



## English for employability: A competency-based curricular framework in higher education in Andhra Pradesh

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### Abstract

Employability and the creation of a workforce have emerged as topical issues in the context of ever-changing technology and the interdisciplinarity of education and training. English, introduced as a compulsory subject in all university programmes, has come to serve as a skill that enhances employment opportunities. The number of graduates from the Arts, Commerce, and Science streams lacks the basic communicative competence needed for professional roles in the workplace. The paper subscribes to a design-based, descriptive approach in designing the English Curriculum. It also attempts to ascertain the efficacy of the existing curriculum and specifies the approach needed in English Curricula. This paper undertakes to integrate the concepts of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), communicative competence, and digital literacy based on the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and aligned with the National Education Policy 2020. The study is grounded in the pedagogic models and fuses with existing research. It proposes a competency-based, discipline-sensitive curriculum model centred on task-based, inter-disciplinary and flexible pedagogy, with authentic testing. In its objective, this study aims at contributing to the existing debates on curriculum change by offering a feasible model for bridging the gap between academic curricula and workplace requirements.

**Keywords:** Employability, English for specific purposes, outcome-based education, curriculum design, communication skills, NEP 2020

### Introduction

Since Colonial times, English has continued to play a significant role in communication across the professional, corporate, academic, and technological arenas. Given the integral role assigned to a language the level of competence on the part of users and the learners is scarce. English in its academic role yet secondary and tertiary level is only a third language and it assumes secondary language role, more of a skill kind at graduate level. In spite of these long years of instruction, the level of competence remains not up to the expected level of received standards. The number of graduates equipped with communicative skills to perform effectively in work environments is low. The reform principles of pedagogy such as outcomes-based learning, skills development, and multidisciplinary education, form the basis of the National Education Policy 2020<sup>[7]</sup>. It advocates replacing content-driven curricula with competency-based curricula that integrate communication, critical thinking, and digital literacy. These anticipated national standards have a stated effect on the local policies of various states in India. Andhra Pradesh being a part of the framework requirements necessitate a localised, discipline-sensitive curriculum that caters to the needs of the state's diverse student population.

### Review of Related Literature

The theoretical foundations of this study draw from a rich interdisciplinary body of scholarship spanning communicative competence, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and the evolving discourse on graduate employability in higher education. Reviewed chronologically, the literature reveals a consistent

trajectory from abstract linguistic theory toward applied, competency-driven curriculum reform — a trajectory that directly influences the present research.

Dell Hymes, in his foundational essay “On Communicative Competence,” challenges the purely grammatical conception of language ability advanced by Chomsky and argues that a speaker's capacity to use language appropriately across varied social contexts is as critical as linguistic knowledge itself. Hymes establishes that true language proficiency encompasses not only what is grammatically possible but also what is contextually feasible and socially appropriate, asserting that a child acquires competence in ‘when to speak’, ‘when not’, ‘what to talk about’, ‘with whom’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘and in what manner’ (Hymes, 1972) <sup>[6]</sup>. This sociolinguistic orientation laid the theoretical groundwork for a more expansive pedagogy of language that foregrounds purposeful, situated use over formal accuracy, a principle central to the present framework.

Building on Hymes's model, Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, in their landmark article “Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing,” propose a three-component model of communicative competence encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Canale and Swain contend that “the primary objective of a communication-oriented second language programme must be able to provide the learners with the information, practice, and much of the experience needed to meet their communicative needs” (28). Their framework, which positions language as a tool for real-world interaction rather than a system of abstract rules, remains a foundational reference for English

language curriculum design globally and provides direct theoretical anchorage for the competency-based model developed in this study.

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, in their seminal volume *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centred Approach*, establish that ESP is not a distinct product but an approach — one in which the learner’s specific professional or academic goals drive every dimension of course design, from syllabus selection to materials and assessment. They argue that the same principles of effective learning apply equally to ESP and General English instruction, but that ESP courses must begin with a rigorous needs analysis distinguishing between target needs (what the learner must do with the language in professional contexts) and learning needs (what the learner requires in order to learn). Hutchinson and Waters conceptualise ESP not as the teaching of specialised language varieties but as an approach that makes language learning purposeful and aligned with learners’ professional and academic needs. This learning-centred philosophy has directly informed the discipline-sensitive curriculum model proposed in the present research.

The National Education Policy 2020 <sup>[7]</sup>, formulated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, marks a watershed in Indian higher education reform. The policy reflects an implicit shift towards an outcome-oriented and competency-based educational paradigm, emphasising measurable learning outcomes and holistic learner development. The policy further promotes experiential, inquiry-based, and discussion-driven pedagogy aligned with twenty-first-century workplace demands. These directives are immediately relevant to the redesign of English language programmes in universities across Andhra Pradesh, where the present study is situated.

In scholarly treatise, *English Language Education for Graduate Employability in Vietnam*, Ly Thi Tran, Tran Le Huu Nghia, and Mai Tuyet Ngo (2024) document a persistent mismatch between current university English instruction and the demands of the globalised economy. The authors argue that English education must be repositioned from a focus on purely linguistic or cultural knowledge to a socio-economic perspective, where English serves as critical employability capital. Drawing on Tomlinson’s (2017) *Graduate Capital Model*, the book establishes that English proficiency intersects with five key areas: human, social, cultural, psychological, and identity capital. Empirical evidence within the volume suggests that moving away from traditional grammar-based, examination-oriented methods toward innovative pedagogies — such as task-based, project-based, and digital approaches — better fosters students’ work-readiness and communicative confidence. These findings support a shift toward industry-aligned curricula that explicitly link language learning to career sustainability and the development of soft skills.

Bhandari, Dahal, Awasthi, and Dhungana (2025) <sup>[13]</sup>, in their review “Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching,” examine the integration of technology into TBLT pedagogy. Their review finds that technology-mediated TBLT improves students’ communicative language skills and also supports the development of technological literacy — competencies of heightened relevance in an increasingly digitised educational and professional context. The authors note that such integration offers policymakers and curriculum designers valuable

insights into transforming conventional English-language pedagogy, thereby contributing to more contemporary pedagogical practices and supporting the digital literacy strand of the present curriculum framework.

Taken together, this body of literature reveals a convergent and urgent scholarly consensus: the gap between English language education as currently delivered in Indian higher education and the communicative, professional, and digital competencies demanded by the contemporary workplace is real, persistent, and pedagogically addressable. The present study responds to this consensus by synthesising insights from communicative competence theory, ESP curriculum design, Outcome-Based Education, and task-based digital pedagogy into a coherent, feasible, and contextually grounded framework for English curricula in higher education institutions in Andhra Pradesh.

### **Outcome-Based Education (OBE)**

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is a pact between the institution and the individual. It transforms the classroom from a place where students merely “sit through” a syllabus into a laboratory for future success. As Spady (1994) <sup>[11]</sup> argues, this “backward design” ensures that the curriculum is built around the graduate’s demonstrable exit outcomes required for real-life performance, not just the professor’s last day of lecture. For a scholar in Andhra Pradesh, OBE replaces the anxiety of “What will be on the exam?” with the confidence of “I know how to do this.” It makes the education system a reliable partner in a student’s journey towards employability.

### **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) humanises language learning by treating the student’s time as a precious resource. It recognises that an engineering student’s need for technical precision is different from a tourism student’s need for interpersonal warmth. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) <sup>[5]</sup>, ESP views language not as a hurdle to clear, but as a tool to master. By focusing on “needs analysis,” educators in Andhra Pradesh honour the unique career goals of each student, ensuring they aren’t just learning English, but are learning the specific English that opens doors in their chosen field.

### **Communicative Competence: The Human Connection**

Being “fluent” in a workplace involves much more than avoiding grammatical errors; it is about the courage to connect and the wisdom to understand context. Communicative Competence suggests that true mastery lies in the ability to navigate social nuances and solve problems in real-time (Canale & Swain, 1980) <sup>[2]</sup>. For a graduate entering the diverse workforce of modern India, this theory translates into “human skills”—knowing how to read a room, explain a complex idea to a client, and maintain professional relationships. It is the “social glue” that turns a qualified candidate into a valued colleague.

### **Digital Literacy**

In a digital-first economy, literacy is no longer just about the pen; it is about the platform. Digital Literacy is the bridge that allows a student’s voice to reach a global audience. As Ng (2012) <sup>[8]</sup> highlights, this is a social and critical skill that involves using technology ethically and purposefully. For a student in Andhra Pradesh, digital literacy enables them to

take their local expertise and project it onto a global stage—transforming their communicative skills into a digital presence that thrives in virtual teams and professional networks worldwide.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a design-based qualitative research approach that integrates established theoretical frameworks with recent empirical studies to develop a contextually relevant curriculum model. Drawing on the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Communicative Competence, the research seeks to construct a structured framework that aligns language education with employability outcomes.

The study is developmental in its focus and puts forth an innovative curriculum model based on the existing pedagogic practices. It involves a systematic academic analysis of employability requirements, examining the competencies and skills demanded by contemporary academic and professional contexts. In addition, the study incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives from language education, pedagogy, digital literacy, and workforce development to ensure a comprehensive approach. Integrating these inputs, a competency-based curriculum is conceived, emphasising defined learning outcomes, measurable performance indicators, and progressive skill development in alignment with OBE principles. Overall, the methodology adopts a forward-looking, solution-oriented approach to enhance student employability through curriculum innovation. The proposed curriculum framework identifies seven core domains crucial to enhancing student employability, representing key areas of competence required for effective participation in academic, professional, and digital environments.

### **Workplace Communication Skills**

Workplace communication forms the foundation of professional success, extending beyond linguistic accuracy to include appropriateness, clarity, and context sensitivity. This domain underscores essential skills such as netiquette, professional email writing, report and documentation practices, and effective communication in meetings. It also foregrounds individual and intercultural communication, recognising the diversity of modern workplaces. These competencies align with the broader framework of communicative competence, which integrates grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities necessary for real-world interaction (Michael Canale & Merrill Swain, 1980)<sup>[2]</sup>. By focusing on authentic workplace scenarios, this component prepares learners to communicate with confidence and professionalism.

### **Discipline-Specific Communication (ESP)**

Recognising that communication needs vary across disciplines, this component adopts the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to tailor instruction to learners' academic and professional goals. Students in the arts engage in critical discourse and media writing, while those in business develop skills in professional communication and negotiation. Science students are trained in technical and scientific writing, ensuring precision and clarity in specialised contexts. This approach is grounded in the learner-centred philosophy of ESP, where language is viewed as a functional tool shaped by specific needs and

contexts (Tom Hutchinson & Alan Waters, 1987)<sup>[5]</sup>. Such targeted instruction enhances both relevance and employability.

### **Multimodal and Digital Communication**

In a digitally mediated world, communication extends across multiple platforms and modes. This component develops students' ability to engage in electronic writing, including blogs and professional profiles, and to practice effective internet communication. It also introduces ethical dimensions of AI-assisted writing and emphasises data presentation skills for professional contexts. Digital literacy here is understood as a combination of technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies required to navigate digital environments responsibly and effectively (Wai Ng, 2012)<sup>[8]</sup>. By integrating multimodal communication, the curriculum prepares students for participation in global and virtual workplaces.

### **Employability Skills**

This domain focuses on equipping students with practical skills required for career entry and progression. It includes training in cover letters and resumes, interview preparation, group discussions, and workplace ethics. These skills are closely aligned with employability frameworks that emphasise not only technical knowledge but also soft skills, adaptability, and professional behaviour (Ministry of Education, 2020)<sup>[7]</sup>. By embedding these competencies within the curriculum, students are better prepared to transition from academic environments to professional settings.

### **Task-Based Learning**

Task-Based Learning (TBL) serves as a pedagogical backbone for the curriculum, emphasising learning through meaningful tasks rather than isolated language practice. Activities such as role plays, case studies, project-based learning, and industry simulations create opportunities for authentic language use and problem-solving. This approach reflects the principles of task-based pedagogy, where language acquisition occurs through engagement in real-life communicative tasks (Ellis, 2003)<sup>[3]</sup>. It also promotes experiential learning, enabling students to apply knowledge in practical contexts.

### **Interdisciplinary Communication**

Modern professional environments require the ability to communicate across disciplinary boundaries. This component fosters cross-domain communication, collaborative projects, and knowledge translation skills, enabling students to convey complex ideas to diverse audiences. Interdisciplinary communication enhances cognitive flexibility and prepares learners for collaborative and innovation-driven workplaces. It aligns with contemporary educational approaches that emphasise integration and collaboration across fields (Repko & Szostak, 2020)<sup>[10]</sup>.

### **Authentic Assessment**

Assessment in this framework moves beyond traditional examinations to focus on authentic and continuous evaluation. Portfolio-based assessment, performance tasks, reflective journals, and continuous assessment strategies provide a holistic view of student learning and development.

Such methods are consistent with Outcome-Based Education principles, where assessment is aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes and real-world performance (William G. Spady, 1994) <sup>[11]</sup>. Authentic assessment not only measures competence but also supports reflective and lifelong learning.

### Discussion

The proposed model signifies a fundamental shift in the educational landscape of Andhra Pradesh, moving away from a traditional, content-loaded syllabus toward a dynamic, competency-based framework. By intentionally integrating English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and Digital Literacy, this approach ensures that English instruction is no longer an isolated academic exercise but a direct response to the multifaceted job needs of the contemporary world. This synergy treats the learner's time as a valuable investment, transforming the classroom into a space where language is a practical tool for professional survival and success. Furthermore, this model breathes life into the core postulates of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 <sup>[7]</sup>. By prioritizing the acquisition of tangible skills and fostering interdisciplinary learning, the framework aligns local academic goals with India's broader national vision. It acknowledges that a graduate's true value in the modern workforce is measured by their ability to adapt, communicate, and solve problems within a digitally-driven, globalised society.

### Implications

The transition to a competency-based curriculum carries profound responsibilities for every stakeholder involved in the higher education ecosystem. For curriculum designers, this necessitates a departure from rigid, one-size-fits-all textbooks in favour of modular, skill-based development. Such a shift allows the curriculum to remain a living, breathing document that can evolve alongside rapidly changing industry demands. Meanwhile, the role of the teacher is humanised and elevated from a mere transmitter of information to a facilitator of growth. By adopting task-based and learner-centred pedagogies, educators can create inclusive environments where students feel empowered to use English as a medium for self-expression and professional identity.

On a broader scale, institutions must recognise that success in this new era requires more than just updated syllabi; it demands a cultural and physical transformation through modernised infrastructure and robust industry collaboration. When the campus becomes a bridge to the professional world, students gain the confidence to apply their skills in real-time scenarios. Finally, for policymakers, there is a vital opportunity to standardise these employability-based models across the state. By ensuring that a student in a rural college has the same access to high-quality, competency-driven English training as one in a metropolitan hub, policy makers can truly democratize the path to professional

success and ensure that no learner is left behind in the journey toward global employability.

### Conclusion

The competency-based English curriculum proposed in this study is more than an academic realignment; it is a constructive intervention designed to transform the employment trajectory of students in Indian higher education. By moving beyond the passive consumption of textbooks and embracing a model grounded in Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), it offers learners a clear roadmap that leads directly from the classroom to a sustainable career. This framework recognizes that for a student in Andhra Pradesh, mastering English is not merely about passing an examination—it is about gaining a life-line to professional opportunity. It serves as the bridge that spans the persistent gap between theoretical learning and the high-stakes expectations of the modern workplace.

The success of this model lies in its ability to humanize the educational journey, treating students as active professionals-in-training rather than mere recipients of information. Through the integration of discipline-specific communication, digital literacy, and authentic assessment practices, it enables graduates with the “digital voice” and communicative confidence needed to thrive in a globalised economy. As this curriculum framework aligns with the transformative vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020<sup>[7]</sup>, it promises to cultivate a generation of graduates who are not only employable but are also empowered to contribute to the professional and social fabric of a rapidly evolving world.

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