

# The Demand For Esp Course In Ethiopian Context: Implications Drawn From The Studies On Esp

Dr. Deepika Nelson, Adinew Tadesse, Dr. Julia Devardhi

(Dr. Deepika Nelson) School of Foreign Language Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia.

(Adinew Tadesse) School of Foreign Language Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia-251,

(Dr. Julia Devardhi) School of Foreign Language Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia-251,  
devardhi.julia@gmail.com, dr.deepikanelson@gmail.com, adinewdegago@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** From the early 1960s English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of English foreign language teaching. It has constantly given insight into the structures and meanings of texts, the demands placed by academic or workplace contexts on communicative behaviors, and the pedagogic practices by which these behaviors can be developed. In this paper "The Demand for ESP course in Ethiopian Context: Implication drawn from the studies on ESP" The study attempts to identify the deficiency analysis based on the recent research done by the master students of TEFL, in Haramaya University, Ethiopia. The purpose of this study is to identify the English language needs of the students in relation to academic requirements at Haramaya University. An in-depth qualitative content analysis was done based on the implications drawn from the study. An ESP text evaluation checklist containing nine items was adapted from Cunnings Worth (1995), which states that the Instructional materials need to be evaluated to ensure that they correspond to learner needs, reflect real language uses and facilitate the learning process. To identify the students' English language target needs, as in the case of the present study, Needs Analysis is the most appropriate method to know about the nature and content of the learners' target language needs. It has been observed that General English does not address the needs of potential students who may be from different disciplines. Research on educational practices and projections about future needs in society contribute to current understanding of the structure of ESP course. Therefore It is the best timely to study this situation because of the growing grievance about the English language communicative abilities of students in the country in general, and college trainees in particular, by employers, teachers and other concerned bodies. This problem can be attributed, among others, to teaching students language courses designed without appropriate needs analysis survey.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purpose, Need Analysis, Target needs, Implications

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century has been witnessing a phenomenal expansion of the ways in which learning and teaching are delivered, and this is equally applicable to ESP and EAP. ESP is today more vibrant than ever with a bewildering number of terms created to fit the increasing range of occupations that have taken shelter under the ESP umbrella. It seems with increasing globalization and mobility of the world's workforce that the demand for specific courses will not decrease but only rise. Stakeholders and learners should realize that English is essential for social purposes, as a means of empowerment and self-expression and not restrict themselves too narrowly to just a few target situations. Debate continues on certain aspects of ESP as to what is the best teaching practice, for instance whether the course should be narrowly focused just on immediate students' needs; what could be termed a restrictive syllabi or a broader focus that also teaches skills and situations and hence vocabulary and grammar remains outside of the need analysis. As we enter the next decade it can be seen from this discussion that ESP continues to evolve along several distinct paths. All these branches however, share something in common; an increasing focus on learners', not just their immediate wants and needs but future wants and needs as well. This is a move toward negotiated or process orientated syllabi with students' actively involved with their courses. This study attempts to identify the deficiency analysis based on the recent research done by the master students of TEFL, in Haramaya University. It has been observed that General English does not address the needs of potential students who may be from different disciplines. Research on educational practices and projections about future needs in society contribute to current understanding of the structure of ESP course. The purpose of this study is to

identify the English language needs of the students in relation to academic requirements at Haramaya University. An in-depth qualitative content analysis was done based on the implications drawn from the study of the [1],[2], [3],[4],[5],and [6]. To identify the students' English language target needs, Needs Analysis (hereafter NA) has been regarded as the most appropriate method, it "can tell us a lot about the nature and content of the learners' target language needs"[7]. NA has been used for identifying the types of the academic activities and tasks of different disciplines and the students' needs of academic English language skills to effectively study their major courses [8]. Language needs assessment studies in Ethiopia is a very recent phenomena, and not much research has been done on the subject. However, certain promising research efforts have been locally conducted at different levels to assess the English language needs of students enrolled at different departments of Universities and Colleges to meet their specific language needs. The worldwide increase in the use of English has led to many changes in educational institutions. Today, English is no longer simply taught as a foreign language, but in an increasing number of countries serves as the medium of instruction, even in non-English speaking countries, like Ethiopia. Depending on the mission of the educational institutions EFL courses are offered. The demand for this course, especially in higher education institutions, is continuously increasing, not only in countries where English is the mother tongue, but also many other countries, as a growing number of higher education institutions choose English as their medium of instruction [9],[10]. Due to this English has been a part of the curriculum of higher educational institutions in Ethiopia for many years. It is also timely to study this scenario because there are a number of complaints about the English language communicative abilities

of students in the country in general, and college trainees in particular, by employers, teachers and other concerned bodies. This problem can be attributed, among others, to teaching students language courses designed without appropriate needs analysis survey. Higher education worldwide is undergoing substantial changes in terms of organization and function in response to globalization forces such as demographics, economic structuring and information technology that are introducing new conceptions of educational markets, organizational structures, teaching methodologies and teaching content. There is increasing diversity in the student population in terms of culture, socioeconomic status, educational and linguistic backgrounds. In general, curriculum should emphasize deep rather than broad coverage of important areas of knowledge, authentic and contextualized problems of study, and problem-solving skills that stress the development as well as knowledge acquisition. It should be sensitive to the particular academic cultured environment in which the courses will be imposed. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Special Purposes arose as a term in the 1960's as it became increasingly aware that general English courses frequently did not meet learner or employers wants. As [11] says ESP now encompasses an 'ever-diversifying and expanding range of purposes.' This continued expansion of ESP into new areas has arisen due to the ever-increasing 'globalized' world. From the outset the term ESP was a source of contention with many arguments as to what exactly was ESP? Even today there is a large amount of on-going debate as to how to specify what exactly ESP constitutes [11],[8].

## **2. Implication of M.A Students work on ESP and its emergent need in Ethiopia:**

According to Haile Alemu (2011) Fissaha Bekele (2012) Tekabib Kassahune (2013), Biniyam Teka (2013), Genene Dejene (2013) and Mekbib Yohannes (2014) the focus is on the importance of the four-macro skills and the other micro skills for the students' academic requirements where all the respondents attached high values. This could imply that there is high need for learning the language skills. Hence, the participants were asked to rate the relevance of sample language skills and their own competence levels. Students' and graduates' response and teachers' comments and ratings indicated that students lack professional English language skills; sample professional language skills are not included in the lesson contents nor practiced in daily tasks. As a result, there are gaps between the ratings of importance of the skills and the ratings of graduates' self competence levels. This shows that though they believe these language skills are important for their career, they pointed out that they face challenges in using language skills. Therefore there is a gap that exists between professional English language needs and students current language competence. On the other hand, despite the high degree of importance given to the sub skills and micro skills, the competence of the students was found to be average or low implying that the skills seemed to be de-emphasized in high school as well as at college level. This seems to mean that the course offered to the students at the college was deficient to help the students develop the most important skills in an integrated manner. Moreover, the overall rating of importance of the skills for academic purpose was high. However, the gap between aggregate mean of competence and the aggregate mean of importance seems to show more lack in English for

academic purposes. Thus, this would mean that the treatment of English for academic purpose seems to be a priority in syllabus design and material preparation of a course. Consequently, the low competence of students in the skills required would also mean that students' current competence or proficiency did not help them much in their academic studies. As all the above researchers' result shows, English skills and activities were not designed as content consistent with student's field of specialization. So English instructors and domain experts of the University showed that focus on English language skills and activities ought to be consistent with students' field of specialization by taking relative importance that is directed towards students' language needs. Concerning the English language need that is principally met by the two course materials, only the academic needs of the students was partially met. This tends to imply that the two course materials ignored the students' need of the professional setting. The contents of the course do not include the students 'wants' and there is no integration of English course and subject area courses. This is a clear indication of the extreme gap between their need and their competence to perform these four skills. Moreover, the graduates from all the disciplines claimed that they could not relate the four skills acquired in the university with the practical communication skills they were expected to perform at their workplaces. Hence the existing course book being used in the university should be revised and appropriate courses designed by taking into account the English language needs of students for their academic studies and future occupation. Finally, the data collected from various participants revealed a crucial pedagogical implication for curriculum developers and English instructors. The fact that was commonly believed by all is that the current English language courses taught was not designed based on needs analysis and the basic considerations of an ESP text implies that it would be necessary to redesign it.

## **3. Textbook Analysis** (Communicative English Skills/College English, Vol. I and Basic Writing Skills) Qualitative Content Analysis was carried out to strengthen the data gathered through the pedagogical implications of [1],[2],[3],[4],[5],[6]. and to examine whether the (Basic Writing Skills and Communicative English Skills) courses being offered to the students were adequately satisfying the academic language needs of the students. Particularly, an attempt was made using an ESP text evaluation checklist containing nine items which were adapted from Cunnings Worth (1995), which states that the Instructional materials need to be evaluated to ensure that they correspond to learner needs, reflect real language uses and facilitate the learning process. Further, the sample course module was analyzed to see the kind of activities students are expected to do and the respective English (functions, structures, skills and genre types) students needs in their academic settings. Based on the above concepts, the contents of the course manuals were assessed. Focusing on: to what extent the language items in the teaching manuals are related to the students' needs; whether the activities can address the students' different learning styles, and their future needs, to what extent the lessons are student-centered, and if the vocabularies are selected from the field of specialization to help learners acquire necessary terminologies, and skills required for their professional needs. A well-designed course book that allows for adaptation and a certain degree of learner spontaneity is generally regarded as the most visible tool in the balanced teacher/learner relationship. Due to the recent

growth of materials in the ESL publishing industry, guidelines are necessary to raise teachers' awareness to various course book designs. Rather than criticizing instructors who are handcuffed to a certain text, relevant evaluation criteria should instruct teachers how to best select course books that fit their certain needs [12]. As [13]states, the selection procedure is intended as a "framework, not a straitjacket," and any procedure should be modified to suit personal circumstances. As stated earlier, the textbook was analyzed using checklist adapted from Cunnings worth (1995). The checklist was divided into two parts. The first parts were open ended questions about the general content and organization of the textbook. As it was learnt, there was no professional English Language needs assessment conducted before the textbook was prepared. The textbook is almost similar to the textbook in high school. Each unit contains six sections-reading, listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary and grammar. Each item included is designed from General English. As the textbook is intended for any student in different fields in the university, there are no tasks or themes related to a particular field of specialization.

**3.1 ESP Text Material Evaluation Checklist (Adapted from Cunnings Worth, 1995: 135)**

1. Is the material based on a careful analysis of the learners needs?
2. Is the content appropriate to learners' needs? Does it have credibility? (Face validity).
3. Is there a body of 'core' specialist language related to the different disciplines across the university?
4. Are the learners equipped with skills and strategies that will allow them to operate effectively in English in academic situation?
5. Is there a balance between subject specific language items (grammar, vocabulary, discourse structure) and operational skills and strategies in language use?
6. Does the material consider the relationship between teachers and students? If so, is a collaborative approach encouraged?
7. Can the material be used for individual study? If so, are teachers given guidance on how to use the material in this way?
8. To what extent do the learning activities mirror real life situations, for example, through task-based and skill based activities?
9. Do learning activities have outcomes or products which will help learners to evaluate their performance?

**Textbook assessment rubrics:** The second part of the check list contained rubrics to be rated in 4 scales-very good (4), good (3), poor (2), and very poor (1). The assessment has been summarized in the table below.

No	Items	Ratings			
		4	3	2	1
1.	The book contains adequate amount of tasks for customer hospitality and face to face discussions.				√
2.	Speaking skill activities address speech delivery techniques at meetings, business reports and seminars.			√	
3.	Samples of data presentations from accounting/medical/law/Information technology/ Agricultural/Social Sciences and Humanities etc areas have been incorporated in the textbook.				√
4.	The topics and tasks varied, so that they accommodate different learner levels, learning needs, styles and strategies, interests, etc.			√	
5.	The topics targeted to students' occupational situations i.e. accounting /medical /law/Information technology/ Agricultural/Social Sciences and Humanities etc .				√
6.	The book contains adequate amount of activities to ensure ample practice in all the skills the students are supposed to master for their future career.			√	
7.	The book presents situations and tasks which are appealing, motivating and purposeful and which are not merely mechanical language drills.			√	
8.	The tasks are purposeful, pertinent to and useful for students' classes; the learners are likely to perform similar tasks in their occupational situations.				√
9.	The book includes enough communicative tasks to ensure plentiful learner activity and independent language use. It allows moving away from the teacher-centred model.			√	
10	The communication in the book is genuine. The texts in the book are taken from Authentic sources areas of students' future professions. The language is up to date and true to life.			√	
11	It is accompanied by supplementary resources (a workbook, audio cassettes/CDs and/or video tapes/DVD, etc.).These materials are useful and interesting. The book can be easily used without the Extras.				√
12	Listening skills are practiced effectively in an integrated way through the tasks which are related to target situations of accounting areas.			√	
13	Speaking skills are practiced effectively in an integrated way through the tasks related to future career situations.			√	

(Adapted from: Foreign language textbook evaluation hart, version 3.knol. <http://knol.google.com/mbp/foreign-language-textbook-evaluation/2qpvzotrhrhs1/36>.) The data in the table above indicates that the contents and tasks included in the textbook are not based on the professional English language needs of any particular field of specialization. The items were rated as "poor" or "very poor". A more promising approach comes from the analysis of ESP texts as all ESP activity has to be linked to a view of text. The curriculum design of General English is expected to broaden students' horizon so that they can meaningfully relate their academic study to other realms of understanding. The course book repeatedly provides activities for students to interact through the expression of meaning. Integration of the receptive and productive skills is the trend in modern course book design. Although equal weighting seems to be given to the four skills, developing oral communication skills is crucial to this goal as it provides students with versatile academic content covering topics such as culture, nature, business, medicine, science and technology to achieve an all-encompassing development of knowledge. According to [14],[8] and [15], the essence of collaboration in ESP is that learners and teachers have to collaboratively work: the students are believed to have more knowledge in their subject areas while the teacher is an expert in the language. Thus, in an ESP context, the students are believed to be co-workers; input providers (content area) in general, collaborative trainees. The communicative skills course considered these and it was incorporated to a great level in the units. However, the Basic writing skills did not take all these essential components of ESP into consideration. As a result of this, the teachers seem to act as only input and feedback providers, organizers and monitors. In short, the essence of collaboration in ESP is conspicuously absent. Overall, the textbook does not seem to respond to the real needs of the students since it does not satisfy many of the elements an ESP material should treat. For example, as [8] explain ESP teaching does not necessarily have to be related to content but it should always reflect the underlying concepts and activities of the discipline, and [16] makes use of the essential problem-solving methodology. However, the current courses did not employ a methodology linked to a particular profession or discipline which differs from that is used in General Purpose English teaching. This would suggest that the text material did not consider the specific needs of the learners under question. In other words, the text does not seem to agree with [14] as ESP is based on needs analysis (end of the course requirement and initial needs including learning needs). Moreover, the course also appears to be a failure as English for Specific Purpose as it does not satisfy some of the absolute and variable characteristics used by [8]. That is, it is not designed to meet specific needs of the students of various disciplines; it does not make use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; and it does not use in specific situations a different methodology (the nature of interaction between the ESP teacher and the learner) from that of general English.

#### 4. Views on Language and Methodology

It is important to consider the relationship between the language, the learning process and the learners. As stated in the course book's Introduction, (the Basic Writing Skills and Communicative English Skills) it is designed to help students develop "skill in using English for communication." Priority thus is given to the process of developing second language compe-

tence i.e. a learner-based course of action in which "both the content and the processes of learning become part of the language learning experience" [17]. The methodology adopted in the textbook should be eclectic, a combination of traditional and communicative approaches as per the specific needs. According to [18], communicative language teaching, adheres to a functional view of language, whose characteristics are provided by below:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.[18]

### 5. The challenges of contextualization of teaching material for specific needs in Ethiopian Context

**5.1. Lack of Competition in the education market:** The market of teaching materials in Ethiopia has comparatively a limited number of publications, with less competition. The Textbook writers are a group of ELT experts selected by the Ministry of Education.

**5.2. Standardization:** Almost all the universities/Colleges in Ethiopia use nearly the same textbook (Communicative English Skills and Basic Writing Skills) for one particular course for many years until there is a new change in the educational policy. The published textbooks by these experts have a common characteristic that they are uniform. The book Communicative English Skills (which is known as College English vol.1) has been in use for more than 12 years. The Ethiopian Universities have expanded drastically with different disciplines emerging to suit the global context; however the common English course book still remains the same. With the different disciplines the textbook should have been contextualized in a more specific manner to cater to the specific needs of the students in different disciplines to enhance their language proficiency for the job market. Hence, Teachers, course designers, and materials writers must be aware that the input provided by them will possibly be processed by learners in different ways than intended[19]. It is important, then, that materials meet students' needs by allowing for different learning styles.

### 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

English is considered as today's language of international commerce and transaction, hence, materials evaluation is an educational necessity because it shows how a textbook can be improved or justified. One key reason for a retrospective appraisal of materials is to provide insight into organizational principles, and therefore make apparent possible techniques for adaptation. At the university level, English is a required language subject. English courses for general purposes are offered to non-English majors two to three hours per week in the freshman and sophomore years respectively. Integration of English course and subject area courses into the mainstream curriculum is therefore the urgent need of the day. In turn, this would help bridge the gap that exists between professional English language needs and students current language com-

petence. The courses need to be designed keeping in mind the pragmatic engagement with occupational, academic, and professional realities. This would then become a crucial link between perception and practice. The principles underlying good ESP materials are somewhat the same as those that underlie sound ELT materials in general. In relation to the structure of the materials, efforts should be made to ensure the relative uniformity not only in the length of the materials, and the number of tasks, but also the systematic development of both contents and skills. [20] has indicated, textbooks are supposed to be generally sensitive to students' needs, particularly in this case, they are designed specifically for them. Therefore, the teacher-writers should consider students' abilities, interests, and learning styles. This consideration might be realized in the materials in terms of variety in text type, task type, level of difficulty, discourse, etc. The choice of texts, therefore, should be occupational-oriented. Although there appear a few difficulties, it is better for the students to work with real/ authentic materials that are easily accessible and more meaningful to their majors. In view of the conclusions and implications drawn, it is appropriate to recommend the practical test called 'CATALYST' proposed by [21]. The eight letters represents the eight criteria by which we can decide whether a textbook fits its purpose and the practical needs of the students. For these reasons, the teacher should shortly ask the key question represented by the word CATALYST.

C Communicative? (is the course designed to be communicative?)

A Aims? (does the course fulfil the expected aims?)

T Teachable? (to what extent is the course teachable?)

A Available? (are resources available to prepare the students for their future needs?)

L Level? (is the level of activities and tasks suitable to achieve the goals?)

Y Your impression? (what do students/teachers think about the design of the course?)

S Students interest? (does the course maintain the interest of the students?)

T Tried and tested? (has the course book been tried and tested to suit the required level?)

It is apt for educators to examine and adjust teaching programmes and pedagogical materials in order to effectively meet the changing realities that occur within societies in personal or professional spheres of its people. Finally, this timely evaluation, along with others, may prove to be a valuable input to the Ministry of Education by serving as a possible guide for similar future textbook evaluations.

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