



**ARTICLE REVIEW: HOOSHANG KHOSHSIMA & ALI ASGHAR
ROSTAMI ABUSAEEDI, THE ROLE OF CONTENT-BASED TEXTS TO
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Abstract

This study reviews the critical article titled 'The Role of Content-based Texts to Motivate Students' by Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi. They investigated the appropriateness of materials that are employed in Iranian ESP classrooms. Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi conclude that novel content-based texts can effectively motivate students and improve their English proficiency. They add that a close cooperation between ESP and content lecturer is necessary to find the best and the most up-to-dated materials in the content area. In this review, it is emphasized that still a lot of research is needed to improve the quality of ESP courses in countries such as Iran. These studies must be conducted in a way that the most reliable data can be obtained. Such data can help ESP course developers to make effective changes in the current courses and improve the efficiency of materials that are being employed.

Keywords: content-based texts, student motivation, Iranian ESP classrooms

In their study, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi have investigated the appropriateness of materials that are employed in Iranian ESP classrooms. Since the profession of language teaching suffers from serious problems in Iranian educational system, conducting such studies seem to be necessary and even an urgent need. This is particularly the case with teaching materials that are employed in ESP courses in Iran. This urgent need is emphasized by Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi where they say "...the majority of university graduates in Iran are not equipped with sufficient knowledge of English to read and understand the original specialized textbooks ...". In several places of the article, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi say that these shortcomings in ESP courses need to be met. They pose a research question

about the appropriateness of ESP materials used in Iranian ESP courses. They ask, “*Do novel content-based texts motivate ESP learners more than simple and familiar texts?*”

In order to answer this question, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi selected two groups of learners. The experimental group was taught by ten novel reading passages related to students’ course of study. The control group was taught by textbooks published by SAMT. At the end of treatment period, the performance of experimental group was compared with the performance of control group. After analyzing the data, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi conclude that novel content-based texts can effectively motivate students and improve their English proficiency. They add that a close cooperation between ESP and content lecturer is necessary to find the best and the most up-to-dated materials in the content area. This finding has been reaffirmed in several studies (e.g. Banaruee & Askari, 2016; Zare-Behtash, Khatinzadeh, & Banaruee, 2017; Banaruee, Khoshsima, & Askari, 2017; Banaruee, Mohammadian, & Zare-Behtash, 2017; Khoshsima & Banaruee, 2017; Khatinzadeh, Khoshsima, & Banaruee, 2017; Zare-Behtash & Banaruee, 2017). In order to present new content-based texts in the most efficient way, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi suggest that an ongoing evaluation and modification of ESP materials is necessary throughout the course. They support their argument by quoting Chen (2005) who suggests three considerations for selection, reorganization, and sequencing of materials:

1. The selection of materials with properly difficult language input in terms of vocabularies and structures by taking into consideration the transition from simplicity to difficulty;
2. Attention to subject content input in the tailor-made materials, usually from general topics to subject-specific topics;
3. The adaptation of adequate and appropriate activities in the selected materials, namely, the activities in each unit have to be coherently matched to avoid discretion and isolation in materials adaptation and to make the adapted textbooks complete.

Here, there are several points that have been highlighted for the designing of ESP materials. Firstly, language must be proper for learners’ level of proficiency. In this regard, the transition from simplicity to difficulty is particularly important in the selection of vocabulary items and grammatical structures. Secondly, in the order of presenting subject matters, less-specific materials must be taught before more-specific materials. Thirdly, adequate and appropriate activities must be employed in the classroom. Among these three points that have been mentioned by Chen and reemphasized by Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi, the second point needs to be clarified. Transition from less-specific to more-specific is a process that must clearly be elaborated on. This transition is not necessarily equivalent to transition from less-difficult to more-difficult. In fact, a very specific subject can be discussed by a simple language, and a very general subject can be discussed by a very

difficult language. In other words, degree of specificity is not equivalent to degree of difficulty. The distinction between generality/specificity and simplicity/difficulty is a point that must not be ignored in the process of designing ESP materials. When ESP materials are prepared, both types of dichotomy must be considered by material designers.

In a section entitled "ESP Materials", Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi discuss differences between ESP materials and general English textbooks. They say that "*the closer and the more relevant the ESP materials are to the field of the learners, the more successful and motivated they will be*". This is a point that has been emphasized by Marrow and Shocker (1978) where they say, "*... in this case the focus is not on process or model in terms of student use of pre-identified areas of language, but rather it is on the content of the text itself*" (p. 249). They expressed the rationale behind the choice of texts is not related with the use to which it can be put through, but, with the involved subject matter.

The findings of Khoshsima and Abusaeedi support what has been noted by Marrow and Shocker. They say that choosing new and interesting ESP texts is a fundamental issue in this field. It has been said that elementary and familiar ESP materials demotivates learners. This view about the role of interesting and motivating teaching has been recently reclaimed in studies in respect with teaching and materials development matched with personality and learning preferences (refer to Yazdani Fazlabadi & Khatin-Zadeh, 2016; Askari, Khoshsima, Khatin-Zadeh, & Banaruee, 2017; Banaruee, Khoshsima, & Khatin-Zadeh, 2017; Khatin-Zadeh, Bakhshizadeh Gashti, & Banaruee, 2017; Zare-Behtash, Bakhshizadeh Gashti, Khatin-Zadeh, Banaruee, 2017). In their comments, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi add that if English is used to communicate familiar scientific matters, learners will not become interested. The reason behind the negative impact on the learners is that learners are primarily interested in the subject matter rather than in English, that is the main concern of ESP instructors.

Discussing a number of differences between ESP and general English courses, Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi enumerate several aspects. They quote Strevens (1988) and mention the following cases as the special characteristics of ESP courses:

- designed to meet specific needs of learners;
- related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and analysis of this discourse.

They also emphasize that in some specific teaching situations, ESP lecturers must use a methodology that is different from the methodology that is used by general English teachers. The methodological differences between ESP and general English courses have been repeatedly emphasized throughout the article. In fact, the aim of the study conducted by Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi was to investigate such differences that should be

attended by course designers, material developers, and language teachers. They rely on the data obtained in their study and say that novelty of the materials and a continuous evaluation of materials must be one of the main concerns of ESP courses. The data obtained in this study suggest that novelty and continuous evaluation of materials is more important in ESP courses than in general English courses. This is a point that must be taken seriously in Iranian educational system. As Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi have noted, ESP courses have not been very successful in Iran. Therefore, some serious modifications are needed to improve the quality of these courses.

The findings of this study can be of great value for course designers and material producers. What is emphasized here is an ongoing evaluation and reevaluation of materials. The role of content lecturer is very critical in this ongoing process. Khoshsima and Rostami Abusaeedi emphasize the role of content lecturer in the modifications that can be conducted throughout ESP courses. The final point that must be emphasized here is that still a lot of research is needed to improve the quality of ESP courses in countries such as Iran. These studies must be conducted in a way that the most reliable data can be obtained. Such data can help ESP course developers to make effective changes in the current courses and improve the efficiency of materials that are being employed.

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