

ESP in India: A Brief Historical and Current Overview

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) is now nearly a 400 year old enterprise in India. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a separate branch of ELT emerged mainly in the second half of twentieth century in the western world whereas the genesis of ESP in India seems to be two century old. However, ESP in India has never been a topic of serious deliberations, with the exception of reviews by Shrivastava (2009) and Raviya (2009). The present paper is a modest attempt to review the current scenario of ESP in India. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part evaluates the contribution of various committees and study group and the British Council to the development of ESP in Indian universities. In the second part, the paper throws light on the research in ESP in Indian universities. The third part considers ESP vis-à-vis the General English courses offered in the conventional and professional degree programmes at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Indian universities. Since the focus of research and teaching in ESP in India is confined mostly to Engineering and Management colleges, the paper stresses the need to extend ESP in India to Humanities.

Key words: ESP, GE courses, EAP, EST, Indian universities

The Genesis of ESP in India

English Language Teaching (ELT) in India is now nearly a 400 year old enterprise (Choudhary, 2001). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a separate branch of ELT emerged mainly in the second half of twentieth century in the western world. As Bengali-English, Urdu-English and other glossaries first appeared in the seventeenth century itself, Chaudhary (2002) is of the view that ESP could have appeared as early as the eighteenth century as special purpose glossaries (p.39). English was initially used for specific purposes - i.e. for trade and administration - in British India. During their regime, the British promoted English education to fulfil the requirement of English-knowing Indians for administrative purposes. They also connected English language with the employment opportunities for Indians. In 1844 Lord Hardinge, the then Governor General, declared that Indians who knew English would get preference in employment (Chaudhary, 2009:477). Thus, English for employment was one of the objectives of teaching English in colonial India.

After independence, there are frequent changes in the language policies of the central and state governments (Parasher, 1998), nevertheless English has been a medium of instruction for many postgraduate courses. It also acts as a *link language* for inter-state communication in the country. In the last decade of the twentieth century it gained importance as the *language of opportunities*. There is hardly any domain where the use of English has been restricted. The rise of English as the *global language* has led to a greater demand for it in the twenty-first century. Consequently the demand for ESP-based courses has increased in India.

Developments in ESP in India

By recommending ESP-based courses the commissions and committees appointed to review teaching of English in Indian universities have played a very

important role in the development of ESP in India. The recommendations of the Study Group (1971) and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) for English (1989) and the ESP projects initiated by the British Council in the 1980s could be considered the mile stones in the development of ESP in India.

i) Contribution of the Committees and Study Group

After independence, English, a colonizers' language, was taught mainly for general purposes in schools and colleges. Though the regional languages had been a preferred option for tertiary education, the Education Commission of 1964-66 sowed the seeds of ESP in India by recommending teaching of English as *a library language*. As a result, the focus of teaching English at the school and college levels remained on reading comprehension, paving the way for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in India.

The Study Group (1971) realized the need of introducing special courses to meet the growing demands for English teaching for specific purposes (p. 215). To meet different professional needs, in the Part II of its report, the Group suggested ESP-based courses like 'English as a library language', 'Course in English for students who wish to be teachers of English or study English Literature', 'Course for Teachers of Spoken English', 'Course in Commercial English', 'A course in English for Non-graduate Teachers'. The CDC (1989) also suggested ESP-based functional units like 'English for Competitive Examinations', 'English for Secretarial Practice', 'English for Business Communication', 'English for Advertising and Copy Writing', etc.

The ESP in India has developed gradually over the past few decades after the ESP-based courses were suggested by the Study Group (1971) and the CDC (1989).

ii) Role of the British Council

Tickoo (1994) has noted that there is dominance of native speakers in setting the agenda in the ESP discipline (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001:23). This could be

witnessed through the ESP projects initiated by the British Council in Indian universities in the 1980s.

Title of the Project	Year	Activities carried out
<i>The Technical Teachers' Training Institute (TTTI) Project, Calcutta</i>	1982 – 1984	Publication of a student-centered, resource-cum-workbook - <i>Communication in English for Technical Students</i> (1984). [In Singh (1986: 78)].
<i>Need-based English for Science and Technology (NEST), IIT Kanpur</i>	1984 onwards	On the basis of needs-survey and analysis, the development of language curricula and need-based materials for science and technology students in the form of a resource book.
<i>The Indian School of Mines (ISM), Project, Dhanbad</i>	1984 onwards	A needs analysis was carried out and a special English for Science and Technology (EST) programme tailored to the needs of students studying the natural sciences was developed for the courses offered by ISM in the first year B. Tech. and M.Sc. Tech.
<i>Key English Language Teaching (KELT) Project, Anna University (AU), Madras</i>	1986	Based on needs analysis and under the guidance of the British Consultants a team of teachers of Anna University developed teaching materials in the form of books for the first year students of degree courses in engineering and technology. [see Dhanvel (2012)]
<i>Osmania University (OU), Hyderabad EAP Project</i>	1987 onwards	Based on the identification of research scholars and postgraduate (PG) students' needs and attitudes the new syllabus was developed. It included three components – listening and oral skills, reading and study skills and writing with focus on grammar.

(Source: *Focus on English*, Vol. 4/1, January 1988)

The special courses for disadvantaged students were converted into ESP projects. All the projects were related to technical English or EST. Only one project at OU was on EAP for PG students. Apart from funding the projects, the British Council helped in providing orientation and training to the teachers of English in India and developing teaching materials in the form of resource books. The development of indigenized teaching materials is one of the features of ESP in India. Thus, obliquely the British council has played a decisive role in determining the path of ESP in India with emphasis on EST.

Research in ESP in Indian Universities

Here is a modest attempt to take a glimpse at some of the explored and unexplored areas of research in ESP in Indian universities. Barring a few reputed universities, the research work on ESP is a rarity in Indian universities. The study of the sections on ESP (pp. 53-57) in Ganguly, S. R. & L.S. Ramaiah (2000) *English Language and Literature Teaching in India: A Bibliography*; 'English Language, Linguistics and ELT' (pp. 79-90) in Kushwaha and Naseem (2000) *Indian Doctoral Dissertations in English Studies: A Reference Guide* and the list of research in 'Language Teaching' in the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad [formerly, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL)] reveals the developments in ESP in India. As a case in point, the research on ESP carried out at the EFLU has been reviewed here.

The focus of the ESP research at the EFLU is on the communicative needs of users of English like Salespersons, Business Executives, medical representatives and student Nurses. There are many dissertations on the teacher training modules at the EFLU. These include ESP courses for the teachers of English at primary and higher secondary levels. There is considerable research in the areas like Teaching English to Tribal Students.

Apart from the seminal work on legal English by Bhatia (1977) not much work has been done in the areas like English for legal purposes and English for Military Purposes. In the EFLU there are only two theses each on the English for the Students of Law and use of English in the Defence sector. There are very few studies on English for Administration, English for Travel and Tourism and English for Competitive Examinations.

It seems that enough attention is not paid towards academic skills of the UG

students. There are no full-fledged studies on EAP for the UG students of conventional degree programmes who want to pursue Masters Degree. For instance, there is a single study on EAP by Datta (1980). There are some studies (e.g. Bellare, 1984) on study skills which focus only on dictionary skills. There is no study with focus on reference sources other than dictionaries. Besides, 'English for PG students', 'English for slow learners' are the least explored areas whereas 'English for Medical Students', 'English for Agriculture Purposes' and 'English for Banking Sector' are neglected areas.

The research in 'Language Teaching' in the EFLU reveals that there is substantial research on Technical English and Business English in India. In comparison to the research on English for students of Science and Commerce and there is negligible research on English for students of humanities. The primary focus of research in ESP in India is on designing courses. Some of the theses are directed to transform the GE courses offered at the UG level in Indian universities into ESP courses. Some studies focus on developing materials. Very few studies are on teaching methodology in ESP courses while there is negligible research on evaluation methods for ESP courses.

ESP in India vis-à-vis General English courses

An ELT course in India is generally referred to as General English (Mohan and Banerji, 2003:20). A course in General English (GE) in India is also known as Compulsory English. It is one of the main courses offered at the undergraduate (UG) level in Indian universities. The GE courses offered in the conventional degree programmes such as B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. differ widely. Compulsory English is a GE course offered in the faculty of Arts. Depending upon the prevalent structure of degree programmes at various universities, the GE courses in the faculties of Science and Commerce have been either compulsory or optional. In the past GE courses were common to the students of Arts, Commerce and Science. Based on the ESP-based

courses recommendations of the Study Group (1971) the Indian universities started to offer different courses to the students of different disciplines, in the late 1970s.

Mohan and Banerji (1985) examined 2564 teaching components of 346 GE syllabuses of 79 universities in India relating to B.A., B.Sc., B. Com., B.Sc., (Ag.), and B.E. programmes and suggested a practical path to access the learner's needs, formulate objectives and select content for a syllabus. As they felt that the Indian learner does not need English for general purposes, the researchers suggested the term 'English for Professional Purposes' for the courses at UG level instead of 'General English'.

Initially, some academicians were skeptical about the suitability of ESP in India. Sood (1988), for instance, was of the opinion that in India ESP courses can be usefully exploited after the GE course at the school stage, such as English for nurses, receptionists, radio/TV newsreaders, etc. to give learner specialized training for a particular profession. He also notes that the students joining technical/professional institutions after Class XII may need ESP. However, he is also of the view that since majority of Indian college learners cannot plan their careers until after they have completed their UG studies, ESP courses would not serve any useful purpose in India.

Aslam (1989) stressed the need to adopt a language teaching approach that caters for the specific needs of students following different disciplines. According to him, the GE courses administered in India are purposeless and have failed to develop the communicative competence in the students, ESP can claim a strong position under the circumstances and can take place of GE courses (Aslam, 1989:124).

Vijaykumar (1992) advocated incorporating EAP components in the GE courses. According to him for the Indian situation in the general academic world EAP should be introduced as part of the regular curriculum. In other words, components of "study skills" should be incorporated into the General English syllabus (Vijaykumar, 1992: 59).

Thus, the failure of the literature-dominated GE courses to cater to the specific linguistic needs of the learners is one of the reasons for the development of ESP in independent India. ESP was considered one of the viable alternatives to the existing GE courses offered in Indian universities. One can see a fine combination of prediction by Aslam and suggestions by Vijaykumar in the present GE courses. The titles of present GE courses are based on ESP framework and the contents of these courses include EAP components like note-making and summarizing.

According to Ghosh et al. (1977), there was a noticeable tendency to provide different kinds of courses for students of different disciplines. Today this trend has become common in some universities, for instance, the courses *English for Students of Arts* at North Maharashtra University (NMU) and *English for Business Communication* at Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK). However, the ESP impact is limited to the course titles and some units like ‘English for Marketing’, ‘English for Banking’ found in the S.Y.B.Com. syllabus of SUK. Surprisingly, a reverse trend is being noticed now in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University (BAMU), Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University (SRTMU), the University of Mumbai (UoM) and the University of Pune (UoP); these universities offer identical or same courses for the students studying in different disciplines! For instance, BAMU and SRTMU have same GE courses for the first and second year students studying in all conventional and professional degree courses. Similarly, ‘Enriching Oral and Written Communication in English’ is the common text prescribed by the UoP for the GE courses offered in the third year BA and second year B.Sc. (Computer Science).

Though according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) there is no difference between GE and ESP in theory but in practice there is a great deal of difference, Antony (1997) is of the view that the line between where GE courses stop and ESP courses start

has become very vague indeed. This is very true about GE courses offered in Indian universities. The incorporation of EAP components in the GE courses can be considered one of impediments in the development of the discipline of ESP in India.

English for Professional Purposes

In the past the technical institutions in India used to teach literary texts. Even the expert committee set up (1983-84) by the Indian society for Technical Education of the Ministry of Education, has suggested teaching “novels and plays” in its curriculum for 4-year degree courses in technical Institutions (Singh, 1986: 59). Khan (1985) has noted that only 2% of technical institutions in India have provided for EST courses (in Singh 1986:58). At present, ISM, Dhanbad offers ESP courses like ‘English for Science and Technology’ (B.Tech. Sem. I) and ‘English for Professional Communication’ (B. Tech. Sem. IV) whereas reputed institutes of higher education in India like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) - Madras, IIT- Roorkee and IIT –Kanpur, to name a few, do not offer ESP courses.

In professional degree programmes like B.Sc. (Computer Science) and Bachelor of Engineering (B.E.); the ESP-based GE courses are designed to cater to the practical needs of the learners. These courses mostly focus on development of communicative English. Besides, in place of the more traditional GE courses, courses like ‘English for Engineers’ and ‘English for Nurses’ are now offered in the professional colleges. As a result, nowadays, ESP-based books like *English Online*, *English for Engineers and Technologists* and *English for Nurses*, etc. are easily available in the market.

Taking into account the exposure to technical English in professional courses, one should not ignore the fact that English of the students of these courses is shaped by the subject teachers rather than the teachers of English.

Some universities and university level institutes in India have introduced ESP

courses for research students. For instance a course entitled *English for Scientists* was first introduced by Prof. S. P. Modak in 1983–84 to M Sc (Zoology) students of the UoP and the course was introduced to M Sc Zoology students at the Karnatak University, Dharwad in 2001–03; and since 2005 the course has been taught to Ph D students at the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, Delhi (Modak, 2007).

At present, some institutes of higher education also offer ESP courses for professionals. For instance, the EFLU offers ESP courses like English for IT Sector, English for Lawyers, English for Doctors/Scientists, English for Business Communication and so on (University News, 2008: 194) and Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar (Gujarat) offers various need based short terms courses to international students, doctors, engineering students, and so on (Raviya, 2009:9). However, the needs of the students can also be known from the annual plan (2011-12) of the courses offered by Regional Institute of English (RIE) Bengaluru. The focus of these courses remains on communication skills and teacher training. In the years to come there would be increase in the number of institutes offering such ESP courses.

Since ‘Technical English’ and ‘Business English’ are the two much practised areas of ESP in India, the restricted sense of ESP in India is revealed through the brochures of the national and international conferences held in India. ESP has been limited mostly to engineering colleges. Here ESP in India is synonymous to EST. The brochures of conferences held in India could illustrate this. The conference brochure (February 2012) of Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, popularly known as GITAM University, Hyderabad lists in the subthemes of the conference - ESP (with special focus on English for Engineers). Similarly the brochure of ELTAI Conference (July 2012) mentions - ESP (only for Engineering colleges). In addition, the 10th Asia TEFL International Conference (October 2012) also lists in its subtopics for paper

presentations – English for Specific Purposes: Business Communications, Scientific Writings and etc.

Furthermore, the articles on ESP appear in the *Journal of ELT (India)* published by the English Language Teachers Association of India (ELTAI), *Language in India*, *University News*, *IUP Journal of English Studies* and the journals of the EFLU, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and Regional Institute of English (RIE), Chandigarh. There is hardly any special issue of these journals on ESP. In the absence of a separate journal devoted to the ESP, the deliberations on the ESP in India are restricted. The only platform to share issues in ESP is ESP-Special Interest Group (SIG) of ELTAI which is again limited to the teachers of English in Engineering / professional colleges.

The initial efforts of the British Council have played a decisive role in directing the ESP in India on the path of EST. The focus of research and teaching in ESP in India has remained on ‘Technical English’ and ‘Business English’. Consequently, the teaching in ESP in India is mostly confined to Engineering and Management colleges. It is curious fact that English never featured in medical education – neither GE nor ESP (Tharu, 2008:96). Even the courses like ‘English for students of Agriculture’ and ‘English for students of Law’ are not yet fully developed. Since a considerable number of researchers in India prefer English as the language of their research, a course like ‘English for Researchers’ would work (see Tasildar, 2011). Furthermore, the number of Indian universities offering EAP courses for the students from African and Middle-East countries seeking higher studies in India can be increased.

The Prospects of ESP in India

Earlier the theoretical introduction to ESP was confined to a handful of universities in India offering an optional paper in ELT for the MA (English) course. Very few Indian universities have recently taken initiatives to introduce need-based optional

papers in ESP for the M.A. (English) students. For example, the University of Madras (UnoM) includes elective papers like *English for Career Purposes* and *English for Corporate Communication* in its MA (English) course (w.e.f. 2007-08). Similarly, papers like *English for Communication* and *English for Business Communication* have been incorporated for MA (English) students by Mother Teresa Women's University (MTWU), NMU, Karnatak University, Dharwad and Christ University, Bangalore. This obliquely points towards the failure of UG level literature-based courses in developing communicative skills of the students.

Since the GE courses offered in the conventional degree programmes, are based on assumptions rather than on needs analysis, the impact of ESP is limited to the course titles. Furthermore, EAP components are incorporated in the GE courses in Indian universities unlike the pre-sessional or in-sessional ESP courses offered by the universities in UK and USA. Moreover, the research in ESP vis-à-vis humanities is also restricted to teacher training modules. Mekala (2004) analysed the needs of students majoring in English in the colleges affiliated to the UnoM. To overcome the drawbacks of the GE course for B.A. Part I, she suggests an alternative course, based on ESP framework, 'English for Literature Students'. This course aims to help students to have a working knowledge of English, to take and make notes, to refer to source materials and to become independent learners. The suggested course includes a separate paper on 'Dictionary Skills'.

In accordance with recommendations of the CDC (1989), some Indian universities have included ESP-based optional papers at the UG level. This could be witnessed from the following examples.

- i) Functional English courses sponsored by the University Grants Commission (UGC) are based on ESP. These courses include papers like *English for*

Broadcasters for Television and English for Journalists / Editors.

- ii) The UnoM offers elective papers like *English for Competitive Examination*, *English for Journalism*, etc. for B.A. English Major course (w.e.f. 2008-09).
- iii) The Department of Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh has included a core paper entitled 'English for Special Purposes' in the final year for B.A. (English) course (w.e.f. June 2008) in all the universities in Madhya Pradesh. However, the title of the paper appears misleading as the content is directed towards 'English for practical purposes'.
- iv) MTWU has prescribed *English for Practical Purposes* (BA III English).

Taking into account global needs of Indian students, there is also scope for courses like 'English for PG students', 'English for Employment', 'English for Yoga Instructors', 'Training for teaching English' (to overcome the shortage of trained teachers of English), 'English for Teachers of Science and Mathematics in Semi-English schools' through the UGC-sponsored Career Oriented Courses in English. Thus, ESP can play a crucial role in vocationalization of English studies in India.

In the light of current career-conscious learners seeking admission to the faculty of Arts [in contrast to the two decade old views about Indian college learners by Sood (1988)], through the incorporation of such ESP-based papers, ESP could be the saviour for English studies in the Humanities.

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