ESP Curriculum Design for Engineering Students

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1. Abstract

A Syllabus is "a specification of what is to be included in language course" (Jordon, 1997). This study aims to review the issues involved in ESP syllabus and course design, such as steps designing syllabus types such as the Structural Syllabus, Functional Syllabus, the Situational Syllabus, the Skill-based Syllabus, Task-based Syllabus the classroom syllabus, the learner syllabus, and Content-based Syllabus.

Keywords: Different types of syllabuses, ELT, Course material, engineering students.

2.1 English for Specific Purposes

From the early 1960s, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA. in ESP (e.g., The University of Birmingham and Aston University in the UK) and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English-speaking countries. We have now courses such as English for Chemists, in place of the more traditional 'General English' courses.

ESP has had a relatively long time to mature and so we would expect the ESP community to have a clear idea about what ESP means. Definition of ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1997).

2.2 Absolute Characteristics

1.   ESP is defined to meet the specific needs of the learners.
2.   ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
3.   ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre.

2.3 Variable Characteristics

1.   ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.

2.   ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English.

3.   ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at the secondary school level.

4.   ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.

5.   Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

The definition Dudley-Evans offers is influenced by that of Strevens (1988), although he has improved it substantially by removing the absolute characteristic that ESP is "in contrast with 'General English'" (Johns et al., 1991: 298), and has included more variable characteristics. The division of ESP into absolute and variable characteristics is very helpful in resolving arguments about what is and is not ESP. From the definition, we can see that ESP can but is not necessarily concerned with a specific discipline, nor does it have to be aimed at a certain age group or ability range. ESP should be seen as simple as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. This conclusion is similar the description made by Hutchinson, et al. (1987:19) who state, "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".

3. Definition of Syllabus

Course or syllabus may be described as "an attempt to communicate the essential properties and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice" (Stenhouse, 1975, p.17). Structuring of syllabus or course, therefore, may require careful consideration of the entire processes of teaching/learning, material selection, equipment, examination, and the training of teachers. Nunan thinks that the syllabus should include methodology and evaluation (1988, 14).

Johnson (1982) explains syllabus as an "Organized syllabus inventory" where "syllabus inventory" refers to the items to be taught. Crombie (1985) also defines "syllabus" as a list or inventory of items or units with which learners are to be taught. But Corder (1975) points out that it is more than just an inventory of items. Candlin (1984) takes a different stand when he says that syllabuses are "social constructions, produced interdependently in classrooms by teachers and learners ... They are concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learned, frequently set down in some written form as prescriptions for action by teachers and learners." Basically, a syllabus can be seen as "a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning" (Breen, 1984) while its function is "to specify what is to be taught and in what order" (Prabhu, 1984).

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Reilly in his article "Approaches to Foreign Language Syllabus Design" (1988) says that "to design a syllabus is to decide what gets taught and in what order". He further discusses six kinds of syllabi for various teaching situations.

Grammatical/Structural Syllabus: This kind of syllabus includes the forms and structures, usually that of grammar, which is to be taught, for example, nouns, verbs, adjectives, statements, questions et.al. Robinson (1991) argues this syllabus has had the longest history in ELT and has also been very important in ESP. "For many ESP course designers, this syllabus type is still powerful if, to them, unacceptable model"(Koh). The focus of the grammatical syllabus is an aspect of grammar (e.g. Verb, tense, sentence pattern, article nouns, etc.).

Notional-Functional Syllabus: The content of this kind of syllabus comprises of the functions performed through languages, for instance, informing, agreeing, requesting, and so on.

Jordon (1997) points out That it entails conceptual meanings: notions (e.g. times, space, and quantity) expressed through language (logical relationship.) and the communicative purpose (e.g., functions) for which we use language (e.g., greetings, requests, apologies, description, comparisons, cause, and effects, etc.).

Situational Syllabus: The content of such a syllabus reflects real or imaginary situations in which language is used. The examples may include, ordering food at the restaurant, buying groceries, and so on. This syllabus, as Jordon argues (1997), entails "the situation or contexts in which the language will be used and analyses the language needed for those situations".

According to Robinson, it is a situationally organized syllabus found in some ESP situations.

Skill-based Syllabus: The selection of content in such kind of syllabus is specific skills that may play an important role in using language. The examples may include interview skills, group discussion skills, and oral presentation skills, and so on. As Jordon argues (1997),this syllabus is based on one or more of the four traditional language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). In this syllabus, the constituents of the skills are often referred to as the sub-skills or the micro-skills. Robinson says (1991), ESP course might focus on another set of skills entitled professional skills or communicational skills. At the time of oral presentations, macro and micro both the skills are used, e.g., control of gesture and body language.

Task-based Syllabus: This kind of syllabus intends to make learners learn certain tasks that are of general importance, for example, applying for a job, discussing with municipal workers, social responsibility, etc. "The procedural or task syllabus, consisting of a set of task or

activities ordered according to cognitive difficulty, is associated in general ELT" Prabhu (1987). Robinson (1991) further argues that "class time is devoted to the performance of task and attention is only consciously directed to the language if this is necessary for the completion of the task"

Content-based Syllabus: The content-based syllabus targets to impart certain information based on the contents. An example is an engineering class being taught in the language. This syllabus, as Jordon (1997) suggests, influences teaching the students the language skills and academic conventions to a particular subject-matter and its content. For a few years, this syllabus is referred to as the particular requirement of the specific disciplines (e.g. Engineering, medical, Legal, etc.)

As Hyland (2006) argues, some engagement with the subject disciplines is essential to the development of an effective EAP course concerning this syllabus. According to him, the subject matter is a concern for the development of the course, and it is also a requirement of students' technical knowledge towards their course. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) identified three main types of subject-language integration: cooperation, and collaboration, and team teaching. According to them, these three basic steps are required for the fundamental development of the student's required curriculum. It is also applied on a big scale in the engineering sector in India and others.

4. Course Design

Various ESP scholars have diverse opinions on syllabus design. Breen argues that the syllabus should have six universal requirements that the designer of the syllabus must focus on (1987, 83). They are:

• An accessible framework of required knowledge and skills
• Continuity for users
• Ability to give a retrospective account of what has been achieved
• Evaluation-provision of accountability to colleagues, learners, and the wider institutions and society
• The precision of purposes, so that it may be assessed for appropriateness through implementation
• Sensitivity to the environment for which the plan is intended (Breen, 1987, 82).

Some scholars focus on context while designing a syllabus. Cummins (1979) discussed a dichotomy between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Languages Proficiency. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills address the communication skills used in informal situations like with family, friends, or colleagues, while Cognitive

Academic Languages Proficiency refers to skills required for formal situations like Academic purposes.

5. Conclusion

Courses are taught in the Engineering colleges in India for the development of students' proficiency in English for their academic, professional as well personality developments. However, the courses taught in the universities require special attention due to the different backgrounds of the student. And this background affects their exposures to the use of English. According to the researcher's observation, the courses should be designed as per the needs of the regional, social, and economical status of the students. Then it would be more useful for students' development and success.

The researcher would like to suggest the following:

We should identify the needs and demands of the learners of Engineering students of colleges and universities in order improve their English writing and speaking proficiency and to develop teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge in teaching technical communication.

To do so, the study should investigate:

• What kind of difficulty engineering students face in improving their proficiency in technical English while writing and speaking?
• What sorts of instruction aids they desired from their ESP teachers?
• What kinds of content they expect their ESP syllabus should include?
• How are ESP facilitators playing the roles to cope up with their demands?

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