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The Need for ESP Curriculum in Polytechnic Colleges

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Abstract

Today's professional world seeks a combination of technical, conceptual, cognitive, managerial and human skills in the job seeking engineers. Aspirants to engineering positions may have the expertise and competence in the areas of their specialisation, but it is generally observed that they seem to show a marked deficiency in interpersonal communication skills in English. This places the challenge before language educators: how to develop and implement a new set of English language skills in place of the current practices, focussing on the needs of their workplace situations. The success of the modern diploma engineering professional depends to a great extent, on his ease and fluency with the register specific to his profession. This need-based English study leads us to an English language teaching environment which involves equipping the students with the "ability to use the language to receive and convey information associated with specialist studies" (Allen and Widdowson, 8). This study details the basic tenets of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and explores the need to implement it in the English curriculum of the diploma courses in Polytechnic education.

Keywords: ELT, ESP, EGP, Language Learning and Proficiency, Fluency, Curriculum

Technical Education has created the need and essentiality of diploma holders worldwide. It has become very urgent and important aspect of education worldwide. Polytechnic institutes were established to mould quality technicians who would cater to the growing demands of the industrial world and developing interest for creative and constructive work. In Kerala, there are more than a hundred polytechnic colleges, in both government and self-financing sectors, offering diplomas in engineering in twenty-one different branches.

In the case of a polytechnic diploma holder, proficiency in the technical field alone does not enable one to be better employed. The success of the modern diploma engineering professional depends to a great extent, on his ease and fluency with the register specific to his profession. Language proficiency has become the most sought-after skill in placement drives. Devi remarks: "English language is considered as a stepping stone along the pathway to securing employment" (18).

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It is a matter of great concern that diploma engineers lack the language skills required of them. Developing an English syllabus which addresses the workplace linguistic needs of the polytechnic diploma students will equip them to fare well in their professional environment. This points to the development of an ESP curriculum which is more skill-oriented, need-based, learner-centered and workplace-dependent?). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has appeared as promising language learning approach for enhancing the linguistic competency needed for the students' academic accomplishments and future professional developments.

What is ESP?

Various linguists and practitioners of ESP have tried to define ESP though "producing a simple definition of ESP is not an easy task" (Strevens 109). The definitions given below would help one understand the different dimensions and perspectives of ESP:

(a) ESP as Workplace Language

Mackay and Mountford's statement about ESP brings out the utilitarian view of the same: "It (here, ESP) is generally used to refer to the teaching/learning of a foreign language for a clearly utilitarian purpose of which there is no doubt" (3). In the same spirit, Pauline C. Robinson states that students generally study English "not because they are interested in the English language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes" (2).

Mackay and Mountford have given the description of ESP as a rational reply to a emergent states of situations. They have recommended three basic of purposes for which ESP is imparted. "(i) Occupational requirements e. g. for international telephone operators, civil airline pilots, etc. (ii) Vocational training programs e.g., for hotel and catering staff, technical trades, etc. (ii) Academic or professional study: e.g., engineering, medicine, law, commerce etc" (Mackay et all, 5).

Laurence Anthony comes up with a valuable definition of ESP by stating that:

... some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. (9-10)

Helen Basturkmen says, "In ESP, language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general knowledge, but to acquire linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments". (18). With this definition, Basturkmen points to the role of ESP. It is to help language learners develop the necessary language skills needed to use them in a specific field of occupation, workplace and the like.

(b) ESP a Leaner Oriented

ESP as a branch of knowledge has a learner-centered orientation of teaching English. It provides brings different kinds of opportunities for students to learn English based on their needs. The definitions given below reflect on the learner-centered characteristic.

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Hutchinson and Waters theorize, “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” (19). Anthony notes, “it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin; numerous non-specialist ESL instructors use an ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication” (10). Munby defines ESP as a course where “the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner” (2).

Brumfit and Johnson agree with Munby when they say that ESP is “a course directly concerned with the purposes for which learners need English, purposes which are usually expressed in functional terms.” They further say that ESP is congruent with the aims of communicative language teaching of recent times.

(c) What ESP is and What it is not

Hutchinson and Waters has provided a very fantastic and classic notions of ESP by presenting the idea what ESP is not meant for.

(1) ‘ESP is not a Matter of Teaching’ Specialised Varieties of English’

Many people have a tendency to see ESP as a branch of ELT which deals only with special variations of English. Though ESP teaches English which is ‘specific’ and has some features which can be recognized as ‘special’ in specific fields, it is mistaken to ponder ESP as a separate domain to teach a specialized variety of English. As Lorenzo reminds us, “ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures” (1).

(2) ‘ESP is not Just a Matter of Science and Grammar for Scientists, Hotel Words and Grammar for Hotel Staff and so on’

Hutchinson and Waters make this clear with a classical example. When one tries to look at a tree, one finds so many others things rather than only leaves and branches. There is much more that remains hidden without the notice of the lookers. There is inside and outside of the tree which one can look at during the observation of the trees. The leaves, fruits, flowers and even branches do not just hang in the air. They have support of an intricate underlying structure. A peripheral examination of ESP would encourage us to reflect that ESP is English used in a restricted sense; a branch of ELT which teaches some words, structures and functions of special occupations. But ESP does not deal with restricted or specialized language alone, but enables the learner to see language as a whole, to train people to use the language.

(3) ESP is not Different in Kind from any other Form of Language Teaching’

ESP does not have a separate methodology. Though the content and structure of ESP may be diverse but the method of instruction and the teaching methodologies and acquiring approaches have similarity to any kind of English learning that can be defined under the umbrella term Communicative Language Teaching. ESP chiefly has great focus on the skills, structures, functions and vocabulary of language. It is fervently needed by a group of chosen

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learners in their professional and vocational environment. By the way it must be finely cleared with great stress that ESP is not any kind of special language or methodology rather is “an approach to language learning, which is based on learner needs” (Hutchinson and Waters 19).

(d) ESP in Terms of Absolute and Variable Characteristics

The dividing aspects of ESP into out-and-out as well mutable appearances, in a very particular, is very accommodating in deciding influences about what ESP is and what it is not. Given below are the definitions of ESP in terms of absolute and variable characteristics of ESP by Peter Strevens and Tony Dudley- Evans.

Peter Strevens’ defining description provides a difference between four absolute and two variable characteristics.

Absolute Characteristics:

ESP contains English language training which has the following things. It is planned to meet stated requirements of the student;

- i. It is associated to the content (i.e. in its themes and topics) t specific disciplines, occupational needs and activities
- ii. It is trotted on the language suitable to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and investigation of this treatise;
- iii. It is applied in divergence with General English Grammar

Variable Characteristics:

ESP may be, but is not essentially

- i. It is circumscribed as to the language aids to be cultivated through training (e.g. reading only);
- ii. It is not imparted according to any pre-ordained methodology (1,2)

Tony Dudley-Evans presented a conception and modified definition at a Japan Conference on ESP in 1997. The suggested following modifications. Their revised definition has various aspects which were earlier not counted. Both suggested their revised definition in by giving the following characteristics:

Absolute Characteristics of ESP:

- i. It is demarcated to meet explicit and definite requirements of the learner;
- ii. It makes use of the fundamental methodology and activities of the discipline and areas it helps;
- iii. It has attentiveness on the elementary language comprising of grammatical rules lexis, and register. It tries to provide skills discourses and which are suitable and befitting genre to these activities;

Variable Characteristics ESP:

- i. It may be planned for any definite disciplines;
- ii. It may be used for teaching in specific situations by using diverse methods and methodology from that of General English;

- iii. It is intended for adult learners. It can be used at a tertiary-level institutions or in a professional work condition. It is used for learners at secondary school level;
- iv. It is commonly intended for Intermediate or advanced students;
- v. Its courses are remarkable in the way and matter that they undertake some basic knowledge of language system but it can be used to impart knowledge to learners. (Tony Dudley-Evans:4-5).

ESP Vs EGP

One would quite naturally ask whether it is not possible to develop the linguistic skills of the diploma student with the help of an English for General Purpose textbook. Hutchinson and Waters have minutely indicated the variances between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) in their seminal book, *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning Centred Approach*. They have successfully stated that there are no variances between the two in theory, but a whole lot of difference in practice. To quote “in theory nothing, in practice a great deal” (Hutchinson and Waters 53).

The foremost variance between ESP and EGP is that of processing and purposes. There is matter of involvement that makes distinction between the two. ESP involves teaching and learning the language so as to communicate the required professional skills to perform specific job-related functions. It is naturally seen as an “approach to language learning” which is “primarily based on the workplace language requirements of the learner.... ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures... The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students’ real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners” (Hutchinson and Waters 53). ESP concentrates more on language in context. Language used in a particular discipline is seen to be different from that of the other. The lexicon, syntax and content of articles relating to Engineering field will have marked differences with those in the medical field. ESP’s main concern is to identify the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical elements of specific disciplines and equip the learners to use those specific language items with ease. On the other hand, EGP focuses on general purpose English. The English that is offered in schools and colleges, to a large extent, is meant for developing skills in general English like taking part in social or personal events or using English in casual conversations and functions. In short, EGP courses are more general in nature, aiming at developing proficiency in carrying out day-to-day functions.

Wright says: General English is concerned with “universal topics like socializing, shopping, travelling, telephoning friends...when we reach the stage at which any topic constitutes an individual’s profession, it becomes crucial that he has mastery of the specialized language pertaining to it” (1).

ESP has been characterized as language teaching predominantly trying to get the specific language needs of the people who learning it. Hence, analysis of the learners’ needs is seen as the starting point upon which an ESP courses begin. ESP teachers are aware not only

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of the learners' needs but the different ways to identify and address these needs than the EGP teachers. Hutchinson and Waters do not distinguish ESP from EGP in terms of the existence of needs but rather in the awareness of needs in ESP. There is a distinction between ESP and General English Grammar. The need of ESP is the need and existence of awareness. They pay more attention to needs and consider them as a primary factor for developing any ESP materials, "...although it might appear on the surface that the ESP course is characterized by its content (Science, Medicine, Commerce, Tourism etc.), this is, in fact, only a secondary consequence of the primary matter of being able to readily specify why the learners need English" (Hutchinson and Waters: 53).

Conclusion.

Implementing ESP syllabus in polytechnics is the need of the hour. In the modern world, job seeking engineers, need to have a combination of technical, conceptual, cognitive, managerial and human skills. These skills cannot be achieved by introducing English for general purposes syllabus, but by initiating them to an English for Specific Purposes syllabus which focusses on achieving the workplace learners' needs.

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