



Factors Affecting the Learning of English for Specific Purposes of the third-year English-majored students at University of Phan Thiet

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Abstract: This study was carried out to investigate common factors that affect learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the University of Phan Thiet (UPT) and suggest solutions to overcome negative factors that hinder the effectiveness of learning the subject. A mixed-method using student questionnaires and interviews were applied for data collection. There were 110 questionnaires administered to a group of students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Data from valid questionnaires were analyzed by mostly quantitative analyses. The findings indicate that factors affecting ESP learning positively are the course's objectives to develop students' speaking skills and ESP vocabulary, students' good competence in speaking skills, vocabulary and grammar, teachers' good teaching competence, and its coursebook providing relatively sufficient and relevant ESP learning. Nevertheless, the results reveal that many factors negatively influence ESP learning at the university, including students' factors, teacher factors, and factors from the university. Furthermore, the findings have shed light on some potential solutions to overcome problems that the learners and teachers have coped with during the learning journey.

Keywords: ESP, factors, learning English for Specific Purposes.

I. Introduction

In more than 50 years since the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an M.A in ESP, e.g. the University of Birmingham, Aston University in the United Kingdom and in the number of ESP courses offered to oversea students in English speaking countries (Harding, 2007; Hyland, 2006; Orr, 2008). In addition, there have been numerous researches on ESP learning and teaching posted on famous websites about ESP which are reported in ESP journals for teachers and the Asia ESP Journal, and so on.

In Vietnam, for recent years, ESP teaching and learning have gained increasing development and become an important part of English language teaching and learning in the curriculum of each year. Together with the trend of ESP increasing development, especially since Vietnam has become the 156th member of the Interpol, attention has been paid to ESP for Security and Police officers to help them integrate into the development of the world. ESP has officially become a compulsory subject in ten colleges belonging to Ministry of Public Security with the aims of equipping learners with professional knowledge in English so as to

meet their specific needs and future careers. However, ESP has also been the field which greatly challenges language teaching. In particular, designing an ESP course to meet the needs of the learners is a big challenge to schools and teachers. As a matter of fact that general language teaching should not be ignored; ESP must combine specific field with English language teaching. Also, ESP teachers and learners often face challenge when they relate language instruction to the respective fields. They often feel isolated from the professionals in their student's specialization as well as their colleagues in other institutions. In addition, many universities and colleges regard English as a non major subject so that ESP is considered less important than other specialist subjects. And the condition is even worse where the number of students in ESP class room is so large. Moreover, the difficulties may include the lack of cooperation between students and students or students and teacher, the inappropriate materials, the level of students as well as the qualifications of teachers. All these factors highly influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning ESP.

As a result, being conscious of the importance of ESP teaching and learning and dealing with the challenges of ESP teaching, researchers have recently done variety of studies to provide theoretical knowledge for the field of ESP teaching and learning or to investigate factors affecting the teaching and learning process in many particular fields such as English language, business, tourism, administration, medicine, and other services.

At the University of Phan Thiet (UPT), general English (GE) and ESP have become compulsory subjects for every course according to Decision No. 06/2003/QĐ-BGDĐT of Ministry of Education and Training since 2003. The purpose of ESP course is to help students improve their language competence, especially speaking skills and writing skills so they can research and explore more professional knowledge relating to their specialist field.

Therefore, in the context of the college, one of the most significant current discussions in ESP is to evaluate the effectiveness of ESP learning, i.e. to investigate factors influencing the learning of this subject. It is believed that by identifying those factors the study might help students and teachers to limit negative impacts and bring into positive impacts, as well as to create a positive learning environment for the third-year students at UPT.

II. Literature review

2.1. Overview of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

2.1.1 Definition of ESP

From early 1960's, ESP has developed to become one of the most prominent parts of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and "become fashionable in the language teaching world" (McDonough, 1984, p.1). He also argued that ESP is regarded as a bridge or a mediator which enables the teachers to deepen their understanding of the teaching occupation and to apply that knowledge in various ways to practice teaching in class. Moreover, according to him, ESP leads learners to the target language they are experiencing and will face in their future career.

Another definition of ESP proposed by Munby (1978) is that ESP courses are those in which the syllabus and materials are developed by the prior analysis of learners' needs of communication and ESP is teaching English relying on actual and urgent needs of students. According to Robinson (1980), defined that ESP is believed to pay attention to the purposes of the learners and refer to the entire resources of language to reach those purposes. In a similar vein, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p.4-5) defined ESP in terms of "absolute" and "variable" characteristics in his speech to clarify the meaning of ESP. Absolute characteristics consider ESP as the teaching to meet specific needs of learners including making use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and being centered on the language which is appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. However, as presented by him, variable characteristics refers to ESP related to or designed for specific disciplines, using in specific teaching situations, a different methodology, possible 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 university level, generally designed for

intermediate or advanced students, and that most of its courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems. In short, there have been many ideas about ESP. However, in this study, the definition of ESP by Hutchinson et al. (1987, p.19) was applied because it is simple, comprehensible, but comprehensive enough to cover all of the ideas proposed by the above mentioned authors: "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reasons for learning".

2.1.2 General characteristics of ESP

Concerning to characteristic of ESP, Striven (1980), Robinson (1980) and Widdowson (1983) agreed that an ESP course would have three features. Firstly, it is purposeful and aims at the successful performance of occupation or education by an individual or a group of learners. Secondly, it is based on an analysis of learners' needs and is adapted to meet these needs. Finally, it may differ from a general English (GE) course concerning skills, themes, topics, situations, functions, language, and methodology.

Additionally, from his own definition, Strevens (1988, p.1-2) differentiated between absolute characteristics and variable characteristics of ESP. ESP has some absolute characteristics: it consists of English language teaching which is designed to meet specified needs of the learner; its content, i.e. themes and topics and is related to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; it focuses on the language appropriate with those activities in syntax, lexis, semantics, discourse and so on. He also included the contrast of ESP with GE in the absolute characteristics of ESP. Additionally, ESP also has the variable characteristics in which ESP may be, but is not necessarily, restricted as to the language skills to be learned and has not been taught according to preordained methodology.

2.1.3 English for Special Purposes (ESP) and General English (GE)

Is ESP different from GE? This is the question that many researchers always raise when doing research on ESP. Hutchinson and Water (1987) stated that the answer to this very reasonable question is in theory nothing, in practice a great deal.

There are many points in contrast between ESP and GE. First, the primary point is about the learners; the learners of ESP are mainly university students spending years on studying English. They attend ESP courses for enhancing their knowledge about the special area and learning ESP relating to their future job. Conversely, GE is for all various proficiency levels of English. The learners for GE may not know anything about English or they may spend many years on studying English. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) argued that ESP is generally designed for adult learners, intermediate or advanced students.

Second, as far as learners' reasons and needs for studying English are concerned, GE course is targeted as improving all English skills and components (Listening, Speaking, Writing, Reading, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Pronunciation) for learners to master and use daily English language, while in ESP courses, the learners mainly use professional skills. They learn English for their job-related future. In the same view, Hutchinson and Waters (1989) added that what differentiates ESP from GE is the realization of learners' needs since ESP students know exactly why they need English.

Finally, the distinction between ESP and GE is also noticed in terms of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The language used in the ESP course is more specialized and often focuses on specific topics or skills. For example, ESP learning and teaching at Universities of Phan Thiet should pay attention to specific speaking skill. In other words, the communicative competence should be directed to the situational contexts of the learners' job-related areas. Teachers and educators should be aware that ESP must aim at language in context rather than language with grammatical accuracy. Accordingly, English will not be taught as a subject separated from the students' real wishes for future jobs; instead, it should be integrated into other subjects important to the learners' special area (Fiorito, 2005).

In short, ESP and GE are different in three main aspects: learners, learners' needs and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

2.2. Common factors affecting ESP learning

2.2.1 Learners' factors

Learners' needs

Learners' need analysis is said to be one of the important steps to succeed in teaching and learning not only English but also other subjects. There are many concepts of needs. Robinson (1980, p.7) considered "what students themselves would like to gain from the language course as students' needs. He himself also believed that if students are already trained in their occupation or their motivation is strong, they will know what they need and why they need it, and they can themselves determine the required skills, purposes and language areas. Learning a foreign language for them is a much simpler process than for the trainees who have not had yet a clear conception of what they have to learn even in their native language.

The needs of the learners taking English language courses are typical and most frequently specified in terms of the end-product (Writing answers to exams, attending conferences, and so on), not in terms of what the teachers and learners have to do to reach that stage. The language needs of learners deal with the ends and not the means of learning. Widdowson (1982, p.2) stated: "Needs can refer to students' study or job requirement, that is, what they have to do at the end of their language course." Mountford (1981) believed that "Needs" is necessary and desirable to be learned from a program of language institution." Most teachers would agree that a more detailed specification of the needs of their students in these terms would be both welcome and necessary (McDonough, 1984).

Target Situation Analysis (TSA) refers to learners' needs; that is, what the learner has to know in target situations. In TSA, the reasons for why the language is needed, how the language will be used, what the content areas will be, who the learner uses the language with, and where the language will be used need to be analyzed and discussed in detail (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Present Situation Analysis (PSA) refers to what the learner currently lacks; that is, what the learner does not know. In PSA, the reasons for what the learner's proficiency level is, what skills the learner wants to improve most urgently, whom the learner uses the language with, and where the language is used need to be analyzed and discussed (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The questions that researchers should find the answers to are almost identical with those in TSA except that TSA investigates what learners need to gain after the course, or in other words, the destination learners need to reach, PSA asks what learners need to improve urgently and what learners have done so far to be considered as learners' starting point at the beginning of the course.

Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) refers to the learner's wants; that is, what the learner feels he or she wants. Learners' wants are determined by their own perceptions. In other words, the learners might have some background knowledge of their needs. Therefore, needs are determined by learners in LSA (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

In Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) viewpoint, learners' needs, i.e. "Wants" or "Route", include almost factors affecting ESP teaching and learning which are connected with both the inside and outside of the learners. Learning needs relating to teachers and teaching environment are the external factors of students' learning needs. Other internal factors belonging to learning needs might be students' learning style, motivation, anxiety, cultural background knowledge, etc; and they are presented separately in detail in the next sections.

Learning styles

Style is consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Therefore, learning style is an individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of processing, retaining new information and skills (Reid, 1995).

Students preferentially process information in different ways such as seeing, hearing, reflecting, acting, analyzing, visualizing, etc. In other words, people learn through their different senses. Approximately twenty to thirty percent of the school-aged population remembers what is heard; forty percent recalls well visually the things that are seen or read; many must write or use their fingers in some manipulative way to help them remember basic facts; other people cannot internalize information or skills unless they use them in real-life activities such as actually writing a letter to learn the correct format (Carbo; Dunn, R. & Dunn, K., 1991). According to these authors, there are usually four kinds of learning style including visual style, auditory style, tactual style, kinesthetic style:

- Visual learners: Visual learners are those who learn things best through viewing, watching, and observing them. Visual learning students like to keep an eye on the teacher by sitting in the front of the class and watching the lecture closely. Often, visual learners will find that information “clicks” when it is explained with the aid of a chart or picture.

- Auditory learners: Auditory learners are those who learn best through listening. They may struggle to understand a chapter they have read, but then experience a full understanding as they listen to the class lecture.

- Tactual Learners: Tactual learners are those who learn easily by touching, manipulating, and handling. They remember more easily when they write, doodle, draw, or move their fingers. Often they are talented people who do creative things well with their hands such as sewing, baking, repairing, designing, painting, etc.

- Kinesthetic learners: Kinesthetic learners are those who learn easily by doing and experiencing. These people cannot exactly remember too much of what they are shown, and appear unable to recall specifics; and they learn most easily by combination of tactual and kinesthetic experiences - a great deal of experiencing, doing, and involving.

Learners' motivation

It is believed that motivation is related to human activities. Something that leads man to act is considered as motivation. But “why do people have to act?” The answer is that they want to satisfy their needs and desires as Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2004) stated “to motivate means to provide with a motive”, and “motive means something as a need or desire that causes a person to act”. In another definition, “Language learning motivation” was considered as “the effort learners put into learning an L2 as a result of their desire or need to learn it” (Ellis, 1997). Based on Socio-educational model, Gardner (1985) argued that motivation is concerned with the question: “Why does an organism behave as it does?” and he defined “motivation to learn an L2” as “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitude toward learning the language”; Learning motivation, therefore, consists of four factors: a goal, an effort, a desire to attain the goal, and favorable attitude towards learning activities.

In this study, Gardner’s definition (1985) was used as the operational definition because it is concise but comprehensible. In addition, the definition is broad enough to encompass adequately and satisfactorily the key concepts formulated in other definitions.

In second language acquisition studies, motivation has always been categorized into two types: Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation has been studied by social and educational psychologists since the early 1970s. They believed that students who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to engage in the task willingly as well as work to improve their skills, which will increase their capabilities. Students are likely to be intrinsically motivated if they: attribute their educational results to factors under their own control, also known as autonomy, believe they have the skill that will allow them to be effective agents in reaching desired goals (i.e. the results are not determined by luck), are interested in mastering the learning activity, rather than just rote-learning to achieve good grades (Heider, 1958; Lock & Latham, 1994).

Contrast to intrinsic motivation, “Extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain an outcome, which then contradicts intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation comes from the outside of the

individual” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, compared with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is associated with lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety.

Learners’ anxiety

Anxiety is defined as “an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (such as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one’s capacity to cope with it” (Meriam-Webster’s Medical Dictionary, 2002). Similarly, Bandura (1997) defined anxiety as “a state of anticipatory apprehension over possible deleterious happenings.” (as cited in Tysinger, Diamanduros & Earley, 2010, p.137).

Anxiety has been known to influence one’s performance and behavior in a variety of situations. Anxiety affects the curiosity of learners which in turn obstructs the functioning of cognitive abilities and competences like logical thinking, reasoning, keen observing, questioning, and so forth. (Vazalwar, 2011). Moreover, Sellers (2000) found that participants who expose the high level of anxiety on self-report instruments remember significantly less content in a foreign language than participants experiencing the lower level of anxiety do. In reality, the high-anxious participants also tend to experience more off-task and distracting thinking that likely further interrupts the process of English learning. Accordingly, many studies have identified the negative impact of anxiety on learning process, especially on ESP learning (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Namrata, 1992; Trivedi, 1995).

Learners’ cultural knowledge

Many studies were conducted in ESP learning contexts in order to figure out the relationship between learners’ cultural knowledge and ESP learning. The results of the studies indicated that cultural knowledge plays an important role in ESP learning. According to McKay (2002), in spite of the relationship between language and culture, different views arise concerning the integration of culture. Some studies discovered that acquisition of language, especially ESP vocabulary, requires an understanding of culture and others look at the cultural content as only a motivating process for students, so “it can be questioned whether the teaching of culture is necessary to integrate in teaching English, which has become the international language” (McKay, 2002; Valdes, 1986).

On the other hand, some studies found that, to reach effective communicative goals whether individuals’ learning ESP or for other purposes, learners need to fit their needs; so using the language requires both learning the language and associating with its culture. This means that the cultural values are presented in the use of the language by individuals (McKay, 2002, p.86).

The integration of culture when using the language seems to be an indispensable factor. McKay (2002, p.85) introduced an example about scientific writing which involves cultural assumptions and presuppositions. For example, the nature of objectivity, the importance of truthfulness in scientific endeavors and what is appropriate to include or exclude in scientific reports. Therefore, it is postulated that the English language used and the special field chosen by learners need cultural knowledge that fits their requirements in an ESP context. In the light of this, Valdes (1986, p.121) maintained that “it is virtually impossible to teach a language without concerning cultural content.”

McKay (2002) believed that culture is essential in a way that ESP students need to know the culture related to particular language use that suits their studies and the goal to be reached when studying the subject. Brown (1986, p.45) argued that culture is essential because “it is really an integral part of the interaction between language and thought. Cultural patterns, customs, and ways of life are expressed in language; culture-specific world views are reflected in language”.

2.2.2. Teachers’ factors

Teachers’ teaching background

There are two main sources of ESP teachers including specialist major teachers and language major teachers. In other words, they usually develop expertise in teaching ESP in two ways. Some teachers begin with particular studies or a career in business, science, engineering, security, medicine or whatever and then change their job to become teachers of English. They use their specialist knowledge as an advantage in teaching ESP (Wild, 1992, as cited in Vo, 2009).

However, Wild (1992, p.288) argued that the number of people who change from a specialized profession into teaching English is relatively uncommon. Alternatively and more commonly, language major teachers are asked to teach an ESP class and need to learn about the specialized areas they go along. Dulley-Evans and John (1998, p. 60) stated that most ESP teachers have a language teaching background and they do not have first-hand experience of the content and context of other disciplines.

Teachers' specialist knowledge

It is certain that the specialist major teachers usually have confidence in lecturing the subject knowledge whereas those who have been trained for teaching GE or Literature feel in troubles and confused with the texts whose content they are inexperienced with them. Therefore, the subject teachers, e.g. ESP teachers, are required to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge of the specialized area. The first group which supported the fact that ESP courses should be instructed by the specialist teachers argued that it is easier, and more sufficient, to train subject-matter specialist in the basics of English Language Teaching (ELT) than to try to train ELT teachers in the technical knowledge of the ESP subject (Troike, 1994, as cited in Vo, 2009). On the other hand, the second group maintained that language major teachers can be good ESP practitioners since they are given a solid base of ELT experience, and the important factors for an ESP teacher are attitude and interest, not content knowledge (Taylor, 1994, as cited in Vo, 2009). In short, there are two ideas about specialist knowledge. The first one appreciates the specialized content-based curriculum and teachers with specialist teaching background. Meanwhile the second idea believes that linguistic knowledge of ESP teachers plays a more important role; and therefore, it supports those GE teachers who have a positive attitude to be in charge of ESP teaching.

Teaching methodology

Selecting methodology is a productive step in teaching every subject in general and ESP in particular. Regarding teaching methodology, Dudley-Evans (2001) stated: "The use of a distinctive methodology is ... a variable characteristic of ESP". The author continued to state that in certain situations, such as non-major or pre-work courses in which learners have not yet started their academic or professional work and have not had rich special knowledge, methods of teaching ESP courses will be identical to those of GE. However, as presented in section 3.2.4 that ESP teaching is different from GE teaching in the favor of CLT. Accordingly, "What is the best English teaching methodology for ESP?" There is hardly a clear answer to this question. Thus in this study, three prominent methods in teaching English which are Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and CLT are reviewed. GTM (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979) had been the convention in foreign language teaching around the world. GTM focuses on the study of grammatical rules, reading comprehension, and translation. Although GTM has been generally acknowledged to be the least effective teaching methodology, it is still broadly used in schools worldwide today. ALM replaced the superseded GTM to become the convention in foreign language teaching (Brown, 2001, p.23). ALM emphasizes listening and speaking over reading and writing. In the 1980s, CLT (Higgs & Clifford, 1982) gradually took over as the preferred method of foreign language teaching. CLT stresses the ultimate goal of foreign language learning to be the ability to communicate interactively with people. In other words, CLT suggests that language students should speak and write sentences that are not only grammatically correct, but also befitting to the audience, time, situation, and context. In addition, CLT expects learners to be able to effectively communicate their feelings and understand the difference between colloquial and written language.

Teachers' evaluating competence

The ESP teachers are often involved in many different types of evaluation: testing of students, evaluating of ESP courses and used materials. Tests are carried out to assess whether students have the necessary specialist language and skills to undertake a particular academic course or career (if needed) and to assess the level of their achievement, i.e. how much learners have obtained from an ESP course. Evaluation of course design and teaching materials should be done while the course is being conducted and after the course has finished for assessing whether students have been able to perform what they learned and finding out what they have needed to improve more. Evaluation through discussion and on-going needs analysis can be employed to adapt the syllabus or curriculum (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

2.2.3 Learning environment factors

Syllabus or Curriculum

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.83-84), a syllabus is a document which contains what will be learned. In fact, there are several different ways in which a syllabus can be defined. At the simplest level, a syllabus can be denoted as a statement of what is going to be studied. It indicates what the successful learner will obtain by the end of the course. In this case, it is referred to an evaluation syllabus. In addition, a syllabus can also demonstrate the order of the content which will be learned. This may be called the organization syllabus because it carries assumptions about the nature of learning as well as language; whereas the evaluation syllabus reflects the assumptions about the nature of language and linguistic performance. On its route to the learner, the organization syllabus goes through a series of interpretations. The first person who interprets the syllabus is usually the materials writer, so the materials syllabus is written. Teachers are usually the one who does the second stage of interpretation, so the teacher syllabus is formed. The classroom is the environment which influences the nature of both what is taught and what is learned. The last type of syllabus is the learner's syllabus. It is the network of knowledge that arises and develops in the learner's brain and it will enable the learner to understand and store the later knowledge.

Materials (textbook)

Materials play a significant role in ESP teaching and learning process. They are best seen as a resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set in terms of learners' needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Each group of learners has its own needs and ESP teachers should choose suitable materials that best fit the learners' needs concerning the objectives of the course, learners' language proficiency, learners' learning styles, teaching methodology and so forth. So, evaluation on materials would be essential and important issues for language learners and teachers. Objective analysis investigates how far the material-in-use being evaluated realizes the criteria. Matching examines how far the material matches students' needs. Criteria for objective and subjective analysis consists of four main points: the learners, the course's aims, and the content.

University facilities and equipment

School facilities have been observed as a potent factor to language learning and teaching as well. The importance to teaching and learning of the provision of adequate instructional facilities for education cannot be over-emphasized. According to Akande (1985), learning can occur through one's interaction with one's environment. Environment here refers to facilities that are available to facilitate students learning outcome. It includes audio-visual devices, software and hardware of educational technology; also, size of classrooms, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves, and so on; in which instruments for language learning practices are arranged (Farombi, 1998; Farrant, 1991).

Other scholars (Wilcockson, 1994; Lawal, 1995; Ajayi, 1996; Suleiman, 1996) variously identified the significance of facilities and equipment in ESP teaching and learning. They confirmed that absence or poor and deteriorating quality of educational facilities and equipment can affect learners' performance. According to

Hallak (1990), facilities form one of the important factors that contribute to academic achievement in the school system. They include the school buildings, classroom, accommodation, libraries, laboratories, furniture, recreational equipment, apparatus and other instructional materials.

Learning resources and facilities are supporting media to successful English as a Foreign Language Learning. Personal and school libraries should have enough books and other equipment to support the learning and teaching process. In non-English speaking countries, students and teachers should be facilitated by various English literatures and audio-visual aids as they are not able to access an English language speaking and culture community (Thahir, 2003).

III. The study

3.1. Research site

The study takes place at University of Phan Thiet which is located at 225 Nguyen Thong Street, Phu Hai Ward, Phan Thiet City, Binh Thuan Province. The students mostly have been learning English for the period of 3 to 10 years. Additionally, most of them are expected to learn English relating to their specialty which will help them much in their future jobs. Those factors seem to be their advantages in learning ESP. However, the students come from different parts of the countries; some students are from cities; others from remote areas with different language background and different attitudes towards learning English. The students who come from cities have learned English at high schools before entering the college whereas those who come from remote areas have learned only little. This mixture causes certain problems to English teaching and learning because some students find in-class activities easy and interesting while the others find them too hard in the same classroom. It is really a challenge for teachers in such a mixed class because the teachers can hardly meet all students' needs. Particularly, the students are from different origins, including the high school graduates, students from ethnic nomination, and officers and officials nominated to study at the college.

The students in the group are rather homogeneous in their English levels and age ranging from 18 to 24 years old, and they are expected to be able to use English for their major after finishing the course. Prior to studying EFS course, most of the students have learned English at secondary and high schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate and examine the common factors that affect the learning of ESP for juniors at UPT. By identifying those factors, this study could help teachers and students to control negative effects and enhance positive impacts. Also, it is hopeful that the findings might make a positive contribution to improve the learning environment for the junior students with the purpose to enhance the quality of ESP teaching and learning at the school.

To achieve the purpose mentioned above, the study is aimed at seeking the answers to the following questions:

1. What are the factors that affect the learning of ESP for the third-year students at UPT?
2. How do the teachers and learners manage to deal with those factors that hinder their ESP teaching and learning?

3.2. Syllabus

At UPT, ESP teaching and learning is applied for third-year students who have finished GE at the intermediate level. In fact, ELT program is totally of three terms divided into two stages: the first stage consists of 120 periods including two terms of GE 1 and GE 2. The stage of ESP consists of 45 periods. Normally, students study ESP one day per week and five periods per day.

The ESP course aims at providing students with: basic ESP vocabulary in English field; the opportunity to improve speaking skills through sample texts about different topics related to students' specialty; the opportunity to improve writing skills with the focus on filling forms, making reports and note-taking; the opportunity to practice speaking skills in common situations related to the students' future jobs; and the opportunity to practice listening skills in common situations related to the students' future jobs.

3.3. Participant and materials

In respect of sampling method, random-purpose sampling was selected based on the specific information and knowledge on the target population. More specifically, a number of about 110 respondents were selected cluster-randomly to form a sample. This sampling method helps ensure the representativeness and the generalization for the research. Cluster-random selection was implemented by delivering the questionnaires to the three groups. Hence the partially randomly-selected sample on purpose can be representative for the population. On this method, Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) argued that “a purposive sample is a sample selected because the individuals have special qualifications of some sort or because of prior evidence of representativeness” (p. 111).

The current ESP coursebook was designed and modified by the ESP teachers at UPT Its content is designed based on the topic-based approach.

3.4 Research method

Because the nature of the research is to investigate common factors affecting ESP learning of juniors at UPT, some problems in ESP teaching and learning, and solutions to those problems accompanied by the rather large population of students, the survey method was chosen to carry out this study. Both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms contribute to research. The chosen research paradigms determine the aims and methods of research because they are bound together. Therefore, if the aim of a study is to understand the difficulties of ESP teaching and learning and solutions to them, then it appears that the qualitative paradigm is more appropriate because its methods can generate richly detailed data that are experiences and interpretations. However, if the purpose of the study is to find out positive and negative factors affecting ESP learning, it is apparent that the quantitative paradigm is more suitable since it can collect the general information of many aspects in a large number of questions.

As mentioned earlier, the existing study covers two questionnaire instruments to collect data. In other words, questionnaires to students were employed in data collection process to improve instrument reliability. In this respect, McMillan and Schmacher (2000) observe that, “potential researcher bias can be minimized if researchers spend enough time in the field employing multiple data collection strategies to obtain data from different perspectives” (p. 412).

Questionnaires to students

As the students might face some problems of misunderstanding when they fill in the questionnaire, the pilot questionnaire study was conducted with 10 third-year students before the official study. The pilot took place in the two week of the course. The purpose of the questionnaire pilot was to check the wording of the questionnaire questions. After the questionnaire pilot, some of the questions were modified so that they would be more intelligible. In an attempt to create the diversity of student participants, questionnaires were delivered to the groups of students.

Semi-structured interviews to students

At the same time of questionnaire delivery, the one-to-one interviews with the three chosen students were conducted. There were three appointments with the interviewees at three different times. Recording equipment was arranged for all of the interviews. The three recordings were transcribed into written texts for the following step of the qualitative analysis.

3.5. Data analysis

SPSS 11.5 program was used with mainly quantitative method to analyze the data such as Descriptive Statistics, Multiple Response, and Reliability Analysis. Focused figures are the frequency (F), percentage (%), mean (M), standard deviation (SD) and Cronbach Alpha (α). A qualitative data process for the interview instrument is carried out by the method presented in section 3.4. The analysis for questionnaires is presented

with respect to the comparison and contrast between students' and teachers' view and between the learners' needs situation and actual situation.

3.5.1 Data from questionnaires

The data analysis is presented in four parts according to the four main sections of the questionnaire: (1) General information of students, (2) Student-related problems, i.e. learners' needs including Target Situation Analysis, Present Situation Analysis, and Learning Situation Analysis, (3) Teacher-related problems, and (4) Teaching-environment problems.

IV. Discussion and Findings

4.1. Answers to the research question 1: What are the factors that affect the learning of ESP for the third-year students at UPT?

This study is concerned with an evaluation on ESP learning of sophomores at UPT, the results of which revealed that junior students had certain EFS needs which were not thoroughly met in the ESP classes they have attended. There are some positive and negative factors affecting the teaching and learning process. These factors are analyzed with the data from questionnaires and interviews and presented as below:

4.1.1 Positive factors

Student-related problems

Concerning students' reason to study EFS, teachers and students both affirmed that students study it for their job-related future. Although trying to cover all skills and English areas as a GE course, the ESP course somehow attempted to equip students with content and ESP vocabulary relating to the particular discipline, special occupation and activities of the Security area.

Regarding the topics and themes relating to specialized knowledge students need to obtain, the course also tried to provide useful and necessary knowledge involving crimes and laws though it did not cover such important topics as immigration, police assistance. On the other hand, reading is identified as one of the most required skills to develop and the ESP course was designed with the objectives to fulfill this need. Similarly, ESP vocabulary is the necessary knowledge students need to gain in both target need and present need and the course's objectives covered these needs.

The need of students to use EFS in Vietnam is students' favorable choice because it is easier for students to perceive ESP knowledge related to domestic issues in Vietnam, such as Vietnamese law system, traffic, criminal and security situations in Vietnam; and students have better insight of Vietnam than of foreign countries.

Regarding the instructional medium, most students wanted teachers to use both English and Vietnamese or only Vietnamese in class. Similarly, most teachers used both English and Vietnamese, only three of them chose the mother tongue as the language of instruction, and no one used English only in class. So, it is believed that this is a positive factor in ESP teaching because using L2 helps expose students to the English-speaking contexts. However, in lecturing, the mother tongue would help to clarify the difficult and vague points more easily.

Students' strong competence of reading and vocabulary are the other factors helping students to fulfill the target and present needs for obtaining the language skills. In addition, students' strength of grammar also seems to be an advantage to assist students to achieve English language skills.

In brief, the most apparent factors affect positively ESP learning are: the ESP course with its objectives partly fulfilling students' needs such as reading and ESP vocabulary, students' good proficiency in their reading, vocabulary and grammar.

Teaching and learning-environment problems

In terms of general evaluation on the ESP curriculum, students agreed that the course provides them with useful knowledge about Security field. Teachers also shared this idea.

Concerning the ESP material, students and teachers were partly satisfied with the sufficiency of vocabulary and suitability of the grammar points in the coursebook.

In short, the two major positive factors are the ESP course provided useful Security knowledge and the coursebook relatively contained relevant and sufficient ESP vocabulary and knowledge of Security area.

4.1.2 Negative factors

Student-related problems

With respect to students' reason to study EFS, teachers and students both responded that students study it for work. Thus, it is apparent that need analyses must be done to specify what special and particular knowledge of English areas students really need to design a course to fulfill these needs instead of trying to cover all skills and English areas like the current ESP course. In fact, students expected to use ESP mainly through reading, speaking and listening. Writing has been considered not as important.

Qualitative analysis of teacher interviews also shows that students should be taught all English skills, special knowledge of English language. However, some special skills for their jobs should be more focused, i.e. reading, speaking, listening and communicative skills. Regarding the target need for communication, face-to-face communication has not been satisfied because speaking, listening and functional skills were not emphasized by the course and there are hardly dialogues in the coursebook to practice speaking skill and communicative functions or to enhance listening skill for both face-to-face and telephone-use communications. Next, most of the texts in the coursebook are academic texts. No conversations or reports are assigned to help students perform communicative language functions. Moreover, with regard to the special topics or themes for Security knowledge, ten topics in the coursebook include four concerning laws and crimes, but there is no topic related to immigration or police-assistance. Even some units in the book seem to be inappropriate such as politics and the government system.

With respect to English skills and areas/components, most students needed to obtain after the EFS course, in order of importance: reading, speaking, listening and ESP vocabulary. The skills and areas students needed to improve urgently, in order of importance: speaking, ESP vocabulary and listening. In reality, the EFS course with its aims and objectives seems to be designed for a GE course to cover all general skills and English areas rather than for an ESP course. Actually after the course, students actually have mastered only the reading skill and ESP vocabulary. Thus the course failed in analyzing the real needs of learners for their focused English skills to help their communications at future work.

Also, both students and teachers assessed students' proficiency at the low rate. Furthermore, approximately half of students surveyed did not have sufficient experiencing time of learning English. This also caused students' heterogeneity in English proficiency. These are the disadvantages for teaching and learning EFS.

Concerning another important learning need for ESP study that is students' cultural background knowledge, though this kind of knowledge is very necessary for learning EFS, students' cultural knowledge was at the average rate. Additionally, at the beginning of the course, most students have not studied subjects involving Security area yet though this knowledge is very necessary for students studying EFS. Therefore, these factors are not the advantages to promote students' learning process.

In respect of perspective on what teaching and learning is. Most students believed that "Teaching and learning" means "Teacher gives knowledge, students receive". This perspective limits the efficiency of teaching and learning English in Vietnam because it does not appreciate and encourage students' learning autonomy and creativity. Moreover, it cannot create a favorable teaching environment to apply effective techniques and

activities of CLT. The analysis also reveals students' low confidence in their English proficiency, which might demotivate students in their ESP study.

Concerning students' motivation, one of the important factors affecting English learning including goals, desire and effort in ESP studying, it is concluded that the intrinsic motivation was less than the extrinsic one in students' self-assessment. The extrinsic motivation may not be long-lasting and self-sustaining along with the learning process as the intrinsic one; so it affects the ESP teaching and learning process negatively. Moreover, the levels of students' desire and effort in studying EFS were not high. Thus students' low motivation is one of the important factors that reduce students' effectiveness in learning EFS at the school.

Another affective factor that negatively affected students' ESP learning is their anxiety. Students' level of anxiety in studying EFS in class was high. Furthermore, their level of anxiety when using EFS outside the classroom was higher than in class. Therefore, anxiety is the important negative factor that obstructs students from effective learning at UPT.

In summary, the student-related problems involve the ESP course's objectives without the focuses on students' needs for speaking, listening and communicative skills lead to the actual ineffective outcomes of students, the language textual types and topics about Security are not appropriate to students' needs, students' proficiency and experiencing time of English studying are under the required levels, the ESP classes are heterogeneous in English proficiency, students' knowledge about their specialization and cultures are not sufficient, and students' learning styles, perspective on teaching and learning, confidence, motivation, anxiety do not encourage ESP learning.

Teaching and learning-environment problems

In terms of the evaluation on the ESP course duration, many students agreed that the amount of EFS learning is acceptable; however, most teachers did not think like that. Teachers suggested that the learning time should be from 60 to 80 periods in a course. It can be inferred that 45 periods are not sufficient for the EFS course and that the course ought to last from at least 60 periods to 80 periods to ensure covering all of students' needs. The same result was found that this is a big problem due to the limit of time for studying EFS at the college. Regarding the materials used for the ESP course, most teachers of the college agreed that the materials for teaching EFS at the college should be written by teachers of the university who have good experience to design the standard-meeting materials. So, the current coursebook satisfied this condition. However, both students and teachers did not highly appreciate the coursebook. In particular, the things should be improved immediately are the exercises in the coursebook. Furthermore, the information in the book is not updated sufficiently. In brief, to design new materials for teaching and learning English for specific purposes at the university is necessary.

In respect of school's facilities and equipment arranged for teaching and learning EFS, both teachers and students did not satisfy with them. In fact, there were neither enough standard-meeting classrooms nor equipment. Lack of audio-visual aids is also the important factor that negatively influenced the learning of EFS at the school. There were nearly no English learning activities organized at the real contexts for students to practice using EFS in the real world or any task-based activities involving EFS. In the school library, there were just a few specialized English books written in English as the references for students. Accordingly, poor facilities and equipment is the negative factor that hindered the effectiveness of teaching and learning EFS at the school. In summary, teaching-environment problems include the objectives of the course, the content and the English skills it provides, ESP course duration, the materials, facilities and equipment.

4.3. Answers to the research question 2: How do the teachers and learners manage to deal with those factors that hinder their ESP teaching and learning?

First, to solve the problem of students' anxiety when using EFS in class and outside the classroom, teachers carried out some solutions: to encourage students by using positive feedback instead of negative comments;

to be patient and enthusiastic with students' learning and improvement; to create a relaxed and cooperative learning environment, where no one will be single out; to avoid fierce competitive evaluation and assessment; and to set up reasonable and suitable learning goals. Apart from this, teachers were always aware of students' language proficiency levels when they adopt the learning materials and activities. As an English language teacher, teachers might lack professional knowledge when they teach EFS. To overcome the problem, teachers always read extensively professional English materials, learned from their colleagues or even from their English-majored students who are good at specialized knowledge. Moreover, teaching EFS at the college, teachers may face some problems related to language instruction. It can be deduced that teaching EFS is a difficult task, to improve teachers' language instruction, the teachers of the college always self-studied English teaching methodology from books, learned from their teacher colleagues' teaching experience, attended courses for teaching methodology.

Concerning students' needs of knowledge and skills, it is indicated that students should be offered all English skills, special knowledge of English language. However, some special skills for their future jobs such as reading, speaking, listening should be more focused. Furthermore, in order to meet the needs of job markets, students must enrich not only Security knowledge but also social knowledge. More importantly, students need to improve the critical competence of communication.

In terms of solutions for the class with different background knowledge, teachers of the school adjusted their instructional style by encouraging autonomy, self-study, pairwork and groupwork. Additionally, they were patient with and paid more attention to weak students to avoid students' de-motivation in ESP learning.

Next, EFS course includes lots of knowledge, for example, language skills and specialized knowledge, but students only have two 5-period-class-meetings a week. Teachers of the school realized that the ESP course duration is not enough and supported the idea of dividing the course into several courses so that teachers could offer more information for students. They, however, could not make any changes except for giving recommendations to the administration of the college. Moreover, to overcome the problem, the teachers encouraged students self study.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, leaning and teaching ESP is such a complex area comprising many inter-related factors that it would be a mistake to take a narrow view on this issue. In this study so far major issues concerning common factors affecting teaching and learning EFS at UPT and some solutions to the negative factors have been taken into consideration and examined both theoretically and practically in the context of the university. Upon the findings of some positive and negative factors, the researcher has presented some pedagogical suggestions to the college and its teachers that she hopes they can enhance the effect in teaching and learning English for English majored students. Although designed with great deal of her efforts, this study has still several limitations due to the sampling strategy, sample size and language. However, it could be believed that the information from this research can be useful for the college and its teachers. Moreover, in order to have a better insight of ESP teaching and learning with reference to the context of UPT, it is necessary to carry out further studies with more research tools and various sample sources.

VI. REFERENCES

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