

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research study undertook to find out if hotel employees received the ESP component of their English course more positively than the general English component. Also of interest was the difference in attitudes between the two taught components; the hotel English classes and general English classes. As motivation is so important for successful language learning; then having knowledge of student attitudes is of benefit to instructors when designing a language course.

Lastly the role of the stakeholder has to be taken into account. Within the ESP spectrum, stakeholders play a pivotal role. It is they who supply the most important thing capital. Without employers' money most ESP courses cannot function. The stakeholders also frequently supply another important commodity needed for a course time. Therefore the interview with the training manager of the hotel provided a useful comparison with the perceived views of the participants in this research study.

It has been shown with the results of the participant interviews that a large majority of the participants (8/10) wanted to study mainly general English. The results of the perceived needs analysis (Table 1) also supported this desire for general English but also gave evidence that the participants realized that ESP instruction was also good for them and they would benefit equally from it. All ten participants agreed that they wanted the class to focus 50% on hotel English and 50% on general English.

Clearly then the answer to the main research question is no, the hotel component is not received or perceived more positively than the general English component. In fact I would argue that the results show no real bias towards the either component. If we look at Table 2, it can be seen that hotel English scored higher in terms of speaking ability by a slight margin. It also of course scored higher when the Likert items were directly connected to their job roles. It can be concluded that general English did enjoy a small positive advantage with regards to the participants' attitudes.

The final class questionnaire results (Tables 3 & 4) were extremely similar and I believe this shows again that there was not a large difference between the two components. Hotel English scored equally as well as the general English component even if the students were more interested in general English.

From my classroom observations I perceived there was no real difference in attitudes during class. In the after class discussions the participants again showed no overall bias toward hotel or general English with each unit and section being treated separately. Some hotel units were clearly more 'fun' and accessible than some of the general English sections. This goes some way in answering the last sub-problem of this research; were students happy to study both ESP and general English at the same time?

The results support this statement, the participants were happy to study both components at the same time. The introduction of general English to the syllabus meant that the material covered week by week was very diverse and followed no set pattern. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.171) posited the view that materials need to be '*consistent and to have some recognizable pattern.*' I disagree with this. It is the very 'sameness' of many textbooks that lead to students' boredom and apathy as each class follows a set procedure. In this course by using two different textbooks the participants

never fell into a dull routine and the participants were challenged to adapt to each lesson afresh.

A sub-problem of this research study was; “will students feel that the outcomes of the ESP component furthered their mastery of language needed for their present job and future careers?” As was discussed above the evidence is very positive that yes; the participants appreciated the ESP component. The participants clearly understood that much of what was studied in the hotel classes was of a practical and communicative nature. The language they practiced could be used immediately with hotel guests. They further perceived that they needed to study the hotel classes (20 positive responses), evidence that the material was not too easy or a repeat of classes studied earlier in their hotel training classes.

Thus far the evidence supports the integration of general English within an EOP course, although evidence has been found (Kaur, 2007) that some groups of students wish only to study specific English, a course with a very narrow focus. Although I can understand some students’ negative attitudes toward a broader course (it requires more time and self study), the benefits of having general English within or alongside a specific course outweigh any negative factors.

It can be seen that although general English does not always concentrate on spoken communication, the participants in this study enjoyed the topics covered in class and undertook to learn a wealth of new vocabulary. If employees’ learn only ESP English, perhaps vital skills will be neglected as Ping and Gu (2004) found.

A sub-problem of this research study was to find out the feelings of the management toward the English component. So it was with great interest that I interviewed the training manager of the hotel. From the results it can be seen that the manager acknowledged the employees’ wants to study general English but in the normal sphere of operations could

not meet that want. The main constraint was a lack of money. The hotel's training budget could not allow for general English to be taught. Also when asked if employees' wants were taken into account she stated that they were not. When employees have no say or stake in their training it leads to feelings of disempowerment which negatively affects motivation. The manager stated that they do '*training needs*' with the employees in order to find out what they need to study but I believe taking into account 'wants' is vitally important as well.

Stated as another major issue was the constraint of time. The training manager also stated that there was normally some general English included for low level employees, so she did realize that general English has benefit within an ESP functional/transactional course. It also appeared that the hotel demanded that employees' use standard wording thus any course or syllabus design has to take this into account for a course to go ahead. This further restricts the teaching of general English as all materials would have to be carefully checked in order that they did not teach language expressions that were not part of the hotel's extensive SOP.

Implications and Recommendations for Classroom Use

In Figure 1 I set out a list of factors involved with an ESP course. I shall now discuss the findings of this research with reference to these factors. I do not set out to list the most important factors first with view to this research study or the teaching of ESP courses. All factors are important and will differ according to the classroom context, situation or setting. Therefore I will work my way around Figure 1 from wants and needs ending up with empowerment.

Firstly it appears that frequently today a proper needs analysis is still not carried out for many courses. The reasons for this are varied, in the context of the hotel; it seemed that the management simply did not realize that they should take into account the employees wants and needs. It can be seen from the results of the needs analysis that a simple questionnaire is also not sufficient to gain a truly valid picture. It was only from the unstructured interviews with the participants later, that the desire for general English became apparent.

Therefore before a course starts it is vital that a questionnaire and at least a pre-course discussion take place for an instructor to gain a good picture of wants and needs. However, while all this is fundamental for a successful course from the point of view of the students, it seems in this situation that the wants and needs of the hotel were different.

As they have a tight monetary budget, delivering general English classes alongside specific English classes is simply not possible. From the interview with the training manager I consider that it is possible to negotiate with the management to include a certain amount of useful relevant general English. This type of instruction would have to prove to the management that students are learning to communicate better 'face to face' which is an overall aim of their specific English classes.

Doing a proper target situation analysis (TSA) is extremely time consuming and expensive. This is one of the main reasons why this is not carried out in many ESP courses. I only undertook to observe some of the food and beverage employees serving at the breakfast sitting. As one of the participants said usually they do not speak or use a lot of English at work. For example at the omelet station, the attendant would ask '*What would you like Sir/Madam?*' Guests would reply '*Can I have/I want/ give/make me an omelet with tomatoes/onion/pepper and salami?*', at the same time pointing to the various dishes. This type of transactional language is clearly very simple and easily learned for the

employee. It is when a guest asks a question outside of this context that general English skills would be useful. The hotel realizes though that this does not happen very often and it is this fact that limits the attractiveness of including general English in their courses.

The employees who need a large amount of 'general' vocabulary are the front office staff who deal with customers and guests daily and probably the bar staff as it is here that more communication of a varied nature would take place with guests due to the social setting.

I also have to point out that the participants in my course were from a variety of positions within the hotel, bartenders, waitresses, room-service, mini-bar attendant and audio/visual technicians so it would have been impossible to do a TSA. I still think though that if an instructor does have a group of employees who all have the same or similar job function then attempting even a limited TSA might give useful results, for example as an opportunity to observe future students' English levels, to see if work needs to be done on a specific skill or if language/lexical items are misunderstood or happen frequently.

From the results of this study and from the classroom instruction it once again is obvious that no true 'specific English' can be carried out to a diverse group of employees. As said above, it is the bartending staff that would have the most immediate benefit from more general instruction. The inclusion of the audio/visual employees meant I could not focus specifically on food/drink situations as this would have been unfair to them. The hotel does usually split up employees into three different groups: food and beverage, housekeeping and kitchen staff which is good. Clearly for monetary reasons it is harder for the hotel to become more specific than this. It is therefore up to the individual instructor to try and cater for specific employees needs, perhaps by assigning specific homework for students (a narrow focus) and keeping classroom instruction more general within the framework of the setting whether that be business, technical, medical or hotel and tourism.

The whole issue of a having broad or narrow focus will never be easily resolved within ESP courses. It became apparent that the employees in this study wanted a more broad approach with the inclusion of general English whilst the hotel wanted a narrow focus approach with only hotel English. As said above it was impossible to have a narrow focus with the diverse nature of the participants. An instructor will have to juggle the participants' job roles within a course to try and deliver an effective course that is successful for the majority. In a normal setting, I would have concentrated more on food/drink situations which would have been beneficial for the food and beverage employees and less so for the audio/visual employees.

The role of the stakeholder within the course has become very obvious to me following the interview with the training manager. As the stakeholder holds the purse strings, it is the instructors' duty to follow their wishes ultimately. Stakeholders however, are not expert in the field of English instruction and it is up to the instructor to negotiate the course with them and the potential pool of students. Stakeholders might have a clear idea of what they want but do not realize that a teaching situation is never straightforward or simple. For example; it might be more effective to split a class into two groups and teach each group separately for 30 minutes because of students' English levels or different job roles and this would lead to a more successful outcome than attempting to teach the whole group together for one hour.

The instructor as a professional should ensure that the teaching situation is as ideal as possible and layout clear reasons for his/her actions. If faced with difficulty from stakeholders, simply pointing out that the course will ultimately fail to deliver what they wanted (and therefore would be a monetary waste) should suffice to bring about negotiation between the instructor, students, and stakeholder.

This course had no clear outcomes or goals; this hampered my ability to deliver effective instruction. This research was aimed at finding out employees' feelings toward general English versus specific English. It is clear though that a successful course has to have very specific outcomes or goals. This enables the instructor to follow a 'path' toward the desired destination. As was said previously it was actually very hard to have specific outcomes due to the participants different job roles. So once again it seems that it is the class make-up that is very important. The more specific a group of employees the better, as an instructor can design a course with set goals far more easily. Of course an overall goal might simply be 'to increase communicative effectiveness' or 'to be able to fill out patients' records and forms.' Within ESP courses it is therefore vital that before a course starts, the instructor and stakeholders must have agreement on course outcomes or goals before instruction takes place.

Methodology as was seen from the literature review is something that cannot be decided upon before the course starts. From my experience an instructor has to adapt to the class and change his/her methodology to best suit the class needs and wants. I do not believe though that the methodology should be very different from what a professional ELT teacher employs in general English classes, and the majority of teaching techniques can be successfully used in a specific English class. I therefore agree with Scrivener (2005) that methodology should not be something that instructors worry unduly about.

I do believe that teaching an ESP course can be more challenging than teaching a general English course; therefore I would stipulate that instructors have sufficient experience of teaching before undertaking an ESP course. If they do not have experience or training then the effectiveness of the instruction might be lacking and course goals or outcomes not met. Also an experienced teacher/instructor is better able to view the class and various factors as a 'whole' and be able to successfully negotiate with the students and

stakeholders before the course starts. Furthermore an experienced instructor will be able to design more effective materials or source authentic materials which are important in an ESP course. As mentioned previously the researcher taught a technical English course in his first year of teaching, if I could re-teach the course now with my added years of experience and training the course instruction and methodology would be better.

Time and money as seen from this research study still play a very prominent role. Unfortunately the twin constraints of these two factors frequently lead to ineffectual instruction and poorly designed classes. It can be seen that before a successful course starts, a lot of work has to be done to lay solid foundations. Far too often English classes are 'built on sand' a lot of content which appears to be impressive but blows away into the ether shortly after.

An effective instructor must be able to juggle these two constraints to the best of his/her ability. Clearly the constraint of time imposes a set amount of what a course can deliver. It is also not desirable to expect students to study extensively outside of class. Frequently ESP students are employees who put in a full day at work before their studies. In this research study the participants worked 10.5 hour shifts. It is clear this leaves little time for outside study.

The less time the students have to study means unfortunately that the course by necessity has to be more narrowly focused. Classroom instruction has to be very focused with a clear objective for every class. This instructor observed that the participants were motivated to study but were tired or missed classes due to their work.

Money although often lacking in an ESP course does not stop a simple NA being carried out. The NA which I handed out to the participants only took up the first 15 minutes of class one. Student interviews can be carried out after class with whoever is available. If money precludes a good textbook from being used then the internet is an

excellent, free and abundant source of materials both authentic and semi-authentic designed by other teachers. As I said above though throwing a lot of money and classroom time at a group of students does not ensure success and a course should not be viewed as 'impossible' to teach or deliver if these factors are very limited. It is amazing how much ground one can cover in 20 hours of class time.

Usually this researcher does not carry out extensive assessment and evaluation of the class during the course. This was a useful exercise therefore to micro-examine classes and see the participants' attitudes to them. In fact it was so useful I will continue to use the class questionnaire sheets with future classes to gain a quick insight into students' perceived feelings on an individual class. A lot of useful information was gained from continual assessment of the classes, for example that general English classes were more interesting because of the topic but of less use to their speaking skills because of extensive readings. Or that ultimately there was no real difference in the participants' feelings toward the two components. I believe this was because general English and hotel English are similar.

This research study used a certain amount of the participants input in deciding the choice of units and sections studied. It was not fully negotiated. As can be seen from above, it is impossible to have a fully negotiated course without the stake holder's input. I think though that negotiating course content with classes is important. Negotiation affects empowerment and increases participation. Students' actively involved in their classes are more likely to be motivated as participation and involvement fall more on the intrinsic side of the intrinsic-extrinsic line of motivation. This can only be good for the students and instructor.

This research study was investigating the participants attitudes toward two components, as said above there were no specific outcomes or goals before the course

started. This made course design much harder. Some materials were resourced from the internet, the inclusion of sourced materials are vital to a more interesting class, for example 'a picture is worth a thousand words', and in the context of ESP I agree with other researchers and writers that a move toward sourcing authentic materials is seen as desirable. However, in the literature review I discussed this aspect of ESP. In this research study the textbooks used were adequate, although the general English textbook had perhaps too much reading and too much advanced vocabulary for the English level of the participants in this course. It is interesting to speculate that the participants would have been more positive with the general English component if an easier, more communicative English textbook would have been used.

Empowerment was an issue this researcher was interested in from the outset of this study. I have been very involved with this issue, since my studies in the Agricultural sector 12 years previously. If we look at the history of humankind, we can see that empowerment is a central driving force. It also has many related or closely associated words such as freedom, self-determination, rights, liberty, and equality. I believe and still do so after this research study that students benefit from general English instruction. As English is the number one undisputed international language of the world, having English skills provides several benefits. Clearly ESP employees and students need English for a specific purpose, but they should also need English for a more general purpose that of social communication. Much has been said for example of the global social community arising via the internet. Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, and YouTube, all these global forums use English as their main source of language. A recent CNN report stated that 2/3's of world internet users browse social networking sites regularly. I have personal experience of this with my own Facebook friend list containing hundreds of non-native English speakers. The recent political problems in Iran also show that young Iranians are actively involved

in these global forums, surely this is only the beginning of a truly global movement of free speech and spoken communication between all the diverse peoples of the world. It is hypothesized we all came from one small area in Africa before splitting and settling all over the world. Presumably we all spoke one language at the start (even if a series of guttural grunts), it would be nice to envisage a day when we all can speak one language again. Even if the abilities of people are not native-like it does NOT require a huge vocabulary to communicate and get your meaning across.

I believe from my research study that the participants appreciated the global nature of English and that is one reason why they desired to study general English so much. I do not believe that my question ‘did the general English component empower them more?’ was adequately answered because as I have said much of the general English and hotel English classes were interchangeable. It also is clear from the interview with the training manager (who had a good command of English) that employers still are not willing to take into account employees broader/wider English wants and needs into account. This is unfortunate and I would press instructors to point out when discussing a course with stakeholders, the social advantages of teaching general English alongside specific English courses. It was also pointed out that some ESP students benefit from the grammar and language practice in general English and this point should also be made to stakeholders.

Recommendation for Future Study

In this section I put forward ideas for future research in this area. As said previously this area has not been researched sufficiently within the ESP spectrum and additional data and information would be of practical value for all ESP instructors.

The decision of whether to include an amount of general English in a course is ultimately up to the instructor. It has been shown that especially for lower level learners,

having a base of general English can be beneficial to their specific studies. It has also been shown that frequently workers appreciate the inclusion of general English in their studies. Students' wants and needs are important for a course, if students are dissatisfied with the materials they are studying then this will lower motivation and negatively affect attitudes towards a course.

In this course hotel employees were examined, as mentioned previously there are few real differences between hotel and general English, therefore it would be very desirable to study a group of workers from a field far removed from normal English, this could be nurses, engineers, technicians and gauge their attitudes toward jointly learning both English for their occupations and general English.

Although the stakeholder will often want a 100% focus on specific English it is up to the instructor to point out the positive effects that teaching general English can bring. More research has to be done in this area to examine if students not just in the hotel and tourism sector perceive they want general English for purposes of broader communication and to empower them more. So far there has been a dearth of studies on joint ESP and general English courses.

Also of interest are the views of the stakeholders', little examination of their attitudes has been put forward in the research area of ESP and specifically EOP. It can be seen though that for stakeholders' to change their own attitudes toward inclusion of general English in their English courses, then real evidence would have to be put forward showing their employees have a strong desire for both English for work and English for social purposes. One way of doing this is including questions of general English in their NA before a course starts.

Conclusions

ESP is a very tentative term. It is widely used but I feel is losing its meaning as general English continues to develop. It was mentioned earlier in the literature review that GESP (Generic English for Specific Purposes) has arisen in many situations perhaps because of a lack of time and money to truly design a proper specific English course. Any course that does not really take into account wants and needs of both students and stakeholders I would argue; falls in this category.

This research study then was placed in a shady twilight zone between specific English and GESP. A needs analysis was carried out with a partly negotiated syllabus being delivered. The participants responded favorably to both the general and hotel English components. Ultimately there was no difference in results between the two components. It was only from the participant interviews and classroom discussions that general English was seen to be viewed more positively by the participants.

The stakeholder acknowledged these results but argued that a lack of money firstly and time meant that the main focus of classes within the hotel had to be on 'specific English.' This result is not really surprising. However, there was acknowledgment that there was a place for the instruction of general English especially for lower level employees.

The motivation to learn English is clear from the results of the study, the participants' attitudes toward learning English are positive and they desired further English instruction in both hotel and general English. They appreciated the ESP English as much of it had immediate communicative relevance for their jobs. They also enjoyed the general English classes because of the various topics covered and the opportunity to learn

new lexical items. Also the general English classes practiced reading skills more than the hotel English classes.

Empowerment of the employees is increased by the study of both components, but I believe general English does empower them more as it increases the breadth and depth of their communicative repertoire. As was discussed in the literature review; general English focuses on universal themes and topics. A student needs knowledge of these in order to communicate socially.

I believe the results of this study support integrating (where possible) general English in a course of specific English. This study also highlights the importance of preparatory work before a course starts. Much is to be said for introducing negotiation into the syllabus. Negotiation is vital between the instructor and stakeholder and it is beneficial to include the students as well to increase their positive attitudes and motivation.

An instructor must juggle many factors to deliver a successful course. The importance of having set outcomes and goals is stressed; also classroom evaluation is a useful tool to gauge the success of individual lessons.

In the course of this study the researcher created a new acronym GESP as it became clear that many so called ESP courses are anything but.

Ultimately the relationship between ESP and life is shown with the twin constraints of time and money hampering courses. It is then up to the instructor to work within these confines to produce a successful course that meets both students and stakeholders wants and needs.

In the course of this study and during the intensive examination of ESP in the literature review it became clear that it is time for a new definition of EOP (English for Occupational Purposes). I therefore set out a list of my own findings as to what an EOP

course is. It should be noted that my emphasis here is on the course itself and not the wider umbrella term.

A 'normal' EOP course should consist of:

1) A thorough needs analysis before the course, ideally with a deficiency or target situation analysis included.

2) A 'very' specific group of students with the same wants and needs.

3) Continuous assessment and evaluation of the course.

4) Careful examination of materials and tasks to best suit learners' needs and course goals.

5) Inclusion of stakeholders at the start of the course design process.

6) A clear set of goals and outcomes.

7) Following the course a final evaluation of the learners' attitudes and an evaluation of the course as a whole.

8) An experienced English instructor with communicative language teaching credentials (TEFL, TESOL, CELTA, and DELTA).

Final Comments

This research study found that employees in a five-star hotel in Thailand wanted to learn general English more than hotel English. Reasons for this could include the more narrow focus of specific English materials and sufficient mastery of English for their present job roles which makes learning general English more interesting for them. The actual attitudes toward both components of the course did not vary much. One reason being the instructor was the same and methodology was therefore the same as well. Also the materials used in both components came from lower intermediate textbooks. What was

apparent also from this study was the similarity of 'hotel' English and general English a further reason that the participants could see no real difference between their components.

The evidence though from the NA and interviews and questionnaires does support including a component of general English alongside a specific course of study. Including general English can lead to increased interest and motivation to study. The inclusion of general English materials also decreases the risk of a course becoming 'routine'. Also general English will drive students' acquisition of new vocabulary items and practice of grammar which increases their overall English abilities.

Although stakeholders might perceive general English as superfluous to their own perceived wants and needs, it is worthwhile for instructors to change these attitudes. General English can be more empowering for students' especially if their specific course of study is in a very restricted range or area.

The participants in this study were shown to be content with both components and it is now necessary to investigate other joint general English and EOP courses to see if results are similar. This researcher believes that including general English alongside specific English is beneficial for several reasons, increased interest and motivation, acquisition of vocabulary and empowerment. I hope this study can lead to increased interest and research in joint general English and specific courses.