
NECESSITY OF NEED BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the needs of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) learners for English communication, particularly the needs of First Year B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture Students from State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in Maharashtra. This study was conducted with the specific objective whether to introduce ESP material in the agriculture curriculum. Learners' responses clearly indicate that the current English course is vitally useful for them. According to them writing skill has the lion's share in the course. While, listening, speaking and reading were got somewhat less allocation. Majority of the student respondents used to read books related to agriculture and several went for magazines, novels and newspaper. So also, some of the learners found to read materials like online materials, comics, literary works, poems, etc. Almost all the learners preferred supplementary material to be added to present English course. This means that the present English language course has a fair scope for improving to match the entire needs of the learners i.e. in-study, post-study, professional and social needs. The study implies that there is an imperative need of inclusion of ESP as supplementary material to present English course prescribed to B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture degree course.*

KEYWORDS: ESP, needs, Agriculture English, curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In fact, the English material in use at the Faculty of Agriculture for B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture degree course teaches only communication skills. The same course is prescribed to other degree courses in SAUs. It emphasises only on communication skills. Hence, it has a limited scope in this respect. Moreover, this course primarily teaches communication skills to a restricted extent. It mainly emphasizes on writing skills related to business and official communication. There is only one introductory topic on reading skills. For listening comprehension there is also only one topic giving overview with no useful practical contents. For spoken skills there is no practical and theory work which would be useful in agriculture and social context. This part has only group discussion and interview, which doesn't help communicate in the classroom and outside the classroom. It doesn't contain the components which are immediately related to the subject specialization of the learners i.e. Agriculture. This type of communication may constitute essential components as they may enable the learners to interact to some extent with

each other as colleagues. But it is very important to take into account that agriculture students are the part of the society; they need to interact not only with their fellow students and teachers but also with the society. For instance, they have to interact with the farmers and scientists from other institutes as part of their study. All these situations and many others require different types of communication, which they lack. Surprisingly, it doesn't contain any element that helps learn specialized agriculture courses. Therefore, no doubt, the learners are not much motivated because the course contents are not of immediate use for them. Though the materials are relevant to the some professional/occupational needs they enjoy learning some interesting topics and uses of the target language. Unfortunately, the ESP would place less emphasis upon research materials according to the needs e.g. agricultural material for agriculture students, medical texts for medical students, Engineering English for engineering learners, and so on. Subject specific language enables students to express linguistic elements and activities relevant to specific specialization (Dudley – Evans and Johns, 1991). The students should be inspired and enthused by the obvious relevance of ESP materials taking into account the fact that they are human beings not machines (Gardener and Lambert, 1972).

METHODOLOGY

There are four agricultural universities in Maharashtra – Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, Dist Ahmednagar; Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola, VN Marathwada Krishi Vidyapeeth, Parbhani and Dr. Balasaheb Sawant Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli, Dist Ratnagiri. Actually, these students study an English course at their first year of the degree course, as a part of requirement of the degree. The syllabi of all the courses are common at all these four agricultural universities. There is a felt need of introducing these materials that may motivate the learners of agricultural sciences to undertake their specialized studies more seriously and enthusiastically. Unfortunately, they will be put to serious difficulties and constraints as they have learnt a very limited language, which runs around narrow domains. Therefore, agricultural English forms just incomplete components and lacks important ones. Therefore, they necessarily need other components such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Therefore, for seeking the views of the students on introduction of ESP material in the curriculum, the questionnaire for students was prepared. For this purpose the students were randomly selected from all the four SAUs in Maharashtra. Moreover, this is the compulsory course in all the agricultural universities in India. The respondents were from almost all the states in India because in Maharashtra SAUs students from other states also admitted. Therefore, generalization was more Authentic. The questionnaire was rendered on 400 students from all the four SAUs, 100 from each one.

This study was conducted with the specific objective whether to introduce ESP material in the agriculture curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are presented as below.

This part is concerned to the investigation of the needs of the agriculture learners as viewed by the student informants. The needs aspect was initiated by an item to illicit information about motivation of the student towards present English course.

The following table (1) describes the students' motivation towards English language course in use in comparison to the subjects of specialization. Their response is given in the table below.

Table (1): Motivation towards the current English course

| Sl. No. | Category (Score) | Respondents (n= 400) | |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1. | The most (3) | 058 | 14.50 |
| 2. | Same as others (2) | 286 | 71.50 |
| 3. | Least of all (1) | 056 | 14.00 |
| | Average: 2.00 Total | 400 | 100.00 |

The above table shows that more than two-third of the learners (71.50 per cent) rated English same as the other courses. More than one-tenth (14.50 per cent) liked this course most in comparison to other courses of specialization. While, more than one-tenth (14.00 per cent) liked it least of all. The average score came to 2.00. This clearly indicates usefulness of the course is Vital for agriculture students. The extent of usefulness of the English language course for study purposes in agriculture context as perceived by the students is given in the table below.

Table (2): The extent of usefulness of the English language course for study purposes in agriculture context as perceived by the students

| Sl. No. | Category (score) | Respondents (n= 336) | |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1. | To great extent (3) | 205 | 61.01 |
| 2. | To somewhat extent (2) | 101 | 30.07 |
| 3. | To a limited extent (1) | 030 | 08.92 |
| | Average: 2.52 Total | 336 | 100.00 |

Table 2 exhibits that more than three-fifth (61.01 per cent) informants regarded the usefulness of the present English course to a great extent. For less than one-third (30.07 per cent) the course was useful to somewhat extent and for only 08.92 per cent students it was useful to a limited extent. The average score was 2.52. Considering these facts it is crystal clear that the present English language course is useful for the learners.

Table (3) explains the allocation of each practical skill as perceived via student informants. It indicates the percentage of the benefits the agriculture English course for the following language skills.

Table (3): Allocation of Practical Skills

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Listening | 27.6% |
| Speaking | 28.4% |
| Reading | 36.7% |
| Writing | 57% |

As observed by the students that writing skill has the lion's share (57.00 per cent) in the course. While, the percentage of the skills of listening, speaking and reading were got somewhat less allocation 27.6 per cent, 28.4 per cent and 36.7 per cent, respectively. This is due to the fact that there is an agreement between the results tabulated above and the contents of the course.

Unfortunately, there was poor implementation of the pragmatic skills viz. listening and speaking, though they are regarded the most important skills in language learning. Some language skills were over emphasized and others are somewhat undervalued i.e. reading and writing were over emphasized whereas listening and speaking were given less prominence. In the agricultural context, each language skill device plays its own role in which it has full rights in the implementation aspect, for instance

- Listening to lectures, symposia, conferences, etc.
- Speaking in agricultural context, informal discussions and conversations, etc.
- Reading textbooks, journals, papers, documents, success stories, etc.
- Writing examination papers, reports, articles and research materials, etc.

Then students were asked to rate usefulness of the current English course in real life situations. The students' rating of the course is given in the following table.

Table (4): Usefulness of the English language course in real life situations

| Sl. No. | Category (score) | Respondents (n= 400) | |
|---------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1. | Useful (3) | 266 | 66.50 |
| 2. | Somewhat useful (2) | 124 | 31.00 |
| 3. | Not useful (1) | 010 | 02.50 |
| | Average: 2.64 | Total | 400 |
| | | | 100.00 |

The above table determines that nearly two-third (66.50 per cent) informants found the English language course useful to them, whereas, less than one-third (31.00 per cent) found it somewhat useful, and only 02.50 per cent students said it was not useful. The average score found to be 2.64. Hence, the present English course is, undoubtedly, useful to the agriculture students in general.

As a preliminary step to examine the views of the students regarding their needs, they were asked whether they read English books/materials other than those, which they study in agriculture context. The students, who responded positively, indicated that the current course did not meet their entire needs. Therefore, they try to improve their English proficiency through self-study in order to cope with the requirements of their studies. ESP learners often need in-house materials because textbooks are increasingly less self sufficient.

The students' responses on reading English material other than their agricultural studies are given below

- a. Yes (374) 93.50%
- b. No (026) 06.50%

If affirmative, what kind:

Table (5): Reading other materials

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Books related to agriculture | 59.00 per cent |
| Magazines | 34.00 per cent |
| Novels | 23.50 per cent |
| Newspapers | 66.50 per cent |
| Other (please specify) | 23.00 per cent |

As expected, almost all the informants responded positively; they perceived well the importance of reading as a self-study device at this stage, where they need great access to supplementary materials, which might help them to overcome some difficulties of agricultural studies. Some of the informants said that they practiced reading skill in more than one area. The above table confirms this fact. Just less than three-fifth (59.00 per cent) used to read books related to agriculture and just less than one-third (34.00 per cent) of the respondents went for magazines. Novels would read by less than one-fourth (23.50 per cent) and newspaper readers were found comparatively more i.e. nearly two-third (66.50 per cent). Other materials used to read by less than one-fourth (23.00 per cent) of the students, which include online materials, comics, literary works, poems, etc. Interestingly, one candidate showed interest to read books on Indian economy.

Reading is an active skill where the reader attempts to build up the meaning the writer had in mind when he wrote the text. Reading is a very important language skill. The students need to develop their strategies to reach the advanced stage if they have to follow successfully the science course programmes.

Then students were asked whether they prefer supplementary material to be added to present English course. The responses of the respondents are as under.

- a. Yes (338) 84.50%
- b. No (62) 15.50%
- c. If yes, which one do you prefer to add?

Table (6): Preference of adding supplementary material

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Agriculture related English material | 49.50 per cent |
| General English material | 35.50 per cent |
| Grammar | 36.00 per cent |
| Other (specify) | 10.00 per cent |

Majority of the informants (84.50 per cent) preferred to add supplementary material to the current English course. This group expressed the view that the English materials in use were inadequate and the utilization was not up to the mark. Therefore, they opted for addition of the

supplementary materials in order to fill in the deficiency of the current materials. Some of the ESP textbooks can be regarded as supplementary material as they just focus on a specific area of language learning.

Some students preferred to add more than one kind of material as they ticked more than one option, whereas other (10.00 per cent) preferred to add other material, opting for conversation. This group liked to improve their speaking ability, because it plays a very important role in real life communication. Those who opted for agriculture related English (49.50 per cent), general English material (35.50 per cent) and grammar (36.00 per cent) liked to have access to supplementary material.

The next question raised by the researcher whether the present English language course meet their entire i.e. academic, professional and social needs. The following table informs in this respect.

- a. Yes (176) 44.00%
b. No (224) 56.00%

Table (7): Agriculture English course and entire needs of the learners

| Sl. No. | Category (score) | Respondents (n= 176) | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1. | To great extent (3) | 37 | 21.03 |
| 2. | To somewhat extent (2) | 91 | 51.70 |
| 3. | To limited extent (1) | 48 | 27.27 |
| | Average: 1.94 Total | 176 | 100.00 |

Table 7 points out that just more than one-fifth (21.03 per cent) students found the present English language course meeting their entire needs to great extents, while more than half (51.70 per cent) found it useful to somewhat extent and more than one-fourth (27.27 per cent) student were of the opinion that this course did match their future professional needs to limited extent. The average score comes to 1.94. This means that the present course has a fair scope for improving to match the entire needs of the learners.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion indicates that necessary improvement may be done in the present English language course to fulfill entire needs of the learners.

Recommendations/Implications

The study implies that there is an imperative need of inclusion of ESP supplementary material to present English course prescribed to B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture degree course.

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