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ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

**A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Teaching ESP by the EFL Teacher
and the Subject-matter Teacher: Students' Point of View**

**AN MA THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE STUDIES
OFFICE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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English Language Department

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Thesis submitted to the Department of English Language in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By Parisa Pouyan

We hereby certify that we have read this thesis written by Parisa Pouyan, and that it is
satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of MA in TEFL.

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To the dearest people in my life

My family

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Abstract

The fact that who is more qualified to teach ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses has long been the cause of argument between the subject-matter teachers on one side and the EFL teachers on the other side. This research was conducted to study students' view about their ESP teachers and to compare the effectiveness of teaching ESP courses by two groups of teachers: the EFL teachers and the subject-matter teachers. Although student rating can't be considered as the only measure of teaching effectiveness and it has its own weaknesses; it is an influential source used to assess teaching performance. Historically, student ratings have dominated as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness for the past 30 years (Seldin, 1999).

The participants of the study were 120 undergraduate students, two groups of 60 students, who were studying in three different majors including Accounting, Business Management and, Industrial Management at the University of Zanjan and the Islamic Azad University of Zanjan. Group A, half of the subjects, was taught by EFL teachers, and Group B, the other half, was taught by subject-matter teachers. Each group was taught six ESP courses. The subjects were asked to take a four-point Likert Scale questionnaire which is consisted of 35 items related to the ESP teachers' knowledge, functions and the techniques used in the classroom. The final results indicated that the group with the EFL teacher expressed greater satisfaction with their ESP teachers than the competing group with subject-matter teachers. The study concluded with recommendations for teaching ESP.

Keywords: EFL, EFL teacher, ESP, Subject-matter Teacher, Satisfaction, Effective Teaching.

Chapter One: Preliminaries

1.0 Introduction

English has acquired a unique status among the other languages of the world and it has been acknowledged as a 'global language'. Crystal (2003) presented several features to explain the world status of English today: a) English is the only or one of the official languages of many important international organizations such as the United Nations, The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the European Free Trade Association; b) The language of most of today's up-to-date information in science and technology is basically English, and most of the books, journals, research materials, and almost all other academic sources are nowadays either written in English or translated into English. This is why the students are required to develop effective listening and reading skills so as to meet their basic academic needs; c) English is taught as a foreign language or second language in over 100 countries. Crystal (2003) pointed out that approximately one in four of the world's population are now already fluent or capable of communicating to a useful level in English and the figure is steadily growing. Consequently, more and more people in the world have started studying it for various reasons. Growing interest in the study of English has led to the expansion of the

domain of English Language Teaching (ELT), mainly concerned with the teaching of general English.

Nevertheless, new world demands brought about a particular (professional, occupational or vocational) interest in the study of a particular domain of the English language. This background of interests resulted in the need of a new methodological field, the study of English for a particular or specific purpose, and the teaching of English for Specific Purposes flourished and evolved, (Warschauer, 2000). Historically, English for Specific Purposes has become vital and innovative activity within the teaching of English as a foreign or second language movement (Howatt, 1984). ESP focuses on learners' specific needs, attempts communicative use of language, and takes into account variables related to learner, teacher, and the context of education that would influence the process of learning.

ESP teachers play a significant role in the success of the programs; they not only act as a teacher but also have to play several other roles too. Swales (1985) prefers to use the term 'ESP practitioner' rather than 'ESP teacher' to emphasize that ESP work involves much more than teaching. He states that the role of ESP teacher will have to deal with needs analysis, syllabus design, material writing or adaptation and evaluation.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) identified five key roles for the ESP practitioner:

1. Teacher
2. Course designer and material developer
3. Collaborator
4. Researcher
5. Evaluator

An issue frequently raised with regard to ESP teachers is whether they need to be experts in the subject area in question. The general assumption is that they are primarily language teachers engaged in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and should, above all, be experts in the language and language teaching, and are not required to have specialized subject knowledge. Nevertheless, they do need to have some understanding of the subject area, which is ideally accompanied by a positive attitude towards it (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). ESP teachers should also have the ability to actively integrate student knowledge about the subject matter or, as Ellis and Johnson (1994, p. 26) put it “It is the learners who have the specific content knowledge and who are able to bring that knowledge to the classroom”. Good ESP teachers will thus above all be “experts in presenting and explaining the language,” who also have the ability “to ask the right questions and make good use of the answers” (Ellis and Johnson, 1994, p. 26). Other valuable sources of information for ESP teachers are subject teachers and subject-matter textbooks.

The focal point in this study is the teacher factor. Undoubtedly, the question “Who is the ESP teacher? Or who is more qualified to teach ESP?” is considered a highly controversial issue among ELT teachers and subject specialists. In order to deal with this controversial issue, this study tries to find out whose teaching satisfies the students more: EFL teachers or subject-matter teachers? Student satisfaction is used to evaluate teaching effectiveness.

Most institutions employ a “student rating” system to assist in the evaluation of instruction. Obtaining student feedback is not only a relatively simple procedure but also is one which has considerable credibility for several reasons. (1) Input is received from a number of raters so that *reliability* is usually quite high. (2) Ratings are made by those who have consistently observed the teacher over many hours, so that they are

based on *representative behavior*. (3) Observations about student learning, the object of instruction, are made by those who have been personally affected and therefore have high *face validity* (Hoyt and Pallett, 1999). An enormous volume of research supports the credibility and validity of student ratings (Aleamoni, 1981; Cashin, 1995; Braskamp and Ory, 1994).

On the other hand, student rating systems have several important limitations. There are no perfectly valid measures in education, including student ratings of teaching effectiveness. For one thing, no rating form can include all possible course objectives or teaching methods. It is also true that ratings are colored by the attitudes students bring to the class. In some classes, nearly all students are highly motivated and eager to learn; in such cases, student ratings of learning outcomes are almost always favorable even if the instructor's teaching skills are marginal. Similarly, if most students take the class only because it meets a requirement, or because it was offered at a favorable time, both learning outcomes and ratings of instructors can be negatively affected. Student ratings fail to take into account *extraneous influences* (factors which influence ratings but which are beyond the instructor's control, such as class size, student academic motivation, or course/disciplinary difficulty).

This is a descriptive study, conducted in the form of a survey to compare two groups of students' point of view, and satisfaction about ESP teachers, and their teaching; to see who is more qualified to teach the course from students' point of view. ESP teachers of one group were EFL teachers and those of the other group were subject-matter teachers.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Effective teaching involves having a sound understanding of how and why certain activities lead to learning and what factors influence their effectiveness

(Kyarcou, 1997). One of the important factors in effective teaching is the teacher. Teachers stand out as a key to realizing the high standards that are increasingly emphasized; characteristics of teachers greatly influence the learners' performance and success within the complex context of teaching (Rice, 2003). Vogt (1984) related effective teaching to the ability to provide instruction to different students of different abilities while incorporating instructional objectives and assessing the effective learning mode of the students. Swank, Taylor, Brady, and Frieberg (1989) created a model of effectiveness that was based upon teacher actions. For them, *effective* meant increasing academic questions and decreasing lecture and ineffective practices, such as negative feedback and low-level questions. Wenglinsky (2000) believed that the classroom practices are important to learning. In his research, Wenglinsky (2000) found that what happens in the classroom is critical and that how a teacher teaches is important.

Evaluation of effective teaching is essential to a variety of important administration recommendations and decisions. Beck (2005) identifies "twelve potential sources of evidence of teaching effectiveness." These include:

- Student ratings (such as Student Evaluations of Teaching);
- Peer reviews;
- Self-reviews;
- Videos of practice;
- Interviews with student;
- Alumni, employer and administrator ratings;
- Teaching awards and scholarship;
- Learning outcome measures; and
- Maintenance of teaching portfolios.

There is a substantial testimonial evidence as well as experimental evidence supporting the usefulness of students' evaluation of teaching (Centra, 1993, Marsh and Dunkin, 1992; Marsh and Roche, 1994). Marsh and Roche (1993) examined students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness as a means of enhancing university teaching. Ryan and Harrison (1995) investigated how students weight various teaching components in arriving at their overall evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

This study investigates the students' opinions about the ESP teachers' performance, focusing on the rate of student satisfaction with EFL teachers versus subject-matter teachers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the Iranian higher education system, students majoring in the different fields offered in universities throughout the country have to pass a two-credit Basic English course followed by a three-credit General English course. They are then required to pass a two or three credit ESP course, depending on their majors. A controversial issue has been raised to maintain whether the EFL teacher or the subject-matter teacher is the most qualified to teach the ESP courses. As the survey done by Ahmadi (2007) showed, most of the heads of discipline-specialist departments participated in the study believed that ESP courses should be taught by subject-matter teachers. The reason is that they think ESP teachers are expected to have sufficient knowledge in content areas and be able to elicit knowledge from students; and since EFL teachers do not possess such knowledge, they are not able to exchange ideas and teach the ESP courses. However, heads of language departments, who participated in the study, claimed that EFL teachers should teach ESP courses; they believed that teaching ESP is part of an English language teacher's job and that it is their responsibility to design or teach such courses.

ESP teachers are primarily language teachers and should be exert in the language teaching and are not required to have specialized subject knowledge.

This study is a survey that has aimed to answer the question: who is more qualified to teach ESP courses: the subject-matter teacher or the EFL teacher? The main purpose was to explore students' views and attitudes towards teaching ESP by the EFL teachers and the subject-matter teachers. The researcher decided to do this survey because the issue of ESP teacher has caused controversy among language teaching circles in Iran. It is worth mentioning that mostly these courses are taught by the subject-matter teachers. Out of 66 credits of ESP courses offered in University of Zanzan in the academic year 2011-2012, the EFL teachers taught only eight credits, (12%). In addition, out of 96 credits of ESP courses offered in Islamic Azad University of Zanzan 16 credits were taught by the EFL teachers, (16 %).

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following questions are addressed in this study:

1. How satisfactorily and effectively do the EFL teachers teach an ESP course from the students' point of view?
2. How satisfactorily and effectively do the subject-matter teachers teach an ESP course from the students' point of view?
3. Is there any significant difference between the rate of satisfaction for ESP students taught by the EFL teachers and the rate for those taught by the subject-matter teachers?

The following hypothesis was thus proposed in this study:

There is no difference between the satisfaction of students regarding teaching an ESP course by the EFL teachers and the subject-matter teachers.

1.4 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The present study is limited, because the sample is restricted to 120 students at University of Zanjan and Islamic Azad University of Zanjan. The study was conducted in six classes only, with six teachers. This was due to the difficulty of finding classes that were taught by the EFL teachers to compare with the classes taught by the subject-matter teachers because most of the ESP courses were taught by the subject-matter teachers.

A major delimitation of the study is the fact that the researcher excluded the students' English language proficiency level from this research context. The reason behind this decision was the assumption that the students had already been selected via a nation-wide entrance exam and thus were assumed to be almost at the same level of language proficiency. In addition, the students were studying at the same term for their university educational programs. However, language proficiency variable can be included in further researches by others.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

1.5.1 EFL - English as a Foreign Language.

The term refers to English taught in countries (such as Japan, Egypt, or Venezuela) where English is not a major language of commerce and education (Brown, 2001, p. 3).

1.5.2 EFL teacher.

A teacher who applies language-based teaching of English and focuses on the general topics and general English language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Yu Shen, 2009, p. 7)

1.5.3 ESP - English for Specific Purposes.

The term refers to the role of English in a language course or program of instruction in which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners (Richards and Schmidt, 2002, p. 125).

1.5.4 Subject-matter teacher.

A teacher who is an expert or specialized in a particular subject area and conduct content based teaching of a specialized subject such as finance of science (Li, 2004, Wang, 2004, cited in Yu Shen, 2009, p. 7).

1.5.5 Satisfaction.

A state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfill his or her expectation (Kotler and Clarke, 1987).

1.5.6 Effective teaching.

Providing the necessary learning environment and learning experiences that enable all students to learn through making meaning from experience (Westwood, 1998).

Chapter Two: Review of the Related Literature

2.0 Introduction

The review of literature for this study will cover the following important aspects of ESP: definition of ESP, historical study of ESP development, rationale behind ESP courses, types of ESP, characteristics of ESP Courses, and parameters of ESP courses in terms of needs, materials, teachers, learners, methodology, and context. It will specially focus on the teacher of ESP, his/ her roles, problems of ESP teachers, and teacher training programs, and it comments on ESP programs in Iran.

2.1 What Is ESP?

There are many definitions of ESP in the literature; some scholars have tried to define ESP in terms of what it is not rather than in terms of what it really is. Most of definitions agree on three key topics: the nature of the language to be taught, the learners, and the settings in which the other two occur. Four main definitions of ESP mentioned here concentrate on what ESP really means.

Stevens (1988) defines ESP by making a distinction between four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics deal with the fact that ESP consists of English Language Teaching which is:

1. designed to meet specified needs of the learner;