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ESP Needs of B.Sc. (Agriculture) Students at SAUs in Maharashtra as Perceived By Teachers

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There are four State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in Maharashtra. In the country like India, agriculture has been becoming more and more important and ultimately the agricultural education. This paper focuses on the ESP needs of students i.e. educational, professional and social. An English language course is taught to the first semester of their first academic year. Hence, it has become considerably important to assess the entire needs of these students as perceived by teachers as they are more aware of the needs of the students and can comment authoritatively in this regard. Since, the teachers are in close proximity of the students and are familiar with their environment; they would be in a far better position to provide proper insight into the needs of the learners. The teachers' approach to 'needs' would be greatly influenced by their practical experience as well as by their own philosophy and conception of their role.

Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed a dramatic increase in different aspects of science. It has become more complicated, productive and progressive, leading to modernization and automation, due to demand and challenges of the new millennium. Of course, this development varies from one state to another, for instance, the situation in advanced countries is different from the one in developing countries.

Nonetheless, scientific research constitutes an essential global component in that development movement. Great emphasis is drawn to English Language Teaching (ELT), as it plays a very important role being the language of instruction of the new technology and science of the modern world. Therefore, many research programmes in different organizations, institutes and conferences are conducted for various disciplines. There is a lack of scientific language to accomplish the needs of the target situation according to the subject specialization of learners, i.e., functional and situational implementation of the language in communication (Rogers, 1969 and Widdowson, 1978:). Hence, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) has emerged in order to promote and contribute in that specific and revolutionary shift.

Methodology

For seeking the views of the teachers, an interview schedule was prepared. For this purpose the teachers were randomly selected and interviewed from the four SAUs in Maharashtra viz. Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola, Marathwada Krishi Vidyapeeth, Parbhani, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri and Dr. Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli. From these universities ten teachers from each one were interviewed. Thus, total 40 teachers were interviewed.

This study was conducted with the following specific objectives

1. To identify the educational (in-study) needs of the students.
2. To seek out the professional (post-study) needs of the students.
3. To ascertain the social requirements of the students.

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 teacher informants. The needs aspect was initiated by an item to illicit information about the necessity of adding supplementary material to the agricultural English material in use. Almost all the informants stressed the need of including additional material to the present English course, the information about this is given in the following table.

Table 1: Need of adding supplementary material to present course.

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes (2)	37	93.50
2.	No (1)	03	06.50
	Average 1.92 Total	40	100.00

From table 1, it can be pointed out that almost all (93.5 per cent) of the teacher informants were in favour and only 6.5 per cent opposed to add supplementary material to the present English course. The average score was found to be 1.92. Therefore, it is crystal clear that there is an urgent need of adding supplementary material to the present course.

Among the most important needs of including supplementary material to the present course received from the informants were audio-video CDs for practical purposes, news papers, periodicals, grammar, scientific reports, reference books, popular articles, research articles, success stories, books on group discussion and interview, etc. Some informants suggested to include material useful for conversation at social settings. Some suggested that the students must be made familiar with the use of internet and dictionary.

Regarding the students’ present and future academic needs the questions were asked to what extent the current English course may help them in this regard. The following two tables throw light on the usefulness of the course to meet current and future academic needs.

Table 2: Usefulness of the course to meet present academic needs of the learners

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To a great extent (3)	16	40.00
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	12	30.00
3.	To a limited extent (1)	12	30.00
	Average 2.1 Total	40	100

The above table indicates exactly two-fifth (40 per cent) of the respondents regarded the present course useful to the learners to a great extent, while less than one-third (30 per cent) each regarded it as useful to somewhat extent and to a limited extent. The average score comes to 2.1. Hence, the present course is definitely useful for the learners, but there is a need to modify it.

The information on future academic needs of students is depicted in table 3.

Table 3: Usefulness of the course to meet future academic needs of the learners

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To a great extent (3)	12	30.30
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	13	32.20
3.	To a limited extent (1)	15	37.50
Average 1.92 Total		40	100.00

The above table indicates that less than one-third (30.3percent and 32.5 per cent) of the respondents said that the course was useful to the learners to a great extent and to somewhat extent, respectively. More than one-third (37.5 per cent) of the respondents said that it was useful to a limited extent. The average score was 1.92. This shows that the importance of this course cannot be denied in respect with the future needs of the students.

The next question was focused on to seeking the views of the teachers to what extent the current English course meet the future professional needs of the students. The following table throws light on the extent of the usefulness of the course to meet the future professional needs of the learners.

Table 4: Usefulness of the course to meet the future professional needs of the learners

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To a great extent (3)	9	22.50
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	16	40.00
3.	To a limited extent (1)	15	37.50
Average 1.85 Total		40	100.00

Table 4 reveals that two-fifth (40 per cent) of the respondents said that the present English course was useful for the learners to somewhat extent, whereas just more than one-third (37.5 per cent) said it was useful to a limited extent and less than one-fourth (22.5 per cent) rated its usefulness to a great extent. The average score found to be 1.85. The reason for such result might be because this course is lacking general English.

“It would be a pity if ESP programmes were treated as an independent aspect of language teaching, which would not be appropriate because language teaching is invisible” (Brumfit, 1977).

The present English course is not treated as a credit course i.e. the marks of this course are not added to the final degree transcript (mark sheet). The teachers were asked whether this course be treated as a credit course; the responses of the teachers are given in the following table.

Table 5: Views of teachers on treating the course as a credit course

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes (2)	31	77.50
2.	No (1)	09	22.50
Average 1.74 Total		40	100.00

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents (77.5 per cent) responded in favour of treating this course as a credit course, whereas only 22.5 percent were not in support of making this course as a credit course. The average score was found to be 1.74. This shows that the teachers are seriously thinking over the improvement of the learners in language

skills by making the course as a credit course and thus making the student to focus on it sincerely.

Then the teachers were asked whether the present English course meets the social needs of the students. This need is interpreted in the following table.

Table 6: Usefulness of the course to meet the social needs of the learners

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To a great extent (3)	6	15.00
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	10	25.00
3.	To a limited extent (1)	24	60.00
	Average 1.55 Total	40	100.00

The above table shows that three-fifth (60 per cent) of the teachers accorded the usefulness of the course to a limited extent, one-fourth said that it was useful to somewhat extent and less than one-fifth (15 per cent) found its usefulness to a great extent. The average score is 1.55. This strongly indicates that general English must be a part of the English curriculum.

One of the fundamental principles underlying learner centred system of language learning is that teaching/learning programme should be responsive to learners’ needs. It is now widely accepted that as a principle of programme designing that needs is a vital prerequisite to the specification of language learning objectives (Brindley, 1989).

The last question asked to the respondent teachers can be regarded as the core of the interview instrument. It sought information from the teacher informants regarding the needs of the agriculture learners in order to improve their overall English proficiency – communication either in the specialized discipline ‘agriculture’ or different situational settings. In response to this item, majority of the respondents suggested that, as the learners of the specialized in agricultural stream and since they were in initial stages i.e. first year of their degree course, they do need to pay attention to the kind of English, which is closely related to their field in addition to the present English course being taught. They also felt the need of teaching general English to the students. The following table gives the information on the suggestions made by the teacher informants in order to improve overall proficiency of the students.

Table 7: Suggestions received from the teachers for improving English proficiency of the students

Sl. No.	Suggestions	Respondents (n=40)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Inclusion of grammar	23	57.50
2.	Vocabulary exercises (scientific and general terminology) to be given	20	50.00
3.	Introduction of one more course	20	50.00
4.	More emphasis be given on spoken English	17	42.50
5.	More emphasis be given on reading skills	16	40.00
6.	More emphasis be given on listening skills	14	35.00
7.	More emphasis be given on writing skills	13	32.50
8.	Inclusion of text (general and also, related to agriculture)	10	25.00
9.	Inclusion of scientific report writing	7	17.50

All the informants said that there was a need for improvement in the present English language course according to the needs of the learners. More than half (57.5 per cent) of the

respondents expressed the need of teaching grammar to the learners. Exactly half (50 per cent) stressed the need of improvement of students' vocabulary both general and scientific terminology and the same per cent of the respondents were of view of introducing one more basic course considering the time constraints due to the semester system; and that the all-inclusive syllabus could not be taught in one semester. They suggested introducing the basic course to the first semester and shifting the present course to 6th semester of the degree course. Just more than two-fifth (42.5 per cent) teachers expected to improve spoken skills of the students. Two-fifth (40 per cent) of them suggested to give emphasis on reading skills and just less than one-third (35 per cent and 32.5 percent) on listening skills and writing skills, respectively. One-fourth (25 per cent) teachers were of the opinion to include general text and text related to agriculture and just less than one-fifth (17.5) said to include scientific report writing in the syllabus.

Some of the respondents wanted that English course so designed that it would help to improve students' overall proficiency of the students. They suggested that the English course would help students to improve their presentation skills, report writing skills, performance in group discussion and interview, accent, expression etc. Some teachers suggested that efforts should be taken to create awareness of language usage and also, expected from the learners to read some English material daily other than their text books and reference books. They suggested that the learners must read English news papers and watch English channels on TV.

Conclusions

From the above discussion it is concluded that necessary improvement may be done in the present English language course, as well as, introduce one more basic/structural course for enhancement of students' correct situational use of English.

Recommendations/Implications

1. The study implies urgent need of inclusion of supplementary material to present English course.
2. It is revealed from the investigation that the authorities of the SAUs in Maharashtra may adopt suitable policy to introduce one more English course containing structural elements in the curricula of B.Sc. (Agriculture) degree programme.
3. The students of the agricultural universities may be trained in grammar and general and agricultural vocabulary to fulfil their present and future needs at satisfactory extent for strong professional based background.
4. The authorities of the SAUs may think of treating the present English course as a credit course for the benefit and for making positive attitude of the students towards this course.
5. The study also brought out the need of shifting the present course to the 6th semester of the degree course.

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