

## **A Need Analysis of Communicative Techniques among Technical Students**

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**Abstract:** *The present paper offers an analysis of the study of English for Specific Purposes with focus on the need for the improvement of communication skills of the Engineering students. In this age, it has become an essential commodity to possess good communicational skills to achieve higher aims and goals in one's career. Hence, it has become compulsory to imbibe excellent communication skills along with the technical knowledge. Lack of this makes them jobless, as the Selection Committee selects those candidates who excel in effective communication.*

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### **I. Introduction**

English language is no longer confined to the study of colonial literature as in earlier days but has merged as a language of communication the world over in all aspects such as trade, commerce, education and so on. It has become a source of information and a medium through which transactions take place. Since the present study focuses on the techniques to be adopted to improve the engineering student's communication skills for better placement, it is felt necessary to consider certain current Communicative Approaches as a branch of study to cater to their needs.

Thus, in attaining this, in 1971, a group of experts has begun to investigate the possibility of developing language courses on a unit-credit system in which learning tasks are broken down into portions or units each of which corresponds to a component of learner's needs and is systematically related to all the other portions.<sup>1</sup>

One among these experts is D.A. Wilkins who proposes a communicative definition of language that serves as a basis for developing communication syllabuses for language teaching. Wilkins's contribution is an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. It is an approach that aims to: make communicative skill the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (LSRW) that acknowledge the independence of language and communication.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, CLT technique adopts a learner-centered approach and experience-based view and allows the learners to articulate their future language needs. The specific language needs of the learners eventually form the base for CLT material design.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Communicative Technique in language teaching starts from a theory of languages as communication. According to Hymes, the goal of language teaching is to develop communicative competence. His theory of communicative competence is a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to communicatively competent in the society. In his view a person who acquires communicative competence which in turn requires both knowledge and ability for language usage with respect to:

- \* Whether something is formally possible.
- \* Whether something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.
- \* Whether something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluate.
- \* Whether something is in fact done actually performed and what it's doing entails.<sup>4</sup>

### **Characteristics of CLT:**

It can be helpful to discuss the characteristic features of CLT, before understanding the concept. Johnson and Little wood consider CLT as an alternative learning technique -----a skill learning oriented approach. According to this technique, the acquisition of communicative competence in a language is an example of skill development, involving both cognitive and behavioral aspect.

The behavioral aspect involves the implementation of these plans so that they can be genitive and behavioral aspect. The cognitive aspect involves the internationalization of plans for creating appropriate behavior for language use, these plans derive mainly from the language system – they include grammatical rules procedures for selecting vocabulary and social conventions governing speech converted into confident performance in real time. This occurs mainly through practice in converting plans into performance. CLT technique thus encourages an emphasis on practice to develop communicative skills.

**Objectives:**

The study discusses the objectives of CLT technique as proposed by Piepho<sup>6</sup>

- \* An integrative and content level in which language is used as a means of expression.
- \* A linguistic and instrumental level where language is learned in a semiotic system.
- \* An affective level of interpersonal relationships and conduct is achieved (language is a means of expressing values and judgments about oneself and others)
- \* A level of individual learning needs (remedial learning based on error analysis)

Little wood distinguishes between “functional communication activities” and “social interaction activities” as major activity types in communicative learning. Functional communication includes tasks as learners communicating behind a screen to another learner. Social interaction activities include conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations skills, improvisation and debates.<sup>7</sup>

**Student’ Role:**

It is felt necessary to discuss the role of a student within CLT technique. According to Breen and Candlin the learner’s role within CLT is: The role of a student is a representative – between the self, the learning process and the object of learning. The suggestion for the student is that he should contribute as much as he gains and thereby learn in an independent way.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, CLT methodologists’ attributes success and failure as an accomplishment and responsibility achieved and acknowledged mutually.

**Teacher’s Role:**

It is equally essential to discuss the role of teachers in the Communicative Language Teaching Technique, who thereby, assume several roles. Breen and Candlin describe teacher’s role in the following terms: The teacher has two main roles --- the first is to facilitate the communication process between all the participation in the classroom and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning – teaching group.

## **II. Methodology**

As the study’s main concern is to suggest certain techniques to be adopted to improve the communication skills of the Engineering students for better placements, it felt appropriate to mention a few methods suggested by the CLT advocates.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit offer a lesson out line suggesting CLT procedures as evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

- \* Presentation of a brief dialogue or several mini dialogues
- \* Oral practice of each of utterance of the dialogue segment to be presented by the entire class.
- \* Questions and answers based on the dialogue topics and situation.
- \* Oral production activities – proceeding from guided to freer communication activities.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Communicative Language Teaching technique is considered the best as an approach rather than a method. It refers to a set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language learning that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures like:

- \* Learners learn a language through using it to communicate
- \* Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- \* Fluency is an important dimension of communication.
- \* Communication involves the integration of skills.
- \* Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error.

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**Content-Based Instruction:**

The study further recommends another technique to be adopted by the Engineering Colleges to improve the B.Tech students’ communication skills i.e. Content- Based Instruction.

CBT refers to an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is structured around the substance or information that students acquire. Kranhe<sup>11</sup> offers the following definition:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught.

Thus, CBT draws on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching. It focuses on real communication and the exchange of information. The students learn the language as a by-product of learning about real world.

Since the present thesis is concerned with the suggestion of techniques to be adopted so as to improve the communication skills of students of Engineering colleges, it is keen to discuss Language for Specific Purposes/ English for Specific Purposes, its background, English for Occupational Purposes and English for Vocational Purposes

### **Language For Specific Purposes (LSP):**

LSP is a movement that seeks to serve the language needs of learners who need to carry out specific roles. For example, students, engineers, technicians, nurse and so on. They acquire core and real world skills through the medium of a second language rather than master the language for its own sake. LSP has focused particularly on English for Science and Technology (EST).

The Engineering Institutions offer English courses to help the students learn to read and write technical articles. LSP/ESP in turn has given rise to a number of subfields such as ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

The study concentrates on the characteristic features and importance of LSP, helpful in the improvement of communication skills. As mentioned earlier, English as a media is introduced in all the academic courses as part of curriculum. English being the common language helps the students in gathering information in various aspects of their academic and profession lives. The activities in the General English for Specific Purposes section are designed to favor practice and learning of general skills that might be used in a variety of contexts. Among many different abilities, special attention has been paid to rhetorical strategies in both written and spoken interactions (e.g., give instructions, write definitions, develop awareness of various argumentative strategies), and to instructions on how to use e-mail exchanges and other Internet resources.

Hence, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been an attempt to cater to the language needs of the professional students for specific purposes. ESP is a step which focuses not only on the specific skills of language learning such as LSRW but also interpersonal skills, team work and so on. A few scholars have offered definitions of ESP in their own terms.

According to Munby, ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analyses of the communication needs of the learner, rather than by non-learner-centered criteria such as the teachers' or instructors' predetermined preference for General English or for treating English as a part of a General Education.<sup>11</sup>

Pauline Robinson, quotes Mackey's definition of ESP as "the teaching of English, not so much as an end in itself but as an essential means to a clearly identifiable goal".<sup>12</sup>

Hutchinson emphasizes the 'language learning processes and not the kind of 'language product'. He means to say that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language teaching material or methodology. According to Hutchinson and Alan Waters, "ESP should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching which is discussed by specific and apparent reasons for learning".<sup>13</sup>

Stevens defines ESP by making a distinction between four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics are that ESP consists of English Language Teaching, which:

- \* Designed to meet specified needs of the learner
- \* Related in content (that is, in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities.
- \* Centered on language, appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and so on, and analysis of the discourse in contrast with General English.<sup>14</sup>

The variable characteristics are that ESP:

- \* May be restricted as to the learning skills to be learned (for example reading only)
- \* May not be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

Pauline Robinson's definition of ESP is based on two key criteria and a number of characteristics that are generally found to be true of ESP. ESP is normally goal oriented and 'aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English'.<sup>15</sup>

Dudley \_Evans consider the three definitions of Alan Waters, Peter Strevens and Pauline Robinson made on ESP and has identified some strengths and weaknesses in each of these. Based on their understanding, they have redefined ESP in their own terms with slight modifications in the absolute and variable characteristics in the following manner:

**Absolute Characteristics:**

- \* ESP is designed to meet the specific needs of the learner.
- \* ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
- \* ESP is centered on the language on the language (grammar, lexis, and register) skills, discourse and genres, appropriate to these activities.

**Variable Characteristics:**

- \* ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
- \* ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology
- \* ESP is likely to be for professional learners.<sup>16</sup>

**Historical Background of ESP:**

A brief look into the historical background of ESP in the field of LSP gives us an insight into the need for a specific purpose of learning a language. “The importance of English as an international language continues to increase as more and more people are being required to learn English”, stresses Kennedy.<sup>17</sup>

It is in the 1960s that ESP has been recognized as a vital and innovative activity within the movement of teaching of English as a second language. The growth of ESP has been due to the developments in the increase use of English as the international language of science, technology and business has given a thrust to the future of ESP. English language is no longer restricted to the classrooms. Its use has become widespread and vibrant, affecting all the sectors of society and economy. English has become a major medium of communication world- wide. The major demand was felt for a variety of English language styles, which could cater to the different expressions arising out of the varied needs. Thus a new form of using the language in the perspective of meeting communication needs has been focused.<sup>18</sup>

The ESP as criteria of research emerged between the late 60s and early 70s. The research is extended into written scientific and technical English for Science and Technology (EST). Because the line of distinction is very thin between ESP and EST, both are mistaken to be one and the same.

The development in the sphere of language learning has sent ripples across the English language teaching – learning community. It is gradually felt that in the language learning process, the position of learners is gaining importance, because the learners begin to determine their needs and interests. As a result, there is a parallel rise in the importance of the English course material to meet the needs of the learners. This increases learners’ motivation levels and thereby makes learning better and faster.

The development of ESP has taken place stage by stage. English for Science and Technology (EST) made the greatest contribution. The overall purpose of an ESP course is to equip the learners with adequate language skills to function successfully in a demanded situation. ESP is regarded as a trendsetter in the field of LSP. The purpose of language learning has seen a dramatic twist with the introduction of English as an international language. The two major divisions are English for Academic purpose (EAP) and English for Occupational Purpose (EOP).English for Science and Technology (EST) and English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) has been considered as a major outcome of ESP.

Since EST is considered with engineering studies, it is felt that a discussion of EST in detail in the following sections is necessary.

EST Branch caters to the Science and Technological requirements through English. According to Kennedy, “The term EST presupposes a stock of vocabulary items, grammatical forms and functions, which are common to the study of Science & Technology.” By this they mean that EST is a specified learning lessons dealing with Scientific content to be used by Scientists and Technologists for various specialist purposes such as presenting a Scientific or Technical paper at a conference, reading relevant literature or writing a paper propounding a theory and so on.

According to Trimble Louis, “Besides, given the wide series of scientific disciplines, it becomes more important to have a focused learning course /program catering to the varied needs of each of these disciplines. The differences can be in the lesson content, standard of teaching aids or the methods adopted. For example, the various scientific Disciplines are engineering, agriculture, medicine and so on. Each of these had a different set of vocabulary, style of expression, recorded and so on”.<sup>19</sup>

The same level of difference applies to the present study conducted on the professional course in Engineering, where there are further sub-branches namely – civil, electronics, electrical, mechanical, and aeronautical and so on. Each of these sub-branches has a specific lessons and specific language requirements,

though all these branches make apply the skills in using the language in general. Thus, the above given definition rightly applies down to the last level of a scientific study.

Therefore, to update one of all the most recent happenings, students participate in field activities, where oral skills come into play in reporting the activity, but writing skills are important in preparing the report. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the needs of the students so that they are equipped with the right skills to aspire for better career opportunities.

### **English for Occupational Purposes:**

As the title suggests this flow of English caters to the requirements of English practice in a specialized setup or in a working situation. The working environment can base upon any profession or job that requires specialized skills for working. To make the concept of EOP clear, it is useful to look at some of the definitions of EOP.

Dudley, felt that there is a need to make a distinction between EAP and EOP as the purpose and the use of the language is different. “The term EOP refers to English that is not for academic purposes, it includes professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and business and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-work situations.” To make the distinction clear, consider the following example – language and discourse of medicine for academic purposes will be useful to medical students, whereas language and discourse of medicine for occupational purposes will be useful to practicing doctors.<sup>20</sup>

Kennedy provides further distinction, “EOP is taught in a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work or profession. For example, doctors, technicians.” Such a course is adapted keeping in view when the learners need to use it. Since, in a professional set up, there might be different stages, the language requirements also varies accordingly. Broadly, three situations have been identified to help classify EOP courses. They are pre-experience, simultaneous/in experience and post experience.

A pre-experience EOP course may have only the basis or introductory particulars relating to the profession. A simultaneous EOP course contains the core needs of the profession and provides extensive learning experience. A post experience EOP course explores further particulars of the profession or provides information on interdisciplinary research and so on.

The emergence of the EOP course goes back to late 60s in the type of standard letter formats, to make complaints or requests for information. These resources existed in the form of model papers, texts and dialogues. The focus was shifted to top business needs, mainly spoken in the mid 70s. During mid 80s the requirement was towards behavioral skills in the business communication situation such as attending calls, arranging and conducting meetings and seminars and so on. The present day EOP explores not only the communication skills extensively but also management and language training requirements.

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) mainly focuses on the business requirements or occupational needs of a profession. Generally, any EOP course comprises the following.

- \* Particular terms and text formats for business dealings.
- \* Clear styles for spoken interactions such as speeches, meetings, telephone conversations and so on.
- \* Linguistic terminology precise to that profession or field of activity.
- \* Behavioral skills.
- \* Approach and methodology to training.

The present learning takes EOP courses into thought because it focuses on Engineering students, who immediately after taking up a job (pre-experience) or after they gain more experience would benefit from an EOP course as appropriate at a point of moment.

The raising specialization of content in English language teaching curricula has seen its beginning in the early 1960's. English languages play a major role in transmitting knowledge as a mean rather than as an end itself. Teaching of English generally is treated as teaching with Utilitarian Purpose.

According to Mackay, “A difference in approach from the current ‘start at the beginning again,’ or remedial ‘solutions’ is needed when English ceases to be an examination subject and assumes the role of instrument of communications”<sup>21</sup>

Mackay and Mountford, opine, “English as a foreign language is taught at the primary and early secondary levels of education. It is generally taught keeping in mind the general education – that is, it is regarded as a ‘good thing’ for them to learn a foreign language as part of broad education.”<sup>22</sup>

Usually, people use English language only when associated with an occupational, vocational, academic or professional requirement. When wants are clear, learning aims can be defined in terms of some detailed purposes in which the language substances are adapted. The outcome is that the coaching is concentrated so as the students can pick up communicative ability in the concerned area. The result can be impressive where such requirement for communicative ability with specially designed materials is relevant to the needs of particular students to improve their communication skills.

Vocational Purposes encompasses settings where English is used for finding or keeping a job, or, more generally, any activity that is related to work. The tasks aim to create a set of practical abilities, consisting first of all of job-related vocabulary, and then of efficient self-presentations and dynamic interactions in job interviews. These latter aims obviously entail awareness of a whole series of verbal and nonverbal signs, related to linguistic, social, and cultural values.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, English language has been fast in status and reputation recently due to the understanding produced by the experts in the field of technical education.

### End Notes

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