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## The Contribution of Workplace Teaching to a Better Understanding of ESP Terminology

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### Abstract

This paper presents an experiment concerning the contribution of workplace teaching to the better understanding of ESP terminologies. Accordingly, 40 learners majoring in electronic and power engineering were selected based on a language proficiency test. Randomly, they were divided into two experimental and control groups. While the instructional material was the same for both groups, experimental group was taught at the workplace while control group was taught in an academic environment. At the end of the experiment, the findings were compared through t-test. Results after the analysis of the data indicated that who were taught at the workplace gained more ESP vocabulary than those who were taught in academic environment.

**Keywords:** ESP, Workplace

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12 : 2 February 2012

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630

## **Introduction**

It is clear that, in learning a second or foreign language, vocabulary plays the most crucial role. A good mastery of vocabulary is essential for both ESL and EFL learners, especially for those who learn for specific purposes. According to Nation and Coxhead (2001), it is wise to direct vocabulary learning to more specialized areas when learners have mastered the 2000-3000 of general usefulness in English. In order to have easy access to specialized uses of vocabulary, learners need to learn and be taught about vocabulary and its use. Language learning should not be limited to only textbook and classroom activities. It is believed that language acquisition would be most effectively facilitated if it could be embedded with the learners' field of study or work. In the context of ESP, students need to practice at using the vocabulary of their chosen field of study and this can be best happen at the workplace.

## **Teaching ESP at the Workplace**

Teaching ESP at the workplace can be a good way which results in ESP terminologies promotion. In the workplace learners are exposed to the real use of technical words and in this way they can produce a picture of words in their mind. In academic environment students just memorize ESP vocabularies and they don't know how to use them in vocational environment. So, teaching ESP words at the workplace can solve this problem and pave the way for learners to learn words better and easier and how to use them.

The recognition that learning occurs within the workplace and that it is necessary for the development of working knowledge and skills is not new.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 2 February 2012

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However, in recent years an interest among employers, researchers and policy makers in what comprises learning and how it can be facilitated within workplaces has increased, and there are now many areas of research in which learning at and through work is a central concern.

Reeve & Gallacher (1999) argue that workplace learning is seen as a flexible form of learning which enables employees to engage in the regular processes of up-dating and continuing professional development which have been increasingly emphasized. Moreover, in so far as the learning is work-based it is also seen as facilitating forms of learning.

Boud and Garrick (1999) state that workplace has become a site of learning associated with two quite different purposes ... The first is the development of the enterprise through contributing to production; the second is the development of individuals through contributing to knowledge and skills.

Therefore, it can be said that teaching ESP at the workplace can pave the way for learners to master specialized vocabulary related to their field of study much better and easier. The reason is that they learn them in a situation in which they must be used in the future occupational opportunities.

## **Review of Literature**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of applied linguistics that focuses on relating the teaching and learning process to learners' needs. Widdowson (1981), a linguist and an early pioneer of the approach, describes the general concept of ESP by stating that "if a group of learners' need for a

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12 : 2 February 2012

Abdolreza Pazhakh

Rahmatollah Soltani

The Contribution of Workplace Teaching to a Better Understanding of ESP Terminology

632

language can be accurately specified, then this specification can be used to determine the content of a language program that will meet these needs.”

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1992), "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." Research findings during the past decade have generally supported the notion that work-based learning activities can invigorate the learning process and act as a positive force for students in both academic and career and technical education programs.

Copa and Wolff (2002) found that learning needs to: (a) be progressive in achieving external standards, (b) engage learners in relevant and challenging experiences, (c) be learner-centered, (d) use real-life experiences and be project-oriented, (e) integrate academic and career and technical education, (f) use and closely coordinate non-school and school learning settings, (g) use multiple and continuous forms of assessment to improve learning, and (h) create and nurture learning communities.

Real world tasks as defined by Nunan (1989) are those which “require learners to approximate, in class, the sorts of behaviors required of them in the world beyond the classroom”.

One of the main goals for an applied English program at a four-year college is to prepare students with appropriate English proficiency so as to help them become competent communicators in their future workplace. Work-based learning is not a new trend in education. In fact, what we term vocational and technical education was the premise of John Dewey’s assertions during the late

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 2 February 2012

Abdolreza Pazhakh

Rahmatollah Soltani

The Contribution of Workplace Teaching to a Better Understanding of ESP Terminology

633

19th and early 20th century. Dewey firmly believed that life and learning should be uniquely integrated (Dewey, 1916). He also believed that the best way to do this is to integrate the working world with education curriculum.

Work-based university learning has been defined by Margham (1997) as: That learning which ... utilizes opportunities, resources and experience in the workplace. It will, in general, have outcomes relevant to the nature and purpose of the workplace. A workplace needs analysis describes the entire context in which English is used. The ESP approach uses the needs analysis framework as the main tool to define learners' needs in a specific field because the awareness is more recognizable in a specific target situation representing a "real-life-situation". In an academic setting, the main concern of learners is the acquisition of knowledge related to their present field of study or future workplace.

Swail's (2000) recent study of data from the College Board's student descriptive questionnaire found that a higher percentage of students with work-based learning experiences in high school had a B or better Grade Point Average (GPA) in high school compared to all SAT test takers, even though they were more likely to be from less-advantaged backgrounds.

Kampits and Swail (2001) found that 80 percent of college students surveyed in their study indicated they learn better through projects and real-world applications than through classroom and textbook instruction only, and that 83 percent planned to participate in work-based learning experiences during college.

Chin et al (2000) found that students, through work-based learning activities, acquire “knowledge and skills in particular occupations; providing career exploration and planning; learning all aspects of an industry; improving personal and social competence related to work in general; and enhancing students’ academic achievement and motivation through contextual learning.”

### **The Main Question of This Study**

Accordingly, the main question of this study can be stated as follow:

Q: Does the implementation of workplace teaching lead to better understanding of ESP terminologies?

From this question the following null hypothesis was found:

H: Workplace teaching would not significantly improve ESP terminologies.

### **Research Methodology**

#### ***A. Participants***

In this study, the addressed community were 40 undergraduate male students enrolled in the ESP course as a part of their major in the electronic and power engineering Department at Mahshahr Islamic Azad University. They have been chosen among from 98 students through administrating of a standardized language proficiency test (Intermediate TOEFL Test Practices by Folse, 1997).

#### ***B. Instrumentation***

Three types of instruments were used in the current study: The first instrument was a standard proficiency test which aimed at controlling the proficiency level of the subjects. The second material that all participants used was a course book entitled *English for the student of power, electronics, control and communications* (Haghani, M.,2005). Thirdly; a post-test was administered to both groups so as to examine their knowledge of ESP vocabulary after the treatment in workplace.

### ***C. Procedure***

At first, two groups of students were selected from the electronic and power engineering department of Islamic Azad University, Mahshahr branch, Iran. This was carried out through the administration of standardized language proficiency test. It was accounted as a pre-test. Then, 40 learners were identified as the participants. They were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. Each class consisted of 20 learners.

On the first day of the experiment, the instructor talked about the importance of ESP vocabulary knowledge and its role which plays in their field of study. Both classes were taught by the same instructor using the same teaching material entitled *English for the student of power, electronics, control and communications* (Haghani, M., 2005) with the same teaching schedule of instruction, except that in the experimental group, the students were taught ESP course in electrical power workshop at Mahshahr electrical power distribution company, while the latter, control group, was taught at the university, Mahshahr branch. Classes were conducted two hours a week and the study took long for thirteen weeks.

At the end of the experiment a post-test on ESP terminologies was administered to both of the groups. It was aimed at measuring the technical vocabulary knowledge of the participants to see if the treatment had made any difference in the ESP vocabulary promotion of the two groups. The results obtained through post-test were analyzed and interpreted through t-test.

### ***Data Analysis***

With the use of the ESP vocabulary knowledge test scores from all the participants, the mean was first computed for the two groups. The preliminary descriptive statistics for means was examined to see if they differed from one another. Furthermore, in order to find out if the difference among the means will be large enough to be statistically significant, t-test was performed to see whether the difference of ESP vocabulary posttest scores between the experimental and control groups existed.

### ***Results and Discussion***

The preliminary descriptive statistics for the ESP vocabulary knowledge test appears in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of posttest for the experimental and control groups

Groups	Test	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Experimental	posttest	20	19.85	3.08	0.69



Control	posttest	20	17	2.60	0.58
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As displayed in Table 1, experimental group's performance in the posttest was better than those in control group. It was also revealed that after the instructional treatment the mean of the posttest scores for experimental group was 19.85 while for control group it was 17. In the case of SD, for experimental group it was 3.08, whereas that of the control group was 2.60. So, the findings suggest that teaching ESP vocabulary in workplace involved more beneficial effects than teaching ESP vocabulary at the academic environment.

***Comparative Effectiveness between Experimental and Control Groups after the Treatment***

Table 2 Results of t-test between Experimental and Control groups' scores

Group	Test	N	Mean	Mean Difference	SD	t-value	df	p
Experimental	posttest	20	19.85	2.85	3.08	3.162	38	.0031
Control	posttest	20	17		2.60			

**\*Significant at .05**

In order to compare the effectiveness of the instruction in workplace on ESP vocabulary learning , t-test demonstrated in Table 2 indicated that the mean difference between the experimental and control groups' scores measured at the time of posttest was significant (t = 3.162, p<0.0001). The mean difference between the experimental group and control group was 2.85. This indicates that the experimental group who were under the treatment at the workplace gained more ESP vocabulary than the control group that were under the instruction at the academic environment. Therefore, it can be claimed that this difference is

due to the kind of instructional environment where the experimental group was taught there and this gives further evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of teaching ESP at the workplace on ESP terminologies. To this end, the following question was under consideration:

Does the implementation of workplace teaching lead to better understanding of ESP terminologies?

To perform this research, subjects were selected on the basis of standardized language proficiency test. Then, they were randomly put in one control group and one experimental group and were assigned to one of the two following instructional conditions:

Experimental group was instructed at the workplace, while Control group was taught in the academic environment. For data analysis, t-test was used. The calculated t-test proved that ESP vocabularies can be learnt better at the workplace. The experimental group was exposed to ESP words at the real situation, workplace, gained considerable amount of vocabularies than control group. So, the computation and analysis of the T-test provided us with the judgment to reject the null hypothesis of this study which stated that teaching ESP at the workplace would not significantly promote learners' ESP vocabulary knowledge.

Results of this study indicated that teaching ESP courses at the workplace might become a useful way for students to improve and facilitate their learning of ESP

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 2 February 2012

Abdolreza Pazhakh

Rahmatollah Soltani

The Contribution of Workplace Teaching to a Better Understanding of ESP Terminology

words. Based on the findings, one concludes that teaching ESP at the workplace has much influence on the learning of ESP terminologies. The reason is that in the workplace they are exposed to technical words in a real situation. Therefore, they have an image of each word in their mind and learn how to utilize words in sectors in which they must be used.

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Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)  
12 : 2 February 2012  
Abdolreza Pazhakh  
Rahmatollah Soltani

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12 : 2 February 2012

Abdolreza Pazhakh

Rahmatollah Soltani

The Contribution of Workplace Teaching to a Better Understanding of ESP Terminology

642