

**ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSE (ESP): AN EVOLVING BRANCH OF ELT****Nishant B. Pandya***Research Scholar, Department of English, K.S.K.V. Kachchh University, Bhuj.***Abstract**

*English for a specific purpose is one of the predominant approaches in language teaching, as it caters to the actual needs of the learner. The present research paper focuses on the role of ESP in the effective implementation of the English syllabus and how it helps the learner to perform effectively in particular situations. What role does it play in accelerating the learning of students and how it can be one of the effective methods of language teaching-learning pedagogy? This and the like concerns are touched upon by the researcher in this paper. The focus of teaching pedagogy has shifted from teacher-centered classes to learners-centered classes. Hence, the role of a teacher has changed from instructor to facilitator who observes and conducts the paths of learning. The present research paper also aims to study the importance of English for Specific Purpose (ESP\_ keeping in view the changing scenario of teaching-learning pedagogy. Although there have been contradictions as to what ESP is, Hutchinson and Waters improved absolute and variable characteristics helped significantly in resolving arguments about what is ESP. Thus, ESP refers to the teaching and learning of English where the learners aim to use English in a particular academic, professional or occupational domain, focusing on learners' special needs.*

**Key Words:** *ESP, Language teaching, ELT, Learner-centered approach, English Language, Need Based.*

**Introduction:**

It is a universal grievance in India that undergraduate students of various faculties are not able to communicate in English very effectively. It is needless to say that accurate developed communication skills are indispensable for the job market today. In India, with

the spread of globalization and constant enhancement of international contacts in various fields, a great deal of attention is being paid to the design of ESP courses that can prepare the learners for 'accurate developed communication skills.' In this respect, Professor Dr. A. K. Singh, Vice Chancellor, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, rightly says, "The Changing context of University Education in the 21st century makes it necessary to restructure the curriculum and re-orient the teachers who are responsible for curriculum transaction. In view of Globalization and the needs of 'knowledge society', the teaching of English has to shift the focus from teaching of literature to teaching of Language and Communication Skills."

However, in 21st century, winds of change are blowing up, the spread new direction of ELT in India demands development and designing of new course that can attract the learners' interests and satisfy their needs. English is the Foreign or Second language for students in India. Hence, they reportedly find it quite difficult to cop up with the complexity of commerce English encoded in their textbooks. Secondly, Even after the successful completion of their course of study, students turned employees find quite hard to cope with the tasks of applied nature in their respective fields, which require proficiency in four basic skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, in addition to acquiring proficiency in supplementary skills like giving presentations, conducting seminars, workshops, preparing reports, drafting letters, preparing minutes, taking part in group discussion etc. The situation as such makes strong case for English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

### **Background of the Study:**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a separate branch of ELT emerged mainly in the second half of twentieth century in the western world. English was initially used for specific purposes - i.e. for trade and administration. Prevailing literature in English language teaching avows that the term English for Specific Purpose (ESP) has a wide range of interpretations, definitions as it covers various roles and characteristics of professions and work environments.

Originally, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) came into sheer prominence in the 1970s. It came about largely in result to number of people coming to study, work and live in the UK and other metropolitan countries. In both cases, there was a call for courses that can meet the immediate needs/requirement of students to enable them to pursue their subject studies in English. Mackay and Mountford (1978) define ESP as the teaching of English for a "clearly utilitarian purpose" (p.2). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was established as a separate branch in ELT mainly due to research studies such as those on register analysis (Barber 1962

reprinted in Swales 1988 ), discourse analysis, needs analysis (Munby 1978), and market needs . As a result, two separate trends became apparent in ESP: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational/ Vocational / Professional Purposes (EOP/ EVP/EPP). The purpose they refer to is defined by the needs of the learners, which can be academic, occupational, or scientific. Mackay and Mountford also defined ESP as the *special language* that takes place in specific settings by *participants*. They stated that those *participants* are mostly and usually adults. They focused on adults because adults are *highly conscious* about English Proficiency in a specific field, and they can make specific use of the specific language in a specific setting they work.

With the growth of English as lingua franca of work and study, many Non-English speakers find themselves needing to attain some level of proficiency in English in order to function in job or course. However, they may have limited time to devote to language learning, and little interest in knowing English outside the work or study context. Responding to these circumstances, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Curriculum designers have attempted to reduce the time frame of learning through domain targeting. They attempted to identify and teach the lexis, syntax, function and discourse pattern most commonly used in a domain (for chemistry students, test tubes, passive voice, clarification requests and laboratory reports). This approach has given waiters, tour guides and airplane pilots enough English to function in their domains after relatively short periods in the classroom, professional or academic domain. (Cobb, T., & Horst, M.)

The above stated definition revolves around the notion of considering need of the learners in context of their academic and job requirements. Hence, meeting their required goals is the key goal of ESP course material. In the area of ELT, often quoted definitions of ESP are those that are put forward by stalwarts like Hutchinson and Waters (1978).

### **Literature Review:**

Hutchinson and Waters (1978) emphasize the primacy of need in ESP. They, Hutchinson and Waters, are of the opinion that ESP is an approach than a product. They are of the view that the foundation of ESP is the basic question: why does learners need to learn a foreign language? To answer this question, information regarding learner, learner's need and the learning context is gathered. This is done through the process of need analysis. On the ground of gathered information, the teaching material is designed.

Stevens (1988) extends the definition by mentioning four absolute and two variable characteristics. A definition of ESP needs to distinguish between four absolute and two variable characteristics:

**1) Absolute Characteristics:**

ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

- Designed to meet specific needs of the learner
- Related in content (i.e., in its themes and topics) to particular Disciplines, occupations 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 be the language skills to be learned(e.g., reading only)
- Not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology

Beside these, the following claims has been made by Robinson (1991):

- Being focused on the learner’s need, wastes no time
- Is relevant to the learner
- Is successful in imparting learning
- Is more cost-effective than “General English”

Hence, Robinson, like his precursors Hutchinson and Waters, establishes the primacy of importance of need analysis in English for Specific Purpose. She claims that ESP is ‘*normally goal directed*’ and ESP courses develop from a *need analysis* which ‘aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English’ (Robinson 1991:3). Further, she puts forward that ESP has certain characteristics e.g. ESP courses have a *limited time* period, students are *adult in homogenous classes* in terms of the work and specialist studies. The definitions of Stevens and Robinson can be evaluated in the following manner:

Each definition has validity but also weakness, either in the Definition or in the features described, Stevens’ definition is the most comprehensive..., but can lead to certain confusion. By referring to content in the second absolute characteristic it may

conform the false impression held by many teachers that ESP is always and necessarily related directly to subject content. Robinson's mention of 'homogeneous classes' as characteristic of ESP may lead to the same conclusion. (Dudly-Evans & St. John, 3-4)

Another definition of ESP which has both, absolute and variable, characteristics given by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) is as per the following:

**1. Absolute Characteristics**

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
- ESP is certain on the language ( grammar, lexis, register), appropriate to these activities.

**2. Variable Characteristics**

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology And activities of the discipline it serves;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional workSituation. It could, however, be used 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, but it can be used with beginners.

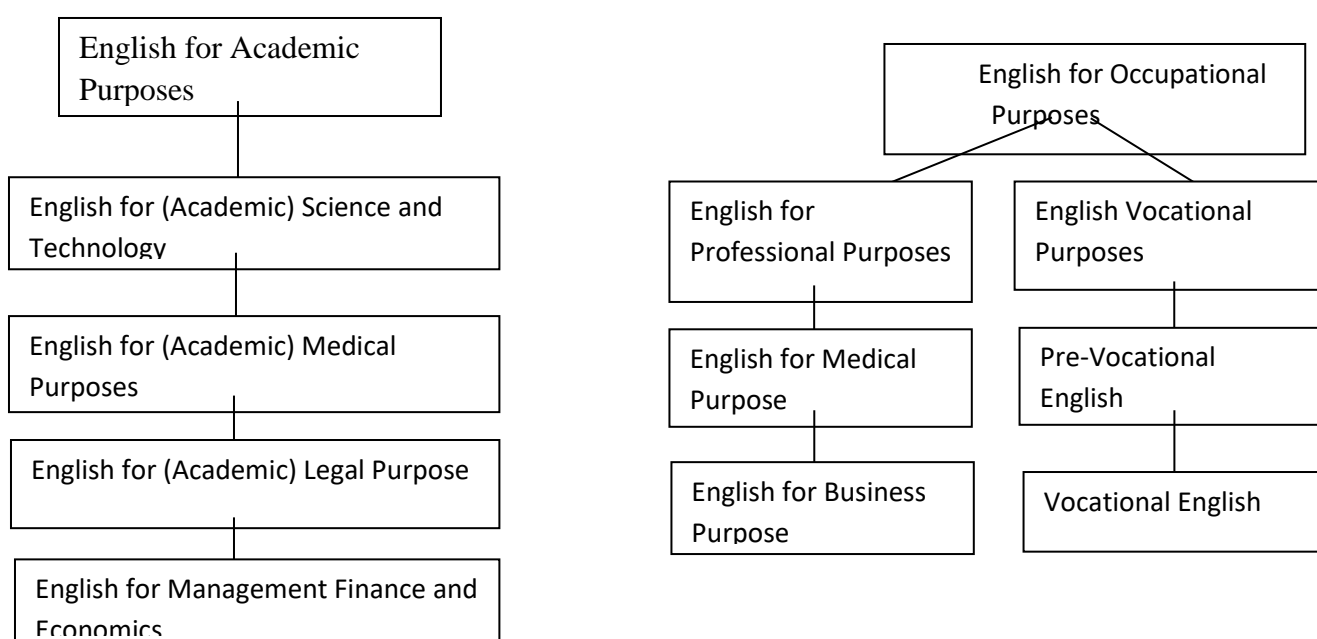
St. John and Dudley-Evans's definition is clearly influenced by that of Strevens(1988). However, St. John and Dudley-Evans' definition is an improved version of that of Strevens'. This has been done by removing the absolute characteristic that ESP is "in contrast with General English", and including more variable characteristics.

In a nut shell, It can be concluded that ESP takes into consideration specific needs of the learner, identifies specific linguistic and discourse features and provides remedial courses so that the learners can perform adequately in specific academic and occupational settings. Hence, need analysis and language description are important components for ESP.

### **Classification of ESP:**

Traditionally, ESP has been divided into two main areas; English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Robinson(1991: 3-4) divides EOP into three categories: pre-experience, Simultaneous/In-service and Post-experience. Similarly, she divides EAP into two categories: *For study in a specific discipline* and *As a school subject*. Each of these categories is divided. For study in a specific discipline, another division is in the form of *Pre-study*, *In-study* and *Post-study*. Moreover, *As a school subject* category, it is further divided into two sections; *Independent* and *Integrated*.

#### **English for Specific Purpose**



**Figure 1: Dudley- Evans and St. John’s (1998:6) classification of ESP.**

Even though ESP has become an important and innovative activity in the field of English language teaching in the 1960’s, the emergence of ESP can be traced back as far as the Roman and Greek empires (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998:1). Certainly, a great deal about the origin of ESP could be written. According to Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, the following three substantial reasons are responsible for the emergence and growth of ESP; “demands of the Brave New World”, “revolution in linguistics”, and “focus on the learner”.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) write that two main historical periods helped ESP to put its corner stone in the world. First the end of 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 of the United States in the post war world, this role (of international language) fell to English” (p.6)...as English became the accepted international language Of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language, business-businessmen and-women who wanted to sell their products, mechanics who had to read instruction manuals, doctors who needed to keep up with developments in their field and a whole ranges of students whose course of study included textbooks and journals only available in English. (Hutchinson and Waters: 6)

Second, the oil crises of the early 1970s, which resulted in massive flow of funds and knowledge to oil rich-countries, accelerated the need to learn English language and this directed to serve for various purposes. Therefore, “Time and money constraints created a need for cost effective courses with clearly defined goals”. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:7).

The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to give the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now become subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:7).

Revolution in Linguistic. It was the second key reason for having a great cause for the emergence of ESP in the 1960's. At this time, language study was resulted in a view of language as communication rather than grammatical structure as to address communicative needs of the learners (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:7). Material writers and syllabus designers use this view as to the teaching of the ESP. As indicated in Hutchinson and Waters (1984), ESP and communicative approach are closely interconnected. As Widowson (1978) cited in Hutchinson and Waters (1987:7) “Studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering the way in which language is actually used in real communication”. The idea was simple: if language varies from one situation of use to another it should be possible to determine the features of specific situation and then make these features the basis of the learners' course.

In a nutshell, Learners' needs based on the analysis of the linguistic characteristics of their specific areas of learning and occupational language got prime focus. The slogan ‘Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need’ become the primary principle of ESP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Focus on the Learner: The other substantial reason that causes the emergence of ESP is



development in educational psychology also filled breath to the rise of ESP, by giving central importance to the learners; i.e. taking the various needs, interests and attitudes of the learner in the teaching learning process and these will have a paramount significance in motivating the learners (Rodgers, 1969 cited in Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:8). As a result, the concept of need analysis emerged and became strongly associated with ESP

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