

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: LEARNING THROUGH CENTRED APPROACH

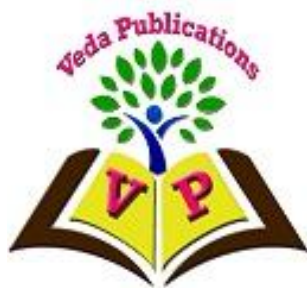
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ABSTRACT

In the present global arena, English language is being used for many purposes. This paper is mainly concerned about the origins and development of ESP and considers the question of how ESP fits into the general landscape of English language teaching. It further looks at the basic principles and techniques in course design, syllabus, materials, methodology and assessment.

ESP like any form of language teaching is primarily concerned with learning. But it is our view that in its development up to now ESP has paid scant attention to the question of how people learn, focusing instead on the question of what people learns. It has, in other words, been language centred in its approach. We would not wish to dismiss this language centred approach. It has provided some very important insights into the nature of specific language needs. However, we feel that, if it is to have any real and lasting value, ESP must be founded in the first instance on sound principles of learning, and it is with this purpose in view that we have proposed learning, and it is with this purpose in view that we have proposed a learning centred approach to ESP.

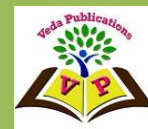


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ORIGIN OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

The end of World War II in 1945 was a watershed even in the history of mankind. After this tumultuous upheaval a new era ushered and there started an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic

activity on an international scale. This led to a chain reaction which gave birth to a world unified and dominated by two forces, namely technology and commerce, which in their relentless progress soon generated a demand for an international language. This effect was to create a whole new mass of people wanting to learn English not for the pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but because



English as the key to the international currencies of technologies and commerce. What not even today this language continues to spread its vicious tentacles in all spheres of human life. English continues to hog the limelight and reigns supreme as a unifier for people to effectively communicate with each other.

Previously in the initial stages of this language becoming very popular, the reasons for learning English had not been well defined. Knowledge of a foreign language was generally assumed as a sign of a well rounded education, but very few had really questioned the genuine and real necessity for learning this language. Gradually, as English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce it created quite remarkably a whole new breed of learners, who knew specifically why they were learning a language. These specific breed of learners, were the so called business men and women who wished to sell their products, mechanics who had to read instruction manuals, doctors who needed to keep up with developments in their fields and a whole range of students whose course of study included textbooks and journals only available in English. All these and many others needed English and most importantly, they knew why they needed it.

DEVELOPMENT OF ESP-SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Right from its inception and humble origins in the 1960,s ESP has undergone three main phases of development. It is now in a fourth phase with a fifth phase slowly starting to emerge. As we delve deeper into this paper, it needs to be noted that, first of all, that ESP is not a monolithic universal phenomenon. It has developed at different speeds and levels in different countries. Each country has its own approach towards this aspect according to the norms of necessity and assimilation. They have assimilated the language to suit their style and usage and this indeed has become an accepted practice among linguists and language experts all over the world.

A concept of special language was pioneered in the 1960,s and early 1970.s and this was associated particularly with the work of linguists Peter Stevens, Jack Ewer and John Swales. Their thinking operated on the basic principle that the English of for example, Electrical Engineering

constituted a specific register different from that of say Biology or General English. They culled out grammatical and lexical features, of these registers and then framed teaching materials, adapting all these as their syllabus. Their zeal was to produce a syllabus which gave high priority to the language forms students would meet in their science studies and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet. This is exactly what matches with this recent phenomenon, namely English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

Going further on in this paper, ESP focuses on language at the sentence level, so the stage now shifted to attention to the level above the sentence, as ESP became closely associated with the emerging field of discourse or rhetorical analysis. Henry Widdowson and others are the leading lights of this emerging field in relation to the development of ESP. This English for Specific Purpose concept has seen an attempt to look below the surface and to consider not the language itself but the thinking process that underlie the usage of language. It is at this juncture that skill centered approach comes into focus. To make use of this language to enhance our skills and productivity. The principle idea behind the skill centered approach is that underlying all language use, there are common reasoning and interpreting processes, which regardless of surface forms enable us to extract meaning from discourse. Hence there is no need to focus closely on the surface forms of the language rather on the underlying imperative strategies, which enable the learner to cope with the surface forms like, guessing meanings from context, using the visual layout to determine the type of text etc.

ESP - A LEARNING CENTERED APPROACH

This so called learning centered approach of ESP stresses the need to approach ESP as an understanding of the processes of language learning. ESP is not a matter of teaching 'specialized varieties of English' rather a 'specific purpose' for the development of an individual in all aspects of life. It is not just a matter of scientific words and grammar for scientists, hotel words and grammar for hotel staff and so on. This approach focuses on the specific needs and requirements of the individual. It addresses the needs and requirements of each



student according to their intake and learning capacity. It operates on the principle of effective and efficient learning. Though the context of learning may vary, there is no reason to suppose that the processes of learning should be any different for the ESP learner than for the General English learner. ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product. There is no methodology as such for ESP but rather the varied applications that we apply for ESP in classrooms, according to situation and context. This ESP is an approach to language learning which is solely based on learners' needs. The content and methods are based on the learner's reason for learning this wonderful and life changing language.

CONCLUSION

The authors of this paper have made a brief attempt to bring forth the significance contained in ESP and its impact it can have in today's teaching and learning process. It needs to be noted that the linguistic factor has tended to dominate this development with an emphasis on the analysis of the nature of specific varieties of language use. English has to be seen according to the context and situation of individuals. Their need to learn this language, their requirements which pulls them to learn this language so on and so forth. Then we can fulfill this idea of 'for specific purpose'. The individual learner has a specific purpose as to why he/she wishes to learn English. And it is in this light that we as language experts should be able to cater to their needs to meet their purposes effectively.

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