

## **A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION IN REGARD TO ITS PROVISION OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATION COURSES: A CASE OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) AND ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES (EPP)**

Rewai Makamani

*Lecturer: Polytechnic of Namibia, Department of Communication, E- mail: [rmakamani@polytecnic.edu.na](mailto:rmakamani@polytecnic.edu.na)*

### **Abstract**

This study attempts a SWOT analysis of the higher level English Communication courses offered by the Department of Communication at the Polytechnic of Namibia (Communication Skills, Professional Writing and Professional Communication), in order to probe the current situation and use the findings to argue a case for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Professional Purposes (EPP) as alternative higher level courses. The study aims at carving a niche for an English curriculum that meets the demands made upon the learners by target situations. Therefore, the problem that this study seeks to address is that whereas learners face a heterogeneous target situation characterized by varieties of English, (English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP), English for Legal Purposes (ELP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP), English for Economics (EE) and English for Science and Technology (EST), as the case may be, (Dudley – Evans and St John, 1998)), the higher level courses expose students to mainly a generalised English curriculum which, by and large, does not fully address the requirements of the target situation. Findings from the study are aimed at bolstering efforts to implement an ESP curriculum that meets the expectation of learners as is demanded by the target situation. The study employs a descriptive analysis of data within the qualitative research paradigm.

### **Keywords**

SWOT analysis – an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a given situation in order to find a positive way forward.

English for Academic Purposes – A variety of English that is needed by the learner in order to learn.

English for Professional Purposes – Varieties of English that are used in the

world of work, for example,

English for Medical Purposes and English for Legal Purposes.

Target situation – The situation in which the learner will apply the acquired knowledge and skills.

### **Introduction**

When she presented her June 2011 conference paper titled, "Pressing the right button to motivate student learning in a multicultural African context", Buyiso Ige of the University of Cape Town's Academic Development Unit noted the following stumbling blocks to learning as evident in her students:

- Some students come inadequately prepared by their primary and secondary schools
- Even English first language speakers are having learning problems
- First generation university students with no one to learn from
- Problems of time management and stress management.

Even though there are very few English first language speakers among students at the Polytechnic of Namibia, Ige chronicles what appears to be universal problems which also affect students at the Polytechnic of Namibia. It is such problems that a well planned English curriculum should address. However, as revealed by findings in this study, the current English curriculum offered by the Department of Communication, particularly at higher level English courses, only partially address challenges faced by students particularly those related to the target situation needs. This paper, which stems from two conferences, namely, the Poetics and Language Association (PALA) conference which was hosted by the Polytechnic of Namibia in July 2011 and the E-Teacher Scholars conference held in August 2011 at the University of Maryland, USA, seeks not only to precipitate debate about the current English curriculum of the Department of Communication, but to encourage academics to purposefully implement the on-going curriculum change without taking any shortcuts in order to fully address the needs of learners and relevant stakeholders.

### **The importance of a needs analysis in the English for Specific Purposes curriculum**

To date, current English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research point to the primacy of needs analysis both in the conceptualisation and implementation of an ESP curriculum (Nunan, 1988, Jordan, 1997, Spiropoulou, 1996, Bouzidi, 2009). In this study, ESP is conceived as referring to a variety of English, used more or less consistently, to serve a specified purpose in a specified context. This view is in tandem with the definition given by Dudley-Evans & St Johns (1998, p. 4-5). Their definition is based on the following absolute and variable characteristics of ESP:

Absolute characteristics:

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner
- ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves
- ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

Variable characteristics:

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
- ESP may use, in many specific situations, a different methodology from that of General English.

It follows from the above that a needs driven definition of ESP regards it as the English that is needed by the learner were s/he to brace with challenges of the 21st-century workplace. The US national Institute for Literacy indicated that employers gave the following as key skills of the 21st-century: skills in communicating, making decisions, solving problems, planning, working in teams, negotiating, resolving conflicts, and taking responsibility for learning (Wastefield et al., [http://www.tesol.org/s\\_tesol/](http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/) ). The learner-centeredness of ESP methodology coupled with its use of authentic materials for instructional purposes makes it the best subject discipline to equip learners with the above-mentioned skills.

