

**A Synchronic Appraisal of the Contributions of English Language Teaching to National Development using the ESP Approach**

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**Abstract**

National development is achieved when all spectra of the society converge efforts in fostering a viable economy. In these terms, the English language specialist can also be part of the drive for national development by deploying the English for Specific Purposes approach. It is to expound this assertion that the present study set out. To achieve this, the participant (unobtrusive) observation and interview methods were deployed on twenty-four (24) English Language (as a Second Language) lecturers drawn from four (4) tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State: Nasarawa State University, Keffi; Federal University, Lafia; Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa and State Polytechnic, Lafia. From each of these institutions, six (6) lecturers were purposively selected and quizzed on their views about the nexus between the ESP approach and national development. The results revealed that the ESP approach houses potentials which can be leveraged for national development. Consequently, the study concludes with advocacy for the adoption of the ESP approach, which holds better promise for national development than English for General Purposes (EGP). It is recommended, among others, that curriculum planners and (education) policy makers at all levels should ensure the mainstreaming of the ESP approach in the Nigerian tertiary education curriculum while the government at state and federal government levels should massively train/retrain English language teachers to interpret the curriculum. It is hoped that if these measures are implemented, national development can be enhanced.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes approach, English for General Purposes, National Development, English Language Specialist

**Introduction**

English language teaching (as a second language) has been an ever-growing phenomenon across the globe, particularly in countries (like Nigeria) where English has acquired both official and national status. In a bid to meet the widening and dynamic needs of English worldwide, several approaches have been adopted. Some of these are English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP).

In very simple terms, EGP can be described as an approach to the teaching of English that attempts to expose the learner to all the language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). EGP adopts a language-centred approach. By the language-centred approach, it is implied that language teaching is tailored to expose the learner to all the various aspects of language studies. Owing to its methodology and scope, EGP can be used to teach English to various categories of learners (for

instance, infants, young, intermediate and adult or graduate learners). The overriding concern in an EGP course or programme is to ensure that the learners' competence and performance are richly enhanced in all aspects of language studies on the completion of the course or programme. EGP courses are usually designed without analysing the actual needs of the learners and their learning situations.

ESP, on the other hand, has been referred to as "applied ELT" as the content and aim of any course are determined by the needs of a specific group of learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In a similar vein, Harding (2007) concurs that a salient feature of an ESP programme is that it is built on an assessment of purposes, needs and functions for which English is required. This explains why ESP is often described as being learner-centred. ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. Bells (2002) submits that the focus of ESP is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. The concern of this study is to appraise the contributions of English language teaching to national development, using the ESP approach.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **The Place of English in Nigeria**

English Language in Nigeria has had a relatively long history, which dates back to the early nineteenth century when missionary activities and trade introduced the language onto Nigerian soil. The language thrived through the period of colonialism and continues to be relevant. Bamgbose (1971:26) posits that "of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English language."

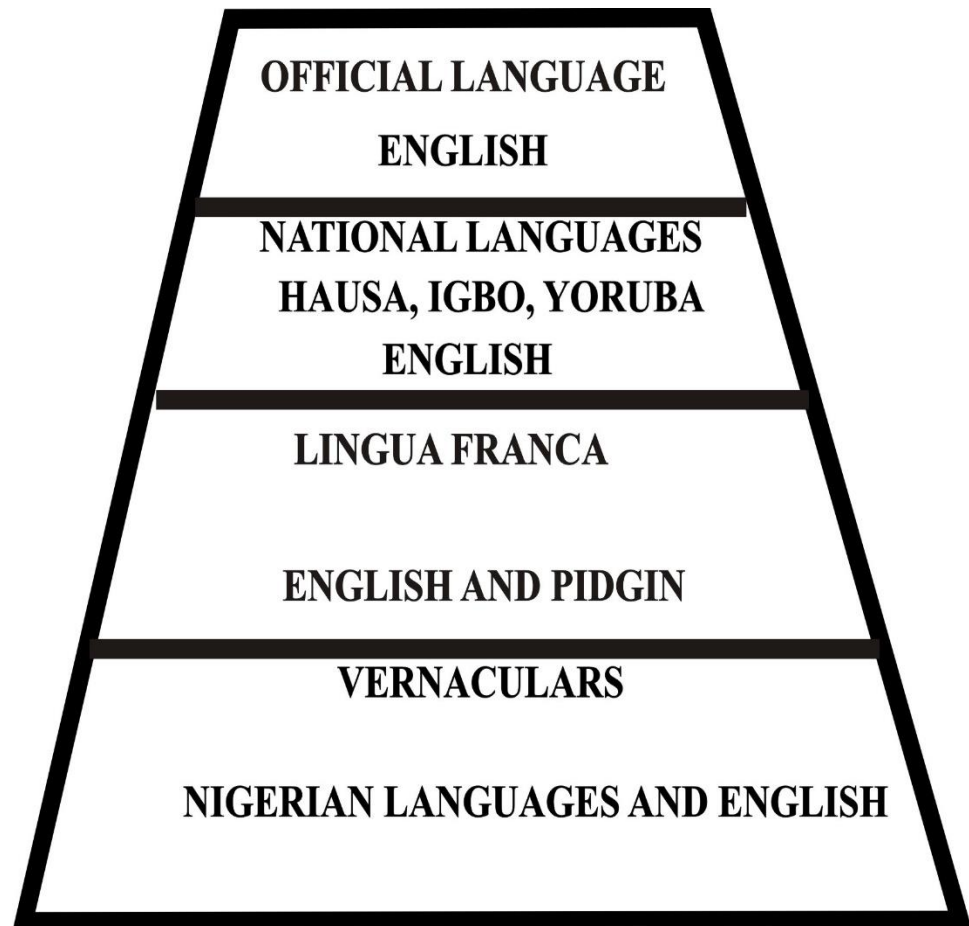
At first, English was seen as the only language, which made communication between the colonial masters and the indigenous people of Nigeria possible. Later, it became clear in addition that communication among the ethnic groups that made up Nigeria was impossible without English. English thus served the dual purpose of facilitating communication between the British and the indigenous, on one hand, and among the ethnic groups with different languages numbering hundreds that makeup Nigeria, on the other hand. Today, with the exit of the British, English continues to serve two purposes: that of Nigeria's window to the world and as a unifying force among Nigeria's over 500 ethnic groups, some of who may not speak or understand any other ethnic language other than theirs (Ike,2001).

Consequently, the use of English in Nigeria survived the departure of the colonial administrators as the language of administration. Today, several years after independence, English still survives and has assumed an important status in Nigeria. Apart from being used as a medium of social and interethnic communication, English is a national and official language which is used to conduct legislative, executive and judicial functions at the three tiers of government as well as in diverse other areas. Teilanyo (2011) enumerates the importance of the English language in Nigeria including:

Its roles as an inter-ethnic lingua franca; an instrument of nationalism, nation-building and national cohesion; an official language used in education, politics and governance, the mass media, formal business and the judiciary; the language of diplomacy; the language of employment and

economic fortunes; a status symbol; the primary language of general literacy or documentation (reading and writing), and several other important sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic functions in Nigeria.

The English language can perform the functions above and more because it is a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) in Nigeria. Udofot (2010) buttresses this assertion by presenting the status of English in Nigeria in graphic terms, thus:



**Fig. 1: A Language Hierarchy for Nigeria**

This hierarchy is succinctly explained by Williams (1986) as cited in Bamgbose (1991) to reflect the roles English performs in Nigeria when he submits a slogan that “if you want to get ahead, get an English head”. This can be the reason why curriculum planners, for learning at all levels in Nigeria, included the study of English or require at least a credit pass in it as an entry requirement for all courses of study.

### **The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Approach**

In Nigeria, like in most West African countries, ESP is relatively new as an approach to the teaching and learning of English. Consequently, not much is known about it yet. This has resulted in a lot of misrepresentations and misgivings about the scope and content of the approach. Even among ESP specialists, debates are on-going as to what ESP means. While some linguists describe

ESP as simply the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified, others are more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes (Strevens, 1988).

In an attempt to define ESP, Bells (2002) opines that the term “Specific” in ESP refers to the specific purpose of learning English. He explains that students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This implies that they can use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach, therefore, enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts.

Dudley-Evans (1997) clarifies the meaning of ESP by extending it in terms of ‘absolute’ and ‘variable’ characteristics as follows:

**Absolute Characteristics**

1. ESP is defined to meet the specific needs of the learners.
2. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
3. ESP is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

**Variable Characteristics**

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English.
3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary-level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at the secondary school level.
4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of language systems.

It may be observed from the various perspectives of the meaning of ESP above that a common strand runs through them. They all attempt to describe ESP as an approach to the teaching of English that assesses needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills. For this study, Dudley-Evans’ definition of ESP shall be adopted as it meets the demand of the task which this paper seeks to address.

**English for Specific Purposes and English for General Purposes: Major Differences**

Several differences exist between ESP and EGP. A few of these differences shall be considered:

- a. Pedagogical concerns: This refers to the approach that is employed in the teaching of language. In EGP, the teacher concentrates on the language. S/he attempts to teach various aspects of the language to the learner. This is what makes EGP language-centred. ESP, on the other hand, concerns itself with only those aspects of language that have been identified as the learners’ needs after carrying out a needs analysis. This, therefore, makes ESP learner-centred.
- b. Level of Learners: In EGP programmes/courses, the learners can be of whatever category (infant or adult, never exposed to the language or graduates of Linguistics). The EGP curriculum is designed to cater for the various types of learners. This is not the case in ESP programmes, which are usually designed for adult or intermediate

learners who already have a fundamental knowledge of the language but require specialized knowledge in certain aspects of the language to enable them to perform better in their various areas of human endeavour.

- c. **Scope of Coverage:** The curriculum or course content of an EGP programme is planned to cover all the aspects of language studies ranging, from Phonology to Syntax. Conscious efforts are made by the EGP teacher to exhaust all these aspects within the available time for the programme. This is done on the assumption that the learner will need all these aspects on completion of the programme. In ESP, the learners' needs determine the scope of coverage. The ESP teacher makes efforts to teach only those aspects the learners need. S/he may however passively treat other aspects of the language that s/he feels they need in addition if time and other factors permit.
- d. **Course Design:** In EGP, the teacher does not have the mandatory responsibility of designing the course outline/structure. This is the responsibility of a group of (subject/course) experts assigned by the ministry or government parastatals saddled with the responsibility. An already designed course outline/structure is handed down to the teacher whose task is to translate it to his/her learners using whatever methodology s/he deems fit. In ESP, however, the responsibility of designing the course lies with the ESP practitioner. This is so because the needs of learners are usually not the same but are peculiar to every group of learners. Consequently, the ESP practitioner plans or designs the courses him/herself to fit the needs of his/her learners.
- e. **Nature of Materials:** The materials used to dispense linguistic knowledge in an EGP programme are usually not tailor-made; they are general. In most cases, the EGP teacher does not produce the materials him/herself and relies heavily on his/her foreknowledge of the subject matter. In ESP courses, the materials are usually tailor-made to suit the needs of the learners. In most cases, the ESP practitioner produces the materials him/herself.
- f. **Needs Analysis:** This is a deliberate attempt by a teacher to survey the needs of the learners for learning the language before actual teaching and learning commence. In EGP programmes, there is no need for analysis before teaching and learning start. The teacher, in this case, assumes to know the needs of the learners and goes ahead to teach without consulting them. This is not the case in ESP. In ESP, needs analysis is a paramount task in the teaching and learning experience. It precedes the actual teaching session and determines what the learners are going to learn. In the case of ESP (unlike EGP), the teacher does not come into class with a pre-conceived preformed mind on what to teach. Rather, it is the needs analysis that dictates it.
- g. **Class Size:** This is the number of learners per class. A class may be large or small. A class size of more than fifty (50) learners is usually considered a large class while a class size of less than fifty can be described as a small class. EGP programmes are usually designed to accommodate small or large class sizes. The class size does not have much influence on the teaching or learning experience. This is not so in the ESP programmes. ESP programmes are usually designed for small class sizes. Consequently, the ESP practitioner may not effectively dispense knowledge in a large class size.

## Empirical Review

Several scholarly engagements have been published on the role of the English for Specific Purposes intervention in enhancing linguistic scholarship. Some of these are reviewed below:

Ciekanski and Chanier (2008) embarked on an advocacy of multimodal communication structures through learner participation and learning practices. Based on evidence from an ongoing research investigation into online CALL literacy, they identify how learners use different modalities to produce collectively a writing task, and how the multimodal learning interaction affects the learners' focus and engagement within the learning process. The adopted methodology combines a quantitative analysis of the learners' participation in a writing task concerning the use of multimodal tools, and a qualitative analysis focusing on how the multimodal dimension of communication enhances language and learning strategies. By looking at the relationship between how the learning tasks are designed by tutors and how they are implemented by learners, that is to say, taking into account the whole perception of multimodal communication for language learning purposes, they provide a framework for evaluating the potential of such an environment for language learning: A coding scheme was developed to translate the video data into user actions and speech acts that occurred in the various modalities of the system (aural, text chat, text editing, websites).

Also, Bradley, Lindström and Rystedt (2010) investigate what wikis can do to enhance group interaction when students are encouraged to participate in constructing text and exchanging peer responses. This interaction is framed, not only by affordances in the wiki but also by what is expected from students as language learners in an English for Specific Purposes class environment. The analysis has a multilevel approach, focusing on patterns of interaction and the nature of feedback. The study shows that collaboration becomes specifically interesting from a language-learning perspective. It was also revealed that revising co-constructed text opens up possibilities for the students to evaluate existing contributions, and it also provides opportunities for them to suggest constructive changes.

In another scholarly expedition, *Sutanovac (2013) notes that language studies, like other fields of learning, has undergone dramatic changes over the years. In Linguistics, the contemporary focus has shifted from formal (prescriptive) to functional aspects of language, which Wittgenstein refers to as “language in us”. Against this backdrop, the study set out to introduce the notion of “Natural Semantic Metalanguage” (NSM) and the “theory of cultural scripts” in a highly systematic, yet, in terms of a wider audience, fully accessible manner. Furthermore, the focus is additionally placed on a) how the pertinent theoretical and empirical findings can be applied in practice, particularly, in the context of L[E]SP and b) how such findings can provide an essential point of departure and the means crucial not only for understanding the cultural specificity of “language in action” (i.e. language in use), but equally importantly for understanding this underlying specificity of L[E]SP. In this respect, ESP is considered as the tripartite exponent of a) language in use; b) culture-specific language; and c) L[E] SP-culture-specific language. The paper concludes with the proposition of a novel interdisciplinary (teaching) model of L[E]SP whose kernel embodies a cross-section of the pragma-kernels and the L[E]SP kernels as postulated by the seminal L[E]SP scholars.*

In the same strides, Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş (2016) set out to investigate the academic English language needs of first-year medical students who were attending advanced English courses at the Faculty of Medicine at Karadeniz Technical University. The data was collected via a structured

questionnaire with 47 items and covered five different parts, focusing on the medical students' purposes of learning English, the significance of learning English, their preference for the learning environment, language learning needs of major language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), their preference of assessment type. The questionnaire was administered to 169 students at the Faculty of Medicine at Karadeniz Technical University. Descriptive statistics was employed to analyze the data.

Finally, Purwanto and Nurhamidah (2021) explored procedures for a syllabus design of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), digitized and functionalized in the sense that it is particularly designed for the online mode of teaching ESP (e-learning), adopting pedagogical applications of Halliday's Functional Grammar (1994). Digital literacy was much reviewed and discussed for Society 5.0 with the four language skills equally treated within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)'s Language Meta-functions, with reference to Cambridge Proficiency Level of English (the CEFR). They recommended that the ESP syllabus be redesigned to comply with a high-quality education in the digital age.

The above studies have variously and diversely contributed to pushing the frontiers of linguistic enquiry, especially as it relates to the English for Specific Purposes approach. Conversely, none of these studies explored the nexus between the ESP approach and national development, with Nigeria being the case in point. Consequently, there is an obvious gap left that this study strives to fill by examining the relationship between deploying the ESP approach in the teaching of ESL and national development. This explains vividly the knowledge gap that the present study is set to address.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Language needs analysts to approach their works from several perspectives. Jordan (1994) and Hutchinson and Waters (1984), for instance, opine that needs analysis be approached from two perspectives: Present Situation Analysis (PSA) and Target Situation Analysis (TSA). Robinson (1991) submits that the needs analysis, which focuses on students' needs at the end of a language course can be called Target Situation Analysis (TSA). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) explain TSA to mean tasks and activities where language course products will be using their language course by-products.

This work agrees with Jordan (1994) and Hutchinson and Waters (1984) that a meaningful need analysis considers the present language stage of learners (Present Situation) as well as their target function (Target situation). Consequently, in carrying out this study, the students' language proficiency levels and the target language situation they are expected to function within at the end of their study course were considered; in this light, the study adopted Jordan's (1994) and Hutchinson and Waters' (1984) perspective to needs analysis as they have affordances that effectively meet the research objectives of this study.

### **Methodology**

Participant (unobtrusive) observation and interview methods were deployed on twenty-four (24) English Language (as a Second Language) lecturers who were purposively drawn from four tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria: Nasarawa State University, Keffi; Federal

University, Lafia; Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa and State Polytechnic, Lafia. From each of these institutions, six (6) members of staff of the Department of English (for the universities) and English language units (for the polytechnics) constituted the population of the study. Out of this number, 4 members of staff from each of the institutions under study, were purposively sampled as participants for this study. Consequently, 16 respondents constituted the size of the study.

### Analysis of corpus

The study set out to investigate the nexus between the ESP approach to English language learning/teaching. To achieve this, the following questions were asked the respondents:

*Table 1: Do you consider English language learning important for your students?*

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	16	100
No	0	0
Undecided	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

To this question, 10 respondents (100%) chose the affirmative, no respondent held a contrary opinion that studying English was not important to their students. This result indicates that all the respondents were positively disposed to learning English as they found it important for their students.

*Table 2: In your view, is there a connection between the learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and national development?*

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	11	68.8
No	3	18.8
Undecided	2	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table indicates that 11 respondents (68.8%) observed a connection between the learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and national development. For 3 respondents (18.8%), there was no connection between the two variables (Learning English using the ESP approach and national development). On the other hand, 2 respondents (12.5%) were undecided.

*In what ways is there a connection between the learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and national development?*

To this question, most of the responded listed the following and supported with explanations:

- i. Needs analysis;
- ii. Target Situation; and
- iii. Course Design.

### Discussion of Result

The study population was quizzed on the nexus between the ESP approach and national development. Their reactions indicated that the ESP perspective on the teaching of English is functional. Consequently, it has immense contributions to national development in the following ways:

- **Needs Analysis:** Needs Analysis is the deliberate effort made by a language teacher to profile the learners' needs for studying English. This activity contributes to national development in the sense that the learners are usually more interested in the



learning/teaching enterprise as they find learning English more attractive. This in turn makes them more productive in their fields of study and in their places of work upon completion of their studies. This helps in adding value to the economy, thereby enhancing national development.

- **Target Situation:** The ESP approach considers the target situation. The target situation refers to the expected work stations of the learners on completion of the programme in English. The essence of considering the target situation is to guide the language teacher on those aspects of language studies that will be relevant to the learner in the future. The relationship between this approach and national development is that it equips the learner to face the demands of the job upon the completion of the study. This makes the learner-turned-employee more relevant and productive in her/his area of designation, thereby effectively contributing to national development.
- **Course Design:** An important activity in the ESP enterprise is course design. Course design involves gathering information that could be representative of the needs of the learner, institutional language policy and the societal expectations or demands for language and using the information collated in designing a course or syllabus. The implication of this on national development is that the courses taught in an ESP situation are arrived at based on the learner needs, institutional language policy and demands of society. Consequently, the participation and involvement of the learner are more sustained. Thereby making them more competent and proficient in English than they would have been if their needs, and other factors, were not considered in the process of course design.

## Conclusion

National development is achieved when all spectra of the society converge efforts in fostering a viable economy. In these terms, the English language specialist can also be part of the drive for national development by deploying the English for Specific Purposes approach. It is to expound this assertion that the present study set out. The results revealed that the ESP approach houses potentials which can be leveraged for national development. Consequently, the study concludes with advocacy for the adoption of the ESP approach, which holds better promise for national development than English for General Purposes (EGP).

## Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- i. Concrete efforts should be made by curriculum developers and planners as well as (education) policy makers to mainstream the ESP approach into the tertiary education curriculum.
- ii. The federal and state governments should ensure that English Language lecturers are periodically trained and retrained on English language teaching strategies, using the ESP approach.
- iii. School proprietors at the federal and state government levels should provide adequate infrastructure in institutions for effective teaching/learning experiences.

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