



English for Agriculture Students in Bangladesh: Necessity, Nature and Approach towards Designing the Course

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received date: Oct. 15, 2018 Accepted date: Jan. 16, 2019</p>	<p>This article shows interest in the English Language course offered to the tertiary level students of Agricultural study in Bangladesh. There are two parts of this work. The first part looks back in the past and puts that beside the current time and trend to see why these particular learners need to take a course for developing their language proficiency even though they are committed to the study of agriculture. In the second part, there is a series of arguments and comments of the experts that help to figure out the nature and process of designing an English Language course intended for the learners of interest. The work presented here will help professionals, both from the field of language and from outside, to understand the level of emphasis that is timely put on English Language course within the tertiary level academic condition. Moreover, it will benefit the readers, as they can perceive the true nature of the course and come to know how it is at once similar and different from other language courses. In addition to these, there will be a basic guideline or direction in re how to approach an English for Academic Purpose (EAP) course designing process. Throughout this paper, there is no dependency on primarily collected data rather there is a reliability on the works and observations made previously by the experts in the respective field.</p>

Key words: EAP, ELT, English for Agriculture, ESP, Needs Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

If broadly spoken, man is found keen to learn a language other than the mother tongue because of two types of reason. The first type being survival leaves the urge and need to know others as the second one. Knowing others can take a number of different forms, such as interacting with people who speak the target language, reading a material that is written in the target language or even using the target language to express one's desire to know. Especially, acquiring knowledge is the most frequently found reason because knowledge does not favor any specific language; it is wide, open and existing variably in all the languages

spoken on the earth. This is why, even the people belonging to the largest language community might have to learn a different language if they require learning something new that is not amply available within the range of the materials presented in their first language.

Like different dynasties ruling civilizations throughout the time and world, at different times, certain language has gained remarkable significance and driven people's attention and effort towards it. In its timely turn, English became the major language of England during the reign of King Henry IV. Later during the 15th century, King Henry V proclaimed English as the official language and by the end of the 15th century law books were made available in English language.

If more on the origin of English is desired, we can always dive a little deeper into the history but that interest can be entertained on a separate occasion, in a different piece. For now, the concern of this writing is language teaching. Keeping that in mind, we can look at England during the late 16th century when immigrants from different parts from Europe were entering the English land. That moment is one of the marked ones in the history of English Language teaching since the widely used English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks came into demand. Among them were some non-natives who could efficiently use English and became first non-native English language teachers alongside the native ones. However, the migrant communities also focused on learning the language in order to strengthen their career prospect (Thanasoulas, 2002). From there, centuries after, today here we are; the language itself might have changed to some extent but the nature of necessity of learning English has been the same. According to a latest data published on *statistica.com* web portal there are almost 378 million people on the Earth who use English as a first language. In addition to that, there are over 700 million more people using English as a foreign language. If we take a moment to look at the major broadcasting companies throughout the world such as, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) etc. are running their shows in English. People with all types of language identity are learning the language with various purposes in mind and in various settings. They can be categorized in different ways based on their place of origin, learning goal and purpose. This article looks into such a particular learner group who shares a common purpose of improving their English through academic course for doing better in their higher study of Agriculture.

This review focuses on the necessity of English courses for agriculture students. Also keeping with the title, discusses the nature of the language course, clarifies the concept of ESP as a part of EAP and emphasizes the importance of needs analysis under the headings of i) necessity of English Language course in the study of Agriculture, ii) nature of the language course for Agriculture students, iii) EAP for agriculture students in Bangladesh and Needs Analysis: prerequisite of a language course designing.

2. NECESSITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE IN THE STUDY OF AGRICULTURE

It has been almost 130 years since Agriculture, as a field of study, has made its place in academia in America (O'Brien, 1914). Today it has established a stronghold throughout the world. In Bangladesh, Agriculture as a subject found its

place in formal higher education with the establishment of the Bangladesh Agricultural University in 1961 in the then East Pakistan. Since then, it has come a long way. Currently it is running around forty-three departments under six faculties (Ansarey, 2016). Apart from that, now, there are other universities offering higher studies in Agriculture.

It takes to have, for an agriculturalist, no less technical knowledge than a doctor, a business analyst, a lawyer or an engineer does. A student of Agriculture may attend lectures, deal with presentation, work and gather experiences in the plots, have field trips, spend hours in the laboratory and some may be in research works, but regardless of the positions and activities, he/she is working with ever-growing written documents in the respective field (O'Brien, 1914). Almost in all the cases, the medium of instructions is English. Such milieu inevitably puts a scholar of Agriculture in a position where he/she has to depend on the proficiency of English for collecting information, acquiring knowledge and offering knowledge. If we just take a moment to think how the knowledge of Agriculture is shared and spread, the whole picture will slightly be more vivid. A discovery or an invention may take place in any corner of the world; a new theory may require attention or an ongoing research may need collaboration, not to mention the seminars and symposiums where communication is the key. In all the just-mentioned-aspects, people need to meet on a common ground. Internet and other technological facilities bring us there within a second, but again, since not all the experts of Agriculture can be expected to have the knowledge of coding/ programming language, they require a lingua franca.

A lingua franca or a bridge language is the only solution. And what language is there to serve better for this purpose than English does (Ansarey, 2016)? Among 210433 publications observed from Science Citation Index (SCI) and Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), 96.5% were found to be published in English while only 3.5% were in non-English with a frequent preference in German (Clarke et al., 2007).

English is the world's most widely studied second language. The English language dominates science, scholarship, and instruction as never before. English will achieve the status that Latin had as the sole language of teaching and scholarship at the 13th-century universities in Europe. The academic journals and books published in English and edited from the United States and the United Kingdom increasingly dominate world scholarship. These publications are almost the only ones internationally circulated. They are the most prestigious journals, and academics worldwide compete to publish in them. Universities worldwide want their professors to publish in these listed journals and reward those who do. If globalization determines the direction of the world economy,

Table 1. Current number of major agricultural programs offered in Bangladesh.

Name of University/College	Number of faculty / institute / School	Number of Department
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University	04	36
Bangladesh Agricultural University	06	45
Chittagong Veterinary & Animal Science University	03	18
Shere-E-Bangla Agricultural University	04	36
Sylhet Agricultural University	06	47
Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University	01	11
University of Chittagong	03	09
University of Rajshahi	01	04
University of Dhaka	01	07
Atish Dipankar University of Science and Technology	01	01
EXIM Bank Agricultural University Bangladesh	02	19
International University of Business Agriculture and Technology	01	01
Ishakha International University, Bangladesh	01	01

science, and other factors, then the growth of English as the global language of science and scholarship is inevitable for the near future (Philip, 2007).

Like other fields of academia, for instance, Business Studies accommodates Business English and values it to reach the goals; Agriculture needs to put no less emphasis on the skills of English. Moreover, the study of Agriculture is, by no means, compartmentalized rather it is multidisciplinary. Biotechnology, Chemistry, Botany, Food Science, Marketing and Management, Economics, Communication, Cultural Studies, Statistics etc. are to some extent closely connected to it (Boucher, 2019). Students need to put information together from all these varied studies. As long as it is about the necessity of English, few people are there to argue, but it gets interesting when the question of the nature of English teaching-learning for Agriculture students comes into the discussion. For a student or even a professor of Agriculture, knowing about the language is certainly not the first priority. They do not have to define a subordinating conjunction, but have to be able to use one correctly when it comes in their speech or writing. Likewise, it cannot be demanded of them that they would know the etymology of all the words in English, but they must have a sound knowledge of the jargon they use. Determining the extent of an English course for the Agriculture students and how it can be made fitting for them thus is not as simple as it is done in an English course for general purpose. The responsibility falls in the hands of language teaching experts and the respective instructors who need to have the knowledge of designing and conducting an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) course (Górska-Poręcka, 2013). To be more specific, it is a matter of EAP.

3. NATURE OF THE LANGUAGE COURSE FOR AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) probably have interpreted ESP in the simplest way by saying that it is “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to the contents and methods are based on learner’s reason for learning.” ESP creates an opportunity for the learners to acquire desired knowledge and skills in a sped up, intensive context (Wright, 1992). At a practical level, ESP deals with preparing the learners’ to be able to use English in academic (students of different fields), professional (people of different professions such as doctors, engineers, and nurses), or workplace (technicians or air hostess for example) settings. As it is about specific students, therefore, it must be tailored to the needs of these students (Sharndama et al., 2014). While taking an ESP course the learner should take the full advantage of provided learning resources to accelerate their learning efficiency, since learning materials are carefully and scrupulously selected prior to the course by the respective instructor.

EAP as a branch of ESP shares all the features, aims and processes of it. It is, by design, directed towards taking care of a student’s needs that arise from a certain field of study (Sharndama et al., 2014). Ansarey (2016) also thinks that EAP is one of the types of ESP, and its aim is to fulfill the needs of the learners at different levels and settings. Thus, it can be said that EAP is a learner-centered approach to the teaching of English (Sharndama et al., 2014). This approach considers the required study skills as much as it does the same for the specifications of the learner’s need (Jordan, 1997). Teaching EAP, therefore, involves developing in the

learners – who could be anyone from a pre-undergraduate or a published research professor – the language and associated practices that they need in order to study or work in English medium setting. For that reason, it must start with the learner and the academic context in which they work or study.

Hyland (2006) acknowledges that EAP pedagogies help students to distinguish differences and provide them with a means of understanding their educational experiences in relation to their home experiences. Bazerman & Russell (1994) are of the view that freshman's Composition and other allied programs in the USA arose as a response to the obvious decline in the quality of writing of students. It was developed in the 1960s in response to the demand for courses geared towards practical and functional rather than educational and cultural end. In academia, EAP as a branch of ESP is one of the notable latest approaches to the teaching of English in higher institutions. In recent years, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become an expanding discipline within universities and other higher institutions. Today, EAP is spreading fast as the demand for English across the world is soaring high.

In many English medium tertiary institutions, students are taught how to improve their proficiency and communicative competence, so that they can follow their academic courses of study successfully. The ability to understand and use language effectively to communicate in authentic social and school environment has for long been the aim of teaching English language to the beginning students in English medium tertiary institutions (Sharndama et al., 2014). At many British Universities English for academic purposes courses form an important language provision for non-native speakers and such courses can either be pre-sessional, where students take the course before they go into further academic study or in-sessional, where students study while already on academic course (Jarvis, 2001). The pre-sessional EAP program is designed to provide the learners of English as a foreign language with Basic English language skills that will enable them to continue their academic course of study in English. The in-sessional on the other hand is taught to the learners of English as a second language to improve their proficiency in English (Sharndama et al., 2014).

Jarvis (2001) has further offered a distinction between subject specific and common core EAP. The common core EAP is concerned with general academic language skills, while the subject specific EAP looks at the language features of particular discipline. Here, in case of the former, students of different course backgrounds are taught the same language skills, which may not promise direct benefits for the students' academic course of study. The aims of teaching the two however is to equip the students with the language skills that will enable them to follow their academic fields of study. Focus is made on the need to raise the students' English to enter higher institutions or study successfully.

It has remained a debatable issue: whether EAP is similar in nature to the general language teaching courses or different. Astika (1999) opines that ESP should not be

considered different from teaching the English language in general. It is just a different approach and it is practiced according to the commonly held perceptions and principles of teaching the language for communicative purposes. The learning processes of ESP is not much different from those of general English, except for the various content of learning, ESP could as well be used in the learning of any kind of English. Therefore, ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). On the other hand, McArthur (1996) thinks that the ESP approach of teaching English is against the traditional teaching of it as a second or foreign language. In EAP classrooms, the framework differs from general language teaching where the students bring both specialized knowledge and learning processes from their disciplines (Hyland, 2006). However, it seems to be the case of perspective. EAP and the general/traditional ways of teaching definitely share some common grounds but with their teaching-learning process, focus-tasks and aims they have some obvious differences and one cannot merely be replaced by the other. It is possible to get a clearer idea if we can explore some of the key features of EAP.

The defining characteristics of EAP, that set it aside from other courses in higher education, are its focus on the language and associated practices that learners need in order to undertake study or work in English medium higher education. EAP, therefore, takes the communicative needs of the learner in an academic context as the central point, and also uses the most modern methods and techniques available – although some of these may be 5000 years old or more (Musumeci, 1997). That means, as a language teaching approach EAP is quite adaptable regarding the methods and techniques since it can be practiced in a variety of conditions. Robinson (1991) has mentioned at least six key features that can illustrate the nature of EAP with clarity. They are the followings:

- I. This approach is strictly goal directed, if not, it will be anything but EAP. The participants are usually current higher education students or members of staff or they are hoping to go on to higher education after their EAP course. They need to learn English in order to succeed in their academic careers. Everything they learn, try to learn or perform in the classroom will be to achieve that goal.
- II. Such a course has to be based on the analysis of needs. That analysis essentially specifies as closely as possible exactly what it is that the learners have to do through the medium of English. For that reason, an important feature of EAP courses is the close attention that is paid to the learners' aims and what they are working on, studying or planning to study. It is also important to take into account the learning or study needs of the students, what they need to do in order to learn the language. The first stage in any EAP, and EPP or EOP, course, therefore, is to find out exactly why the learners are

learning English and what language and practices they will need to pay attention to.

- III. An EAP course should have a specific duration. If the course is not fixed term the use of it will be disturbed. Here the learners are found to be preparing for a particular task – such as an essay, dissertation or conference presentation – or an academic course or they are studying English for a short time every week along with their academic courses or jobs.
- IV. Most EAP students are over 18 and they will have made a difficult decision to study in an English medium university or, for example, researching, publishing or teaching in English may be a requirement. These people are of a specific type but not of similar type. Each group is different from the other. Understanding this difference is essential to make the course a success.
- V. In the standard EAP setting, the expectation is that the students/learners will be proficient enough to understand their lectures, communicate with the other students, go through and take the advantage of the textbooks and bring a good grade with their assignments and examinations. A very high level of proficiency is never the goal of such a language course. As long as they can complete the tasks expected of the students with success, the objective of an EAP course is completed.
- VI. Solely knowing about the language and practicing that knowledge is not sufficient, for EAP the linguistic tasks are essential. An EAP lecturer would not take a text and ask, “What can I do with this text?” The starting point is always, “What do my learners have to do? What texts will they need to read? What will my students need to do with this text and how can we help them to do it?”

4. EAP FOR AGRICULTURE STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH

The features of EAP drawn by Robinson (1991) clearly describe the condition of a BS in Agriculture student. Even more so in Bangladeshi context, students here who want to go for this specific degree must fulfill some minimum requirements. For example, School of Agriculture & Rural Development (SARD) of Bangladesh Open University offers a number of different programs like Bachelor of Agricultural Education (B. Ag. Ed), MS in Soil Science, MS in aquaculture and so on. The minimum requirement here for applying for the bachelor’s degree is having HSC (science/agriculture group or any group including subject of Agricultural Science) or Diploma in Agriculture/Equivalent Certificate. To participate in an undergraduate program at BAU (Bangladesh Agricultural University) a potential candidate must have passed HSC (Science group) or

equivalent examination with a total of GPA 9.00 out of 10.00. Also from the private sector, a major institution like EBAUB (EXIM Bank Agricultural University Bangladesh) requires their students to pass HSC/Equivalent where they must have Mathematics and Biology. The minimum educational requirement of these different places indicate the necessity of ensuring a standard just as badly as having a certificated (HSC) that makes sure that the student has been taught English in the previous years and they are familiar with the core elements of the language. At such a point, they must have some guidance through an EAP course where they can put their previously acquired knowledge of the language with the right focus.

Secondly, most of the students going for the higher education in the Agricultural field cannot find an alternative to the massive amount of study materials that are written in English. Knowing this fact, they make their decision to pursue the degree in English medium. In terms of this decision making process all the students are similar but they widely vary in the ways they approach this new medium (except for the students who come from an English medium background) of education.

Thirdly, keeping with the fifth and sixth features mentioned in the previous section, the focus of EAP is not to teach the students about English or English in general nether teaching fragments of it randomly. It is about working with certain selection of communicative competence. The goal is never to transform the learners into native like English users rather to prepare them in a way so that they can be comfortable with the language while performing their academic tasks like presenting and preparing assignments, writing in the examination or for research, comprehending the class lectures, taking notes, sharing relevant ideas with other etc. That is why an EAP course first considers the learners’ requirements and then goes on shaping the syllabus, teaching method, materials and other necessary elements accordingly.

And finally, as mentioned in the second feature pointed out by Robinson (1991), an effective EAP course designed for the students who start for higher education in Agriculture in Bangladesh requires a through needs analysis.

5. NEEDS ANALYSIS: PREREQUISITE OF A LANGUAGE COURSE DESIGNING

There are many different ways to define and present needs analysis but regardless of the ways, the learner is always at the center of it. A complete and meaningful needs analysis helps to develop an adequate and useful language course, precisely it makes sure that the syllabus used for the course/program is strictly relevant and students are spending their time and effort for completing the course objectives.

Lawson (1979) thinks that needs analysis is a kind of diagnosis. A diagnosis that expectantly will bring some shortcoming on the learners’ part in the light. For Johns (1991), needs analysis is the first step in course design and it

Table 2. A quick glance at the perspectives/contribution of different linguists about needs analysis.

Linguist/Educationalist	Perspective about needs analysis/Contribution
Munby (1978)	Munby designed and introduced 'communication needs processor', which is the basis of Munby's approach to needs analysis. Based on his work, Chambers (1980) later introduced the term "Target Situation Analysis".
Brindley & Berwick (1989)	Offer definitions of different types of needs and accounts of various problems and limitations in making use of this concept, including ways in which we might usefully distinguish between needs identified by analysts and those expressed or experienced by learners.
Nunan (1983)	"Techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design"
Jack C. Richards (1992)	"The process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities."
West (1994)	Gives a thorough overview view of needs analysis in language teaching, including Its history, theoretical basis, approaches to needs analysis etc.
Fatihi (2003)	"A device to know the learner's necessities, needs and lacks"
Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998)	Suggests, needs were seen as discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary.

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A needs analysis attempts to collect as much information as possible in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the needs and issues facing your course. Once those needs are understood, it is a lot easier to identify potential solutions (Sharndama et al., 2014).

When the term "need" comes to a discussion like this Berwick (1989) sees it as a distance between "what is (current proficiency level) and what should be (expected proficiency level)". Hutchinson and Waters (1987) go further into investigating the situation where the learner will actually use the learnt language and refer to that as "target needs" also the things one has to do to learn successfully, the "Learning needs"

The first stage in the teaching of EAP is to assess why the students are learning English and the skills they need. This is what is called in the study of ESP needs analysis (Sharndama et al., 2014). It is indispensable for teachers who want to be effective to start where students are. As such, teachers have to get information about learners' current proficiencies and ambitions, strengths and weaknesses. Together with this, teachers should also consider students' learning context and their future linguistic roles (Hyland, 2006).

Informal needs analyses have been conducted by teachers in order to assess what language points their students needed to master. In fact, the reason why different

approaches were born and then replaced by others is that teachers have intended to meet the needs of their students during their learning (Songhori, 2008). Teachers may find their syllabus handed to them by administrators or prescribed in set texts. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the fact that a key aspect of developing an EAP course is formulating goals and objectives from the data gathered by needs analysis (Hyland, 2006). Widdoson's (1981) view about the process of needs analysis however, is bipartite. One focuses on the activities a learner should perform to acquire the language and the other part deals with the reasons of learning the language, what the learner would do once he/she learns the language.

At a level of self-directed learning (Holee, 1980) encourages learners' autonomy and proposes to help the learners to learn how to learn so that, they are competent enough to figure out the solutions of the problems entangled within variations among different needs. Eventually that will lead them to narrow down the considerable gap between what the learner wants to learn and what he does in fact learn. However, this approach looks to be somewhat impractical within certain academic setting, where the course gets a very limited time and is strictly controlled with achievement tests.

Holliday (1995) in this respect has been thoughtful about practicality. According to him, the process of need analysis can be made more realistic if the means of implementing it is thoroughly considered. Here he proposes to relate the instrumental factors with the model of needs analysis. By instrumental factors he refers to the institution where the analysis is carried out, and the administration staff who are expected to provide support, access, and resources that are necessary for implementation, such as access to study documents, interviews or visits to offices etc. (Astika, 1999).

This leads to the point of designing the syllabus and determining the most effective and appropriate teaching method. In the next stage of the model section of teaching-learning materials is done. Then it is time to take that all to the class for implementation, which opens the window for evaluating the learners' performance. Finally, feedbacks should be provided so that the students can benefit from the structured guiding process. For an EAP course to be successful, the target needs should be performed in different academic contexts by the students. The classroom practice may vary according to the classroom culture but it must begin with the analysis of needs. The experts who have researched the process have suggested similar types of information to be collected but there are differences of forms and parameters.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The arguments presented here provide insight as to how an English Language course is expected to be approached. At this point, it is quite clear that in ESP setting there is no such thing as panacea. There can be no ideal or obligatory model for course structure. As long as it is about the success of a particular course, fulfilling some basic requirements is not acceptable and knowing the participants is definitely on the list.

Hawkey (1980) says "Language training situation with reasonably specific occupational or educational objectives involves a reasonably homogeneous group of learners", but in a given language training context there is not always the assurance of getting homogeneous learners. Learners may share some common aims and their target situations might have many similarities but the level of competence they bring to the class may vary. And there are always these slight yet significant variations.

These facts under discussion are easily relatable to the Agriculture students in Bangladesh. For admission process, different institutions set their own type of placement test with varied difficulty level. This may ensure similarity of students regarding learning capability, background knowledge and level of proficiency for a specific institution. However, which course plan and classroom methodology fits for one institution may not work just as well for another.

Apart from the learners' proficiency level, their long-term goal is also a decisive factor in language course designing which also tends to vary from institution to institution. Yalden (1984) prefers to see language course specifics as instruments being used by teachers, which help to achieve a certain degree of fit between the needs and aims of the learners and the activities that will be performed in the classroom. In the light of the facts and arguments placed through this article, it should have already been established that as a context Bangladesh is not an exception. Before adopting the practice of copying all the features of the English Language course of a University or institution for another as a complete and ready package, just for the reason

that the source institution is considered good or highly esteemed through consideration is earnestly advised.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper certainly does not suggest any direct solution or model for developing a language course for an institution offering BS Agriculture. Rather it explores the existing studies and addresses the issues that are often taken for granted. Especially this particular work shades a little light on the Bangladeshi context where often the decision making figures are prone to take this matter of approaching a course designing whimsically.

Every language teacher/instructor has his/her own style of conducting a course based on personal preference and understanding. A radical change in this personality is not possible nor expected or needed, but a consciousness of the presence of other functioning variables in the course that significantly influences the outcome is of paramount importance in the professional arena.

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