

Implementation of an ESP Curriculum for Developing Workplace English in Polytechnics



Jalson Jacob

Assistant Professor of English, Govt Polytechnic College, Vennikulam, Kerala

Email : jalsonj@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

A student seeking a diploma in engineering from a polytechnic college in Kerala is usually trained solely on the technical content, and his/her communication skills are largely ignored in the course of study. Studies point out that insufficient workplace communication skills stand as a major obstacle for engineers to reach desired levels in their career. A positive way to address this problem is to develop and offer an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) curriculum where enhancement of communication skills as well as professional skills required for the engineer are taken care of. This paper presents the need and scope of an ESP curriculum and the modality of its implementation. In the first year diploma course, traditional ESP (focus on the lexicon, syntax and functions of language needed at the workplace) is recommended. Traditional ESP will eventually progress to integrated ESP and then to CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) in the second and third years of diploma study. The features of Integrated ESP and CLIL have also been dealt with in the paper.

Key words: ESP Curriculum, Workplace English, CLIL, Language-Focused ESP, Integrated ESP

The greater importance of English for engineers in industry and academia has created a strong demand for English teaching and learning. Effective teaching methods and materials which develop strong foundation in English have become the need of the hour and many teachers and administrators have begun exploring and even questioning the meaning, application, validity, and practicality of the existing curriculum. Nowadays, curriculum developers and educationists stand in favour of an ESP curriculum which promotes the mastery of English skills both in their

workplace and in their academics. This paper deals with the present language competency of the polytechnic students in Kerala, the modality of introducing the ESP curriculum, an evaluation of the Polytechnic Course books in English and the importance of CLIL in the field of technical education.

Case of Polytechnic Students in Kerala

Diploma engineering students in Kerala face tough challenges before they are employed in an organization. The increasing number of diploma holders passing out each year and the tough recruitment process of

companies pose a strong challenge for them to get placements in good companies. Language proficiency has become a mandatory skill required for finding a good placement. Graduates are expected to possess verbal communication skills, presentation skills and written skills along with comprehension skills. Until recently, the English syllabus followed in the state polytechnic colleges has not helped diploma engineers to come up as good practitioners or users of English. The present day English curriculum, which is mainly ESP oriented, aims at developing the professional communication skills the diploma holders need at their work place.

ESP and EGP

The major difference between ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and EGP (English for General Purpose) lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English. ESP involves teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by a particular learner for a particular purpose. It is naturally seen as an approach to language learning which is primarily based on the language needs. In other words ESP is designed to meet specific needs; it is related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; it is centered on language (syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics) that is appropriate to the activities; it is non-General English oriented and it has no pre-ordained methodology (discipline, strategy or need-dependent) (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998). In fact, the ESP teacher “should not become a teacher of subject matter, but rather an interested student of the subject matter” (Micic 2005: 5). They should also regard

themselves and their students as “professionals who learn and complement each other” (Irizar and Chiappy 2008: 13). Teaching grammar and language structures which are of little use for the learners do not come under the purview of ESP teaching. Needs assessment determines which language skill is to be emphasized, contrary to the general skill development focus of EGP. An ESP programme, for example, might stress the development of speaking skills of those who study English in order to become a Tour Guide or writing skills of those who study English to become engineers.

The difference between EGP and ESP courses is that in EGP the learner focuses mainly on usage of general English to express ideas for general purposes and daily needs whereas ESP stresses workplace specific language skills. English studied in secondary and higher secondary classes come under EGP and content based English like English for Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers etc come under ESP.

Implementing ESP in Polytechnic Colleges

In Kerala, polytechnic education is a three-year diploma course and English is studied only in the first year. English study should be included all the three years in order to bring in the desired language output. A fully fledged ESP curriculum should be introduced only after the students are exposed to a language- focused, traditional ESP in the first year. The features of the language-focused ESP and Integrated ESP are given below.

In language-focused ESP curriculum, primary

importance is given to the familiarization and internalization of the language elements/ functions a diploma engineer needs at the industry. In language-focused ESP, the learner is enabled to use English accurately, appropriately and fluently by exposing him to a range of learning materials. Here the content is only a source to teach professional language. In other words, the language needed for a diploma engineer at the workplace is familiarized through different content matter which need not be subject specific. Traditional/Language- focused ESP should act as an intermediate course between the EGP the students have studied in their school and the Integrated ESP to be learned in the second year.

Examples of Language- Focused ESP curriculum

The first year course books in English (*Words to Deeds and Rise and Shine*) prepared for the polytechnic students of Kerala are presented as a good case in point. The design and content of the course books provide rich language learning opportunities for learners and equip them to use more sophisticated language. The features of the course book that enable the learner to study integrated ESP are:

1) Principle of Scaffolding

The course book provides different types of support for learners to use English with ease in diverse situations like writing, reading or speaking. *Get Set, Go* (warmers and Lead-in activities) prepares the learners for the main text. *The Self Check Questions, Word Gloss, While Reading Questions* and *The Self Evaluative Answer Key* scaffold the learners.

2) Principle of Task Continuity

Activities and tasks in the course book are linked to each other. Each module in the course book has a core text from which the activities /tasks follow and these activities and tasks are connected to its succeeding ones.

3) Principle of Repetition

Language elements introduced in a module are reintroduced and repeated in some other sections without monotony so that maximum reinforcement of the language item is made possible.

4) Principle of Integration of Skills

The course book intends to develop the basic skills in English. This is done through integrating skills. It involves using the different skills to practice vocabulary, grammar or language function.

5) Principle of Learning by Doing

At no point in the construction of the book has the learner factor been ignored or side-tracked. Learners learn best when they are actively involved in the process of learning. Maximum opportunity is given for students to engage themselves in collaborative learning. The tasks in the course book are organized in such a way that the learners can work individually, in groups or as a full class and interact with the peer groups, teachers and the course book.

6) Principle of Reflective Thinking

Sufficient opportunity is given for the learners to revisit what they have learned and to think of how effective they remember the things they learned. "Now I Know" section in each module checks the grammar consciousness of the learner.

INTEGRATED ESP

Integrated ESP Curriculum gives importance to both the professional content matter and the language for professional communication. It is proved that significant learning takes place when the subject matter is of interest to the learner. Here, in Integrated ESP, as the subject matter (content) relates to one's area of study (the engineering subject) the learner shows greater interest in working on it. Moreover, students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their field of study. The vocabulary and structures learned in meaningful contexts are sure to help them to understand the content better. In short, by learning the content the student unconsciously masters the professional communication as most of the activities intend to develop the communicative competency of the learner. Language is a means to acquire both content and language.

Traditional ESP Vs Integrated ESP

The question that one naturally asks is why we should go in for a traditional, language-focused ESP if Integrated ESP is betterment upon the other. It is seen that opting for Integrated ESP at the beginning has some practical difficulties.

In the first place ESP curriculum works well with those who have comparatively good foundation in EGP. We can't expect the first-year students to have strong orientation in English. If students lack in their basic English language skills it will naturally reflect upon the quality of ESP teaching and learning.

Moreover, for many students learning

professional Communication along with professional content (Integrated ESP) will be a difficult endeavour at the entry level. So a language –focused ESP course may be considered as a buffer or preparatory one before one starts the integrated ESP course.

The third reason is that students develop a fairly good knowledge about their workplace and nature of work after their first year. Integrated ESP curriculum at the second year enables them to understand it in a better way.

FROM INTEGRATED ESP TO CLIL

The approach followed in many technical universities nowadays, CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) works well with learners if they are introduced to traditional and Integrated ESP curriculum in the first and second year.

The term CLIL was launched in 1996 by UNICOM, University of Jyväskylä and the European Platform for Dutch Education. There are several definitions of the term offered by its promoters: CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language. (Marsh,2002). CLIL is an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught through a foreign, second or other additional language. (Marsh,2002).

CLIL aims at creating a strong foundation in the technical subjects keeping in mind the importance of acquiring proficiency in language skills.

CLIL AND ESP

CLIL and ESP share a number of key features, such as the use of content from different non-linguistic subjects, development of academic and communication skills, and use of communicative language teaching methodology. However, there are some key differences in these two approaches. First one is with regard to the objectives.

CLIL clearly states that content-learning objectives are equally or even more important than language-learning objectives, whereas ESP is language-led and language-learning objectives are of primary importance.

In ESP, the content of the course is often adapted to the learners' proficiency level or rather the learners are often grouped according to their levels of language proficiency. In CLIL, it is advised to use 'scaffolding' strategies to make content more manageable without really adapting it (Hammond and Gibbons 2005). In CLIL, language is learned when one studies the content. In CLIL, learning strategies are employed to provide language support for content acquisition.

More tolerance to language usage, more support for language production, enabling learners to acquire language in such a way is one of the key principles of CLIL, as opposed to traditional language teaching. CLIL also tolerates more use of L1, and code-switching strategies.

One more key difference is the teachers. An ideal CLIL teacher is a subject specialist with an appropriate level of language proficiency. Sometimes in CLIL, tandem

teaching by content and subject specialists is used. A typical ESP teacher is a language teacher who does not take on the responsibility for teaching subject content as it is beyond their competence because of the high cognitive demands of the subjects taught in higher education. One of the ways of solving the 'content' issue for the language specialists in higher education is to rely more on project or problem-based teaching and to co-operate with subject specialists.

REFERENCES

- Dudley-Evans, T. and St John, M.J. 1998. *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hammond, J. and Gibbons, P. 2005. "Putting scaffolding to work: The contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education". *Prospect* 20 (1), 6-30.
- Irizar, T. and Chiappy, A. 2008. "Operational level 4: A Cuban project". *Professional and Academic English* 32, 12-17.
- Marsh, D. 2002. *CLIL European Dimension: Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*. Retrieved from <ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc491_en.pdf>
- Micic, S. 2005. "Reforms in English for medical academic purposes in Belgrade". *Professional and Academic English* 27, 4-9.
- Jacob, J. et al. 2015. "Words to Deeds". State Institute of Technical Teachers training and Research: SITTR, Kalamaserry.
- Jacob, J. et al. 2015. "Rise and Shine". State Institute of Technical Teachers training and Research: SITTR, Kalamaserry.