

CONSIDERING ASPECTS ON SELECTING ESP TEACHERS

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Abstract

This paper is meant to lead ESP approach followers to reflect on the profile of an ESP teacher as well as on their own ideas and practices. It is also meant to launch procedures for choosing teachers with adequate competence to become ESP professionals. As we are not interested in only finding out about linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, we changed the traditional way of selecting teachers, filtering also their feelings, their way of thinking about what happens in the classroom and their way of looking at their students as human beings. Our intention is to clarify doubts that may occur about the purposes, design, practice, criteria for evaluation, and the legal structure that sustained the examination which was meant to choose candidates for a post as an English for Specific Purpose Teacher at E.T.F.Q.-R.J. We also took into account the pedagogical philosophy and necessities of the school, the team of English teachers, the pedagogical practice as well as the target clientele, the future professionals. We will go through the test analysing the needs, the steps and the results going into details that reflect our priorities when devising the ten questions that compose the written test and all the issues linked to the nature of such innovating work. We also make a self-evaluation as we consider some aspects to be altered and developed.

Key-words: *teacher selection; ESP approach, pioneer work; self-evaluation.*

Resumo

Este trabalho tem como objetivo levar os leitores que seguem a abordagem Instrumental a refletir sobre o perfil do professor de linguagem instrumental, assim como questionar suas idéias e práticas em sala de aula. Também pretende lançar um novo procedimento na escolha de professores potencialmente competentes para exercerem suas atividades dentro da Abordagem Instrumental na Língua Inglesa. Uma vez que não estamos interessadas somente nos conhecimentos lingüísticos e pedagógicos, optamos por filtrar também suas percepções, sua postura reflexiva diante do que acontece em sala de aula e sua habilidade de considerar seus alunos como seres humanos. Nossa intenção é esclarecer as dúvidas que possam ocorrer sobre os nossos objetivos, elaboração, aplicação, critérios para a avaliação e aspectos legais que norteiam o concurso, que tinha como meta o suprimento de vaga para professor segundo uma Abordagem Instrumental na E.T.F.Q.-R.J. Consideraremos a proposta pedagógica e objetivo final da Escola, o grupo de professores de Inglês e a sua prática pedagógica, assim como a clientela-alvo, os futuros profissionais. Nós examinaremos a prova escrita, levando em conta as necessidades, as diversas etapas e os resultados, dando detalhes que refletem nossas prioridades ao elaborar as dez questões da prova escrita e todos os demais aspectos relacionados à natureza de um trabalho pioneiro e desafiador. Faremos também uma auto-avaliação ao considerar alguns aspectos que alteraríamos e desenvolveríamos em situações futuras.

Palavras-chave: *seleção de professores; abordagem instrumental; trabalho pioneiro; auto avaliação.*

1. Introduction

Facing the task of having to select English teachers for our school, in January 1995, we had a problematic situation to solve as we have been working within an ESP approach for a decade and we were looking for special teachers to fit our needs, establishing some requirements to be fulfilled by the candidates.

Thus, we needed to analyse the specific necessities of a technical school, taking into account its pedagogical philosophy, the team of teachers (as we have a peer work) and our main objective, the student who is bound to be a professional.

As our teaching practice is not based on a traditional approach, we intended to choose a professional with the profile suitable to our needs: flexible, prompt, sensible, sensitive, logical, responsible, curious, a restless classroom researcher, a hard-working adventurer. Therefore, we did not mean to design an exam to come up with good traditional language teachers. The candidate's linguistic competence was evaluated in the written answers and during the teaching practice exams.

This paper is an alternative to solve a problem detected on selecting professionals with formal and informal ESP knowledge but, moreover, to spread the ESP approach within foreign languages teachers community.

2. Our school

At E.T.F.Q.-R.J. (Federal Technical Chemistry Highschool -Rio de Janeiro) the students major in Chemistry,

Food and Biotechnology. Our aim is to enable the students to start their professional lives in industries and laboratories right after leaving highschool.

3. Our students

The students come from various social contexts, the majority of them belonging to a low-middle class segment with little chances of taking private language courses. They end up having different learning and cultural experiences as far as a foreign language is concerned.

Due to the specific requirements of the courses, the students have to get in contact with English technical texts. This fact led us, English teachers, to adopt an ESP approach aiming at the development of reading skills as fast as possible so that the English language would turn out to be a helpful tool for the students, fulfilling their needs according to our short three term course.

4. Our teaching

For the last twelve years we have been gradually improving our work in classes and developing adequate materials to suit our students' needs.

We research and select appropriate texts to design materials concerning specific and general knowledge areas. When necessary, we seek the advice of specific subject teachers.

5. Our needs

For these reasons, the E.T.F.Q.-R.J. English group of teachers naturally came up with the conclusion that, to supply a single vacancy for an English teacher, the selective test would have to be based on ESP theory and practice.

6. Our selection

The examiners did not have the intention to select exclusively ready-made ESP specialised teachers. By giving hints to each question proposed in the test we meant to facilitate the candidates' gathering of ideas. Eventually, it was very easy to identify three different types of applicants:

- a) those who had no ESP knowledge and experience at all;
- b) those with a fairly good theoretical background and experience;
- c) the ones with little ESP knowledge and practice but being open-minded and retaining a high potential to become a good ESP teacher, once having the opportunity to be more competent and develop talents in this kind of philosophy of work.

7. The steps

Instructions were given to the candidates on filling in the application form, which also included the contents and bibliography (see Appendix 1).

The selection process comprised three stages:

- a) A Written Test, which is the core of this paper, requiring at least 60 (sixty) points.
- b) A Teaching Practice Test demanding a minimum of 60 (sixty) points (see Appendix 2 for criteria). The topics were chosen by lots twenty-four hours before the Teaching Practice Test day (see Appendix 3). The classes were to be given in the English language so that the examiners could also evaluate the oral linguistic competence of the candidate.
- c) Certificates: the points were given according to general rules established by the Head Department of the School (see Appendix 4).

8. The core

The Written Test was divided into two parts:

- a) **Reading and comprehension of texts** [total 40 (forty) points].
In this section of the test, all the answers were to be given in Portuguese. It consisted of five texts aiming at assessing the comprehension of ideas, discourse analysis, material design, as well as allowing the applicants to play the role of an ESP student.
- b) **Theory and practice in ESP** (although the issues settled in this part may be suitable to any L2 ESP teacher).
There were six questions to be answered in English [ten points for each, total of 60 (sixty) points] enabling us to evaluate not only the written linguistic competence of the examinee but also the coherence of theoretical concepts. Another item that was taken into account was the way the

applicant expressed him/herself, and sensed his/her role as an educator.

9. The core into slices

a) "The Icing"

a.1. **Text one** was taken from a technical magazine intended for professionals in the area of Food : “Innovation through Partnership” (*Food Engineering International*, Sept/1994:45). The question meant the identification of the key-word and the target reader (eight points):

a.1.1. Identify the most important word (key-word) for the comprehension of text one. Give its meaning in Portuguese.

a.1.2. What kind of reader does the text aim at? Justify your answer.

a.2. **Text two**, “Historical Perspective-Splitting the Atom” in Masterton, *Chemical Principles*, 1990, is a helpful tool for the students at E.T.F.Q. This text was suitable for materials design, focusing on non-verbal information and the structure of the text as it traces a historical perspective on the splitting of the atom (eight points).

a.2.1. Design one comprehension activity to each of the following reading skills:

- a) non-verbal information;
- b) structure: relations between parts of the text

a.3. **Text three**, “Industrial Biotechnological Applications” (Henderson & Knutton, 1990) involved a simple activity working on vocabulary of the area (six points) :

a.3.1. Combine the products/processes with each industrial sector.

a.4. **Text four**, “How bacteria beat a retreat”, (*New Scientist*, Nov./1993) required a summary of the movement of a bacterium. This task was supposed to obtain from the candidate the capacity to extract an idea precisely, synthesising it.

a.4.1. Write a summary explaining how a bacterium moves.

a.5. **Text five**, the twin texts, presented the same subject, published on the same day, on two different English newspapers: “Finnish diamonds fuel Baltic hopes” (*The Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 9th 1994) and “Lapps await diamond fever” (*The Times*, Sept. 9th 1994). The item requested the recognition of four equivalent pieces of information in the articles (four points) and a comparative critical discourse analysis of the two authors, extracting examples from the texts in order to justify their different styles (six points).

a.5.1. The two articles report the same fact and were published on the same day by two different newspapers.

a.5.2.a) Read the articles and point out four different pieces of information that appear in both texts.

b) Analyse and compare the discourses of both authors. Give examples.

b) “ The filling”

The idea underlying the introductory quotations was to present the main concepts to be developed in the answers.

b.1-The first question

“Awareness raising is ensuring students understand with their hearts as well with their heads...” (Scott,1986:02)

“Awareness raising cannot be seen as a collection of recipes...” (Figueiredo, 1994)

"Why is awareness raising important to the ESP approach?" dealt with the importance of “conscientização” as it is the heart bumping blood to the teachers and students' brains. If the teacher does not have confidence in the whole approach in order to reach a functional language competence s/he will never be able to engage the students in an enthusiastic work.

b.2-In the second question

“Meaning is created, not extracted, from texts.”

(Alderson, 1994)

“Good readers are good decoders.” (Abdullah, 1993:10)

“... of the four language skills, reading is the one most suitable to the development of vocabulary knowledge.”
(Huckin, apud Moreira, 1986:01)

"How far would you agree with these quotations within an ESP approach?" The concepts considering how readers tackle words in texts and how meaning is worked out

were crucial for the candidates to allow the “essence” to flow and to permeate their explanations.

b.3-The **third question**

“From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”

(Karl Marx apud Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:53)

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

(Chinese Proverb)

"What is the role of the ESP teacher?" Shall we suppose it could be extended to other subject teachers? The applicants should perceive what for and how long teachers are supposed to carry out their work of enabling the students to become self-sufficient, taking into account their individual paces, satisfying their needs. In this question, we focus on the high priority of the learning process, that is, making the students responsible for their own development, as a consequence of moving the spotlights away from the teachers.

b.4. The **fourth question**

“To take testing for evaluation is similar to take the yolk for the egg or the bedrooms for the house.”

(Santos, 1987:01)

"What should be taken into account in the process of evaluation?", treats evaluation as a natural, continuous process during classes as it is part of the whole learning

process and not an end in itself. This philosophy of evaluation comprises a somewhat threatening practice for some teachers, for students have to be allowed the opportunity to exert the responsibility of managing their own learning and developing a critical ability to perceive their accomplishment.

b.5. On coping with Applied Linguistics the **fifth question**

“Should we call the art of cooking applied chemistry ?”
(Palmer, Joe D., apud Celani, 1992:15).

"To what extent is Applied Linguistics related to a technical school in Brazil?" , is meant to highlight the needs of such an educational institution, giving the teachers a chance to be constant researchers of their class practice as a whole. Therefore, the teachers must be aware of the difference between linguistic proficiency and communicative competence, as our work is based on the comprehension of ideas despite the students' linguistic deficiencies.

To apply knowledge with art is a decisive point for technicians. They must avoid being merely reproductive agents of techniques and rather become more sensitive and sensible, searching for new solutions, opening new paths and being more reflexive, inventive and productive.

b.6-The **last question**

“...the language teacher is not the teacher of an abstract and neutral means of communication but a way of expressing oneself and changing one’s own role in society.” (Holmes, 1992)

"How can ESP teachers help students become agents for the development of society?", refers to the language teacher of a subject that is an inspiring agent to influence the students in a way so the latter may act as responsible citizens in the society.

On dealing with texts which trigger ideas that may shake up their ideas of technical structure, the students face situations in which they have the chance to develop their affective counterpart, not being afraid of unpredictable hindrances, making the best of their own potentialities, while preparing them to make their own judgements and self-evaluation, regardless of the patterns furnished by society.

10. "The last bite"

Out of thirty-eight applications, twenty-two candidates showed up for the written test. The candidate's answers were read each at a time by the examiners and the most complete ones were graded the highest scores.

Twelve applicants were selected for the Teaching Practice Test; among those, eight were sufficiently qualified taking into account their performances and correspondent grades.

After rating the certificates, the final eight teachers were classified according to the total of points obtained.

This kind of selection met our needs as the three examiners worked in a similar way, having in mind the same outline for the design of the exam as well as for the whole process of evaluating the candidates. This previous cohesion

of ideas and philosophy of life as educators was fundamental to reach our aims.

We had in mind it would not be easy to evaluate the written answers but as we were working together, sharing doubts and opinions, we accomplished a coherent and fair evaluation. Furthermore, turning formal pedagogical and linguistic knowledge into pedagogical and reflexive questions, prompted the candidates' readiness to follow this approach. We considered relevant the main points in the formation of such professionals as revealed by the answers of the test. The questions were designed in a way to make candidates expose their knowledge and ideas, for hints were given as a chance to display their behaviour as educators, once ESP teaching cannot be enclosed in a classroom environment.

Besides that, this trial was a unique opportunity to work with ESP focusing on the teachers and not on the students. For us, it was a pleasant, though hard, working experience. And we are aware that the whole process was an exciting adventure, consequently meeting peers that share the same beliefs.

In a future opportunity the examiners would design a shorter exam due to the many hours the candidates spent to accomplish the task. The second part of the test might have had four questions, instead of six and it would not impair the global evaluation.

Concerning the Teaching Practice test, it would have been less artificial to have had a real classroom atmosphere, with real students. However, the examiners had to follow a general pattern of rules established by the institution.

The same kind of restriction occurred by the time of grading the certificates. We were not allowed to give higher points to ESP experience or certificates due to a bureaucratic hindrance.

Once we have been bitten by the ESP bug, we became extremely interested in “biting” others who would also carry on transmitting the ideas and spreading this approach.

This newly designed test was to suit the purpose to our needs and we hope it is definitely a boost to all ESP enthusiasts.

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Magazines

- Food Engineering International (Sept./1994): *Innovating through partnership*. Chilton Publications, USA.
- New Scientist, (Nov./1993): *How bacteria beat a retreat*. IPC Magazines Ltd, England.

Appendix 1: Material distributed to the candidates

Public Examination for Federal Vacancies
Specific instructions

I. On the written test

I.1 - Duration: 4 (four) hours

I.2- **Structure:** The test will be composed of writing questions to evaluate the candidate's ability concerning reading and comprehension of texts, writing, and foreign language for specific purposes current theories.

I.3 - Rules: (applied to all areas)

- * It will be tolerated up to thirty minutes delay. It will not be allowed leaving the premises during the first thirty minutes after the beginning of the test.
- * Under no circumstances will it be allowed to remain in the test room less than three candidates.
- * It will not be allowed to the candidate to look up information in any reference source.
- * It will be allowed to make use of calculators.

II. On the Teaching Practice Test

II.1 - Duration: 50 (fifty) minutes

II.2 - The practice test will be an ESP class about a topic to be chosen by lots twenty-four hours ahead, based on a list of contents according to the E.T.F.Q.-R.J. English syllabus (see Item III).

II.3 - Further information on the Teaching Practice Test will be given by the time of the written test results.

III. Syllabus

- A) Foreign Language Teaching Applied Linguistics Aspects
- B) Foreign Language Learning Theories
- C) Discourse Analysis
- D) The ESP Approach
- E) Specific Vocabulary of the Chemistry, Food and Biotechnology Areas.

Appendix 2

Teaching Practice Test

Name	pts
Performance	10
Fluency	10
Use of English	10
Adequacy	10
Creativity	20
Text Selection	20
Material Design	20

Appendix 3

Specific instructions for the teaching practice test

- 1) The candidate has to give an ESP class in 50 (fifty) minutes.
- 2) The candidate has to hand three copies of the materials to the examiners.

- 3) It will not be allowed any interference from the audience.
- 4) During the Teaching Practice Test, the candidate will also be evaluated on his/her oral English linguistic competence.
- 5) The candidate may ask for audio visual aids: over-head projector, tape recorder, TV set, VCR.

ESP Approach (Table of Contents)

I. "Conscientização"

- * Key-word
- * Non-verbal Information
- * Transparent words

II. Levels of comprehension

- * Overall
- * Main Points
- * Detailed Comprehension

III. Vocabulary

- * Synonym
- * Antonym
- * Noun-phrase
- * Use of the dictionary

IV. Discourse Analysis

- * Textual Structure
- * Referents
- * Cohesion
- * Coherence
- * Functional Grammar

V. Critical Reading

- * Uncovering Implied Ideas

- * Facts X Opinions
- * Relation to real life situations

Appendix 4

CERTIFICATES

Rating rules established by the General Head Department

SUBJECT:

Candidate	pts
Master or PhD	30
Specialisation	15
Post Graduate Studies	05
Teaching Experience	07 (per each academic year)
Maximum	70

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