THE CHALLENGES OF ESP TEACHING AND HOW THE USE OF ICT CAN HELP TO ADDRESS THEM: A SOCIAL-SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The advancement of technology has brought remarkable changes in language education. The integration of Information and communications technology (ICT) into language classrooms is unavoidable. This research attempts to investigate the challenges of ESP teaching and explore how the use of ICT can help to address them. The social-semiotic perspective is used due to its relevance with ESP teaching. The authors employed a case study conducted in the Port and Shipping Management Department at a Maritime Polytechnic in Semarang, Indonesia. Data were collected by conducting an interview with an English teacher and having Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with a group of students. The result of this study indicates that teachers' limited knowledge of social practices in the Port and Shipping Industry causes obstacles in selecting relevant teaching materials and activities. To address the challenges, teachers can use various sources, such as websites and video-sharing platforms which are rich with samples of authentic communication. To deal with authentic materials which have a high level of difficulty, teachers need strategies such as scaffolding and giving consistent feedback to students' performance.

Keywords: English For Specific Purposes (ESP), Information And Communication Technology (ICT), Social Practices, Authenticity

Introduction

English Language Teaching has undergone a remarkable development. Globalization has erased borders across nations and created a demand for international language (1). There are businessmen or businesswomen who want to expand their business in other countries, doctors who need to study and keep up with the latest knowledge of the medical field, engineers who are required to read instruction manuals written in English, seafarers who have to work on board the ship with multinational crew, and logistic managers who need to discuss contracts with foreign clients. People then realized that General English is not enough to fulfil their needs to communicate in the fields that they are working in. A call for more specific English is required. In this case, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) plays its role.

The rising awareness about the significance of ESP comes from a basic insight that "language is a tool of communication, rather than a set of phonological, grammatical, and lexical items to be memorized" (2). Since it is considered a tool, it is important to adjust the teaching based on the students' needs. Doctors and seafarers, for example, will have different needs of language, therefore should receive different English courses. However, it is difficult to separate ESP and EGP. In fact, General English will support someone in learning ESP. As Barnard and Zemach (2) state that "ESP should not be regarded as a discrete division of ELT, but

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simply an area (with blurred boundaries) whose courses are usually more focused in their aims and make use of a narrower range of topics". In other words, ESP considers learners' needs as important sources for teachers to select materials and arrange learning activities in order to cater students' communicative needs in their future fields of work.

Teaching ESP has become a great challenge for English language teachers. Many consider teaching ESP as highly demanding. Teachers need to have the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. They also need to understand the students' needs (3). Studies on ESP teaching have revealed some significant problems. Teachers' lack of knowledge on students' field of study, lack of ESP training, lack of proper need analysis, and large classes lead to ineffective ESP teaching and learning (4–6). Many ESP teachers struggle to solve the problems by putting a great effort into their teaching preparation and also invest their time and money to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching ESP according to their field. One of the teachers' efforts is by utilizing information and communication technology (ICT).

The advancement of technology has brought significant changes in the education sector, especially in language classrooms. The use of ICT becomes an integral part of language teaching. ICT is considered to have many benefits. It plays an important role in making English lessons becomes more relevant, interesting, and motivating for students (7,8). It provides tools to facilitate students' development within the existing English curriculum (9). The tools can enhance learner autonomy in language learning (10); provide multimodal target language-and-culture input and allow opportunities for the authentic negotiation of meaning in intercultural learning environments (11); offer more individual attention and deeper learning as well as encourage discovery (12). Teachers can also access a great number of various

written and oral texts at differentiated communication levels: from the interpersonal, group, and institutional to mass communication as the teaching materials in the classroom (13,14). To sum up, the use of ICT can increase learners' satisfaction and the quality of learning (15). It can promote modern and efficient learning activities to enhance better achievement in English (16).

However, there are also problems regarding the use of ICT in the classroom. Teachers' difficulties in managing the classroom, irrelevant websites that can distract the learning activity, poor maintenance, and lack of infrastructure are some of the reported problems (17). The lack of ICT literacy among the teachers and the lack of time allocated for their teaching and learning process have also become obstacles (18). The use of technology, in fact, requires good preparation both from the teachers and students (19). The institution also needs to invest time, effort, and commitment to provide training for teachers. It is important to make sure that teachers have a high level of pedagogical competence in teaching using ICT (20). It was Koehler and Mishra (21) who proposed the term TPACK (Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge) which refers to a conceptual framework to describe the integrative and transformative knowledge of teachers to effectively teach with technology. Teachers need to have content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge to be able to teach ESP effectively in the digital era.

One of the perspectives that is valuable in ESP teaching is the social-semiotic perspective. From the social-semiotic perspective, language must be interpreted within a socio-cultural context. Language and society are considered as a unified concept and need to be investigated as a whole (22). The language we speak or write varies according to the type of situation. The field (what's going on in the situation), the tenor (who is taking part in the situation) and the mode (what role is being played by

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language and other semiotic systems in the Situation) determine which meanings are selected and what forms are used for the expression (23,24).

This study attempts to analyze the challenges of ESP teaching in the Port and Shipping Management Department at a Maritime Polytechnic in Semarang and discuss how the use of ICT can help to address them. There are numerous studies about the use of ICT in language classrooms, but only a few discuss the use of ICT specifically in ESP. This study is aimed to fill the research gap by using the social-semiotic as perspective to view the issue. It is expected that our findings can help to address the challenges faced by ESP teachers and contribute to the improvement of ESP teaching.

Methodology

This study employed a case study design in which the authors tried to explore the challenges of ESP teaching in the Port and Shipping Management Department at a Maritime Polytechnic in Semarang, Indonesia. The authors involved an ESP teacher to have a semi-structured interview, 8 (eight) second-year students and 5 (five) fourth-year students to have a Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The teacher's interview was conducted at the end of a semester. The teacher was asked several questions related to her teaching activities and how she used ICT in her classroom. The students' FDGs were conducted in 3 (three) groups: two groups consisted of 4 (four) second-year students, and one group consisted of 5 (five) fourth-year students. They were asked to discuss their learning experience in one semester. The results of the interview and FDG were then transcribed and analyzed.

The social semiotic was used as the perspective in the analysis since it is considered relevant with the ESP teaching. Using the framework of Halliday, the authors perceived language as a product of the social process. Therefore, language should be interpreted within a socio-cultural context. In analyzing language, it is important to take the context of culture and the context of situation into consideration.

Findings and Discussion
The challenges of ESP teaching from the social semiotic perspective

Teaching English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is never easy for an English teacher. Different from teachers who teach General English, "ESP teachers are no longer the authority on subject knowledge. He or she is more like a language consultant, accepting equal (or even lesser) status with learners who have their expertise in the subject matter" (1).

Besides English, students of the Port and Shipping Management Department receive numerous subjects related to the Port and Shipping industry. After they graduate, they have the opportunity to work in various fields, such as at shipping companies, logistic companies, export-import companies, customs, etc. They often have to communicate with foreign clients, colleagues, or supervisors. The English lesson should help them to obtain the ability to communicate effectively using English. It becomes the task of the English teachers to provide the best learning experience for students so that they can improve their English ability to communicate in a real working situation. However, based on the current study, there are several challenges faced by the English teacher of the Port and Shipping Management Department.

The first and the utmost challenge is the teacher's limited knowledge of the social practices in the Port and Shipping Industry. The interview revealed that the teacher has a lack of knowledge about communication in the Port and Shipping Industry. Sometimes, it makes her uncomfortable when teaching. She needs to struggle to master the language aspects and the subject matter which she has not experienced before. An ESP teacher is often not a practitioner who works in the industry. The educational background is typically English language education. The field of

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work in the Port and Shipping industry is very broad, and it is necessary for the English teacher to understand the context of communication that students will have in their future workplaces.

According to the social-semiotic perspective, it is important to interpret language within a socio-cultural context. This perspective has an implication in ESP teaching, that an English teacher needs to know the context of culture and the context of situation of the communication of the community that students will participate in the future. Success in communication requires people's understanding of the context of situation. It can give them information about the exchange of meaning that is still taking place, and enable them to respond accordingly. To understand the context of situation, there are 3 (three) aspects that need to be analysed: "the field (what's going on in the situation), the tenor (who is taking part in the situation), and the mode (what role is being played by language and other semiotic systems in the situation)" (23).

People will talk and behave differently according to the time and the places that they attend. They will involve in communication with other people through social practices. "Social practices are people's acts of living and working in communities. It refers to people's engagement in multiple, interrelated, multimodal and everchanging practices in ongoing encounters in communities" (25). Understanding social practices in the Port and Shipping industry can provide teachers with information about students' needs to participate in the community.

Teachers' lack of understanding of the social practices will lead to the second challenge: difficulty in selecting relevant teaching materials. The Focus Group Discussion with the semester 7 students revealed that several materials were not relevant to their needs. According to the social semiotic perspective, the selection of teaching materials is "determined by the particular social practices we want students to join in. The social practices are based on the community discourses which students are preparing to join or to develop expertise in" (25). Teaching materials should match students' needs to perform effective communication in their future workplaces. Further, (25) suggests that the selection of teaching materials should consider the following aspects: they should be recognizable and relevant to students, they should be real examples from the relevant community and they should be representative of community practices. In other words, the use of authentic materials is very crucial.

Many scholars perceived that authentic materials have significant benefits in language teaching. Shrum and Glisan (26) state that "authentic materials provide an effective means for presenting real language, integrating culture, and heightening comprehension". Authentic materials enable students to get the experience of using language in the real-world to serve a real communication purpose. Therefore, such materials are rich in cultural content that is important for students. They can help students understand the context of culture and the context of situation of communication in their future workplace community. During the FGD, students mentioned that they wish to receive more relevant materials that help them to conduct effective communication with foreign clients both in oral and written form.

## How ICT can help to address the challenges

ICT can be a useful pedagogical tool in the ESP classroom. ICT provides teachers with numerous teaching materials. Sources like websites, personal blogs, social media, video-sharing platforms are rich with authentic samples of communication. One of the biggest weaknesses of ESP teachers is the lack of knowledge in the technical content or subject content. ESP teachers in the institution under study are not practitioners in the field of the Port and Shipping industry. They have no previous

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working experience in that field, causing them to have very little knowledge about how English is used for communication in that community. Using information from the internet, teachers can learn and observe social practices or communication practices. Teachers, as well as students, can learn many things.

Traditional ESP teaching which focuses on translating technical vocabulary from English to mother tongue or vice versa can be considered boring and less meaningful for students. Such a method of teaching is no longer relevant to the present situation. Nowadays, communication is conducted multimodal. People send written texts together with pictures, or even motion pictures or videos. The use of YouTube videos in the classroom can be one of the strategies to address the issue of multimodality in the classroom. By using videos, students can learn visually (by observing) and they can also learn auditorily (by listening). This will provide students with a rich and meaningful learning experience. This finding is in line with the findings of (27) that the use of online videos has advantages in ESP teaching. It can be utilized for covering specialized knowledge, improving the knowledge of technical terms, and developing advanced listening skills for students.
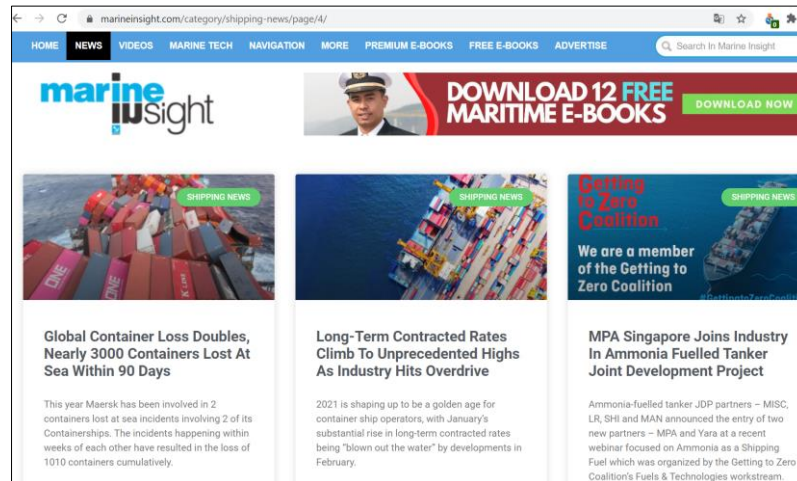
Related to the field of the Port and Shipping industry, various learning resources can be found online. Besides YouTube, some websites are rich with authentic materials. One of the examples is www.bimco.org. BIMCO is the world's largest direct-membership organization for shipowners, charterers, shipbrokers and agents. On their website, we can find various samples of documents and contracts related to the Port and Shipping business. This can be a great source of learning, both for teachers and students as well.
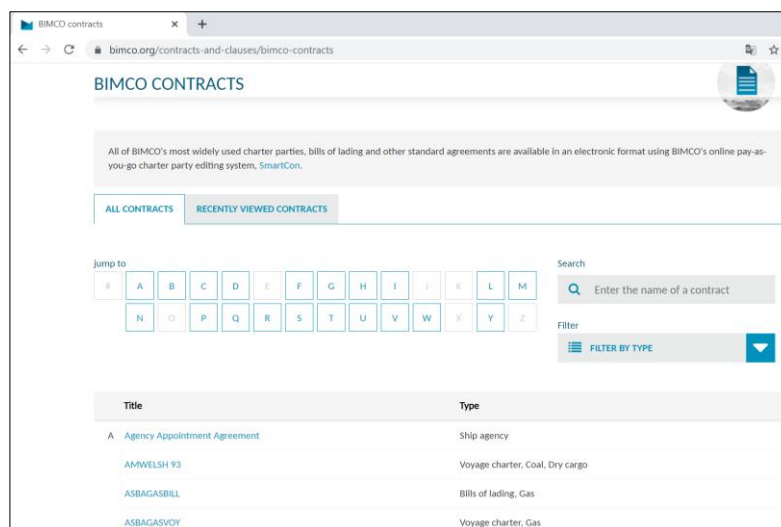
Picture 1. Screenshot of BIMCO Website

Marine Insight in their website www.marineinsight.com also provides information on various aspects of maritime issues. This can also be a valuable resource for teachers. There are numerous news and videos that can be used as authentic teaching materials which are updated frequently. In this sense, ICT increase the flexibility of access to information, minimize geographical barriers, improve students' engagement and enhance their motivation for learning (28).

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Picture 2. Screenshot of Marine Insight Website

ESP Teachers have many options when they want to select ICT resources and activities for teaching and learning. It is essentials that teachers can design activities that are meaningful for students to maintain their learning motivation (29). Careful consideration should be given when teachers select the teaching materials and design learning activities. Authentic materials can be motivating and easy for some groups of students but can be difficult and boring for others (30). It is important to note that authentic materials are not specifically produced for language teaching but for real communication purposes (26). There will be a consequence that the vocabularies are new and difficult for some students. In this case, scaffolding is very important. In education, scaffolding refers to three related pedagogical 'scales'. First, the teachers need to provide students with a support structure. Second, the teachers need to arrange particular activities in class, and third, the teachers need to provide assistance during the interaction with the students (31). Teachers can give a simple task first which involves simple vocabulary before moving to more difficult texts. Teachers also need to assist students during the teaching and learning process and give them consistent feedback.

Conclusion

From the social semiotic perspective, language must be interpreted within a socio-cultural context. The field (what's going on in the situation), the tenor (who is taking part in the situation) and the mode (what role is being played by language and other semiotic systems in the Situation) will determine people's selection of language when they exchange meaning.

In ESP teaching, it is important to understand the context of culture and the context of situation of the field of work that students will enter in the future. Knowledge about such things will help teachers to cater students' communicative needs in their future careers.

However, this study revealed that the ESP teachers have limited knowledge of the social practices in the port and shipping industry. The teachers have no working experience in the port and shipping field which makes them have limited knowledge about students' communicative needs in the real workplace. This problem resulted in the difficulty of selecting relevant teaching materials and arranging relevant learning activities for students.

The use of ICT can help teachers to address the challenges by providing them with numerous references which are rich with authentic samples of communication in the field of Port and Shipping Management.

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The use of YouTube videos, for example, enables teachers and students to learn and observe the social practices or the communication practices in the port and shipping community. There are also various websites that can provide authentic materials such as various samples of documents and contracts related to the Port and Shipping business.

However, it is important to note that authentic materials are not made for the educational purpose which made the level of difficulty for students is relatively high. Therefore, teachers need to select the teaching materials meticulously and arrange the learning activities carefully to provide the best learning experience for students.

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