



## THE STATUS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE IN INDIA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper entitled, *The Status of English for Specific Purposes Course in India and Implications for the Development* attempts undertake an appraisal of ESP courses in India at tertiary level institutes with a special focus on the currently available ESP courses along with the method of teaching followed and materials adopted for teaching ESP. It further endeavors to find out the problems involved in offering ESP courses and the probable solutions for the same.

Key words: ESP courses, problems, prospectus, language policy, uniform syllabus

### INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is one of the significant features in the field of English Language Teaching; and, it is an important branch of the EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) arena. In the backdrop of the expansion of various fields and branches of knowledge, it assumes the status of a significant branch in English Language Teaching (ELT). ESP courses gain prominence and the concept of teaching of ESP has been accepted all over the world. Most of the countries are implementing it at the tertiary level of education to carve out successful professionals.

India, being a populous country has created a very highly competitive atmosphere both in the educational and career fields. This situation has necessitated the need of preparing the jobseekers to communicate effectively to obtain, retain and progress in their job. Up to the tertiary level, English is taught as a second language along with other subjects for educational purposes. This type of teaching/learning process has not proved helpful to the learners to use English for immediate or for real communicative purposes. If, at tertiary level, ESP courses are taught, the students will get benefit from these courses as they are designed to meet their specific needs.

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### Review of literature

Globalization has its impact on India as well; this phenomenon demands its subjects being proficient in English for international exposure in diverse fields as English language is used as a medium for global communication. The status of English for specific purpose courses in India is at its infancy and it did not develop considerably.



The number of ESP courses that exist at UG level is very few and restricted to a handful of institutions. And a very few of the universities in India are offering ESP courses at PG level. These courses are confined to the universities which are offering an optional paper in ELT for the MA (English) course as theoretical introduction of ESP courses is possible only in such universities. And recently few Indian universities have taken initiatives to introduce need-based optional papers in ESP for the M.A. (English) students. For example, the University of Madras (UnoM) includes elective papers like English for Career Purposes and English for Corporate Communication in its MA (English) course (w.e.f. 2007-08). Similarly, papers like English for Communication and English for Business Communication have been incorporated for MA (English) students by Mother Teresa Women's University (MTWU), NMU, Karnataka University, Dharwad and Christ University, Bangalore. This implicitly points towards the failure of UG level literature-based courses in developing communicative skills of the students.

The impact of ESP courses is limited only to the titles of that course. It is the consequence of the General English courses which are offered in the conventional degree programmes and are based on assumptions rather than on needs analysis. In addition, ESP\EAP components are included in the General English courses in Indian universities unlike the pre-sessional or in-sessional ESP courses offered by the universities in UK and USA. Furthermore, the research in ESP vis-à-vis humanities is not carried widely and it is restricted to teacher training modules only.

Mekala analysed the needs of students majoring in English in the colleges affiliated to the University of Madras. After analyzing their needs, she suggests an alternative course, based on ESP framework; "English for Literature Students" for the General English course for B.A. Part I. According to Mekala, the proposed course of her will be effective in enhancing specific language skills of the students. The main objective of this course is to help students have a working\practical knowledge of English, to take and make notes, to refer to source materials and to become independent learners. The suggested course includes a separate paper on 'Dictionary Skills'. (Mekala, S. 2004).

In accordance with recommendations of the CDC (1989), some Indian universities have included ESP-based optional papers at the UG level. This could be witnessed from the following examples.

i) Functional English courses sponsored by the University Grants Commission (UGC) are based on ESP. These courses include papers like English for Broadcasters for Television and English for Journalists / Editors.

ii) The UnoM offers elective papers like English for Competitive Examination, English for Journalism, etc. for B.A. English Major course (w.e.f. 2008-09).

iii) The Department of Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh has included a core paper entitled 'English for Special Purposes' in the final year for B.A. (English) course (w.e.f. June 2008) in all the universities in Madhya Pradesh. However, the title of the paper appears misleading as the content is directed towards 'English for practical purposes'.

iv) MTWU has prescribed English for Practical Purposes (BA III English). (Tasildar, Ravindra, 2013)

It is high time to consider the glocal (global and local) needs of Indian students and provide them needed specific language skills. If such needs are identified seriously and necessary steps are taken, there is also scope for courses like 'English for PG students,' 'English for Employment,' 'English for Yoga Instructors,' 'English for Teachers of Science and Mathematics in Semi-English schools' through the UGC-sponsored Career Oriented Courses in English. Thus, ESP can play a vital role in vocationalization of English studies in India.

Still General English teaching is being followed in India and it does not fulfill all the needs that the learners require to pursue their higher education. The language skills they may incidentally acquire are inadequate to meet the communication needs of professionals even within the nation, leaving aside the global scenario. In this context, ESP teaching, which aims at incorporating learner's expert area into the syllabus of



English, is highly recommended. To effect this change, the government has to take steps to bring out considerable radical changes in the field of English Language Teaching.

#### **Prospectus**

The Central Government should maintain a booklet comprising language policy to be adopted by the entire country which should focus on English language teaching/learning. This booklet should be made available to every educational institution which should supply it to every English teacher. It should also provide guidelines about the objectives of the course, graded and comprehensive material, methodology and testing pattern of the course etc.

#### **English Language Policy at the State Level**

The Central Government should insist all the State Governments to introduce English language teaching right from the class I. Every State government should take care of English language policy and its implementation by maintaining a booklet where it can include the following points clearly and should instruct strictly to implement all the mentioned points.

i) Language policy, ii) Objectives, iii) Course designs, iv) Methodology, v) Materials, vi) Assessment Pattern

In every state, the government should take the responsibility of implementing English language teaching right from class I to the Intermediate level. There is a need to adopt a holistic approach to language teaching; language tutoring should be perceived as a whole, finding its role as complementary and supplementary in education. All the language skills should be taught in an integrated manner. Hence, the State governments should take the responsibility of syllabus design and setting specific objectives and strive for their achievement.

All the UG Courses come under University Grant Commission (UGC) which works under the Central Government. Since all the degree courses are under the supervision of the UGC, it should specify the needs of graduates and provide English language skills accordingly which should be uniform throughout the country. On the whole, the system should seriously perceive the process of imparting the required English to the students of different courses.

#### **Responsibilities of the Educational Institutes**

In the changed language learning contexts in the developing countries like India where it is taught as a second language or European countries where it is taught as a foreign language, the educational institutes have to adjust and modify the teaching/learning process according to the current language demands of the youth who uses it. English language skills have become imperative due to the globalization which brought considerable social and cultural changes in the world. And, to emerge as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, India has to be active on the global scenario. The rapidly multiplying multinational companies set English language skills as one of the parameters in their recruitment process in their companies. The increasing employment requirement of the middle class and the addition of the employment seeking educated youth to the numbers every year are the factors that have increased the responsibility of the government to be more attentive to the quality of education. In the light of these facts, there is a tremendous need to develop English language skills of the youth of the country. Moreover, unlike in many other countries, the percentage of youth is 45% in India and the governments do have the responsibility of making the right use of this youth force.

The present research has proposed the following suggestions to provide English language communication skills; basics by school level and advanced skills by the Intermediate level in turn to prepare ground to introduce and develop ESP Courses at the Tertiary level. To achieve this target, certain measures have to be implemented.

#### **Introduction of English from Class 1**

English Language Teaching needs to be revised in the light of present day concerns and language needs of the students in sequence to make them more competitive. The introduction of English language teaching is not alike and the material used for English language teaching within country also different resulting



in heterogeneity of English language competence of the students of different states of India. This problem can be alleviated by prescribing same syllabus throughout India. To impart uniform English language teaching country wide, to provide solid foundation and to nurture students' academic career in order to make them competent enough to face the challenges with in nation and across the nations, English should be introduced from the class I because scientific research has proved that children learn languages faster than the adults. They imitate the teacher's pronunciation, sentences, phrases, and words with ease without asking rules for grammar, sentence formation etc. Experts in ELT like Perren (cited in Dua, Hans) states as, "the earlier a child is exposed to a language the quicker it learns to use it: 'Since all must use English, it is best for children to begin at an age when it is easiest, when there is no pronounced language learning differential". (Dua, Hans R, 1994).

Correspondingly, the child should be provided better language models. And the material used for teaching at this level should be activity-based rather than content-oriented.

#### **Uniform Syllabus for English throughout India**

Apart from introducing English from class 1, prescribing the same syllabus with same set of text books to English and non-English medium students should take place throughout India to provide equal access to English language education at school level. This ensures homogeneous usage of language by entire nation. The common syllabus should be graded and comprehensive. As far as syllabus design is concerned, the syllabus designers need to consider from a practical angle, relating it to the needs of the learners. While designing a course, the proficiency level of the learners should be taken into account. It avoids heterogeneity in the usage of English language and whenever people from two States meet and talk, no problems arise in terms of intelligibility of spoken language.

The prescribed syllabus of English at school level and college levels repeats certain topics. For example, topics such as, parts of speech, direct and indirect speech, letter writing, is included in the primary school English syllabus and also in high school English syllabus as well as in the English syllabus of the college. To avoid this type of repetition, syllabus needs to be changed. The entire English syllabus from Class I to X should be prepared with gradation and then the materials should be prepared accordingly. It clarifies the language chunk to be learnt in every academic year and provides a direction to teaching and learning. Gaps in terms of learners' needs, objectives, and the outcome of the course should be identified and analyzed and necessary changes should be made in the following academic year. This review of the workability of the syllabus and materials should be done every year and the same must be revised accordingly.

Besides providing the same syllabus throughout India, there is a need to reassess the English syllabus at school and college level to the extent where the students' needs are being met by the existing English language syllabus. For this, a reassessing the English syllabus should begin from Class I. English syllabus should be redesigned as follows:

- Class I to V – 80% of syllabus with spoken activities and 20% with written activities. Written activities include Vocabulary acquisition.
- Classes VI and VII -- 40% of syllabus with spoken activities and 60% with written activities. Written activities include Reading and Vocabulary acquisition.
- Classes VIII and IX -- 20% of syllabus with spoken activities and 80% with written activities. Written activities include Grammar, Reading and Vocabulary acquisition.
- Any gaps in learning the second language should be cut down.

#### **Basic English Language Skills by Class X**

English language skills at school level should be taught in on integrated manner. Basic skills should be ensured by the time the children leave the school. If the basic English skills are provided by Class X, all the three



types of students benefit from these skills; the students who discontinue their studies after class X and who continue their Intermediate courses, and who wish to pursue Certificate or Diploma courses.

The students who discontinue their studies after Class X will be ensured jobs if they are imparted the basic English language skills. These basic skills will fetch them jobs like, office in charges, data collection executives, office assistants, accountants etc. Online Advertisement posting jobs and form filling jobs are also available for X class pass outs who have basic English skill

The students who opt to take up Vocational Courses or Certificate Courses such as Certificate in HIV & Family Education, in Environmental Studies, Civil Engineering (PTD), Electrical Engineering (PTD), Mechanical Engineering (PTD) Skilled Technician (Machine Maintenance), Skilled Technician (Machinist), Quality Assurance Inspector etc., after completing their schooling, also benefit with the basic English language skills as these skills enable them to pursue their respective courses with ease; no language problems occur in terms of comprehending their respective subjects.

#### **Advanced English Language Skills by Intermediate Level**

To target at uniform level of skills of basic communication among the two disparate groups of students at the Intermediate level, bridge courses should be conducted to improve the language skills of the weaker students. Intermediate level is best suited for intensive teaching of English language skills for more than one reason; students are mature enough to understand the working of a language and young enough to internalize the rules that govern a language. Moreover, at this stage, they are also more ambitious about their future professions and more serious about reaching their educational targets to fulfill those ambitions. After providing basic as well as advanced English language skills at the Intermediate level, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses can be introduced at the Undergraduate level.

The students who have basic English language skills should be offered advanced English language skills. At this level, English language teaching should not include basic language skills. The advanced skills of English, imparted at Intermediate level provide help to three categories of students: students, who aspire to take up jobs, who wish to pursue Vocational Certificate and Diploma courses, who take up further studies.

The students who aspire to take up jobs will be at an advantage if they are equipped with advanced English skills as they can take up higher level jobs such as supervisors in supermarkets, store keepers, clerical posts in banks, BPO and call center jobs etc.

There are Certificate and Diploma courses such as, Certificate in Radiography & Imaging Technique, Certificate in Operation Theatre, Assistant Certificate in Optometry & Ophthalmic, Assistant Certificate in Physiotherapy & Yoga Therapy, Certificate in Dental & Oral Hygiene, in Clinical Dental Technology, in ECG Technology, in Medical Laboratory Technique, Graduate diploma in print and web, broadcast or multimedia Journalism, diploma Courses in Aeronautical Engineering and Aircraft Maintenance etc. The students who wish to pursue these courses are certainly at advantage if they are provided with advanced English skills as these skills enhance their grasping and make them confident in their learning process.

#### **ESP Courses at UG Level**

The students who join the Undergraduate courses of different streams have to be more focused with advanced English skills. The ESP courses are suggested for graduate students at tertiary level as this level is the most suitable stage to introduce ESP courses. At this stage, the student will be very enthusiastic to learn and is passionate to pursue his/her elected domain of study. In this context, at UG level, all the students should be given highly focused courses of ESP. In addition to ESP courses, they should be imparted a course in English for Academic Learning (EAL). This course is classified in to Academic Reference Skills which include library skills, reading, gathering material etc; and the other skill is Academic Writing Skill which includes writing using academic words, presenting collected material for writing articles, reports etc, in a comprehensive and logical



order. These skills enable students to get different types of jobs like content writing, content developing, and jobs related to journalism etc.

The students who do not aspire to pursue Postgraduate Courses and conclude their studies with graduation and aspire to take up jobs should be provided the needed English skills to that extent. On the whole English language learning must be meaningful where nobody gets stuck because of lack of proficiency in English. So offering an ESP course at Undergraduate level course would help both the students who go for higher studies and those who take up jobs after graduation.

#### **New Teaching and Testing Methodologies : ESP**

In addition to the newly entrusted responsibilities of the language teachers, the methodologies of English teaching and testing should change to suit the needs of the learners. The latest research findings in ELT should be followed. The methodology prescribed by the ELT experts should be adopted. As discussed in the previous section, basic English skills should be provided by the end of schooling and advanced English skills by the end of Intermediate course and ESP courses at UG level are suggested to be introduced.

To transform teaching to skill-oriented testing system in the classroom needs to change. So the educators should seriously contemplate on the Tests conducted for English at all levels. For higher levels such as Junior college and tertiary level, the models are available from the international Tests in English such as GRE, TOEFL, SAT, IELTS etc. Within the Indian situation such models can be adopted and the testing can thereby be made more authentic, meaningful and ultimately useful for the learners. This would ensure teaching of English following the right methodology.

In ESP courses, the testing system should be more authentic than in the general English course. At present, even the Universities which claim to have introduced "Technical English" course to the students of Engineering and Technology faculties have not evolved a suitable testing of an ESP course. The approach to the test of an ESP course is different: it should include testing of both the language proficiency as well as the vocabulary in that field. Just asking them to write a technical report does not make the test an ESP test. The teaching should take care of the vocabulary and structures to be used in writing a technical report. One solution for this problem could be to make use of the technical texts that those students study for their optional subjects. But to achieve success in this type of testing, the teachers should be thoroughly oriented to teach and test technical English. So, before introducing an ESP course in various faculties, in house training should be made compulsory for the English teachers offering a particular ESP course.

#### **Role of the Teacher: EGP to ESP**

ESP is a new concept in India and the role of English teacher needs to expand from teaching general English to the teaching of ESP courses. Harding is of opinion that the skills of English teachers such as being communicative, using authentic materials and analysing English in a practical way are also applicable to ESP. He gives the following suggestions to the ESP teachers:

- Think about what is needed and don't just follow an off-the-shelf course or course book.
- Understand the nature of their students' subject area.
- Work out their language needs in relation to their specialism.
- Use contexts, texts, situations from their subject area.
- Use authentic materials.
- Make the tasks as authentic as possible.
- Motivate the students with variety, relevance and fun.
- Take the classroom into the real world and bring the real world into the classroom. (Harding, K. 2207)

In the context of ESP teaching, the English teacher will be delegated additional designations such as a course designer, researcher, evaluator etc.. They need to develop certain teaching strategies to make these courses



successful. It is imperative for teachers to improve their knowledge and teaching skills by approaching different sources such as referring ESP books and seeking advice from the subject experts. Bell suggests the following three "Cs" to English teachers to become successful ESP teachers.

1. Curiosity  
The teacher should be interested in the subject area and want to learn more.
2. Collaboration Teachers should seek out subject specialists, show them their work and ask for their feedback.
3. Confidence

Confidence will grow as teachers explore the new subject matter, engage with subject specialists and learn from their learners.<sup>(Bell, D.2002)</sup>

In the context of ESP teaching, the roles and responsibilities of the English teachers are not confined to class room teaching. They should grab the opportunity of teaching ESP courses as this would allow them to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills. Adding to these, ESP teachers are expected to find suitable authentic material for their teaching. Swales prefers to use the term "ESP Practitioners" instead of "ESP Teachers."<sup>11</sup> Hence, the teacher's responsibility does not end with their primary objective of teaching ESP courses, as there are more follow up activities to be conducted after teaching

To sum up, the purpose of the present study is not just to point out the existing problems in the English language teaching in India. It aims at refining the present system. It suggests that there is an urgent need to revise the existing general English courses to make them go in tune with the communication and market requirements. The entire system of English teaching from the primary to the tertiary level is not taken as a continuous system. The problems involved in such type of material usage/use and in the teaching methodology and testing pattern can be mitigated by introducing graded and comprehensive syllabus which is not content based but conducive to language teaching. The basic language skills should be provided at school level and advanced language skills by the Intermediate level with the help of trained/oriented language teachers. If these are enforced properly by all the States in India, English for Specific Purposes course goes a long way to make the students successful in their education and competent in their professions.

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