



## Relevance of ESP in the Present Educational Scenario

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### ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching (ELT) can be broadly divided into English for General Purpose (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 Occupational Purpose (EOP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Science and technology (EST). In the rapidly changing present world when teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), ESP practitioners face new opportunities and challenges. For non-English speakers the ability to speak more than one language (English along with

the Mother Tongue) become imperative to assess the language abilities of second language learners. In the classroom, assessment can be seen as an ongoing process, in which the teacher uses various tools to measure the progress of the learners. Among those tools are portfolios, self-assessment, and, of course, tests. If assessment can be seen as a movie, since it is a continuous process, then a test is a still photographs; it gives a picture of the learner's language at a particular point in time. If used properly, these tools can help the teacher develop a full picture of the learner's progress. It is important to note that all type of testing and assessment are important in gathering information about student's abilities.



## KEY WORDS:

Rhetorical, pedagogically, methodology, disseminate, restricted, and sophisticated.

## INTRODUCTION

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987: 53) have pointed out the differences between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) in their book, *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning Centred Approach*.

On the face of it, ESP differs from EGP in the sense that the vocabulary, structures and the subject matter relate to a particular field or discipline in the former. For example, a lawyer writing a brief, or a diplomat preparing a policy paper needs his jargon, ESP courses make use of vocabulary and tasks related to the specific field that one belongs to. So a course in ESP is designed to meet the specific professional or academic needs of the learner, creating a balance between educational theory and practical considerations. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, however, has instruction that builds on EGP and is designed to prepare the students for the

English used in specific disciplines, vocations or professions to accomplish some specific purposes. ESP makes use of the methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, and is centered on the language appropriate to these activities. As Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters rightly put it. "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (1987:19).

In this connection, it is interesting to note Tony Dudley-Evans (1987: 1-9) explanation that ESP may not always focus on the language of one specific discipline or occupation, such as English for Law or English for Physics. University instruction that introduces students to common features of academic discourse in Sciences or Humanities, is frequently called English for Academic Purposes. (EAP) is also ESP.

## DEFINITION OF ESP

Peter Strevens (1988-1-13) definition makes a distinction between four absolute and two variables characteristics.

1. Absolute Characteristic

ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

- Designed to meet specified needs of the learner:
- Related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupation and activities.
- Centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse semantics, etc and analysis of this discourse;
- In contrast with General English.

## 2. Variable Characteristics:

ESP may be, but is not necessarily.

- Restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);
- Not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “SPECIFIC” IN ESP.

## THE MEANING OF THE WORD “SPECIFIC” IN ESP

The word “specific” in ESP refers to “specific in language” and “specific in aim”. A simple clarification that can be made here is “specific in language” and “specific in aim” are viewed as similar concepts although they are two entirely different notions. George Perren (1974) noted that confusion arises over these two notions. Ronald Mackay, and Alan Mountford (1978: 4) have stated that the only practical way in which we can understand the notion of specific language is as a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well defined context, task or vocation. On the other hand “specific in aim” refers to the purpose for which the learners learn a language, not the nature of the language they learn. Consequently, the focus of the word “specific” in ESP is on the purpose for which the learners learn and not on the specific jargon or registers they learn. As such, all instances of language learning might be considered ESP.



## ORIGIN OF ESP

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987: 6-8) succinctly identified three key reasons that are common, to the emergence of all ESP; the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics and the focus on the learner. They noted that two key historical periods breathed life into ESP. First, the end of the Second World War brought with it an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. For various reasons, most notably the economic power and technological advancement of the United States in the Post-War World Scenario, English has become an important language for global affairs. Secondly, the oil crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The medium of this knowledge has been English. The general effect of all this development is to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods.

## TYPE OF ESP

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

Ronal Mackay and Alan Mountford clearly illustrate the difference between the restricted language and the language with this statement (1978: 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 language just as tourist phrase book 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 (1978: 4-5).

The second type of ESP is English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. David Carver 1983: 131-137) indicates that this English should be at the heart of ESP although he refrains from developing it any further. Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987: 16-18) on the other hand have developed a “Tree of ELT” in which the subdivisions of ESP are clearly illustrated. ESP is broken down into three branches. English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), and English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches. English for Academic Purpose (EAP) and English for Occupational Purpose (EOP). An Example of EOP for the EST branch is “English for Technicians” whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is “English for Engineering Studies.”

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ESP COURSES

The characteristics of ESP courses identified by David G. Carter (1981: 167) and discussed here. He states that there are three features common to ESP courses.

- (a) Authentic Materials;
- (b) Purpose-Related Orientation; and
- (c) Self-Direction.

These features of ESP courses are indeed useful in attempting to formulate one’s own understanding of ESP. If one revisits Tony Dudley-Evams (1998: 8-29) ) claim that ESP should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level, the use of Authentic Learning Materials is entirely feasible. The use of authentic content materials, modified or unmodified inform, is indeed a feature of ESP, particularly in self-directed study and research task. For Language Preparation, For Employment in Science and Technology, a large component of the student evaluation is based on an independent study of assignment in which the learners are required to investigate and present an area of interest. The students



are encouraged to conduct research using a variety of different resources, including the Internet.

## FORMULATION OF APPROACHES TO ESP

The approaches in ESP are formulated on the basis of five conceptions in ESP, John Malcolm Swakes (1990) uses the term “enduring conceptions” to refer to the following:

1. Authenticity
2. Research –Base
3. Text
4. Need
5. Learning Methodology

The main consideration in ESP according to Bernard Coffey (1984) is that of authenticity. It includes authentic texts and authentic tasks. Swales, in explaining what is meant by the research-base of ESP, reviews the ESP literature and observes a trends towards papers that they rely on some kind of data-based (textual or otherwise). In addition, Peter Strevens ()

1980: 105-121) alludes to the importance of the “specific language” of ESP in Functional English’s’. That is, only those items of vocabulary, pattern of grammar, and functions of language which are required by the learner’s purposes are included in ESP. Peter Strevens also alludes to the importance of learner in discussions of ESP. Finally, ESP draws on the methodology or learning theories which are appropriate to the learning teaching situation. In other words, Specific Purpose Language Teaching (SPLT) is not in itself a methodology. According to Peter Strevens (1988: 39-44) this characteristic of ESP makes the materials both more relevant and more interesting to the student due to the varied and ingenious exploitation of opportunities provided by ESP Settings. These five conceptions have dual and potentially origins in both the real world (the “target situation” of the ESP pedagogy. It is therefore crucial to discuss each of them in an attempt to survey the development and directions of ESP as it has evolved. Such a survey will identify five major approaches to ESP, each of which has focused on one of the major conceptions and thus contributed

to the growth of ESP itself. However, it is also evident that as each approach to ESP has evolved: its particular enduring conception has also evolved, bring ESP practitioners towards their current thinking in each of the five areas.

The five major approaches to ESP are:

1. Skills-Based Approach
2. Register Analysis Approach
3. Discourse Analysis Approach.
4. Learning – Centered Approach
5. Communicative Approach

Sill-Based Approach to ESP has enlarged the conception of authority in two principal ways. First, authenticity of text is both broadened to include texts other than written texts and narrowed to differentiate between different types of texts generated by each skill.

The second conception is that of the Register Analysis Approach. It has developed out of the need for a research based for ESP, Michael A.K. Halliday, Amos

McIntosh and Peter Strevens (1964: 266) are the first scholars who have pointed out the importance of, and the need for, a research base for ESP, set out in one of the earliest discussion of ESP.

The reaction against Register Analysis is the early 1970s concentrated on the concept of text rather than thus the lexical and grammatical properties of register. The approach is clearly set out by two of its principal advocates. Allen and Widdowson as follows:

One might usefully distinguish two kinds of ability which an English course of ESP level should aim at developing. The first is the ability to recognize how sentences are used in the performance of acts of communication, or the ability to understand the rhetorical functioning of language in use. The second is the ability to recognize and manipulate the formal devices which are used to combine sentences to create continuous passage of prose. One might say that the first has to do with rhetorical coherence of discourse, the second with the grammatical cohesion of text (1974).



The attention to strategy analysis give rise to new generation of ESP materials which is founded as much on conceptions of learning as one conceptions of language or conceptions of need. As Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987: 14) have rightly put it.

Our concern in ESP was no longer with language use although this would help to define the course of objectives. The concern was rather with language learning. We cannot simply assume that describing and exemplifying what people do with language would enable someone to learn it..... A truly valid approach to ESP would be based on an understanding of the processes of language learning (1987: 14).

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters called this approach the Learning-Centered Approach and stressed the importance of a lively, interesting and relevant learning teach style in ESP materials. The first ESP materials to adopt a conscious model of learning were probably those of the Malaysian UMEPP Project in the late 1970s. The approach has received its widest publicity in the papers and materials of

Hutchinson and Waters, and more recently, Mary Waters and Alan Waters (1992: 264-273)

The recent approach that emerges from the concept of authenticity in the development of ESP is that of Communicative Approach. The first generation of ESP materials that appeared in the mid-1960s took skills as their principal means of selection, arguing that ESP teaching materials. The definition of skill is somewhat broad, establishing little more than the ranking of the four usual language skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking (LSRW). Almost all materials course of collection of specialist texts with accompanying comprehension and language exercises. As R.A. Close (1972) rightly argues that the conception of authenticity is central to the approach taken to develop language skills.

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## THE NEED FOR RESEARCH ESP TESTING

The rapid expansion in ESP teaching is not accompanied by a similar increase in EST testing. Perhaps, the earliest attempts at testing ESP date back to the time when the ELTS were launched. At that time, in

1980, there had been little or no research into the validity of giving academic English proficiency tests based on different subject areas. John Charles Alderson (1981) in a discussion on ESP testing questioned many of the principles behind this approach. He agreed that since different University Departments placed different demands on their students, there are some good arguments for including ESP tests in an ESP test battery. He felt that a comparison between performance on academically specific tests and the communicative needs of the relevant area might provide useful diagnostic information. He also accepted that ESP tests would have really high face validity for both content-area students and University Lecturers. However, he questioned whether it was possible to produce a test which would be equally suitable for students in all branches of a discipline. For example, he wondered whether it would be possible to have a test for Engineers and whether they would have the same level of appropriacy for all Engineers, regardless of their specialization. This highlights one of the main difficulties



with English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) testing.

Another difficulty with ESP tests is delineated in Alderson's question "How specific is specific?" (1981). Since at that time it is usually impossible to give each student a test which is tailor-made for unique set of circumstances, any ESP test has to be a compromise; and, in case of EAP, where many disciplines would be considered less than one broad subject area. These areas would cover so wide a field that some students would not fit into any of the groupings. John Charles Alderson (1981: 133) cited the example of a student in urban studies who would not know whether to choose a test in science or in social studies.

Over the past two decades, there have been several studies on the testing approval to be employed to test English proficiency. Three articles by John Charles Alderson and Alexander Hugh Urquhart (1983) aroused considerable interest and led to several follow-up studies. These articles described three studies carried out with students attending English classes in

Britain in preparation for British Universities.

In each. John Charles Alderson and Alexander Hugh Urquhart (1982: 192-204) compared students scores on reading texts related to their own field of study with those on texts in other subject areas. The student's scores on the modules were found to be somewhat contradictory. On one hand, for example, science and Engineering students taking the technology module of IELTS were found to be facing better than the Business and Economics students as well as the Humanities students, who took the same test. On the other hand, the Business and Economics Students fared no better than the Science and Engineering group on the Social Studies module. Alderson and Urquhart conclude that background knowledge has some effect on test scores, but that is not always consistent, and that their future studies should take into account linguistic proficiency and other factors as well.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES.

The present study is an attempt at answering a few questions that pertain to the student's performance on LSRW skills in ESP (English Language for Specific Purpose) contexts. The objective of the investigation can be expressed in the following research question:

1. What are the student's needs to learn Technical English keeping in view the global context.
2. Is there a correlation existing between the learner's need and the syllabus which is being used to teach Technical English?
3. What is the significance of the existing syllabus and is there a need for significant change?
4. What is the role of ESP course designer and materials producer in this context?

All these questions can be answered in terms of the following hypotheses.

H1 Majority of the students will have stronger needs for learning

Technical English given to the global context.

H2 There has been a negative correlation between the syllabus and the learner's needs.

H3 The change required in the existing syllabus are hence of utmost significance.

H4 The role of the curriculum developer in an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific and technical knowledge is crucial to language – learning.

Education at present has recognized the need for making use of the latest technology for better results. This could be seen for making use of the latest technology for better results. This could be seen in the introduction of the language labs in the Engineering Colleges to impart various language and allied skills to the prospective profession also. Still, it is the textbook which is supposed to carry on the aims and objectives of the syllabi. Hence a



critical appraisal of the textbooks used in different Universities becomes imperative.

## THE ROLE OF TEXTBOOK IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

English language instruction has many important components but the essential constituents in many English classrooms and programmes are the textbooks and instruction materials that are often used by language instructors.

As Tom Hutchinson and Ennice Torrers suggest;

The textbook is an almost universal element of (English Language) teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aids projects have been set up to produce them in various countries. No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook (1994: 315)

## IMPORTANCE OF TEXT ANALYSIS

Although handling the text in the classroom is time-consuming, text responses complement the data, providing more varied and detailed information about what respondents think, feel, and do. Text analysis for Surveys is that it gives the ability to analyse respondent's attitude and opinions. As a result, one gains a clearer understanding of **what the pupils likes or doesn't like and why**. When one understands what people think and feel in their own words, one can draw more reliable conclusions about their future behavior and use that predictive insight to meet needs more successfully.

Text analysis is an interactive process enabling the teacher to know the major themes grasped by respondents, and also know how many respondents could mention at least one theme, whereby an insight into respondent's belief, attitudes,



or behaviors can be obtained. When one works with the survey responses, one is likely to re-extract concepts and re-categorize responses using different category definitions or coding schemes, different terms or synonym definitions or different grouping of responses. One may repeat this process several times before one is satisfied with the results

## PURPOSE OF A TEXTBOOK

A textbook is defined as a book used as a standard work for the students of a particular subject. It is usually written specifically for a particular purpose, as a manual of instruction in any branch of study, especially as a work organized by scholars who usually have taught courses on the subject/s dealt with in a particular textbook.

## TOOL USED FOR TEXT ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL SCIENCES.

Researcher usually use two types of investigation processes. First is quantitative research, which employs numerical indicators to ascertain the relative size of a particular communication phenomenon. The second type of investigation process is qualitative research, which employs symbols and words to indicate the presence or absence of phenomena or to categorize them into different types. Quantitative and qualitative observations provide researchers with different ways of operationalizing and measuring theoretical constructs and practical concepts. While quantitative methods can provide a high level of measurement precision and statistical power, qualitative methods can supply a greater depth of information about the nature of

communication processes in a particular research setting.

## FEATURE OF QUANTITATIVE METHOD

As Gareth Margon and Linda Simircich (1994: 315) state, the functional or positivist paradigm that guides the quantitative mode of inquiry is based on the assumption that social reality has an objective ontological structure and that individuals are responding agents to this objective environment. As Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon (1988: 237) have rightly put it in their article, the assumption behind the positivist paradigm is that there is an objective truth existing in the world that can be measured and explained scientifically. The main concern of the quantitative paradigm are that measurement is reliable, valid and generalizable in its clear prediction of cause and effect. In this connection, Mary John Smith (1998) in his book Contemporary Communication Research Method

mentions quantitative research involves counting and measuring of events and performing the statistical analysis of a body of numerical data.

The strengths of the quantitative method can be enumerated as follows:

- According to Chava Frankfort-Nachmais and David Nachimias, the main strength of the quantitative method is stating the research problem is very specific and set terms;
- Clear and precise specification of both the independent and the dependent variables under investigation;
- Can follow firmly the original set of research goals, arrive at more objective conclusions, test hypothesis and determine the issues of causality;
- In the words of Howard Llord Balsley, achieving high levels

of reliability of gathered data through controlled observations, laboratory experiments, mass surveys, or other form of research manipulations are possible in this method;

- Eliminating or minimizing subjectivity of judgment is another important strength, as mentioned by Daniel Kealey and David Protheroe;
- Allow for longitudinal measures of subsequent performance of research subjects.

## WEAKNESSES OF QUANTITATIVE METHOD

The weaknesses of the quantitative method are also noteworthy:

- Fails to provide the researcher with in depth information on the context of the situation where the studied phenomenon occurs;

- Lack of much control the environment where the respondents provide the answers to the questions in the survey;
- Outcomes are limited to only those outlined in the original research proposal due to closed type questions and the structured format;
- Does not encourage the evolving and continuous investigation of a research phenomenon.

The present research, however, has employed both the methods; hence it has benefitted from the strength both these methods and tried to overcome for limitations.

## FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE METHOD

As Gareth Morgan (1980 491-500) states, qualitative research shares the theoretical assumption of the interpretative paradigm, which is based on the notion that social



reality is created and sustained through the subjective experience of people involved in communication. In this connection David Fryer throws more light on qualitative research. They are concerned in their research with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the meaning of phenomena occurring in their normal social contexts. Further he extends his statement to say that the researchers operating within the frame work of the interpretative paradigm are focused in investigating the complexity, authenticity, contextualization, shared subjectively of the researcher and the researched, and minimization of assumption (1991: 3-6)

## STRENGTH OF QUALITATIVE METHOD

The strengths of the qualitative method are as follows:

- Obtain a more realistic feel of the world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research;
- Possess flexible ways to perform data collection, subsequent analysis and interpretation of collected information.
- Robert Bogdan and Steven J Taylor provide a holistic view of the phenomena under investigation in their book Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods (1975);
- Able to interact with the research subjects in their own language and on their own terms as stated by Jerome Kirk and Mare Miller;
- Has descriptive capability based on primary and unstructured data.





## WEAKNESSES OF QUALITATIVE METHOD

- Departs from the original objectives of the research in response to the changing nature of the context, as stated by Catherine Cassal and Gillian Symon;
- Arrives at different conclusions based on the same information depending on the personal characteristics of the researcher;
- Not up to the work in investigating causality between different research phenomena;
- Has difficulty in explaining the difference in the quality and quantity of information obtained from different respondents and arrives at different, non-consistent conclusions;
- Requires a high level of experience from the

researcher to obtain the targeted information from the respondents;

- Lacks consistency and reliability because the researcher can employ different probing techniques and the respondent can choose to answer only a few queries and ignore others.

## QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE TEXT ANALYSIS

As William Paul Vogt (1993: 193-183-184) has opined there are two ways in which the social scientists distinguish quantitative from qualitative analyses. On the one hand, qualitative analyses can be differentiated from quantitative analyses according to the level of measurement of the variables being analyzed. Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff (1977) argue, for example, that indiscriminate use of this quantitative – qualitative distinction has often resulted in the label, qualitative content analysis, being not only aptly applied to rigorous analyses of categorical data but also



inappropriately applied to haphazard (and thus unscientific) analyses of such data. On the other hand, social scientist also distinguish their methods of quantitative or qualitative. In this connection, it is interesting to note Berg's explanation on quantitative methods, which is more deductive, statistical, and confirmatory, qualitative methods are more inductive, non statistical and exploratory. It is only according to this latter distinction that quantitative text analysis has been applied to this study (1995: 2-4)

## CONCLUSION

The present study has employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, endeavoring to use the strengths of each method. While the quantitative method helped the research to involve a good number of subjects and the various aspects of English Teaching in the Universities selected for study, the qualitative method has allowed the researcher to make an in-depth analysis of the responses of the subjects. It has also been observed that the target group turned out to be a suitable subject for qualitative analysis as they hail

from professional colleges. They displayed a keen perception on the strengths and weaknesses of their system and provided the researcher a sharp analysis of various aspects of the teaching of English in their colleges.

Keeping in view, the strengths and weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative methods, a questionnaire was prepared, and the opinion of the students was obtained. The questionnaire contains questions related to their parental background, the Board of Examination through which they had taken their school leaving certificates, etc. Students were asked to express their views on textbooks prescribed for study in terms of content, form, presentation and other aspects such as grammar and the four skills important they need.

Therefore, any thesis does not stop at the point of being mere critique of the status quo; in addition to critiquing the existing scenario of teaching Technical English at Professional level, the thesis also makes a modest attempt at suggesting measures in the last chapter to better the status quo.



The suggested measures are based not on the theoretical speculation but on practical experience and the prolonged experiments and evaluation conducted for the technical students at Acharya Nagarjuna University College of Engineering and Technology, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (Kakinada), Koneru Lakshmaiah University and Vignan University, Guntur.

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