



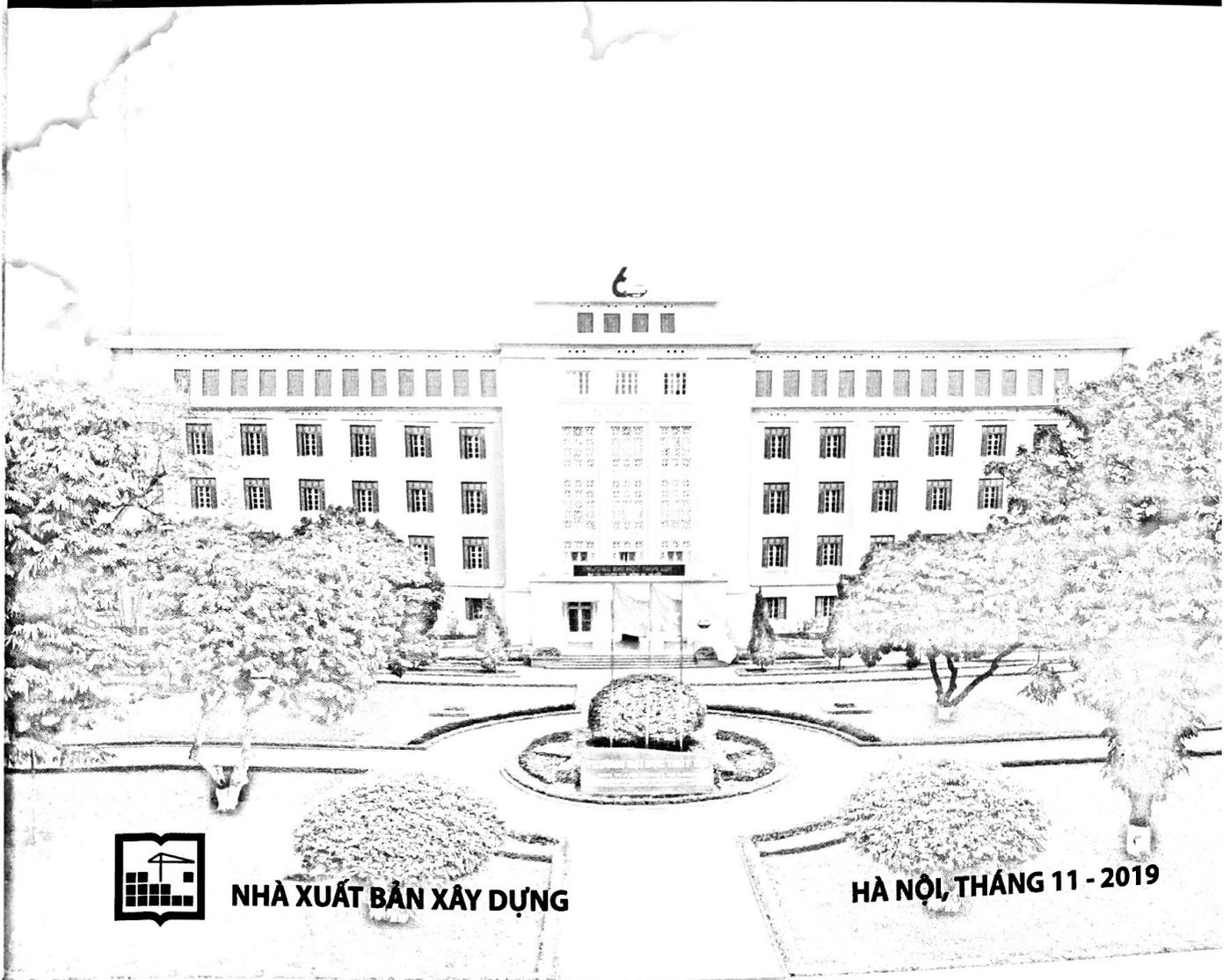
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THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ESP TEACHING AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY FROM TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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1. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has recently attracted language researchers' attention due to the requirements of workplaces and the society. ESP is a learner-centered approach whose purpose is to fulfill the specific needs of target learners to satisfy either their professional or vocational demands. At present, ESP is either a compulsory or an optional subject at technical universities in Vietnam, which aims to help their students to be well-equipped with specific language in their working contexts and professional skills after graduation. However, the teaching of ESP are interpreted differently among universities, leaders, teachers as well as students. These stakeholders' perspectives on ESP play a decisive role in designing and implementing ESP courses at university. Considering the above mentioned issue in ESP implementation, the paper tries to identify the current situation of ESP teaching at a technical university in Vietnam from teachers' perspectives. The findings will be precious data which help leaders and managers at universities to have an insight into the roles of ESP for the university. Therefore, they contribute to making teaching and learning ESP activities more advantageous and practical in association with the university's context and close to the workplace's requirements.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper uses document analysis and interview with teachers to identify the current

state of teaching ESP at a technical university. Interviews were conducted with 3 ESP teachers from different faculties who have been teaching ESP for more than 5 years. The interview questions focus on their classrooms' current situation, activities, challenges and their viewpoints. Interviews were also carried out with 2 leaders from 2 faculties which have a dominant number of ESP subjects and one of them is also in charge of the Training Curriculum; Information, data on document analysis and synthesis; requirements from workplaces, ideas and comments from graduates were also noted to make the findings more valid and reliable.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) consists of teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular learners for a specific purpose. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) defined ESP as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning. The definition given by Johns and Dudley - Evan (1991) suggests that ESP is proved to be a permissive, flexible field of study, having influenced the entire process of English teaching.

English is a language; therefore, the teaching should focus on cultivating students' ability of applying English. ESP follows this principle which refers to a specific profession or related disciplines, setting up English courses according to the learner's particular

purpose or the specific need. However, it reveals an enormous gap between higher education provision and industry needs. That is why employers find it hard to employ graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfill their job's requirement. This problem can be caused by factors related to teachers, materials, teaching methods, testing, curriculum and even policies from universities and Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. There are no specific policies to raise the level of ESP teaching; there is a serious lack of stable professional ESP teachers; the ESP courses are undertaken by non-English major teachers whose English level is not high and the teaching method is not appropriate, which kills the students' interest and confidence in learning English. (Bingyao, 2016). The problems also appear in the curriculum which put the focus on teaching GE for students at a certain level since the leaders think that they can change from General English (GE) to ESP without any difficulties. And instead of making real analysis on ESP stakeholder's needs, ESP teachers become slaves of published textbooks without analyzing their appropriateness for the ESP course.

4. CURRENT SITUATION OF TEACHING ESP AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

4.1. ESP syllabus design

The University under study has 9 majored faculties with 29 different ESP subjects conducted by content teachers. Todate, they have used fifty-six different ESP textbooks, 25 of which are published abroad and 31 are published domestically and implemented internally. Of the 31 ESP textbooks designed by content teachers, 21 include reading passages with a list of new words and 5 to 10 questions at the end of each lesson. The rest 10 ESP textbooks give some more exercises in vocabulary, translation and summary, only 2 textbooks mention listening and speaking skills. (Duong, 2017).

In 2006, the Training Curriculum changed from school year to credit system, the hours for ESP subjects were cut down from 75 hours to 45 hours (3 credits) or 30 hours (2 credits); English. (Duong, 2017). All 3 ESP teachers admitted that the duration for ESP is too short, *"It seems like a quick walk or a very brief introduction into ESP"* (Teacher 2); *"We need more time for the subject so we can introduce academic studies and ESP with their future jobs"* (Teacher 3). *"We teach 2 hours weekly in 15 weeks, students even do not remember what they studied the next week and they have to study several subjects at the same time. We need more time to fulfill the outcomes of the ESP course"*. (Teacher 1). The interviewed leaders admitted that there is no official policy for ESP at the university and each faculty designs and develops their own ESP syllabus based on the Training Curriculum Framework by the university. *"The faculties build their own training majors in which ESP is either an optional or a compulsory subject. They will choose the number of credits for each subject to fulfill the outcomes requirements of the training major"* (Leader 2). As a result, the number of credits for ESP (and some other subjects) must be reduced and its outcomes of equipping students with knowledge, work-related skills are hard to achieve.

4.2. Teachers and teaching methodology

ESP teachers at the university are also content teachers from different majored faculties. The procedure of the ESP lesson described by teachers seems to be typical, more "lecture-centered" than "learner-centered". They also believed that terminologies and translation are the most important in teaching ESP for technical students, which is thought to achieve the outcome purpose and suitable to the very short course like ESP. *"We want students to be able to read specialized documents in English, which can help them in doing research for higher study"*. (Teacher 3); Such perception, to some extent makes the lessons less interesting and students passive and demotivated in ESP lessons.

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In terms of methodology, all interviewed ESP teachers have never attended a course for ESP methodology between ESP and language teachers at the university. For the nature and objectives of ESP pedagogy, it has been proved that language teachers are more suitable for ESP teaching than teachers of subject knowledge because teaching ESP is in fact teaching languages. (Tabatabaei, 2007). Therefore, the content teachers' teaching methods are not appropriate, not innovative. The teachers change the ESP courses abruptly into translation courses and bilingual courses which may kill the students' interest and confidence in learning English and it is difficult for the teachers to persuade the students of the importance of ESP for their future's job.

4.3. ESP learners

According to ESP teachers, only some students are interested in the lessons and the majority feel demotivated. The main reason is because of students' low level in General English. *"Students' attention was not high. They showed their interest at first then lost it after 30 minutes. It maybe because they were lazy and found the lessons difficult with lots of new words"*. (Teacher 2); *"Students' competence in English is too low; therefore, only some students who are good at English participate in the classroom activities"*. (Teacher 3). Besides, problems of heterogeneity in language proficiency, low levels of general proficiency, lack of motivation and passive learning style are also mentioned as problems in ESP teaching.

4.4. Teaching ESP at the university versus workplace's requirements

The requirements from workplace in using English in working environment seem mismatch with the way ESP is being implemented at the university. The outcomes of ESP course focus on reading and translation while working environment requires a variety of skills such as writing

email, processing technical issues, reading and writing reports, working with foreign partners. *"We have to retrain both major and ESP and organize short courses in ESP so that the new employees get used to the job and be able to get work done"*. (Graduate 1).

5. CONCLUSION

ESP teaching at technical universities is still a controversial issue which should be paid more attention by policy makers and leaders. Problems in ESP teaching from teachers' perspective are an important channel for them to make right and wise decisions which help to align with society's requirements. Both solid professional knowledge and English application ability are favorite in the job market. The employers are more humanized to graduates' foreign language ability. ESP teaching is imperative. It should be made *"the students as the main learners, teachers as the leading"* throughout the higher vocational English teaching. At the same time, they also need to integrate into the international education and step into the future together. (Bingyao, 2016).

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