

**ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: ITS MEANING AND IMPORTANCE IN  
PRESENT INDIAN SCENARIO**

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**ABSTRACT**

Teaching process in India to some extent still depends upon conventional objectives of passing the examination and getting jobs according to the academic achievements in the form of grades and percentage. Students focus more on syllabus contents and get less time to concentrate on expanding their knowledge outside syllabus. Same thing happens in case of English learning also. Students concentrate more on learning answers to the questions provided to them by their teachers and grammar exercises done in the class. The obvious result is though they score very high in their subject but when it comes to using the knowledge they are complete failure. They lack appropriate words to convey their message in their work place. My paper deals with same issue and also with the importance of English for specific Purposes in present scenario.

**Article Outline**

1. Introduction – Importance of ESP in Indian Scenario
  2. Meaning of ESP
  3. Absolute and variable characters of ESP
  4. Difference between General English and ESP
    - 4.1. Role of ESP teachers
    - 4.2. Conclusion
- References

Looking in Indian context 'English for specific purposes' is at its infancy. Learners feel that the things they have learned in their educational institutions or training centers are not proving helpful when they enter the workplace once they have completed their education. The problem does not restrict only to those students who have studied in Hindi medium schools but also with many who have got their education from good English medium schools. Generally the learners complain that the prescribed textbooks do not satisfy their needs. They feel high scarcity of appropriate words while at work place. Looking into the problem there is a need for instructors to understand what learners actually want. Three months spoken English courses supplied by various training centers are definitely not going to solve the problem. And one defined course cannot satisfy all the learners. We have to find out what kind of language acquisition is actually required by the learner. It is at this point importance of ESP emerges. But before plunging into it we need to know what actually English for Specific Purposes means and how is it different from General English courses. English for specific purposes is no doubt popular internationally. Most of us are also aware of a well established international journal dedicated to ESP discussion, "English for Specific Purposes: An International Journal". But in India ESP still needs long time to mature.

There is much confusion regarding the meaning of ESP not only in India but in various Asian countries. Being aware of the confusion Dudley – Evans, Co-editor of the ESP Journal came up with

an extended definition of ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics.

*Definition of ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1997)*

#### ***Absolute Characteristics***

1. ESP is defined to meet 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.

#### ***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 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.

Dudley – Evans has no doubt done a wonderful job by dividing the ESP into absolute and variable characters. It helps in resolving arguments about what is and what is not ESP. He makes it clear that ESP can but is not necessarily related to specific discipline. It also does not aim at certain age group but generally used by adults. Hutchinson et al. rightly says, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to

content and method are based on learners reason for learning.”

Though the demarcation line between General English and ESP is very thin, it does exist. When asked about the differences Hutchinson et. al. (1987:53) aptly remarks “in theory nothing, in practical a great deal.” Teachers teaching General English concentrate more on the language in general. They aim at giving the learners a course that may satisfy their urge to know and understand certain language but when it comes to ESP, teachers give more importance to needs analysis, material writers think very carefully about the goals of the learners. Based on my personal observation though India still depends on conventional approach of examination oriented teaching the scenario is slowly changing. While analyzing the syllabus prescribed at various technical colleges I have observed that teachers now days are getting aware of need analysis. The syllabus especially in technical institutes is designed in such a way that it to some extent matches the goal of the learners. While teaching communication skills in an engineering college for few years I observed that the syllabus concentrates even when it is dealing with written communication on writing tenders, quotations, reports, etc which of course will be frequently required by them in their work place. Teaching Business Communication at one of the reputed Business Schools of India I again felt that institute wants us to give different kind of training in communication to different areas opted by students. This proves that though not much but to some extent ESP is influencing English teaching in India. Various corporate sectors also provide training to their newly recruited employees concentrating

on the kind of language and vocabulary they will be frequently using at their work place. Aviation industry is one such example.

As we see that the ESP is new concept in India the role of ESP teachers will also come as a challenge. Their role as a teacher will expand from teaching to a course designer, researcher, evaluators, etc. They will have to aim at giving a language that can be learnt for immediate use. They should aim at developing programmes that could help them in culturing the learners into the professional community. While drafting the projects for the learners they should intend at making them work independently in small groups. The project should involve exercises such as interviewing, talking to the people in the field, gathering information on the internet, through books, Journals, etc. In present context his role as a researcher becomes most important. He has to produce original and separate teaching material for separate fields. It is for this extremely vivid role that ESP teachers would play Swales (1985) prefers to use the term “ESP Practitioners” instead of “ESP Teachers”.

Though in India and at various Asian countries ESP is still in its infancy but its future is bright. To make it flourish we need to make the entire community know what ESP actually represents. We have to come up openly with the differences ESP holds to General English. The training centers should also come up with different curriculum to different learners. With all these efforts ESP will definitely grow.

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