

Training Needs of ESP Practitioners in Vocational Education

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Abstract

Teacher training is an important tool in the provision of effective learning of English for Special Purposes (ESP) courses in Kuwait. From a trainer's view, this study identifies and documents the training needs of ESP teachers working in vocational. A questionnaire, which was answered by twenty eight participants, was used as the primary method of acquiring the findings presented in this study. Besides, the respondents were ESP teachers, making the results relevant and ideal for decision-making. The questionnaire was also used to establish whether using memos is more active in the provision of ESP education compared to books. The findings suggested the urgent needs for the formulation of ESP courses that will be employed by the trainers in the delivery of ESP Education. Besides, the study established that many ESP practitioners prefer using memos than books when teaching.

Keywords: ESP, training, questionnaire, participants, teachers, memos, books.

المخلص:

يعد تدريب المعلمين أداة مهمة في توفير التعلم الفعال للغة الإنجليزية لأغراض الدورات الخاصة (ESP) في الكويت. من وجهة نظر المدرب، تحدد هذه الدراسة وتوثق الاحتياجات التدريبية لمعلمي ESP الذين يعملون في المهنة. تم استخدام الاستبيان الذي أجاب عليه ثمانية وعشرون مشاركاً كطريقة أساسية للحصول على النتائج المقدمة في هذه الدراسة. إلى جانب ذلك، كان المستجيبون من معلمي ESP، مما جعل النتائج ذات صلة ومثالية لصنع القرار. كما تم استخدام الاستبيان لتحديد ما إذا كان استخدام المذكرات أكثر نشاطاً في توفير تعليم ESP مقارنة بالكتب. اقترحت النتائج الاحتياجات الملحة لصياغة دورات ESP التي سيتم توظيفها من قبل المدربين في تقديم التعليم ESP. إلى جانب ذلك، أثبتت الدراسة أن العديد من ممارسي ESP يفضلون استخدام المذكرات على الكتب عند التدريس. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الدورات الخاصة ESP ، تدريب ، استبيان ، مشاركين ، مدرسين ، مذكرات ، كتب.

Introduction

Teachers play a significant role in the provision of ESP for learners in which English is not their first language (Chostelidou, 2010). However, the trainers have a range of requirements to enable them optimize teaching and learning opportunities for students in their institutions of working. Besides, there is a need for transmission of training materials by organizations as a way of making learners adopt and discover more from the lessons. In this respect, this study reveals that focusing on the provision of memos as learning materials is better than using books or a combination of both. Since English is not the first language for the learners, provision of memos is necessary as they are simplified by the trainers, making them easy to understand (Savaş, 2009). Some of the reasons why a majority of trainers supported note-taking method of teaching is because it motivates students to fully concentrate on the lessons as they have to write what their instructors provide. Besides, note-taking is essential in the sense that it trains the learners on how to write and learn ESP (Gatehouse, 2001). In this respect, as the students write, they gain a deeper understanding of how the ESP words should be pronounced. This paper will analyze whether ESP teachers should provide memos to learners or use course books to teach learners.



Significance of research:

The motivation for the study arose from the fact that the increasing trends of teaching English for Specific Purposes has changed perception of role of teachers and their teaching techniques. There is a need to analyze the importance of designing course content and aligning it with learner's objectives. Moreover, there is need for memos designed by ESP teachers as they provides essential information in one document rather than using multiple books for teaching and learning purposes.

Problem Statement:

It is argued that ESP teachers require proper training to teach ESP courses and a trained ESP practitioner is equipped with skills to design ESP courses. However, there is a chance of discrepancy between the course designed and the learning objectives of course and students. However, memos designed gather essential information from different sources so, should they be replaced with books available in the market and used as a teaching material.

Aims and Objectives:

The basic aims and objectives for the study are:

1. To identify whether teaching from memos is a preferable option than teaching from books already available in the market.
2. To evaluate the current system of ESP training and need for organizing ESP courses.
3. To evaluate the importance of memos in ESP teaching.

Hypothesis:

Two hypotheses will be tested based on the previous arguments by different researchers.

1. Whether memos are better medium for ESP training than books or not?
2. Whether memos enhance student learning by motivating and keeping them focused or not?

Definition of terms:

This paper defines memos and books as following:

Memos: Memos are trainer compiled pamphlets designed for students to aide their learning capabilities.

Books: Commercially available text books from which trainers gather data to design memos.

Literature Review:

Teachers play a central role in the provision of ESP for learners and a continuous debate has been going on the explicit grammar teaching. Explicit knowledge is considered to be more useful as it allows teachers to guide students more effectively and give teachers a self-confidence. Teachers proficient in language adapt course materials that have descriptive shortcomings. Language awareness in ESP teacher training are essential as content of ESP courses are different from the general language courses. These courses are for special purposes such as business, medical, legal and academic. Learners want to improve their language and the courses should be designed accordingly to meet the requirements of learners.



It is important to understand how the courses content for ESP training is designed as it directly affects the learning ability of students. Crookes (1991) discussed the term action research which focuses on the ability of good teachers to design the course and how innovatively they teach the course material. It deals with trying new ideas to improve the knowledge of curriculum, learning and teaching (Nunan, 1990). Research is essential as long as the teacher is aware of the concepts and knows how to use the content generated. Teachers should have the ability to conceptualize their ideas in theoretical terms to convey them appropriately to students.

ESP teachers must have some background knowledge of the language to teach learners. In a language course, relating vocabulary to lexico-grammatical system is essential. Moreover, these teachers are aware of the excessive use of certain words in written and spoken language but are unaware of the details of skewing which enhances the need for teachers to be aware of the basic concepts of ESP courses. Moreover, it also enhances the need for the audit of geographical belonging of ESP trainee teachers (Ferguson, 2002). Variation associated with ESP practitioners is complex and cannot be easily comprehended in one teacher education course. There is difference between spoken and written language, scientific and academic English and formal and informal English which teachers should incorporate while designing the course.

Javaid (2011) proposed that course content available in the market does not serve the purpose and teachers should design course materials according to the linguistic needs of the learners. ESP practitioner should be able to fulfil five key roles; teacher, course designer, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. But the role of ESP practitioner as a teacher is more specific because they have to bear the burden of designing course content according to the needs of learners (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). Designing course and providing learners the relevant and suitable course material is the key responsibility of ESP learners because the needs of ESP learners are specific and already available content is not suitable to fulfil learning objectives.



Teachers should act “material provider” by surveying the content available in the market, selecting the relevant units from the course books and writing the rest content themselves. This situation becomes more challenging as the ESP practitioners have to design the course according to the needs and requirements of the learners and are expected to complete the task within limited time (Jones, 1990).

ESP teachers are required to upgrade their knowledge and behave professionally by remaining in touch with the recent researchers and developments. Moreover, they should be able to conduct research to understand the mindset of learners and understand the student’s psychology about a course material. Thus action research along with upgraded knowledge about the recent researches is essential in the field of ESP and for ESP practitioners (Nunan, 1990).

Teachers should design memorandums for students to enhance their learning ability and making the course content relevant to the learner’s needs. Unlike books, provision of memos during ESP classes sharpens the students' skills on note-taking, making them accustomed to writing in English (Boch & Piolat, 2005). During the curriculum teaching period, the students learn how to write basic, medium, and advanced ESP essays. Adoption of note-taking as the only form of ESP learning by the institutions will be essential as helps in the recording of information provided in class. In the process, students develop a good memory that helps them in revising and understanding the teachings made during class time. The first-time English learners need more time to assimilate lessons compared to native speakers (Krarzia, 2013). For example, learning on how to make little external memory aids such as diaries are some of the ways ESP learners can improve their interest and understanding of the English language. One of the primary objectives of students in information-transmission institutions is to avoid forgetting what has been learned in class. In essence, note-taking provides the learners with a better opportunity of acquiring knowledge as they can collect information from their trainers, secondary learning sources, and learning situations.



Methodology:

Research design and sample:

This research study has been conducted in the Higher Institute of Telecommunication and Navigation to elaborate the importance of course content designed by the teacher. University has two departments; Main and Assistant and the participants were selected from two sub-departments of Main department: Transmission and Central. 28 ESP teachers from the transmission and central departments participated in the research.

Data analysis and procedures:

A faculty questionnaire has been designed to explore the experiences of ESP teachers and the importance of memos designed by teachers over books. Questionnaire statements have been presented in the results section and are analyzed using descriptive statistical method. Microsoft excel has been used to calculate frequencies and percentages which are then discussed in the results section in detail.

Results:

The questionnaire results have been discussed below.

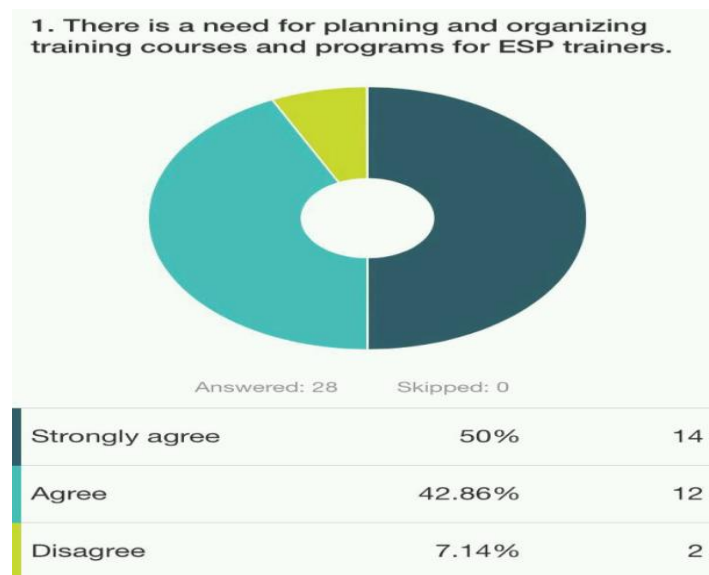
1. Need for planning and organizing training courses:

Figure 1

Out of 28 respondents, 14 ESP trainers strongly agree with the need for planning and organizing training courses according to learner objectives (figure 1). 2 disagree with the question posed and remaining 12 also agreed that trainers should organize and provide course materials to learners.

2. Current system of ESP training:

This question was asked to evaluate the current system of ESP training whether training is good enough for practitioners and will enable them to teach the accurate material to learners according to their learning objectives.

2. The current system of ESP training is good enough for ESP practitioners

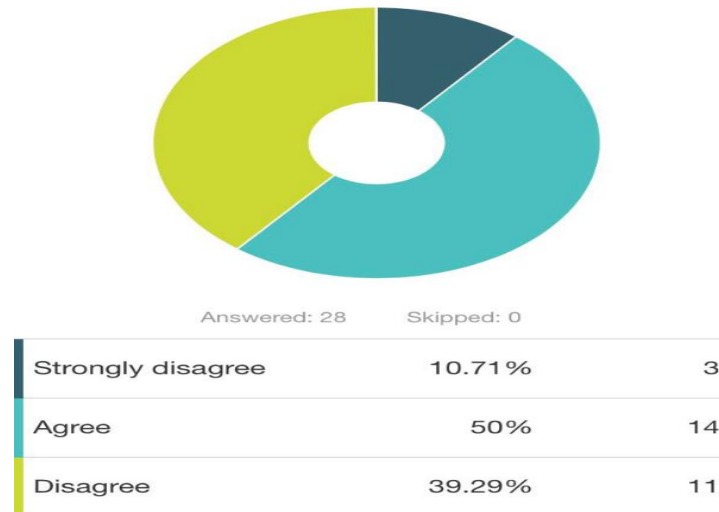


Figure 2

Results in figure (2) indicate that 11 respondents disagree and 3 strongly disagreed with the statement proposing that ESP trainers are not provided with good training to enable them to handle the ESP courses. However, 14 respondents agreed with the statement that ESP trainers are well equipped due to training procedures and can handle the ESP programs efficiently.

3. Notes/Memos are ideal for teaching:

The question has been designed to inquire the effectiveness of memos in teaching ESP learners as compared to books. Memos are provided by ESP teachers which enable learners to learn the language easily and readily as compared to books.

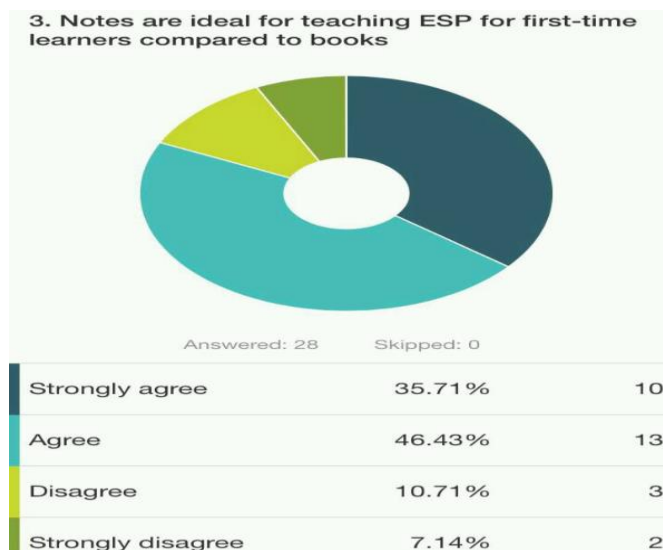


Figure 3

Chart in figure (3) indicates that 23 respondents out of 28 either strongly agree or agree with the statement that notes are ideal mean for teaching ESP learners as compared to books whereas only 5 opposed the statements and consider books to be a better learning mechanism.

4. Books are affordable as compared to memos:

This question has been designed to determine the affordability of books whether students can easily afford the books are not.

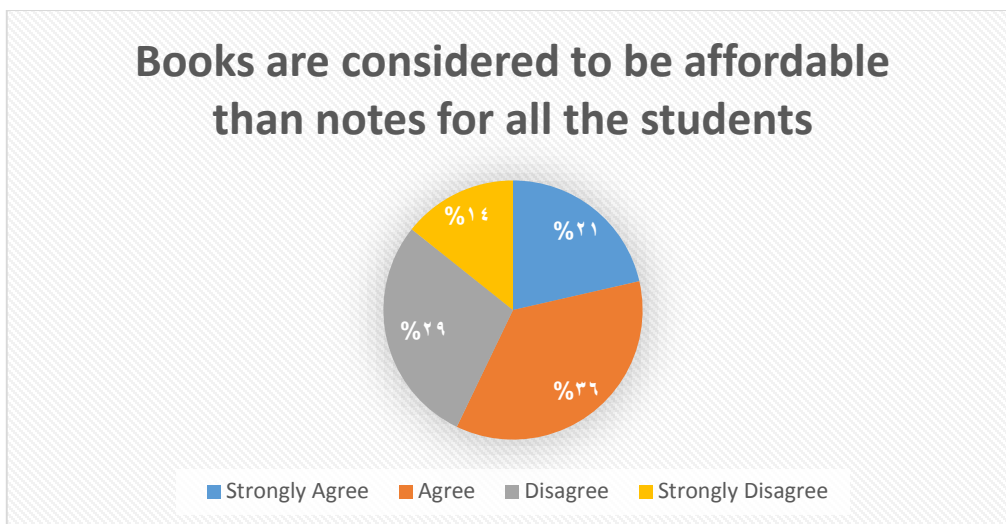


Figure 4

Results in figure (4) indicate that 6 strongly agree and 10 agree with the statement that books are affordable as compared to notes and remaining 12 does not consider books to be affordable. Notes are generally considered less expensive as compared to books but if notes are lengthy than it is feasible to purchase books.

5. Memos allow documentation:

The following question has been posed to understand the need for memos provided by ESP practitioner.

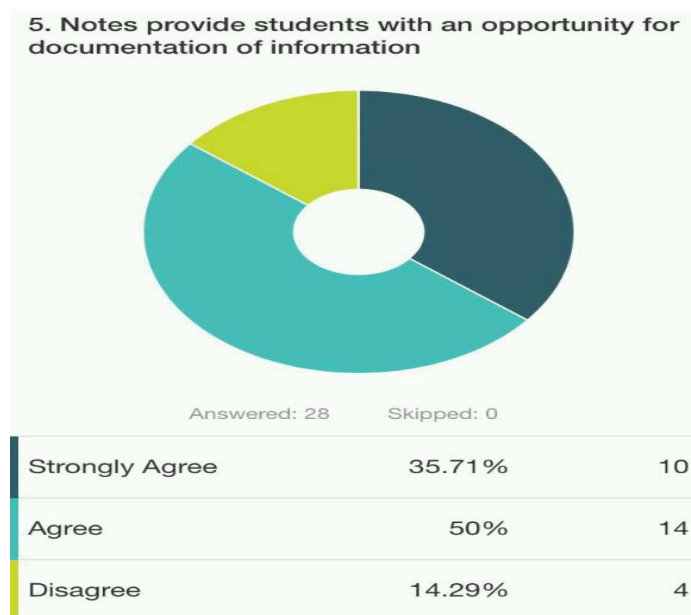


Figure 5

Results in figure (5) indicate that 24 respondents agree that memos allow students to take notes during lectures and make the learning procedure easier for them. They find it easy to make notes and write important points on the memos provided by the instructor. However, 4 teachers disagreed with the statement and they believe that memos are not helpful for ESP learners.

6. *Why Memos are preferable?*

The question that memos enable students to benefit from collected information is asked to understand the diversity of information associated with memos and the benefits associated with using different information.

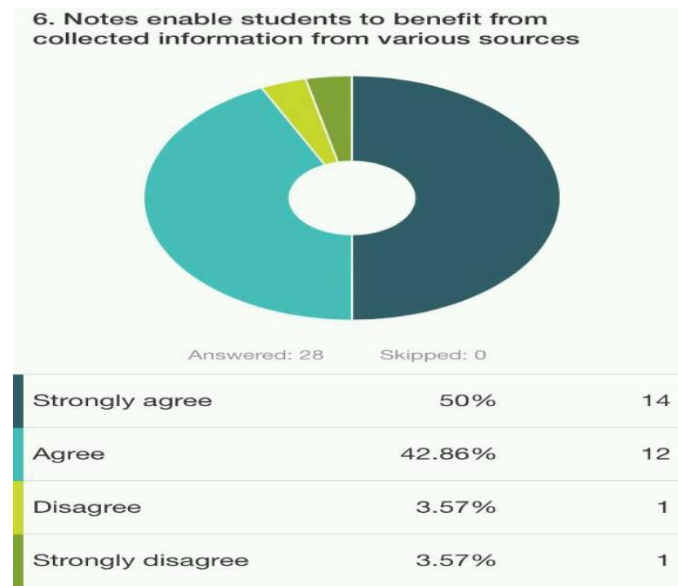


Figure 6

Pie chart in figure (6) indicates that 14 respondents strongly agree and 12 agree with the statement that notes/memos enable students to benefit from diverse information collected using different sources. However, 2 does not agree with the statement and consider collected information not a better medium for teaching ESP learners.

7. Memos allow interaction between learners and trainers:

The question has been designed to understand whether memos enhance interaction during lecture.

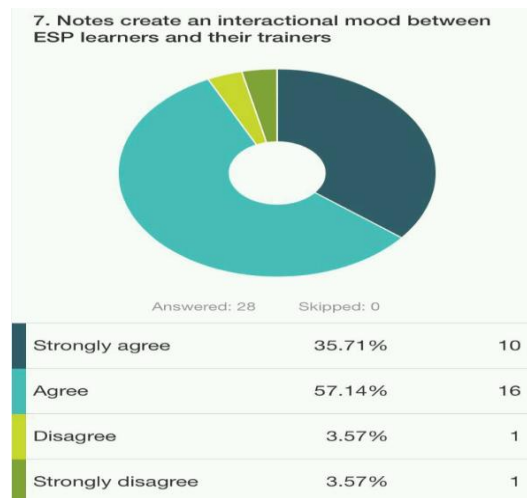


Figure 7

Chart in figure (7) indicates that 10 strongly agree and 16 agree with the statement that memos enhance interaction between students and teachers and only 2 disagreed with the question. Memos allow teachers to coordinate with learners and enhance the interaction during the lecture.

8. Memos can be used as training and learning:

The following question has been asked to understand another aspect of importance of memos.

8. Notes can be used as both training and learning materials

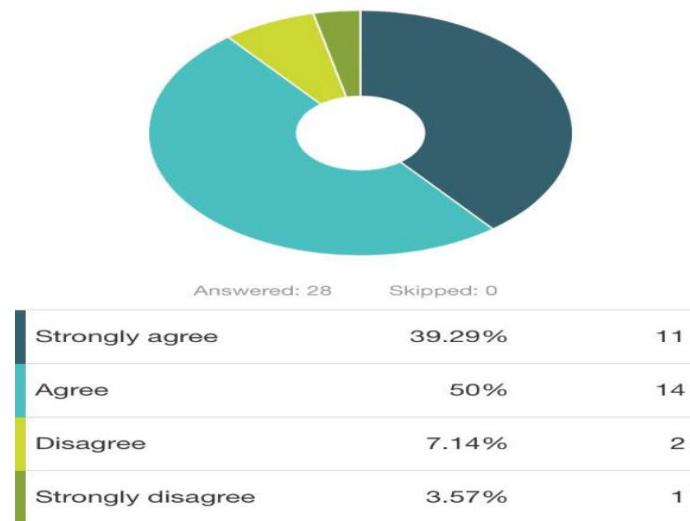


Figure 8

Out of 28 respondents in figure (8), 11 strongly agree and 14 agree that memos can be used as training and learning materials. It allows teachers to incorporate training exercises in memos which enhances the learning ability of students. 3 respondents disagree with the statement and do not consider memos as an essential mean to be used as learning and training by students.

9. Memos motivate ESP learners to remain focused:

The following question has been designed to evaluate the role of notes in student's concentration and focus.

9. Notes motivate ESP learners to remain focused during training sessions.

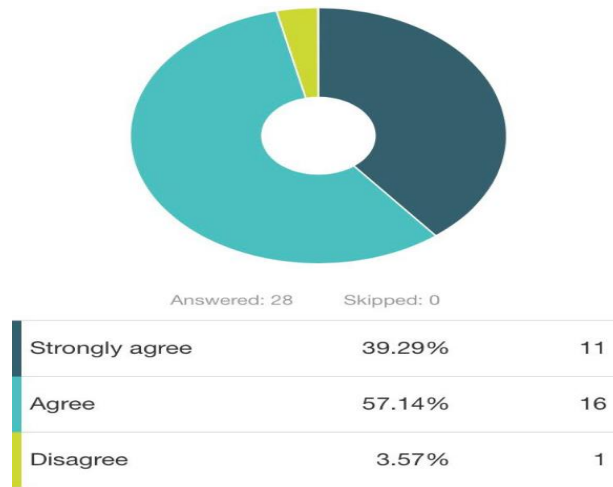


Figure 9

Results in figure (9) indicate that 11 strongly agree and 16 agree that memos motivate ESP learners to remain focused during lectures. The lectures are designed according to the memos which enable students to concentrate on the lecture being delivered. However, 1 respondents disagree that memos does not enable learners to remain focused.

10. Memos allow the evaluation for student’s progress:

The question has been designed to analyze the importance of memos in evaluating student’s progress.

10. Notes provides a basis for evaluating the student's progress in ESP learning

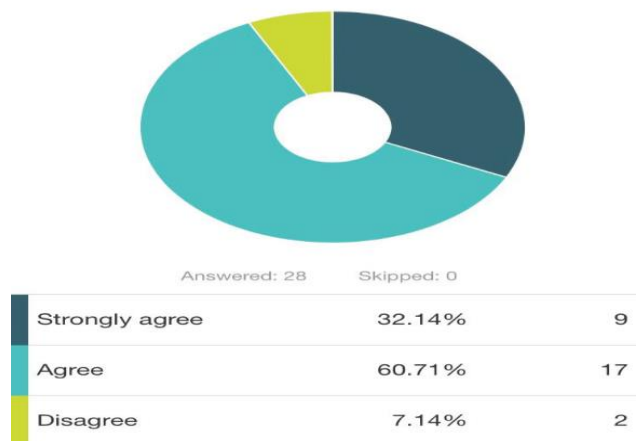


Figure 10

Results in figure (10) indicate that 9 strongly agree and 17 agree with the statement memos allow teachers to evaluate student's performance however, 2 disagree with the statement.

Discussion:

Overall results indicate that memos are better mediums for teaching as compared to books and motivate and engage students to listen lectures carefully. ESP practitioners should organize and plan course materials but there is a need to improve the current system of ESP. 50% of respondents considered the current system to be good enough whereas rest believe that the system should be improved. ESP practitioners are responsible for designing the course material to fulfil the learning objectives of students. Books are available in the market for ESP courses but instructors prefer to develop memos by gathering information from various sources to enhance the learning ability of students and conduct special training activities during the lecture to engage students. Though training activities are available in the books but the gathering diversified information allows teachers to choose the best and reliable techniques. This research indicates that memos are ideal for ESP practitioners to teach relevant material to students and also allow first time learners to easily grab the concepts.



Moreover, memos are relatively cheap than books so, preferred by both students and teachers rather than buying multiple expensive books. These memorandums designed by teachers are more engaging and allow students to take notes during lectures. They are designed to make documentation easy for students during lectures without losing track of lecture. Memos enhance the interaction between students and teachers and allow students to remain focused during lectures. Finally, this research suggests that memos provide easier medium to evaluate students' progress. Thus, memos should be designed by teachers to enhance student performance and learning ability.

Conclusion:

Optimal teaching rules for ESP programs require ESP practitioners to design course materials which allow students to learn effectively from the diverse course material gathered at one place. Teachers play a central role in ESP so should be trained enough to provide effective learning opportunities to students. Thus there is a need to design memos to allow learners to adopt and discover from the lessons. Since, English is not the first language for the learners, provision of memos is necessary as they simplify the content and make it easier for the students to understand.

This research indicates that memos are better medium of teaching as compared to books. 14 respondents believed that there is a need for planning and organizing training courses and support the current training system to be good enough to teach students. 23 out of 28 respondents consider memos to be ideal method of teaching as they allow documentation during lectures and provide students with diverse information gathered from commercially available books. 26 respondents believed that memos enhance interaction with trainers and allow students to remain focused. Furthermore, memos play a key role in student evaluation and teachers can evaluate their performance during lectures. However, only 16 respondents believe that books are more affordable than memos only if memos are lengthy. Memos are targeted materials designed to train students for specific purposes so length is generally short than books.



Thus, memos are better medium of ESP learning as compared to books as books are expensive to purchase and does not completely cater the learning objectives of every language program. Hence, it is cheaper and also feasible for students to purchase memos provided by ESP teachers and enhance their learning as planned by ESP practitioner.

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