

## EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) AND THEORIES OF SYLLABUS DESIGN FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT B.SC. (HONS.) AGRICULTURE

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### ABSTRACT

*The language requirement and the use of the language have gone drastic change depending on the users and their needs of the particular language. The language users, from different professions, require a language to accomplish their professional duties. The professionals do have a basic knowledge of core English language but that does not help them to fulfill the requirement of that particular job setting. For this purpose, they would require a specific kind of English and communication ability. It gives birth to the concept of English for Specific Purposes which emphasizes the language requirements in different professions.*

*The present article attempts to explore the usefulness of the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Theories of Syllabus Design for English Language Teaching. It includes reviewing definitions and the theories laid behind the concepts. Further, it was also attempted to review historical development, types, and importance of theories of ESP and syllabus design.*

**KEYWORDS:** *English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Syllabus Design, English Language Teaching (ELT)*

### INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) can be broadly divided into English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The teaching of English language at schools, colleges and Universities comes under English for General Purposes. ESP is meant for English for Occupational Purpose (EOP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Science and Technology (EST).

#### The Concept of ESP

The language requirement and the use of the English language have gone under a huge change. They are in need of a kind of English that can meet their specific requirements of language and communication to accomplish the duties of professionals working as Engineers, Doctors, Nurses, etc. These professionals do have a basic knowledge of core English language but that does not help them to fulfill the requirement of that particular job setting. For this purpose, they would require a specific kind of English and communication ability. To meet this need of the learners Hutchinson and Waters (1987) indicate distinctions between English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

Thus, ESP came into existence when the learners themselves became aware of their specific needs. And as a result, they started focusing on ESP.

The difference between the two concepts i.e. EGP and ESP courses is that in EGP focus is given on general aspects of language usage and its mechanics, and in ESP, the language is taught in particular context and for a specific purpose. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) said, "There is no difference between the two in theory; however, there is a great deal of the difference in practice." Therefore, it can be said that ESP differs from EGP in all aspects including vocabulary, sentence pattern, content, and context. Moreover, it is for adult learners who have already acquired a particular level in core English language and are ready to go for specific learning.

### **Definition of ESP**

Different scholars have tried to define ESP as they perceived and understood it. It is significant that all these definitions approach the concept with some innovative ideas. A few definitions are given below:

Munby (1978) defines ESP as, "A course where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner". In this definition, Munby means to say that it is the learner's need which is given importance depending on their academic and professional settings.

Brumfit (1984) positively accepts Munby's view and says that ESP is "a course directly concerned with the purposes for which learners need English, purposes which are usually expressed in functional terms".

Mackay and Mountford (1978) tried to define ESP as, "The teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose'. Here the term purpose refers to the needs of the learners that can be academic, occupational, or scientific.

Hence from the above definitions, it can be observed that ESP is a learner-centered approach. And its distinctive features are the selection of teaching materials and its unique syllabus that is exclusively designed keeping learners' needs in mind.

### **Emergence of ESP**

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.6-8), there were three main reasons for the emergence of ESP;

- The demands of the brave new world
- A revolution in linguistics
- The focus on the learner

Further, it was noted that mainly two key periods supported the emergence of ESP, the end of the Second World War and welcomed the development of scientific technical and economic at the international level. As United was ahead of being the economic power and in technological advancement, English has been accepted by the world for communication and trade. Next, in the 1970s, the oil crisis made western countries to share their money and knowledge with countries having a rich source of oil. English became the mediator in sharing knowledge and money. The scenario compelled other countries to give importance to the teaching and learning of English for trade purposes.

The other reason for the birth of ESP is the revolution in socio-linguistics. There were two opinions on the use of English, some favored the traditional features of the language whereas some opined for the real-life usage of the language.

## Types of ESP

There are major three types of ESP identified by David Carver (1983, p. 131-137) i.e. English as a Restricted Language (ERL) English for Academic and Occupational Purposes (EAOP) and English with Specific Topics (EST). The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language.

Ronald Mackay and Alan Mount ford indicate the difference between the restricted language and the language in this statement (1978 p. 4-5)

The language of international air-traffic control could be regarded as ‘special’, in the sense that the repertoire required by the controller is strictly limited and can be accurately determined situationally, as might be the linguistic needs of a dining-room waiter or air-hostess. However, such restricted repertoires are not languages, just as a tourist phrasebook is not grammar. Knowing a restricted ‘language’ would not allow the speaker to communicate effectively in a novel situation, or in contexts outside the vocational environment.

Next, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes is also a type of ESP. David Carver (1983, p. 131-137) points out that English should be at the heart of the ESP although he refrains from developing it any further. However, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 16-18) introduced a “tree of ELT” which indicates the subdivisions of ESP. There are mainly three branches indicated of ESP i.e. English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE) and English for Social Studies (ESS). Now, all the three are further divided into two types namely, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

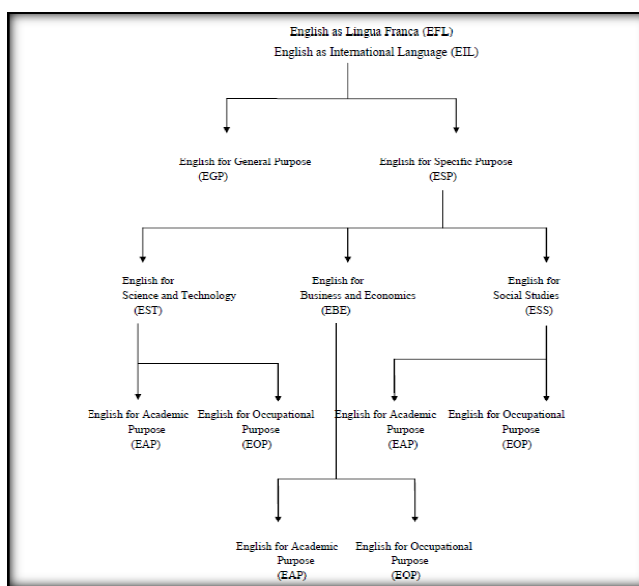


Figure 1

## ESP Research in India

The major researches in the area of ESP in India focused mainly on developing teaching-learning materials and aspects of designing the syllabus. Further, programme description and discourse analysis are two major trends in ESP research in India. A few researches are also available which are based on English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). There is a list given below of the researches done in the field of ESP at EFL University, Hyderabad.

### Before 2000

- A Selection of Reading Materials for Students of Science and Technology (Indira, 1972)
- Analysis of the Register of Defense Technical Institutes as a Basis for English Proficiency Test Construction ( Mukerji, 1976)
- The Teaching of English in Indian Institute of Technology (Rama Rao, 1976)
- Designing a Special purpose course in English for the Students of Law in Rajasthan (Bhatia, 1977)
- English for Business: An Analysis Designing a Special Purpose Course for Students of Commerce (Usha, 1978)
- The Language of law: some Distinctive Features ( Srinivasan, 1987)
- After 2000:
- A Framework for EST Course Design with Special Reference to Engineering Students of Andra Pradesh (Srilalitha, 2003)
- The Suitability of the Textbook in Engineering Colleges for Developing Communicative Skills: A Study (Indira, 2003)
- Curriculum Reappraisal Issues in Business Communication Spoken Skills Course: A Case Study (Lanka, 2005)
- Redefining Issues in Syllabus and Materials Design: An Analytical Study of the First Year JNTU English Course (Neelaveni, 2005)
- Envisioning Language for Technical Workforce: An ITI based Study (Victor, 2007)
- Exploring the Training Needs of English Teachers in Engineering Colleges (Mohapatra, 2010)

A notable difference in research trends can be observed from the above list of studies carried out before and after 2000. In the years before 2000, the focus of the researches was on program description and discourse analysis, and after 2000 more emphasis was given to materials evaluation, teacher training, and curriculum appraisal.

### Theories of Syllabus Design

The people who are in need of English for their occupational and vocational purposes increasing. The need for specific English in the specific field has become a necessity. This made the researchers and the course designers focus on the syllabus design for special purposes.

### Place of Syllabus in Language Teaching

Reilly(1988), has identified about six different types of syllabi and the place of syllabus in his article ‘Approaches to Foreign Language Syllabus Design’ published in 1988. He stated, “to design a syllabus is to decide what gets taught and in what order”.

Reilly (1988) noted that selection of a syllabus is a significant decision in language teaching, and it should be made as determinedly and with as much information as possible. It is a matter of confusion over the years “as to what different types of content are possible in language teaching syllabi and as to whether the differences are in syllabus or method”.

### **Types of Syllabi**

Reilly (1988) has pointed out six major types of syllabi which are difficult to differentiate from each other. The characteristics of each syllabus are defined as under;

- **Structural (formal) syllabus:** The content of language teaching is a collection of the forms and structures, usually grammatical, of the language being taught. Examples include nouns, verbs, adjectives, statements, questions, subordinate clauses, and so on.
- **Notional/functional syllabus:** The content of the language teaching is a collection of the functions that are performed when language is used, or of the notions that language is used to express. Examples of functions include: informing, agreeing, apologizing, requesting; examples of notions include size, age, color, comparison, time, and so on.
- **Situational syllabus:** The content of language teaching is a collection of real or imaginary situations in which language occurs or is used. The primary purpose of a situational language teaching syllabus is to teach the language that occurs in the situations. Examples of situations include: seeing the dentist, complaining to the landlord, buying a book at the bookstore, meeting a new student, and so on.
- **Skill-based syllabus:** The content of the language teaching is a collection of specific abilities that may play a part in using language. Skills are things that people must be able to do to be competent in a language, relatively independently of the situation or setting in which the language use can occur. Skill-based syllabi group linguistic competencies (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse) together into generalized types of behavior, such as listening to spoken language for the main idea, writing well-formed paragraphs, giving effective oral presentations, and so on.
- **Task-based syllabus:** The content of the teaching is a series of complex and purposeful tasks that the students want or need to perform with the language they are learning. The tasks are defined as activities with a purpose other than language learning, but, as in a content-based syllabus, the performance of the tasks is approached in a way that is intended to develop second language ability. Task-based teaching has the goal of teaching students to draw on resources to complete some piece of work (a process). The students draw on a variety of language forms, functions, and skills, often in an individual and unpredictable way, in completing the tasks. Tasks that can be used for language learning are, generally, tasks that the learners actually have to perform in any case. Examples include: applying for a job, talking with a social worker, getting housing information over the telephone, and so on.

- Content-based-syllabus: The primary purpose of instruction is to teach some content or information using the language that the students are also learning. The students are simultaneously language students and students of whatever content is being taught. The content teaching is not organized around the language teaching, but vice-versa. Content-based language teaching is concerned with information, while task-based language teaching is concerned with communicative and cognitive processes. An example of content-based language teaching is a science class taught in the language the students need or want to learn, possibly with linguistic adjustment to make the science more comprehensible.
- Munby (1984) stated that, syllabus design is a matter of specifying the content that needs to be taught and then organizing it into a teaching syllabus of appropriate learning units. According to Maley (1984, p. 77), syllabus design encompasses the whole process of designing a language program. He says that "the needs analysis which produces an order unit of items to be taught is organically related to a methodology consistent with the syllabus, a set of techniques consistent with the methodology, and evaluation procedure consistent with the whole.

## CONCLUSIONS

The review of related literature explored the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Theories of Syllabus Design for English Language Teaching. Further, the paper attempted to explore the definition, emergence and ESP researches in India. It was also attempted to the concept of syllabus design and Distinction between curriculum and syllabus. On the basis of the review and detailed study, it could be concluded that the study of ESP and syllabus design could be an asset to a course designer and teacher.

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