

NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR RECEPTIONISTS WORKING IN PRIVATE-SECTOR HOSPITALS OF LAHORE (PAKISTAN)

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ABSTRACT: *The objectives of the paper are to have an overview of the linguistic needs and thereby design an ESP course for a group of receptionists working in various private sector hospitals of Lahore, Pakistan. The key phases in the research include needs analysis and designing a course plan. As far as research design was concerned mixed method research approach was used. For needs analysis triangulation was exploited. The quantitative data were collected through close-ended questionnaire. The constructs of questionnaire were on likert scale. The questionnaires were distributed among the samples and authentic data were obtained. The qualitative data included informal discussions with the head or senior receptionists. Moreover one of the researchers had been serving in a hospital as receptionist. So his practical experience of serving as receptionist also helped the researchers in knowing the needs of the target group. The data collected suggested that there is a dire need for an English language course for receptionists working in various hospitals. So the focus of the article would be on English for Specific Occupational Purposes (ESOP). A detailed course outline has been created in the light of the linguistic needs of receptionists.*

Key words: ESP, ESOP, receptionists, course design.

INTRODUCTION

English language has got greater substance and prominence in almost every walk of life. With the globalization and the perpetual increase of international communication in various fields, the demand for ESP is expanding especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. As Pakistan is a developing country where English is used as a second language and most of the focus is on General English and less on ESP. Though, it is an acknowledged fact that ESP courses are proving very fruitful in training the professionals for their places of work. This study is an attempt to identify a real group of receptionists working in various private sector hospitals of Lahore, Pakistan for needs analysis and course design. The fresh and young graduates, joining this profession, are facing a lot of difficulty in carrying out most of their professional tasks. They find their professional duty a herculean task because majority of the individuals visiting hospitals belong to elite class and they use English language for communication. The receptionists are simple graduates who remain unable to respond in English language. Moreover the hospitals too are not offering any ESP courses to them while promotion or good performance is linked with communicative competence. So the job has become very challenging for them. So needs analysis and course design plan may be beneficial for them.

Literature Review

The dust has not yet settled yet in the area of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and no one would expect the ESP community to have a clear idea about what ESP means. Some scholars in this field have simply described it as the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise, describing it as the teaching of English for academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or occupational purposes.

A researcher [1] refers to the considerable recent debate on the meaning of ESP despite the fact that it is an approach

which has been widely used over the last three decades. However, a scholar [2] distinguishes between four absolute and variable characteristics of ESP in his definition. In terms of absolute characteristics, ESP consists of English language teaching which is (i) designed to meet specified needs of the learners, (ii) related in content (i.e. in its theme and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities, (iii) centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics etc. and analysis of this discourse, and (iv) in contrast with General English. In terms of variable characteristics, ESP may be, but is not necessarily (i) restricted as to the language skills to learners (e.g. reading only) and (ii) not tough according to any pre-ordained methodology.

Dudley-Evans [3] offered a modified definition for ESP. The revised definition Dudley-Evans and St. Johns postulate is the extension of the definition proposed by Stevens [2] in terms of absolute and variable characteristics. ESP (i) is defined to meet specific needs of the learner, (ii) makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, and (iii) is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. In terms of variable characteristics, ESP (i) may be related to or designed for specific discipline, (ii) may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English, (iii) is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation, and could also be for learners at secondary school level, (iv) is generally designed for immediate or advanced students, (v) assume some basic knowledge of the language, and (vi) can be used with beginners.

The division of ESP into absolute and variable characteristics, in particular, is very helpful in resolving arguments about what is and is not ESP. From Dudley-Evans' definition one can see that ESP can be (though not

necessarily so) concerned with a specific discipline, not does it have to be aimed at a certain age, group or ability range. ESP should be seen simply as an 'approach' to teaching or what Dudley-Evans describes as an attitude of mind. This is similar conclusion to that made by Hutchinson and Waters (pp.19) [4] ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on learner's reason for learning. In other words, ESP is an approach to English Teaching as a Foreign or Second Language, whose aim is to empower a group of people with specific needs, no matter if, for academic, professional or personal issues. The whole course is tailor-made, so that the focus of the teaching content and method varies according to each field of interest. Johns and Dudley-Evans [5] put ESP in these words, "ESP requires the careful research and design of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of adult learners.

History and development of ESP

Hutchinson and Waters [4] identified three key reasons they believe are common to the emergence of all ESP: the demand of a Brave-New World, a revolution in linguistics and focus on the learners. As to the first reason, they explain that two historical periods played an important role that led to the creation of ESP, the end of the World War II and the oil crisis in the 70s. The second very important reason that had a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Most of the works of linguists in 60s and 70s of the past century focused on the ways in which language is used in real communication contrary to the works of traditional linguists who set out to describe the features of language. The final reason that Hutchinson and Water [4] mention to have influenced the emergence of ESP has more to do with psychology than linguistics. More attention was given in the 70s of the past century to the means through which a learner acquires a language and ways in which it is learnt. Hence there was a shift of focus from methods of language to different learning strategies, different skills, different learning schemata and different motivating needs and interests that are employed by different learners. This consequently led to a focus on learner's needs and designing specific courses to better meet individual needs. The result of this was a natural extension learner-centered or "learning-centered" perspective on ESP.

Needs Analysis

According to Iwai et al [6] the term needs analysis generally refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve us as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of students. The aim of ESP course is to move learners for A (current performance) to B (target performance). It is not possible to design and develop an ESP course without previously conducting a needs analysis. It consists of a procedure or series of procedures intended to obtain information about both current performance and target performance. Rather than rules "written on stone" a needs analysis is an ongoing process.

Purpose of the Needs Analysis

A needs analysis is the first and foremost step to investigate the receptionists' needs as a basic foundation of ESP program development. Knowing the target populations' needs and their learning background can be helpful in designing and administrating the course more successfully and effectively. Moreover, the ultimate goal is to take all the needs into consideration of designing the ESP program. It is beneficial to the non-English native speaking employees engaged in English learning as well as promotes their quality standard of service.

Target Population

The target population of Needs Analysis of this study was the young graduates working as receptionists in the private Hospitals of the city of Lahore. For sampling, mode of convenient sampling was adopted. For the receptionists of five private hospitals namely, Omar Hospital, Surgimed Hospital, Doctor Hospital, Farooq Hospital and Naseer Hospital were chosen. Their language background was almost the same. They studied General English till graduation. They had normally been recruited on the expectation that they were fluent in English and would be able to communicate with customers and doctors in English conveniently. But as most of them had read General English till graduation, they could not perform well at their work place. Moreover, the hospital administrations had never offered any ESP course for improving their professional skills.

Methods of Needs Analysis

In order to successfully conduct the needs analysis, there have been used triangulations of two instruments for this study which include questionnaire and informal discussion. The needs analysis instruments are intended to capture the participants' perspective and needs. Each instrument is elaborated as follows.

Questionnaire for Receptionists

The questionnaire (see appendix A) contains three parts. The first part attempts to elicit personal information. The second part is a query about language learning priorities for the target samples. While the third part gathers skill wise information about the job functions and skills needed at their place of job. This step is very helpful for program designers to have a better and clearer idea about the employees' particular job contents related to use English, so that they can develop the accompanying tasks for the ESP program.

Informal Discussion with Senior/ Head Receptionists:

The informal discussion with senior or head receptionists is to find out the most common situations and problems the samples encounter when they interact with foreigners or English speaking local customers or with doctors. For example, welcoming, greeting, explaining specifications of the hospital, describing the availability of the doctors, telling the rooms or wards situation, using vocabulary, interacting on phone etc.

The Procedure of the Needs Analysis

The first step of the procedure of needs analysis is a questionnaire for receptionists. Then after the administration of the questionnaire, informal discussion with senior receptionists was done. Such kind of discussion will

authenticate and validate the information gathered through questionnaire.

Data Analysis Questionnaire

The questionnaire was given to ten receptionists of the five hospitals mentioned above. They, after finishing the questionnaire submitted them back to the researcher. Based on

Language skills	Very important	Important	Not important
Listening skills	80 %	20%	nil
Reading skills	nil	60%	40%
Speaking skills	100%	nil	nil
Writing skills	20%	60%	20%

Table 1

the responses of questionnaires, their English language background and job content could be easily comprehended. Through the answers of the questionnaires some questions for informal discussion were also elicited.

As far as the first part of the questionnaire is concerned, it tells about the personal information of the samples. One important thing to jot down here is that most of them are

Data Analysis...

B. Language Skills

Speaking Skills

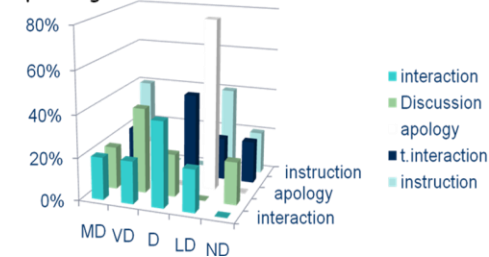


Table 2

graduates and have studied General English only. The second part of the questionnaire aimed at knowing the language learning priorities of the learners. The purpose of this section is to find out those skills which are very important for them in carrying out most of their professional tasks. The result of the questionnaire shown in table 1 indicates that for the samples speaking and listening skills are very important while reading and writing skills are less important for them.

Data Analysis...

B. Language skills

Listening Skills

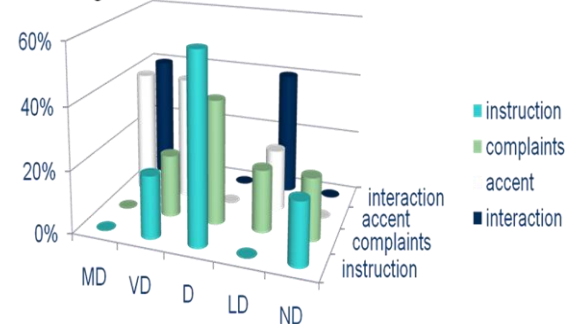


Table 3

Responses related to speaking skills show that 80 % receptionists find interaction with difficult generally with local English speaking visitors and particularly with foreigners. The percentage of difficulty is the same when they have to discuss different issues regarding their jobs with their senior colleagues or doctors. As far as making apologies are concerned, they feel less difficulty i.e. 20 % only. While performing their professional duties they have to provide a lot of information on telephone. Communication on telephone is

Data Analysis...

B. Language Skills

Writing Skills

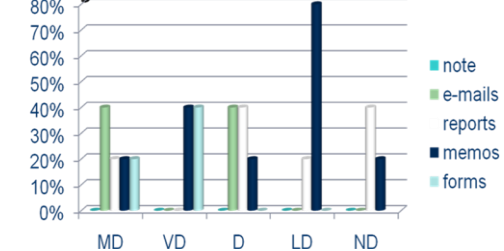


Table 4

the third grey area for them. The percentage for this difficulty is 60. Last but not the least, 60 % respondents agreed that they feel little difficulty in giving instructions while 40 % find it most difficult.

Responses of another important skill i.e. listening skills, show that 80 % respondents feel difficulty in understanding the accent of foreigners as well as local visitors. Their difficulty in understanding instructions given by the visitors or senior doctor is 80%. 60% samples face difficulty in understanding complaints and face to face interaction.

Table 4 states that 80 % samples face difficulty in writing official reports while 60 % difficulty is in writing notes. They feel no difficulty in writing memos and less difficulty in filling in the forms. As far as composing or responding e mails is concerned, most the respondents are of the view that they feel less difficulty in this. Furthermore, more

Data Analysis.....

B. Language Skills

Reading Skills

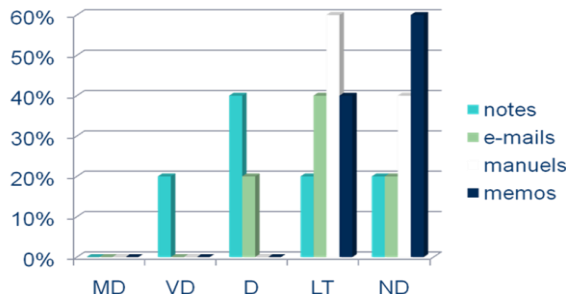


Table 5

So far as reading skills are concerned the grey areas represented in the table 5 are very small and that is only in reading notes of seniors. The percentage here is only 60 %. On the other hand, samples feel less difficulty in performing other functions like reading e mails, reading service manuals and memos.

Data Analysis of the informal discussion

After the data collection through close ended questionnaires, informal discussion was done with senior receptionists regarding the difficulties faced by newly recruited receptionists during working hours. It was found that the newly appointed receptionists face a lot of difficulty than the senior ones in using and understanding the register of hospital. They also face problem in uttering words with correct pronunciation. They also feel difficulty in understanding the accents of the visitors. They are also weak in grammar and lexis.

Findings of the Research

The findings which emerged out of questionnaire as well as informal discussion have been given here below:

- Speaking and listening skills are the most important.
- Grey areas in speaking skills: interaction with foreigners, using vocabulary related to the profession,

Course framework

- Giving correct pronunciation, discussions with seniors/doctors and conversation on telephone calls.
- Weakness in listening Skills: accent, understating vocabulary, face to face interaction.
- Problems in writing skills: Reports and notes.
- Impediments in reading Skills: a little difficulty in reading handouts.

ESP course designing

Dudley-Evans and St. John (pp. 145) [7] discuss a number of parameters needed to be brought into account while making decisions about course design. They are as follows:

- Should the course be intensive or extensive?
- Should the learners' performance be assessed or non-assessed?
- Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?
- Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or should it be as facilitator of activities arising from learners expressed wants?
- Should the course have a broad focus or narrow focus?
- Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study or experience?
- Should the materials be common-core or specific to learners study or work?
- Should the group taking the course be homogenous or should it be heterogeneous?

Course Title: ESP for Receptionists of Hospitals

Credit Hours: 02

Classes: 03 classes of two hours/ week

Course Length: 05 weeks

Class Days: Last three days of the week

Class Timings: 5 pm to 7 pm

Maximum Enrolment: 20 students

Goals of the overall instructional program:

By the end of this course, the participants will be able to ...

- Listen and speak correct English language and to enable them to fulfill requirements of communications with local or foreign visitors.
- Carry on face-to-face and phone conversations on work-related topics, such as giving information about the hospital facilities and availability of the doctors, dealing with room/ward complaints and giving and taking instructions.
- Write reports and notes free of errors and mistakes.
- Develop cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for emergent problem solving at the workplace.

Sessions	topics	skills	Communicative activity	Related activity	micro	Language form	Carrier content	Activities
5 classes /sessions of two hours each	Fluency speaking	Quick thinking skills/ speaking skills	-How to hold a steady understandable conversation with foreign or local visitors -How to communicate on telephone. -How to give instructions	-Pronunciation -Stress -Rhythm -Intonation -Use of appropriate verbs and register -Giving information -Use of imperatives -Use of modal auxiliaries like should, must, ought to etc.		Verbs Adverbs Adjectives Use of helping verbs like is/ am/ are etc. Imperatives Tenses	Movies Discussions A/V aids hospitals authentic text material like hand out, brochures etc.	Role-play Discussions Lectures
5 classes of two hours each	Communication	General communication skills/ listening skills	-How to listen and comprehend the locals and foreigners. -How to understand the questions -How to understand foreign as well as local accent. -How to understand instructions, complaints etc.	-Recognizing stress, tone, rhythm, register and vocabulary. -Interrogatives -Imperatives -Complaints		Adjectives Adverbs Conditional sentences Imperative sentences Interrogative sentences Tenses	Authentic material Audio/ Visual aids	Role-play Discussions
5 classes of two hours each	Report-writing Note-taking	Writing listening	-How to write a report -How to note down important points from spoken/written texts	-Getting gist/ summary of what happened for report writing -Format of report -Note-taking -Guessing meaning from context -Recognizing grammatical word class -Getting gist of what is said for note-taking		Tenses Tenses-shift Modal auxiliaries	Authentic material Statements Previous reports Previous notes	Lectures Controlled, guided and free writing exercises

Teaching Strategies:

- Classroom lectures
- Group Discussions
- Role-plays
- Pair work
- Group work
- Communicative activities in functional and situational contexts

Assessment and Evaluation:

- Attendance and Class participation
- Individual presentations
- Self and peer assessment
- Question answer session
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CONCLUSION

Information collected through needs analysis of the receptionists working at various private hospitals of Lahore

shows that speaking and listening skills are very important for them. It also shows that they are facing a lot of difficulty in interaction, vocabulary, accent etc. In the subsequent course design an effort has been made to cater the needs of this homogenous group. For this purpose learner centered approach is strongly recommended so that the participants after studying this intensive course may give maximum output during working hours.

The current research in the field of ESP may help young researchers who want to conduct their investigation in this field. It may be beneficial for the receptionists working in private or public sector hospitals. It may provide insights to the planners in human resource development in the country. It may be fruitful for the administration of the private hospitals.

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