# TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH: A REVIEW PAPER

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***Abstract:*** The purpose of this paper is to give an account of the work done so far in the field of research related to the teaching of Business English. But, unfortunately, very little work has been done in this area. So the researcher didn't rigidly stick to only research related to teaching of Business English material. This helped in giving a broad outline of the thoughts of prominent thinkers and experts in ESP with respect to the needs of the students learning Business English in India. It also helped to identify the teacher effectiveness in teaching Business English. The present review, therefore, includes the review of various reports, books, articles, thesis on this subject.

***Keywords:*** ESP, Needs, Business English, Business Communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Business English teaching in the management institutes prompts changes in the ways and methods of teaching and preparing students for continuous learning and effective use of the language to communication with people from various parts of the globe. Now with multimedia computers and internet resources available to common people, Business English presents English language teaching and learning with unprecedented opportunities as well as challenges.This paper offers a ground which serves as a theoretical basis for the further investigation on teaching Business English in India. The purpose of this paper is to survey and evaluate relevant research in teaching Business English in India. This paper reviews the practices in the teaching of Business English over the years and the perspectives on Business English that have been influential in conceptualizing a new approach to curriculum design. Literature pertaining to English language teaching in general is available in bulk, but studies discussing the present research objectives are quite rare. However, studies that are directly or indirectly related to the teaching Business English have been reviewed in order to arrive at a place to envisage research questions and design of further studies. The present review is a summary of some of the studies that structure the basis for future research and its various aspects. The review demonstrates the changing trend of teaching Business English. It is more like an evolution from intuition-led practices to content-based teaching, and further more research-based practices nevertheless with its shortcomings. Apart from teaching methodology, teaching materials and evaluation stand as lacunae in achieving quality education. This is because the higher order thinking is seen very rarely. There is no coordination between materials, methods and evaluation. In some instances in India teachers of different age group teach Business English

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and question papers for examinations are set by some elderly retired people who are not aware of the recent developments. They do not communicate with each other. There is no proper coordination among them andfinally, the students suffer.

ESP and business discourse studies are the two perspectives which have both contributed insights into Business English and have led us to a working definition of Business English. Business English, which aims to cultivate business expertise rather than just teaching language skills and discrete knowledge of the subject areas as is often promoted in the ESP literature.

Business schools, always a subject of controversy, are 'almost regarded as a necessary evil' (Vinten, 2000). Such integral part of the business world is this 'necessary evil' that its purposes appear rarely to be a subject of reflection (Grey, 2002), especially to those who teach them. Yet a need to prioritize the mission objectives of business schools to the benefit of those stakeholders for whom they dedicate most of their energies is undeniable. The researcher has found that business graduates lack in soft skills, including managerial skills. More or less same conclusions have been reached to in various studies conducted further (Wardrope, 2002; McPherson, 1998). Numerous articles (for example, Buckley, 1989; Thompson & Smith, 1992) suggest that business schools are failing to help students develop needed competencies and skills.

These facts confirm the criticism that B-schools are facing failure to groom students with the required skills and competencies essential to the new workplace and yet the efforts to overcome this failure have proved fruitful only to a limited extent. The content of a business management programme, the nature of its curriculum and how it meets the needs of business life distinguishes a B-school from its competitors (Baruch and Leeming, 1996). This curriculum is crucial to all the stakeholders- the employers, the business school, the faculty and the students. Given the importance of curriculum content to all the stakeholders and given the dramatic changes in the workplace environment, it is essential for business educators to incorporate changes in their curriculum in order to meet the changing workplace demands.

Research on the opinions of business executives (Chandler, 1995; Locker, 1995) and students (McPherson, 1998) reveal that the ability to communicate effectively in business is as ranked one of the top most skills necessary for job success. Chandler, 1995; Plutsky, 1996; Epstein, 1999; Stowers & White, 1999 Cappel, 2002, & many others in their studies based on their surveys on recruiters have repeatedly established that employers require and expect that business management students *i.e.* their employees will possess good communication skills when they graduate. In 2002, Wardrope conducted a study on the perceptions of department chairs, relating to business communication. According to the department chairs who responded, written communication was ranked the most important among the communication skills, while using correct grammar was ranked the most important in the written

communication category. Swanson and Swanson (1990) found that alumni perceive business communication as the most valuable course than any other course required in the core. Likewise, Gustafson, Johnson, and Hovey's survey (1993) established that alumni believe communication to be the most significant tool for advancement to higher levels of responsibility. Such studies substantiate and confirm to the criticality most business communication educators attach to their subject for success in the workplace. The business communication curriculum must reflect the current trends that are accepted in the business world. This paper makes a small attempt towards indicating the areas of this much required change in teaching Business English.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

The chapter will now begin with a brief overview of the development of ESP. Robinson (1991) points out that observing past students who are working may be an effective means in seeing to what extent the ESP course has fully prepared them for workplace needs. After such observation, the course designer is then able to reorganize the course materials for the successive batch of students. The researcher also observed that the employers were not satisfied with the students who have been recruited during the placement or otherwise. Lack of communication and people skills were the cause of concern for the employers. The employers were of the view that the new employees were not job ready.Another distinguishing feature of Business English teaching is that it is not a service industry, as Hutchinson and Waters (2002) suggest ESP is, but rather an independent form of language education conducted by English departments of the universities that offer Business English programs. In contrast, Alexander (1999) describes Business English as a service program for students of business administration, economics, or commerce.

## BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN INDIA

Criticism about lack of communication skills and concern about the need to improve them are not unique to India as well, a non-native English speaking country. The same is true of countries where English is the native or dominant language, (for example, in Australia and New Zealand (Clout, 1994; White, 1993; Dwyer, 1992) and the (Plutzky, 1996; Willmington, 1989).The problem of poor English communication skills becomes graver in a non-native English speaking country like India. After the recent Make in India approach the people all over the world are recognising India as a strong stake holder as far as trade is concerned. India is globally recognised as a profitable business partner. So can business be accomplished without Business English? Undoubtedly not possible. Business English teacher has to be proactive in their approach now and update themselves with the latest technologies to be recognised with other strong and developed nations like China.

Indian English is a language spoken by the educated class in India. There are 18 official languages in India, and English is often the language of national communication (Gannon, 1994). However, it is understood that, English is a foreign and acquired language for Indians, communication skills in English do not come naturally to Indian students. It then seems only logical that the prime stakeholders of business management education in India, in the light of the international business scenario today, would be a very valid source of information about which communication skills they perceive as important for success and what would their preference be for the business communication course curriculum. Among various stakeholders, business instructors, with their obvious ties to local business, are arguably in the best position of all to determine the types of communication skills necessary to succeed in the workplace and to judge whether students need to improve those skills.

These facts prompted this study in which scholars and researchers' perceptions about the business communication curriculum are examined. Stanga and Ladd (1990) noted that despite the importance of communication skills, relatively little is known about the obstacles that students face when attempting to develop their communication abilities. It is time to also acknowledge the troubles business instructors face while dealing with students for whom English is second language and yet, who have to be taught in English since it is the language of business. Hence, business instructors may arguably be in a strong position to opine what should be taught in a business communication curriculum and to what extent should it be taught. As stated earlier, studies examining employer and student perceptions of student communication skills have been conducted before but the share of faculty opinion in the above stated studies is relatively very small. Plutsky and Wilson (1996) did undertake some work what the faculty teaching business management students feel about business communication course curriculum but little has been done in India, where the linguistic context, communication challenges and student expertise in English differ. Also, in the fast globalizing Indian corporate sector with increasing presence of MNCs, effective communication skills have assumed an indispensable quality in any successful manager's skill set.

**NEEDS ANALYSIS**

The idea of the large scale of analysis of students' needs was begun largely with Richterich's (1971) pioneering work for the Council of Europe, through the phrase 'analysis of needs' was used as early as the 1920s by Michael West when teaching Indian civil servants. Approaches to needs analysis have changed as views on language and communicative competence have changed. Thus, the first main movement, Target Situation Analysis, grew up alongside the functional/notional work of Wilkins (1976). Wilkins' work, widely regarded as heralding in the age of 'communicative' language teaching, argued that language was made

up of functions - the purposes to which language is put - and notions - concepts expressed by language. This resulted in a search to find those situations where students would need language and subsequently an attempt to define the language needed in those situations.

Mohanty (2009) mentions about the importance that organizations place on 'good communication skills' in the global market. This aspect deals with the humanistic aspect of the need to be well grounded in 'soft skills' as these soft skills help groom the whole personality of the individual. A person who can communicate well integrates into a team more easily and effectively, resulting in an increasing level of efficiency and productivity. The studies on language needs analysis and communication patterns in various workplaces identified that ESP practitioners need to collaborate with subject matter experts from specific professional areas such as business or engineering related subjects to better execute the communication tasks expected from students as highlighted by Mehisto (2007). She emphasized the need for a comprehensive needs analysis and collaboration with content specialists so that the mismatch between the workplace needs and ESP courses offered could be avoided. To excel in the workplace engineers not only need to effectively communicate technical information but also need to have acceptable social and communication skills. English for Professional Purposes (EPP) practitioners are (Bhatia, 1993, 1997, 1999; Dudley- Evans, 1997; Flowerdew 2000, Henry and Rosebury, 1998; 2001).

Mohanty (2011) states that students today are digitally literate and they live in a world immersed in visual literacy. Television, computer/video games, cell phones, social networking sites, emails, chat rooms and instant messaging are common forms of entertainment and communication among students of this generation. Thereby students gain the exposure to learn from the visual media. Visual literacy has become extremely important today in both education and in the wider world of business and industry; the latter because employers are increasingly demanding it of their prospective workers. Learning with technology fosters creativity in the learner as he or she is empowered to design individual representations of content using technology.

Warrier (2007) reports on the urgent need to improve technical students' communication skills. Narayanan, vice chairman of Cognizant Technology Solutions and Chairman of NASSCOM, in an interview regarding the talent demand and supply gap and the role of the NASSCOM to help the industry bridge the gap comments: "The current situation is that, in terms of availability of talent, the numbers are good. The problem lies in the suitability of people. The industry has moved forward rapidly and technology also has changed but the educational institutions and the curriculum have not changed that rapidly. So, we have to bridge the gap by providing additional training to the people who are coming out of colleges so that they are industry - ready".

Gaur (2008) states that in order to teach communication skills, the traditional ELT methods are not enough. They have to be supplemented with a different knowledge base and have to borrow heavily from behavioral sciences and management. Since the emphasis is on the use of English not only for the communication of one's own thoughts, but also on using persuasive techniques or making communication scientifically objective. The methods of analyzing the receiver's personality and the factors affecting the decision making process before the communication loop ends, have to be a part of the teaching and learning process.

Srivastava (2009) comments on the aspects of language learning in the Indian scenario, "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 learners actually want.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Therefore the current review can examine various aspects of a needs based approach in the teaching and learning process of English for management purposes. Its results and implications will no doubt be of use to policy makers, teachers and also for students. Restructuring curriculum on the basis of these suggestions will produce new managers for the new generation. In a learner-centered curriculum, key decisions about what, how and when etc. could be decided on consultation with the learner. Learning-centeredness is empowering the learner decide what he wants to learn. Usually a student develops this ability at the end of a course. It does not mean abdicating the responsibility of the teacher to the student. Nunan, (1995) finds that a learner-centered curriculum will encourage learners to move towards autonomy at the end of the pedagogical continuum. This is what ESP/EBP curriculum focuses upon. Over the past decade increasing attention has been focused on the importance of communication skills for management students in India but not on the gaps in the implementation of the designed syllabus thus seeking measures to minimize the gap to help students achieve skills to transfer it in real world situations. This review thus provides an insight into the certain theoretical foundations related to the research and discusses relevant teaching-learning theories and recent researches done in this area.

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