



English for specific purposes: Its relevance and importance for engineering students

Y Vidyavathi Devi

Assistant professor Basic sciences and Humanities, Vignan Institute of Technology & Science (Affiliated to JNTU-H)
Deshmukhi, Yadadri district, Telangana, India

Abstract

Importance for English communication skills has increased due to globalization. Ability to communicate effectively in the fields, like Aviation, Nursing, Medicine, Hotel Management, Business management, Engineering, Pharmaceutical sciences etc; to satisfy the demands of organization is required. Out of various fields there is major demand for engineering courses because of wide job opportunities. It is imperative for Students and professional engineers to learn to give Presentations, Attend Interviews, prepare CV'S/ Resumes, drafting Business Letters, drafting Technical reports etc. In most of the working situations the employers are not satisfied with the communication skills of their employees. This happens because English has been taught and learnt for General Purposes (EGP) from school level to junior college level. Learning EGP at advanced level cannot meet the employer's needs. Hence it is realized to acquire language skills in the context of 'English for specific purposes'(ESP) at higher level of learning. It is the need of the hour to focus more on improving the specific skills required for work place. ESP approach can fulfill these demands. ESP teaching is done in the learner centered process. Therefore, this paper attempts to explain the importance and relevance of ESP, for engineering students for their bright future.

Keywords: English for general purpose (EGP); English for specific purpose (ESP); relevance and importance; job requirements and effective communication

1. Introduction

In recent years, English has gained much importance in the fields of engineering, medicine, business management, aviation etc. Interest in designing English language courses, specific to work related and academic objectives has been observed. English is the main means of communication in social and professional life of engineering students. Acquiring specific English skills like LSRW are required for engineering students. English gained more prominence than other languages because of global exposure.

In the Indian context though majority of students are from English medium schools, still they are not up to the mark in using English at academics and work places. Here, at school and college level English is taught to satisfy the General purposes That's the reason students are unable to meet the required needs of organization after their education. The academic books they have studied and any other language related courses attended didn't improve their competency levels.

In spite of attending English language related courses for various purposes like - to face interviews, to write competitive exams, for higher studies abroad -much improvement is not noticed. At this point question arises what kind of English should be taught for engineering students. Here, at this juncture relevance and importance of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) comes into picture.

Before knowing the relevance and importance of ESP for engineering students in Indian context it's important to know its origin, what the ESP means, and how it is different from General English (GE) courses.

According to Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, ESP was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends.

Three main reasons common to the emergence of all ESP courses were identified.

- a. The Demands of a Brave New World
The end of the Second World War in 1945, led to the unprecedented expansion in Scientific, Technical and Economic activity on international scale. This expansion created a demand for an international language i.e., English. Previously the reasons for learning English were not defined. The learning of English was considered as a sign of well-rounded education. But expansion of Technology and Commerce created new generation learners to analyze why they wanted to learn a language. Also, the oil crisis of the early 1970s resulted in a massive flow of funds and Western expertise into oil rich countries. This created a huge demand for designing English courses. From the above, English now became as a subject to satisfy the wishes, needs and demands of people.
- b. A Revolution in Linguistics: At the same time as the demand was growing for English tailored courses to specific needs new ideas began to emerge in the study of language. That is the new studies shifted from teaching traditional rules of English usage - the grammar- to discovering the ways to teach English for real communication.
- c. Focus on the Learner: The third feature is because of developments in education psychology importance was given to the learners' needs and the attitude of learning rather than linguistics.

According to Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. It is an approach to language learning, based on learners needs.

Also, it is an approach to language teaching in which selection of content and teaching methods are based on the learner's reason for learning.

There were many discussions regarding the definitions for ESP. In spite of confusions Dudley -Evans, offered a modified definition.

1. Definitions of ESP (Dudley -Evans, 1997)

Absolute Characteristics ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners.

ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.

ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable Characteristics ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, in different methodology from that of General English.

ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.

ESP is generally designed for Intermediate or advanced students.

Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems

2. Differences Between ESP and GE

According to Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters of English Language Teaching (ELT) tree diagram, English as a foreign language (EFL) is divided into ESP (English for Specific purpose) and GE (General English). GE aims to concentrate more on general purposes like for exam purposes at schools, colleges and universities. ESP aims to concentrate more on Specific needs. ESP is divided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

ESP is an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learner. In ESP teaching, importance is given for designing various appropriate courses suitable for the learners. In teaching GE less importance is given for designing courses as we can't specifically mention the needs of GE learners.

The difference between ESP and General English is ' in theory nothing, in practice a great deal'. The needs of the ESP learner are specifiable. And the needs of the general English learners are identifiable of some sort. ESP focuses on specific vocabulary, structures and the subject matter related to a specific field. GE focuses on applications in general situations. In designing ESP courses Needs analysis plays an important role to reach the target situation.

3. Purposes of Learning English By Engineering Students

Considering the views of placement officer, faculty of English, technical faculty and students the following skills are required to get through Interviews and satisfy the needs at work place.

Listening and Speaking skills: ability to participate in Group Discussions, Technical seminars, Technical Presentations, Interviews and formal or informal conversations.

Writing skills; ability to draft Business letters Technical reports, emails memos circulars for meetings

Vocabulary: to know the meanings and usage of technical and business vocabulary for the above purposes and to write eligibility test; GRE, IELTS ETC

Grammatical competence: to improve grammar competency for communication in real life situations.

All these purposes can be fulfilled through ESP courses rather than general English courses for the following mentioned reasons.

5. Needs Analysis

The most important characteristic feature of ESP course design is needs analysis. Needs analysis consists of:

1. Target situation needs. (What the learner needs to do in the target situation)
2. Learning needs. (What the learner needs to do in order to learn)

In the Target situation needs, we consider necessities, lacks and wants of a learner. As per the Target situation analysis frame work, we can get the following information

1. Do learners need language for study or for work or for promotions etc;
2. Do they use language for writing or speaking or reading purposes?
3. Places where the language is used, like in meetings or workshops or offices etc.
4. According to the learning needs analysis frame work we can get the following information regarding the learner:
 1. Reasons for taking course. e.g. for promotions or for compulsory or optional purposes.
 2. Procedure of learning can be estimated based on their learning background, applicable methodology etc.
 3. Learners personal information like their age, gender, knowledge they possess, their interests, subject knowledge etc.

6. How ESP is Relevant and Important for Engineering Students

According to Bloor and Bloor (1986) teaching a specific variety of English can start at any level including beginners. More over learning specific variety of English (for example English for doctors, English for engineers etc;) is highly effective. ESP is understood to be about preparing learners to use English within academic, professional or work place environments. The key feature of ESP course design is that the syllabus is based on an analysis of the needs of the learners. As the syllabus design is based on learners needs, courses will be interesting and motivating. Activities like Group discussions, Oral presentations, mock Interviews, vocabulary activities, conversation situations etc., are designed based on the real needs of the student and ability of the student to meet the purposes mentioned above. Through the ESP course, learners can feel the obvious relevance of what they are studying and it leads to get expected results. For example, when they are learning Business English related vocabulary, letter writing procedure of conducting meetings etc, will be taught and suitable exercises will be provided. Thus, in ESP, language is learnt not for the sake of gaining a general education. It is learnt to use at specific situation. The learner, here the engineering students can improve the proficiency level to get success at their academics and jobs. It lays a smooth path to reach the target needs. Moreover, most ESP courses are subject to time constraint and time must be effectively utilized (West,1994). Mostly ESP courses are time bounded. In teaching ESP courses teachers play a vital role. Their role

is to frame syllabus, plan suitable activities and prepare course material. As teachers in ESP classes often have restricted time to teach it makes sense to teach them only the bits of English they need. Teachers act as facilitators, guide, material designers etc. Thus, the task of the ESP course developer is to identify the needs of the learner and design a course around them. It is learner centered focus. Learner centered approach is followed. Awareness of needs of learners to the teachers helps in bringing out productive course.

From all the above we can say that ESP courses at higher education level specifically for engineering students can be encouraged and developed in Indian context as they are relevant and important.

7. References

1. Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters. English for Specific Purposes- A learning-centered approach. Cambridge University Press.
2. Dudley Evans Tony. Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A multi-disciplinary approach. Cambridge University Press.
3. Helen Basturkmen. Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes. University of Auckland, New Zealand.