

Improving the quality of teaching and learning English for business correspondence course for english major students at hai phong university

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Abstract: *Through analyzing the current situation and some challenges in teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in general and English for business correspondence in particular that lecturers and English major students at Hai Phong University are facing, the author proposes some innovative solutions to achieve the set goals of teaching and learning of the course at Hai Phong University.*

Keywords: *English for business correspondence; improving, teaching and learning*

1. Introduction

In the general trend of training English as a foreign language (TEFL), many studies mention that teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays an important role in academic disciplines. If English is for those who learn and use language intensively, ESP in general and English for business correspondence in particular have an important position for English major students. Therefore, students must be able to use ESP in jobs related to the business job after graduation. However, reality shows that the current teaching and learning of English for business correspondence at Hai Phong University has not kept up with the fast changes of the society. That has made teaching and learning English for business correspondence not as effective as expected. Effective, synchronous and comprehensive teaching measures will partly help improve the situation of teaching and learning English for business correspondence in the new situation.

2. Content

2.1. General issues about English for business course

2.1.1. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course

English for Specific Purposes – ESP is a subject included in the foreign language curriculum for university students in many countries around the world. It is a term used to refer to English used in professional work or to serve work in different majors.

In ESP courses, teachers and schools have to meet learners' reasons and needs for learning more effectively. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), needs analysis is basically an attempt

to understand and gather as much information as possible about learners, their working environment, expectations about the course, as well as their learning preferences. Needs analysis, further, establishes the 'how' and 'what' should be taught in an ESP course. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.

- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English.

- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.

- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.

- Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

2.1.2. English for business correspondence course

a) English for business

Business English (English for Business Purposes) is a new branch of ESP which is a type of ELT (English Language Teaching) emerging as a response to a growing awareness of certain types of learners with specialized needs which are not fulfilled in General English courses. The teaching of Business English, directly related to learners' and employers' professional needs, started to be accompanied and guided by abundant theoretical literature. As a consequence, Palmer (1964) mentions the selective concentration on particular language skills and abilities as an important characteristic of ESP; Strevens (1977, 1980) offers a comprehensive definition of ESP; Robinson (1980) writes a thorough review of theoretical positions and what ESP meant at that time; Coffey (1985) updates Strevens's work

and puts ESP in the context of communicative language teaching.

The term, Business English is wide; according to the Oxford Business English Dictionary, it covers the areas, such as, accounting, commerce, e-commerce, economics, finance, HR, insurance, IT, law, manufacturing, marketing, production, property, the stock exchange, (international) trade, transport. Business English is associated with the skills which most people need to perform well are writing e-mails and reports, making presentations, doing negotiations, using the telephone, attending and participating actively in meetings or telephone conferences, receiving visitors, etc.

b) English for business correspondence

This course provides learners with knowledge and vocabulary in Business English, the styles and structures of business letters, as well as grammatical structures and terms related to business correspondence such as e-mails, inquiries, quotations, offers, orders, sales, complaints, etc. This course also helps learners to shape and cultivate their communication skills through those sorts of business letters.

2.2. Current status of teaching and learning English for business correspondence for English major students at Hai Phong University

2.2.1. Curriculum and textbooks

There is currently no unified program nationwide on English for ESP in general, English for business correspondence in particular. The Ministry of Education and Training's regulations on the number of teaching periods as well as the number of required units to accumulate are not consistent for each regional university or at each specific time so it is difficult to have uniformity in training. The structure of the textbooks mostly focuses on lessons, specialized vocabulary, reading comprehension and translation. This structure prevents teachers' creativity and students' active learning activities.

At Hai Phong University, the curriculum of English for business correspondence course has 30 periods with ten units. The content mainly focuses on different types of business letter. The goal of the course is to provide basic, necessary language knowledge for students to develop documents, reports, and respond to business letters and commercial contracts in English.

2.2.2. The teaching methods

Over the past few decades, there have been many studies addressing the characteristics or methods of

teaching Business English modules. Recent studies show that teaching and learning Business English modules is opening up many opportunities as well as facing challenges from many sides. Sharing many common views, different universities around the world that offer Business English training all recognize that: while English for business creates opportunities for learners to approach expertise through Using English in work communication or to search for information for work... Teaching and learning Business English modules still faces some obstacles in terms of program allocation and choosing appropriate textbooks. The input level and learning level of the students, as well as the capacity and teaching methods of the teachers cause this work not achieve the expected results.

The teaching methods that most teachers apply are still influenced by textbooks and are not very communicative. Teaching methods to stimulate students' exploration, creativity, and real communication seem not to have been widely applied yet.

2.2.3. Students' learning awareness and level of absorption

The short time study (30 periods), non native language practice environment and low students' awareness limit the students' learning. The difference in the English level of students in the early stages of learning English for business correspondence as well as the difference in the level of many students in the same class cause many difficulties for the teachers. In addition, some students are not passionate in learning and mainly have a reactive attitude. Many students do not have a clear motivation to study, just hoping to get a score of 5 to avoid repeating the course.

2.2.4. Assessment

Tests are still lack of unified standard assessment tools such as international standard tests TOEFL, TOEIC... Assessment methods are not highly reliable because the teachers themselves set the questions and score. Assessment contents mainly focus on contents learned, with little in-depth research on the correlation between actual needs and training results.

2.2.5. Challenges from teachers

Teachers' specialized knowledge is still limited. Teaching methods are not diverse. Most teachers have few opportunities to participate in short-term and long-term training courses to improve their teaching capacity as well as knowledge of the major they teach.

2.2.6. Perspectives on teaching English for business

correspondence

Currently, most teaching materials are designed to develop writing business letters and the ability to translate documents. However, there are many opinions (mostly from specialized teachers who directly teach ESP) that it is only necessary to supplement students with as much specialized vocabulary as possible to support professional knowledge. Many textbooks compiled by teachers are unbalanced in terms of developing the four skills, focusing only on reading skills and specialized vocabulary exercises. In general, the current goal of ESP training is not really based on understanding and analyzing students' needs.

2.3. Some measures to improve the quality of teaching and studying English for business correspondence course for English major students at Hai Phong University

2.3.1. Enhance students' interest and positive motivation in learning.

One way to inspire increased motivation is to increase student's expectations of success and their sense of self - efficacy. Tell students you believe in them and that they will learn a particular content or strategy if they study hard and are motivated.

2.3.2. Train and foster the teachers through methods training courses and capacity building courses.

With the characteristics of business English, most of the difficulty focuses on specialized concepts and terms. So teachers need to self-study to understand what they are teaching. They can look up on the internet or discuss with colleagues about suitable teaching methods for each lesson. The teachers who have good lectures should share for other colleagues to learn from. Thus, experience will be accumulated more and more.

2.3.3. Build a tests based on standards such as TOEIC or other international standards.

It is necessary to develop test questions based on standards such as TOEIC or other international standards. Students must be trained according to this standard when studying to prepare them for the final exam. Based on the available conditions of training facilities, it is necessary to encourage the application of exam formats similar to international exams to stimulate learning motivation and orient teaching activities according to students' communication abilities.

2.3.4. Foster other soft skills for students

Beside reading and writing skills, vocabulary, grammar... students need to be trained in other

supporting soft skills such as: interpreting, summarizing, inferring, raising problems, expressing, comparing, contrasting, presentations, group work, report writing... These skills will help students study more effectively.

3. Conclusion

English is the real global language and is important in education, relations and business. English for business correspondence has been widely used and spread as the globalization of business environment and considered a part of English for Specific purposes. To improve the current situation of teaching and learning English for business correspondence for English major students, the teachers need to: motivate students in learning; participate in training and fostering courses, improve the way of assessment. The above measures will help students achieve the goals of the course and do well at work after graduation.

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