

English for Specific Purposes: Learning Trends and Language opportunities

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Abstract

English language is considered as lingua franca of our world. Its role is paramount throughout the world. The breakthrough of technology and use of English language made everybody to communicate throughout the world. The concept of communication has changed the scenario making English a part or a medium of communication skills.

This paper throws a light on the English Language Teaching, the methods and approaches followed to teach the learners of professional education to master and acquire English language for their professional and functional purposes.

The study is on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) an approach of ELT and its trends particularly in reference to Target Situation Analysis and Pedagogical Needs Analysis. It also discusses about the various English language learning activities that helps the learner to acquire vocabulary, grammatical structures and LSRW skills in regard to develop communication skills.

Key Words: ESP, Communication Skills, Target Situation Analysis, Needs Analysis, Language opportunities.

Introduction

English Language is considered as Lingua franca and widely used as first, second and official language around the world. It has become a prime base or medium for acquiring and expressing knowledge. Now a days it is playing a major role in the field of technology as it has conquered the whole world. The invasions by the foreigners brought English language into India. Its role is paramount before Independence and after independence. It has influenced and influencing the usage of English language as a second language in schools and first language in colleges (professional). Decades back English was taught merely as a subject. The concept of communication skills has changed the scenario making English a part or medium of communication skills. In this regard there is a need to focus on the best method to teach the learners to develop linguistic competence and communication skills. Until recently, language pedagogy centered around the question of what is the best method or approach to be followed by the syllabus-designer and/or the language teacher (Allright, 1983). The shift of focus in ELT research and the effort to arrive at the best method or approach to the study of learning processes, learner variables, and the learning environment has resulted in greater effort being devoted to understanding the characteristics of the language learning environment and creating this in the classroom (Kennedy, 1973:78; Appel, 1984:23). It is realised that language learning depends not only on what the teacher taught does or makes the learner do, but on the language learning opportunities that are made available. There are different methodologies that are followed in India.

Methods of Teaching English followed in India

India always encourages the learners and the teachers to follow the different methods to teaching English that change from time to time according to the purpose. It is ever ready to accept and adopt all the significant methods of ELT in the recent decades. From the last century different types of methods were practiced to teach English. Few are mentioned below.

The first and foremost method that is followed is Grammar Translation Method. It was used by the teacher to teach young children, where teacher explained every word to students in the native language to make the learners understand and learn English. But in this method English language is not much focused. In order to focus the learners towards English language the teachers practiced Bilingual method which helped them to use both L1 and L2. For example if a student is in the process of composing his or her English sentences. The teacher can help the learner through the use of mother tongue. In this method students couldn't acquire fluency and naturalness in language. It benefited only up to some extent. The other method that is followed

by teachers is Direct Method. In this method teachers use only English to teach English language. Here, teacher is not supposed or authorized to use any single word from L1. Many students will face great difficulty in understanding certain words and their meanings as the teachers could not assist the learners with the mother tongue. Later Christopher Candlin and Widdowson started focusing on structure to help the students to learn language. In addition they also mentioned that the student needs to develop communicative competence and functional competence through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The principle of CLT is that the English language is best learnt through the process of struggling to communicate. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986) the basic premises of CLT are as follows:

1. "Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse".

(Richards and Rodgers 1986)

Another approach that is followed parallel to CLT is ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Robinson says that 'English for specific purposes implies language for specific purposes, especially utilitarian purposes'. (Robinson, 1980). The purpose of ESP is to facilitate the learner with the certain linguistic skills that are required for a particular branch of study or pursue a particular vocation. ESP refers to the teaching and learning of English for an instrumental purpose, work or study related. (Michael Byram, 2004). The aim and purpose of ESP determines the language required, the particular skills needed and the range of functions to be performed in the language for a specific area or related to the fields like, aviation, engineering, law, medicine, tourism etc. ESP is not for primers it is framed upon the core competence of the English language that is been acquired. The desired goal of CLT and ESP in teaching English is to achieve 'communicative competence' in the learners.

Functions of ESP

ESP often functions for a particular purposes. The language used in ESP is a little different approach to English for General Purposes (EGP) that is learnt from childhood in schools and colleges. The difference between EGP and ESP courses is that EGP focuses the learner mainly on usage of general English to express ideas for general purposes and daily needs whereas ESP focuses the learner to acquire language in regard to particular purpose for a particular content or

as required according to the professions like Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers etc. The purpose of ESP is to facilitate the learner with the certain linguistic skills that are required for a particular branch of study or pursue a particular vocation. ESP not for primers it is framed upon the core competence of the English language that is been acquired.

Mackay and Mountford (1975) describes ESP as ‘a pragmatic response to a developing situation’. They suggested three kinds of purposes for which ESP is taught:

i) Occupational requirements

E.g.: for international telephone operators, civil airline pilots, etc.

ii) Vocational training programs

e.g.: for hostel and catering staff, technical trades, etc.

iii) Academic or Professional study

e.g.: engineering, medicine, law, commerce, etc.

Munby (1978) defines ESP as a course where “the syllabus and materials are determined in all the essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner”.

Further Brumfit describes the importance of ESP as, “ a demand for shift away from literary training, a language suited to specific purposes which encompassed ‘communication needs and language skills which are learner centered and so on’.”(Brumfit 1984).

The aim of ESP not only to equip the learners with grammatical and linguistic competence but train the learners capable of using English language to communicate with their peers and sphere of activity and the people as per the context with required language interacting or responding spontaneously. Widdowson (1983) says ESP focuses on language ‘use’ rather than ‘usage’. It can be said that ESP is closely related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The classification of ESP

ESP is considered equal or synonymous to CLT as it serves many purposes. According to the purpose ESP is classified into two main areas:

EAP- English for Academic Purpose

EOP- English for Occupational Purpose

- EAP includes English for science and technology (EST) whereas English for medical purpose (EMP) and English for Legal purpose (ELP) is paid attention.
- EOP includes English for Professional Purposes (EPP) in business, law and medicine.
EVP English for Vocational Purpose focuses on work or pre-work situations.

English for Academic Purpose (EAP) is further divided into two fields English for General Academic Purpose (EGAP) and English for specific Academic Purpose (ESAP).

Wardhaugh (1974) focused the need to develop the communicative competence of the learners. Later supported by Widdowson (1979) for the developing of underlying competence of EST students which is particularly applicable in the contexts where most of the students lack communication ability when they take admission into engineering courses. The requirement of communicative competence in EST paved a way in to origin of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Communicative Language Learning (CLL).

There are various Learning trends to understand the above mentioned classifications of ESP. The trends are register analysis, rhetorical and discourse analysis, Genre analysis, Target situation analysis, Present situation analysis, Pedagogic needs analysis, and Learning needs analysis, Means analysis. In the mentioned trends of ESP, Target Situation Analysis and Pedagogical Needs Analysis laid a strong foundation for ESP through teaching and learning.

1. Target Situation Analysis

It is one of the trends of language learning in ESP. Hutchison and Waters says that Target situation analysis was not new to ESP even during early 1970s (Hutchison and Waters, 1987). The term Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was, in fact, first used by Chambers in his 1980 article in which he tried to clarify the confusion of terminology. For Chambers TSA is “communication in the target situation”. TSA took over the limitations of register and linguistic analysis which considers needs as ‘discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary’ (Dudley –Evans and St. John, 1998). Munby’s Communicative Syllabus Design (1978) gave importance to the learners than other factors in the process of teaching and learning. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) say, what the learner needs to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Most subsequent target needs analysis research was based on Munby’s model for the reason that it offers comprehensive data banks and target performance (Robinson, 1991).

Munby’s overall model is made up of the following elements:

1. Participants: information about the identity and language of the learners: age, sex, nationality, present command of target language, other languages known and extent of command;
2. Communication Needs Processor: investigates the particular communication according to sociocultural and stylistic variables which interact to determine a profile of such needs;
3. Profile of Needs: is established through the processing of data in the CNP;

4. In the Meaning Processor “parts of the socio culturally determined profile of communication needs are converted into semantic subcategories of a predominantly pragmatic kind, and marked with attitudinal tone” (Munby, 1978: 42);
5. The Language Skills Selector: identifies “the specific language skills that are required to realize the events or activities that have been identified in the CNP” (Munby, 1978: 40);
6. The Linguistic Encoder: considers “the dimension of contextual appropriateness” (Munby, 1978: 49), once the encoding stage has been reached
7. The Communicative Competence Specification: indicates the target communicative competence of the participant and is the translated profile of needs.

2. Pedagogic Needs Analysis

The term pedagogic needs analysis includes deficiency analysis, learning needs analysis and means analysis as proposed by West (West,1998). PNA obtains more information of target group and learning environment which facilitates learning. PNA focuses on needs of the learner to be reached through an ESP course expecting to provide information about the gap between present and targeted extra-linguistic knowledge, mastery of general English and language skills.(Jordan, 1997).

i) Deficiency Analysis

Deficiency Analysis can be matched with the *lacks* as defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The approaches to needs analysis that have been developed to consider learners’ present needs or wants may be called analysis of learners’ *deficiencies* or *lacks* According to Allwright (1982, quoted in West, 1994). As said the deficiency analysis is a way to reach from a present situation to target situation considering the learners needs. It should provide data about both the gap between present and target extra linguistic knowledge, mastery of general English, language skills, and learning strategies. Therefore, deficiency analysis can form the basis of the language syllabus (Jordan, 1997)

ii) Analysis of Learning Needs

Learning needs analysis concentrates on the learners’ interests and the preferences on learning strategies. It is concerned how learners wish to learn language that is the learner preferred learning strategies (West 1998). In the beginning of the LNA Method it was not given much importance. Later it gained importance when ‘needs’ were separated from ‘wants’ by Allwright (1982) as mentioned by West (1994). Hutchinson and Waters took initiative to talk about ‘learning- centered approach’ which highlighted analysis of learners’ learning needs. As

Bower(1980) says "... a student will learn best if he wants to learn, less well what he only needs to learn..."(Jordan 1997:26).

The framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) for analysis of learning needs is as follows:

1. Why are the learners taking the course?
 - Compulsory or optional;
 - Apparent need or not;
 - Are status, money, promotion involved?
 - What do learners think they will achieve?
 - What is their attitude towards the ESP course? Do they want to improve their English or do they resent the time they have to spend on it?

2. How do the learners learn?
 - What is their learning background?
 - What is their concept of teaching and learning?
 - What methodology will appeal to them?
 - What sort of techniques bore/alienate them?

3. What sources are available?
 - Number and professional competence of teachers;
 - Attitude of teachers to ESP;
 - Teachers' knowledge of and attitude to subject content;
 - Materials;
 - Aids;
 - Opportunities for out-of-class activities.

4. Who are the learners?
 - Age/Sex/Nationality;
 - What do they know already about English?
 - What subject knowledge do they have?
 - What are their interests?
 - What is their socio-cultural background?
 - What teaching styles are they used to?

- What is their attitude to English or to the cultures of the English speaking world?

3) Means Analysis

Dudley-Evans and St. John suggests that Means analysis is nothing but “information about the environment in which the course will be run”. The main issue that is concerned with the means analysis is “what works well in one situation may not work in another” (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998:124-125). The idea is supported by Jordan considering the learning environment as an effective factor and says that it should provide us with a tool for designing an environmentally effective course (Jordan 1997). John Swales discusses five effective factors that can be considered for the successful ESP programme by the curriculum specialists the following are the factors:

- Classroom culture
- Status of service operation
- EAP staff
- Pilot target- situation
- Study of change agents

As per the understanding of the above approaches and methods of English language teaching in regard with general and specific English it can be made clear that the proficiency of English language in the learners can be achieved through well designed curriculum, syllabus, well trained teachers, Learning environment and learning opportunities.

Learning Opportunities

As mentioned above learning opportunities is one of the processes where students will be assigned the tasks or the language activities which help the learners or students to develop or improve their language skills. The activities like Crossword puzzle, Just a minute, Role play, Mind mapping, language games i.e. icebreakers, Group discussions, debates, presentations, report writing etc will help the learners to use the English language with appropriate vocabulary, correct sentence patterns and improve Listening, speaking Reading and Writing skills. One activity is presented as an example which is practiced in the classroom.

Activity

Name of the Game: Content words – story

Objective: to develop LSRW skills

Purpose: to illustrate the forms of content words (Nouns, adjectives, verb, adverb)

Linguistic use: to give learners meaningful practice in differentiating the forms of content words and their usage while using the words

Main language points: how to differentiate the content words

Procedure:

- Eight groups, each group consisting of eight students
- Group will be assigned a meaningful word
- Each group has to form at least twenty content words using the letters from the word that is assigned to them.
- The group has to frame a meaningful moral story with the content words.
- The content words can be modified into noun, adjective, verb and adverb basing on the use and framing the sentences using different verb patterns like past, present and future sentences.
- Members of the group speaks about the title, theme, story and the content words that are used.

This helps the learner to acquire vocabulary, sentence constructions and master LSRW skills..

However, though there are many methods and approaches . ESP is paramount approach to teach specific as general English. Basing on the needs analysis of ESP it is important to teach the learners while understanding their lacks, needs and wants, the learners' strengths and weaknesses in regard to language learning. The learners should be analyzed accordingly as per the indicatives of needs analysis so as to make the learner acquire language comfortably by using the ESP method. The teacher and the language opportunities play an important role in infusing knowledge in learners to develop language skills.

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