

RESEARCH ARTICLE



NEEDS ANALYSIS AND A COURSE DESIGN OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF (CLERKS) OF GOVT. ISLAMIA COLLEGE, LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to design a course of English for Specific Purposes after analyzing the needs of the administrative staff (clerks) of Govt. Islamia College, Lahore, in their official context. Survey research strategy has been used for data collection. The researcher has used triangulation of tools by using quantitative and qualitative research approaches to collect data for this study. The quantitative data have collected through a questionnaire comprised of close-ended items retrieved from the clerks of the sample of the study. A sample of twenty 20 clerks out of approximate total population of 40 clerks has been selected for survey questionnaire. The qualitative data have been collected through individual interviews of the deputy superintendent and superintendent of the college. The sampling technique was convenient as the researcher enjoyed an easy access to the clerical staff of this college. The data analysis reveals that the clerical staff of the college has poor proficiency in reading and writing skills and they face a number of problems to get their official work done in English. The results of needs analysis suggest that there is a need for an English language course for the college clerks. So, this article focuses English for Specific Occupational Purposes (ESOP). A course outline has been designed for this public sector college clerks whose English reading and writing skills are not developed enough to cope up with official documentation. This paper also includes needs analysis, course plan, course contents, course length, course aims, course materials and evaluation. The underdeveloped countries and societies like Pakistan, where educational and administrative conditions are similar, can benefit from the findings of this research.

Key Words: ESP, Clerks, Govt, Islamia College, Quantitative, Qualitative, Approach.

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INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language learning in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learner's particular needs to learn the language (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The need

for English for Specific Purposes is on the increase day by day due to the rapid development in trade, commerce and business. The need for English for specific purposes is very urgently required in such countries where English is taught as a second language. In order to cope with this increase for

demand of English in every professional field, it is necessary to guide the students to face the competitive society successfully in their respective fields. ESP courses can help the learners for future professional communication. ESP is an important branch of English as a Foreign/ Second Language (EFL/ ESL) and there are various branches of ESP, for example English for Academic Purposes, English for Technical Purposes, and English for Occupational Purposes etc.

English for Specific Purposes enables the learners exploit and use English in their respective contextual fields (Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, J.M. 2005, p-11). This paper is an attempt to design a course outline of English for Specific Occupational Purposes (ESOP) after analyzing the needs of the administrative staff (clerks) of Govt. Islamia College, Lahore, in their official context for an effective and proper job performance. It also includes needs analysis, course plan, course contents, course length, course aims, course materials and finally assessment and evaluation.

Background and Context

English is getting importance in every field of life especially in educational institutions; the use of English language for correspondence and communicative purposes is very important. Even in public sector colleges, the whole documentation is carried out in English language. The college administrative staff includes clerks and a superintendent possesses low proficiency in English language due to less qualification and non-availability of pre or in-service English language courses. Their official documentation and correspondence mainly deals with reading and writing official letters or notices, memos, leaves, retirement cases, joining and relieving reports of the college staff etc. It has been observed that generally the clerical staff of Govt. Islamia College, Lahore, is dependent on the teaching faculty of the English department of the college and sometimes they rely on previous record and copy it. However, this article focuses on ESOP course outline designed for these clerks whose English reading and writing skills are not developed enough to cope up with official documentation.

Needs Analysis and Methodology

The needs analysis collects and analyses data to determine what learners “want” and “need” to learn (Soriano, 1995). To design an ESP course, it is important to carry out needs analysis in order to determine the specific reasons for learning the language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Before designing an ESOP course, the needs of the learners were identified to decide what type of course could meet the language needs of the learners. In this regard, an analysis of their needs was carried out through questionnaires and interviews.

The main sources of obtaining data regarding learners’ needs included questionnaires and interviews. The use of triangulation of tools helped in getting both quantitative and qualitative data. The results of quantitative data assured reliability whereas qualitative data helped in getting more views and in-depth understanding of the opinions from the participants. The questionnaires consisting of closed ended questions were administered from the sample of the population of the study (see appendix-A). Semi structured open ended interviews were conducted with college superintendent and deputy superintendent. Approximately, all the 40 clerks of Govt. Islamia College, Railway Road, Lahore comprised the population of the study. A sample of twenty (20) clerks out of approximate total population of forty (40) clerks was selected for survey questionnaire. However, a smaller sample with one college superintendent and one deputy superintendent was taken for individual interviews. The convenient sampling technique was used as the researcher had an easy access to the clerical staff of the college.

Results and Data Analysis

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the qualification and job experience of the college clerks. Through their responses it has been observed that most of the clerks (70%) are matric and only thirty percent (30%) clerks are intermediate and graduate degree holders. The majority of the college clerks has more than 20 years job experience, whereas just ten percent (10%) clerks have less than 10 years job experience.

The second part of the questionnaire deals with the language use and the priorities/ importance of the language skills at their work

place. The responses of hundred percent (100%) respondents show that they their official

documentation is done in English only.

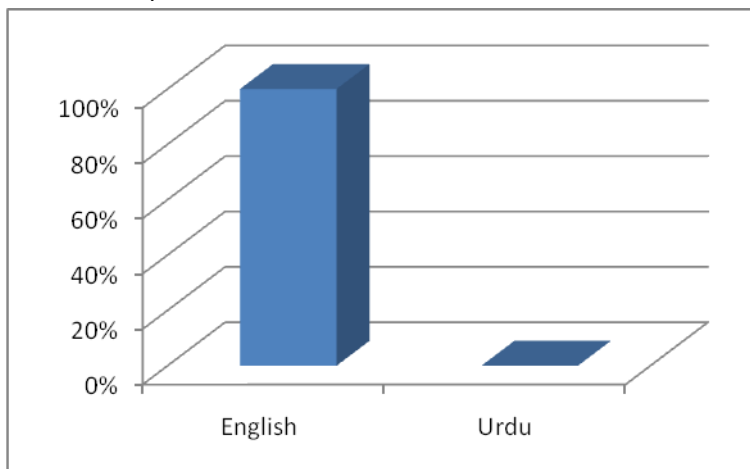


Fig. 1

As far as the use of language skills at their workplace is concerned, responses of sixty percent (60%) respondents show that the use of reading skill is important and forty percent (40%) respondents show that the use of reading skill is very important. As far as the use of writing skill is concerned, responses of thirty percent (30%) respondents show that the use of writing skill is

very important and seventy percent (70%) respondents show that the use of reading skill is important. With regard to listening and speaking skill, none of the participants mentioned their use at the workplace. So, the importance of both reading and writing skills is indispensable at their workplace.

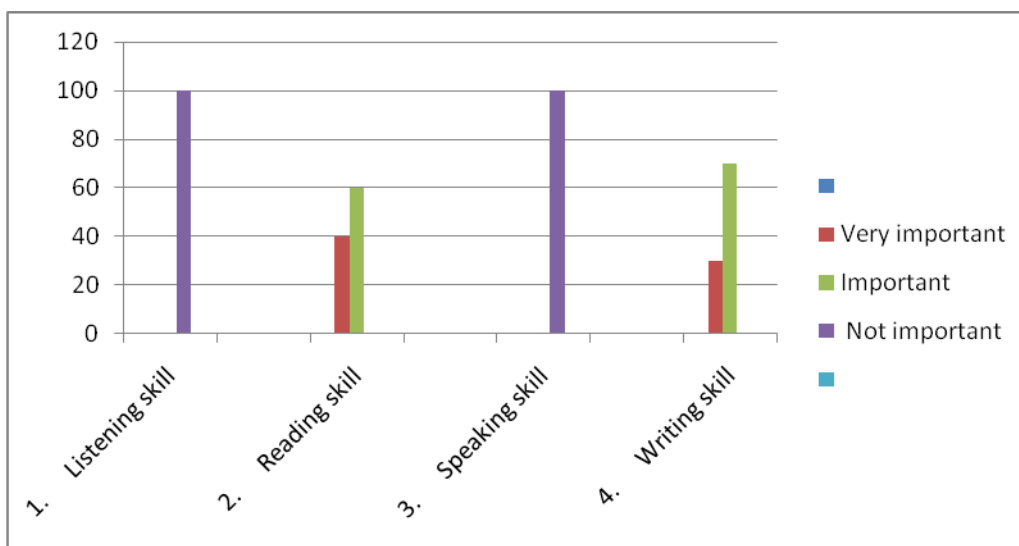


Fig. 2

The third part of the questionnaire deals with the tasks the learners face difficulty in performing in English regarding their target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). To analyze the degree of difficulty a scale of 1-5 was used: where 1=most difficult, 2=very difficult, 3=difficult,

4= little difficult and 5= not difficult. Regarding the use of language at their workplace, all the respondents mentioned that they face problems while using reading and writing skills of English to deal with their official documentation properly. As far as reading skill is concerned, sixty percent (60%)

respondents mentioned that they find reading official letters and application difficult and very difficult. Only twenty percent (20%) and ten percent (10%) respondents are of the view that they find reading official letters and application little difficult and not difficult respectively. Thirty percent (30%) respondents are of the view that they find reading e-mails difficult. Whereas, twenty percent respondents find reading e-mail more difficult task. Only ten percent (10%) responded that reading e-mails is not a difficult task for

them. According to the responses of majority of the participants seventy percent (70%) respondents are of the view that they find reading and comprehending explanations and memos very difficult. However, twenty percent (20%) respondents find reading and comprehending explanations and memos the most difficult task. Only ten percent (10%) respondents find that reading and comprehending explanations and memos not a difficult task.

Reading Skill	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
1. I find reading official letters and applications	10%	30%	30%	20%	10%
2. I find reading e-mails	20%	30%	40%	0%	10%
3. I find comprehending explanations and memos	20%	30%	40%	0%	10%

Table 1

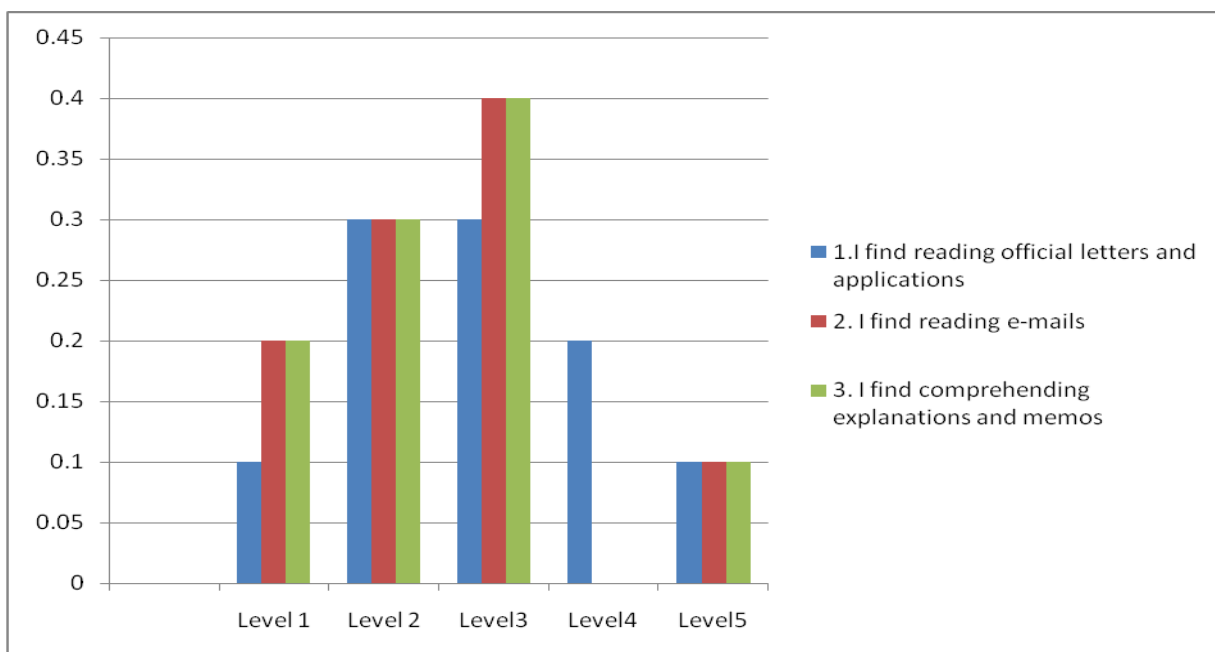


Fig. 3

As far as writing skill is concerned, most of the participants (40%) find writing official letters and e-mails most difficult task. Whereas, twenty percent (20%) and thirty percent (30%) participants find writing official letters and e-mails very difficult and difficult respectively. Regarding writing or composing e-mails most of the participants (90%) find it more difficult. Only ten percent (10%) respondents find composing e-mails not a difficult task. Most of the participants (50%) find writing official joining and relieving reports a difficult task. Whereas, twenty percent (20%) say that writing

official joining and relieving reports is very difficult and twenty percent (20%) participants find this task a little difficult. Forty percent (40%) and fifty percent (50%) respondents opine that they find writing memos very difficult and difficult respectively. When they were asked about preparing retirement cases, thirty percent (30%) considered it most difficult, thirty percent (30%) took it very difficult, and forty percent (40%) mentioned it a difficult task to deal with. None of the participants considered it little difficult.

Writing Skill	Level 1	Level 2	Level3	Level4	Level5
1. I find writing official letters	40%	20%	30%	0%	10%
2. I find writing/composing e-mails	40%	40%	10%	0%	10%
3. I find writing official joining/ relieving reports	0%	20%	50%	20%	10%
4. I find writing memos	0%	40%	50%	0%	10%
5. I find writing leave applications/ retirement cases	30%	30%	40%	0%	0%

Table 2.

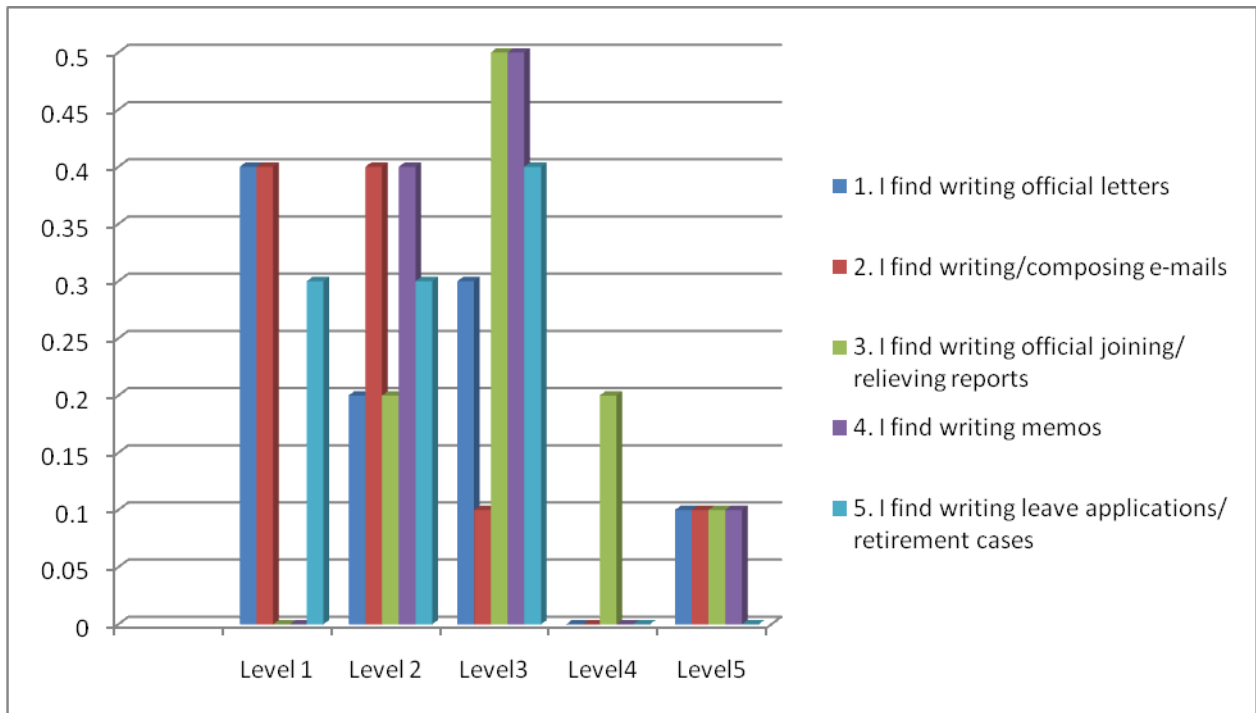


Fig. 4

Analysis of the Interviews

The interviews with the superintendent and the deputy superintendent helped to present an in depth analysis of the college clerks’ needs. Regarding the nature of their job they mentioned that they prepare taking charge and making charge reports, retirement cases, explanation letters, memos, maintaining college funds, contingency bills, other financial matters etc. While explaining the difficulties faced by the clerks when handling official documentation, the interviewees responded that they face the problem of sentence structures, vocabulary and spellings in order to write memos, letters and reports. They added that they also face difficulty in preparing retirement and leave cases of the teachers.

They stated that generally they rely on the previous record to resolve language problems. They look at previous record as samples and follow those

samples to write applications, letters, memos, reports etc. They added that all the senior clerks were neither computer literate nor intend to be computer literate. They have one or two clerks who are computer literate and handle online/ e-mail correspondence only.

Regarding proficiency of the college clerks in carrying out the official documentation in English language, they express that their proficiency is low due to which they are dependent on teaching faculty of the college for getting their work done. In this regard, the principal has appointed an office in-charge which is an additional duty of an assistant professor from the teaching faculty of the English department of the college to resolve the language issues related to the official documentation.

Both, the superintendent and the deputy superintendent welcomed the idea of introducing language courses for their staff that never got any

pre-service and in- service training in the use of English language at their workplace. Even most of the clerks who were also sitting in the same office and listening to the interviewees and the interviewer second their opinion in favor of English language course.

Course Description

Aims

The aim of the course is to improve the learners' specific needs of reading and writing skills that are required to deal with their official documentation.

Class size and nature of the Course

The focus of this ESOP course will be narrow because it mainly concentrates on reading and writing skills of the students. According to Kaur (2007), the students are very pleased with a narrow focus course as they have the realization that their time is not wasted during their course. This course will focus on a few target events such as report writing, letter writing, application writing etc. The course will address the needs of a group of thirty to forty homogenous learners. The participants are homogeneous in terms of discipline and needs. They have the same educational background and work at the same place where they face the same target situation and have the same specific and immediate language needs.

Course Duration/ Length

It is a short in-service training course. It is a two week (8 days) programme which suggests four days of a week (Monday to Thursday) in the afternoon timings from 3pm to 5 pm at the learners' own institution. The total time length of the course is 16 hours (8 days) divided into 2 hours per day. Moreover, end week days will be followed by two to three holidays during which the learners can go through the taught course contents and underline difficulties faced by them.

Course Material and Methodology

In designing the course, an authentic tailored made and specific material will be used. To meet the needs of the learners' and keeping in view the nature of their job, the materials will be selected and adapted according to the specific language that they use at their work place for official documentation. The activities will be designed keeping in view the real life situations at

their workplace such as reading and writing official letters, memos, leave cases and reports.

The learners of this course belong to Urdu medium background where they were just exposed to traditional teaching method; however, for better learning outcomes, they would be taught through an eclectic approach. Regarding teaching methodology and a teacher's role, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also express the idea that the role of an ESP teacher is very important. The course will be learner centered and methodology will be communicative. Interactive and communicative approaches will also be used. Interactive approach is not a single approach, but, rather, a much extended continuum. At one end of the continuum, teaching appears to be teacher-centered and teacher-dominated, but the teacher also deliberately grants occasional opportunities for learners to interact and speak, either with each other or with the teacher. At the other end of the continuum, the central role of the teacher almost disappears and students play a key role in the learning process through their active participation (Coleman, 1999, as cited in Xia, 2006). According to Clarke (1989) as cited in Kitao (1997), communicative methodology is very important as it is based on authenticity, realism, context, and a focus on the learner.

The teacher would not only give them the lecture but would also involve them in pair and group activities in which they would be encouraged to participate. Keeping in view the learners' preferences, the teacher would provide them handouts with written explanatory notes to learn through activities. According to Ning (2007), a well-planned group work with each group given clear, defined and achievable goals, can promote deeper and broader learning outcomes for all students. It not only can help students develop language and communication skills but also can give them opportunities to experience cooperated learning. The positive and pleasant learner-centered language teaching atmosphere will help to realize the notion of competition between individual students into a race of different groups. In a large ELT class, the advantage of group work may be doubled. On the one hand, in one sheer mass of students, too many students make it impossible for

the teacher to give proper directions to each of them; on the other hand, the many students make it easier to share their ideas. With all these merits, group work and pair work are no doubt a very reasonable choice in a large ELT class.

The course contents/ syllabus have been arranged from simple to complex structure. The syllabus used for teaching the course would be structural and skill-based. The course outline has been mentioned in the tentative ESOP course design.

Assessment

There will not be any formal test at the end of this course because the participants of this

course are professionals and they already have workload at their job place. However, the teacher will keep on assessing their performance through on going assessment, not let them feel being assessed. However, a range of class activities focusing on achievement, involvement and progress can be taken as on going assessment. Students can also be motivated and encouraged to reflect upon how well they use the target language to fulfill tasks, and identify what they are not able to do (Graves, 2001 as cited in Jiajing, 2007).

Tentative ESOP Course for the College Administrative Staff

Days	Skills	Topics/ (Material)	Method/Approach	Structure	Activity/Strategy
1.	Writing	Sentence Formation/Basic sentence structure, (White board)	Learning Cooperative Method /Communicative Method	Simple present tense, Simple past tense & Active voice	Brain storming/ Group Work & Pair Work,
2.	Writing & Reading	Sentence Formation, Report writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joining & relieving reports (Authentic material/White board etc.)	Learning Cooperative method	Past tense & Passive voice	Group work & Pair work
3	Writing	Leave applications, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study leave/ Long leave 	Communicative Approach/ Collaborative learning	Changing the forms of sentences from present to past tense (Active voice)	Questioning & answering, Group Work & Individual work
4.	Reading, Vocabulary	Reading comprehension, Letter Reading, Reports Reading, (Authentic material)	Learning Cooperative Method / Questioning & Answering	Scanning	Group Work, Silent Reading
5.	Reading & Writing	Letter Writing (Hand out & White Board)	Cooperative learning Approach/ Interactive Approach	Formation (Pattern/ structure)	Group Work & Pair work
6.	Reading & Writing	Reports Reading & Reports Writing (Authentic material)	Communicative approach/ Interactive Approach	Guided writing, vocabulary focus	Brain storming, Group Work, Individual Work
7.	Writing	Vocabulary building, Use of Idioms,	The Direct Approach/ Communicative approach	Spellings, Official/technical terms, abbreviated words	Drill, Pair Work
8.	Writing, Reading	Filling in the forms, Formative Assessment	Communicative approach/ Cooperative learning Approach,	Learning technical terms	Brain Storming, Short questioning & answering

Findings

The findings of the study show that even public sector institution that is run by the government mainly impart Urdu medium instructions but the whole documentation is carried out in English language. The staff for dealing with official documentation and correspondence includes clerks and superintendents possess low proficiency in English language due to less qualification and non-availability of pre and in-service English language courses. Resultantly, to get their official work done, the clerical staff is found to be dependent on English language teachers of their college. However, the respondents feel the need to be trained in reading and writing skills.

Recommendations

It is, therefore, suggested that the administrative staff of Govt. Islamia College, Lahore, should be given training in using English language to deal with official documentation properly. The administrative staff (clerks) of other public sector colleges can also be benefitted from the same course of ESOP which has been prescribed for the administrative staff (clerks) of Govt. Islamia College, Lahore, as the course addresses the needs of homogeneous group of learners. The clerks/participants from other public sector colleges are homogeneous in terms of discipline and needs. Almost all of them belong to the same educational background and context where they face the same target situation and have the same specific language needs.

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