is the learning to take place? (needs analysis)
- What does student need to learn? (language description)
- How will the learning be achieved? (learning theories)

11.Previous Related Studies

Abo Mosallem (1984) investigated the English language needs for 150 Egyptian police officers in ten police departments. He used a questionnaire to collect data. As a result of his study the English needs of police staff varied between speaking and listening skills for most departments he covered, except the Interpol department who gave priority to writing and reading skills. Majority of officers indicated that acquiring English would help them to perform their job more efficiently.

Hatim Ibrahim Aldohon (2012) investigated the needs and problems for Jordanian tourist police. His study revealed that speaking is perceived as the most important language skill for workplace. Listening came after speaking and considered as an important skill. Regarding English function they need at their workplace Jordanian tourist police staff highlighted general conversation as the most important function, then comes providing

information. The most difficult part of English that has been revealed by the study are that foreign tourists speak too fast and they cannot catch what they say (listening problems) , also tourist police staff indicated inability to know the meaning of some vocabulary (reading problems).

Khamkaew (2009) investigated the Metropolitan Police Officers“ (MPOs) needs and problems in English language listening and speaking skills who work at Chana Songkram Police Station. A questionnaire and the interview administered to 30 metropolitan police officers. Results revealed that EL listening and speaking skills should be improved in “greeting and offering help, asking for personal details and problems and wants, giving information about accommodation, tourist information, transportation, emergency calls, giving directions, and giving advice and instruction in safety, travel, and shopping” (p. 37). Most MPOs expressed the need of good command of English in listening and speaking. On the other hand, the main problems associated to speaking were using expressions, producing full sentences, and the pronunciation of vowel sounds.

12. Data Analysis and Discussion

The questionnaire was mainly designed to investigate some of the causes of the lack of sufficient training in English that Sudanese military staff need at the work place and to elicit some of the solutions to overcome the problems under investigation.

Table (1) the mean and standard deviation and chi-square values for the study Hypothesis: Lack of sufficient training of the English that Sudanese military staff need at the work place can be attributed to different factors.

No.	Statements	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	Sudanese military staff receive sufficient training in English language	2.4	.50	28	0.010
2	Sudanese military staff receive	2.5	3.8	15	0.006

	specialized training meets job requirement				
3	Time allocated for English training is sufficient and suitable	2.8	1.7	12	0.000
4	Sudanese military staff 's needs are always analyzed before joining a training course	3.6	.50	22	0.000
5	Sudanese military staff find difficulties to understand English speakers when they speak naturally	2.6	.50	22	0.036
6	Sudanese military staff find difficulties to understand different language genres	3.4	-.50	28	0.010
7	Sudanese military staff find difficulties to understand different dialects	2.4	.50	28	0.010
8	Sudanese military staff can't respond to what is said in English	3.6	.80	29	0.023
9	Sudanese military staff can not use terminologies related to my work	3.3	.70	23	0.006
10	Sudanese military staff find it difficult to read terminologies related to my work	3.4	2.5	33	0.000
11	Sudanese military staff find it difficult to write reports and letters related to my work	2.9	4.8	34	0.000
12	Sudanese military staff find it difficult to fill in forms	2.9	.70	32	0.023
13	Sudanese military staff use mother-tongue in their speaking classes when they are asked to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge about and teachers tend to translate everything into the first language, as a result they face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of	3.6	.80	22	0.023

	meaningful situations and real- life contexts developed in the class				
14	Sudanese military staff face problems in decoding messages in the target language because of my weakness in vocabulary and inability to form well-structured sentences.	3.3	.70	23	0.006
15	Shyness, and reticence are general personality traits which frequently lead to weak language skills.	3.3	.70	23	0.006

It is clear from the above table that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents’ answers in the (15) statements are greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents. According to the above findings , we can say that EFL Sudanese military staff experience lack of sufficient training in English they need at the work place due to the above factors, so the first hypothesis of the study is verified.

Study Hypothesis Two:

Teachers can help Sudanese military staff to improve their language skills by raising their awareness about the importance of English skills for learning in general and providing them with learner-centered approach to developing an ESP course frame work for Sudanese Military Staff.

No.	Statements	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	To teach ESP effectively teachers need to adopt a critical view of learning and teaching language and integrate both subject matter and students’ needs	2.4	1.9	12	0.00

2	To be able to participate fully in ESP classes, learners need to possess a good knowledge of general English at an intermediate level. Otherwise, learning ESP would represent a great problem	2.5	2.6	17	0.00
3	Problem-based learning (PBL) useful is a teaching approach which involves students in the process of curriculum design, thereby enhancing the students' motivation	2.4	2.4	13	0.00
4	Teachers should have positive attitudes and willingness, as well as some basic knowledge of the discipline they teach, to achieve meaningful communication between teacher and learner	3	.80	25	0.03
5	Schools and universities need to pay more attention to time constraints, large , unmanageable class size class	2.9	1.6	20	0.00
6	One way of teaching ESP courses is by obtaining information about students' needs, interests and aspirations and by asking them directly which would allow teachers to make important decisions concerning course objectives, select appropriate methodological principles and design a suitable course	2.4	1.9	12	0.00
7	Teachers should teach the language functions in ESP writing such as expressing different purposes; expressing necessity; predicting; defining; expressing cause and effect; comparing; recommending, etc. moreover, they should teach writing for everyday	2.5	1.4	17	0.00

	needs such as writing notes, reports, letters, charts, etc.				
8	To teach ESP effectively the teacher requires analytic techniques to identify and select the appropriate language for the course as teaching students strategies is especially important when it comes to dealing with language skills	2.7	2.6	15	0.00
9	Teachers should use a learner-centered approach to developing an ESP course frame work for Sudanese Military Staff	2.8	.80	20	0.001
10	When teaching ESP the teacher should present topics which are valid but of sufficient general interest to bridge the gap between the needs of Sudanese Military Staff and the world of everyday experience.	2.5	.70	21	0.008

From the above table, it is obvious that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the (10) statements is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, so the second hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

13. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the findings of the questionnaire which conveys the views of teachers about the problem of the study, Sudanese Military Staff experience lack of sufficient training in English they need at the work place due to many causes such as the following:

- Sudanese military staff can not use terminologies related to their work.

-Sudanese military staff use mother-tongue in their speaking classes when they are asked to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge about and teachers tend to translate everything into the first language, as a result they face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of meaningful situations and real- life contexts developed in the class.

- Sudanese military staff face problems in decoding messages in the target language because of my weakness in vocabulary and inability to form well-structured sentences.

- Sudanese military staff find it difficult to write reports and letters related to my work.

- Time allocated for English training is sufficient and suitable.

- Sudanese military staff find difficulties to understand different dialects and language genres.

- Sudanese military staff do not receive sufficient training in English language.

- Sudanese military staff do not receive specialized training meets job requirement.

According to the responses of the teachers to the questionnaire, the following are some suggestions to overcome the problem under investigation among EFL Sudanese military staff.

- Teachers should use a learner-centered approach to developing an ESP course frame work for Sudanese Military Staff.

-When teaching ESP the teacher should present topics which are valid but of sufficient general interest to bridge the gap between the needs of Sudanese Military Staff and the world of everyday experience.

-To teach ESP effectively the teacher requires analytic techniques to identify and select the appropriate language for the course as teaching students strategies is especially important when it comes to dealing with language skills.

-One way of teaching ESP courses is by obtaining information about students' needs, interests and aspirations and by asking them directly which would allow teachers to make important decisions concerning course objectives, select appropriate methodological principles and design a suitable course.

- Schools and universities need to pay more attention to time constraints, large , unmanageable class size class .

- Teachers should have positive attitudes and willingness, as well as some basic knowledge of the discipline they teach, to achieve meaningful communication between teacher and learner.

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