

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF GOIÁS
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES
A REPORT ON ESP COURSES

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The purpose of this paper is to present to you the real situation of ESP courses at the Federal University of Goiás.

Our University joined the National English for Special Purposes Programme in October, 1978. Since then our teachers have been participating in the various Regional and National ESP Seminars held in Porto Alegre, São Paulo (2), Uberlândia, and Vitória. As part of the Programme, we had the opportunity of having Prof. John Holmes in our Institution as a guest lecturer in 1981. Last year, also as part of the Programme, I was given the opportunity to attend an ESP course at the University of Lancaster, which I considered very important.

From 1979 on, our Department has offered ESP courses to various areas of specialization. The first ESP course in our Institution was given to a group of Science teachers who had requested it in order to learn how to read and understand specialised texts for their postgraduate courses. Then, we had ESP courses offered to undergraduate students of Communication, Exact Sciences and Biological Sciences. In the Physics Course, for example, two terms of ESP courses have become compulsory as a result of the optional courses offered to the students. In the same way, the Computer Science Course, to be started next year has proposed two terms of ESP as part of its Curriculum.

In the same way, as in the Courses requested by the postgraduate teachers, the graduate students, as well

as their Departments, are, primarily interested in reading and understanding specialised texts written in English since most of the materials available for those courses are in English, and only a small number of books and journals have been translated into Portuguese.

Although having this general purpose, some groups present specific interests. In order to cope with those interests, we are always trying to consider each ESP group individually, through an attempt to devise a needs analysis as accurately as possible.

Our Courses have been planned to last 02 (two) terms in a total amount of 60 hours each term. In 1982, first semester, we had 07 groups of ESP I (180 students) and 02 groups of ESP II (50 students). In 1982, second semester, we had 03 groups of ESP (110 students) and 02 groups of ESP II (50 students). At present, we are having 06 groups of ESP I (190 students) and 01 group of ESP II (25 students).

As the ESP courses offered in our Institution have gradually become successful, other areas started to request ESP courses for their students. On the other hand, teachers dealing with ESP have felt a growing interest to deepen their knowledge of the English language aiming at an improvement of the ESP courses given here.

Concerning our syllabus design the content of the courses has been chosen according to the areas of specialization of the various groups, but we also have been trying to select texts that do not aim only at the specific fields of specialization but that may help our students create strategies and skills for reflective thought as well. We are trying to provide our students with materials

that may offer them strategies that would enable them to gain the most advantage from their readings, as well as offering them materials adequate to cope with their needs.

Concerning the selection of texts we have been adopting two different strategies: first, we had ESP courses where the materials were suggested by the student's own Department, and, secondly, we had courses where the ESP teachers selected the texts to be studied.

In the first case, we had the advantage of the student's previous knowledge of the subject-matter. The experience proved to be somehow positive, but what occurred was that the texts were very specialised in content, so we had to be permanently in contact with the student's Department. Besides, there was a certain repetition of topics which was not very motivating to the students. Due to that, we decided to introduce, during the term, texts of general knowledge associated to those of science which proved to be motivating and helpful.

Concerning the second strategy, where the ESP teachers selected the materials, we decided to discuss the student's needs and interests before selecting the materials. That first experience in needs analysis was done through discussion and a questionnaire.

As a result, we decided not to use the materials selected by the student's Department anymore, but tried to follow the results of the analysis. Trying to cope with the student's needs we used two different methods: for one group of students the materials were selected from textbooks, magazines, specialised journals like the Scientific American, Physics Today and many others, trying to choose texts referring not only to the specific

areas of specialization, but also to more general topics like Science and Government, Nuclear Waste as a social problem, the relationship of Sciences and Medical problems. Also, texts suggested by the students were studied in class.

With the other group of students, a textbook was adopted: "Reading and thinking in English" - Concepts in use. As the students had specific purposes in mind, it was very difficult to find a textbook which could provide them with adequate texts. Nevertheless, the process of expressing fundamental concepts effectively thinking with language presented in the textbook has proved to be efficient, and, due to its non specific character it has been helpful and motivating. On the other hand, due to the level of studies of our students, concerning the specific matters of their courses, the textbook had to be supplemented with some extra-reading passages, more related to the student's specific purposes.

Therefore, the fact does not invalidate the use of the textbook since it presents varied materials, linear and non-linear texts, which ranges from "conceptually simple descriptions of systems and builds up to a complex and comprehensive description of a complete system." So, our purpose is to select materials that may give them a chance to focus on techniques that help them manage any specific text.

The important point, in our opinion, is to provide our students with strategies and skills related to reading, but taking into consideration that reading is a creative process which includes the student's previous knowledge and the level of competence they are trying to achieve, taking into consideration that reading is essentially thinking. In most of the texts, we try to evaluate at

first, the level of comprehension we want to achieve through reading. Two techniques have been used: skimming and scanning, and it has been our purpose to consider the text as a whole, making hypotheses, not only about word meanings, but also about the kind of audience the text is addressed to, and the physical constitution of the text. We have been trying to make the students predict and make suppositions, skim and scan the text, analyse its organization and check predictions.

Nowadays, besides analysing new ESP books, we are trying to select adequate texts and create new exercises based on varied methods. We have been trying to apply, for example, Alan Waters and Tom Hutchinson's model for preparing materials. This model, presented at the University of Lancaster, proposes that questions about the content should not be the only way to discuss a text. They propose that content and language should come from the input and that content and language should direct the learner straight to the task, which is the important point since we use language to do something, and in the task, as they propose, the students do something to use language communicatively.

Finally, we should like to say that the National Project, coordinated by Professor Dr Maria Antonieta Alba Celani, from the Catholic University of São Paulo together with the British Council and the Brazilian Government, has been of an enormous importance to the creation and improvement of both ESP courses and research in Brazil and we, from the Federal University of Goiás, wish to thank the representatives of the Project, and, specially Miss Celani, for her high interest and effort not only to the improvement of ESP courses and teachers in our country but also to Education in general.