# English in Libya and the Need for EAP

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**Abstract:**

English as a school subject enjoys a very distinguished status within the Libyan education system both at the pre-university and the university level. This type of distinction stems from the role that said language plays at those levels. This paper addresses the need for a special type of English i.e. English for Academic Purposes ' EAP' that is felt to be needed to be inserted in the pre-university English language syllabi. Establishing this need is based on the researcher's own 35 years experience of university teaching as well as his Ph.D. thesis (2000) that used a field research regarding using English a s a medium of instruction in both faculties of medicine and faculties of engineering in the Libyan universities.

This article comes in two sections: (1) Section one is a brief literature review of the origins of ESP as the main umbrella that accommodates EAP, the reasons for EAP emergence, and the types of EAP. (2) Section two reviews the importance of inserting EAP within the Libyan pre-university educational system.

العدد الأول – ديسمبر 2014

## • Introduction

Almost everybody knows that English enjoys a very important status within the Libyan educational system. A fact that stems of the very prominent role that English plays not only as school subject at the pre-university stages but also at the university level as a medium of instruction in most applied science faculties. By instruction, here, I do not only mean the language of lectures and lecturers but also the language of most the educational written material used in the said faculties. This paper addresses a topic closely related to the role that English plays as a medium of instruction at the university level i.e. English for Academic Purposes 'EAP'. EAP is a sub-branching of English for Specific Purposes known in the circles of applied linguistics as 'ESP'.

## • The Origin of ESP

Perhaps it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of ESP and the exact date and place of its first emergence.  However; ESP did not emerge for nothing.  Therefore, we need to identify the reasons for its emergence to have a convincing background for its existence and its ever increasing impact on the language teaching/learning process.  Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify three obvious reasons for the emergence of ESP. They are: the new world with its very peculiar demands, the revolution that took place in the fields of linguistics and language learning, and the awareness that led to focusing on the learner's needs.

The post Second World War revolution that took place worldwide resulted in an expansion in the fields of science and economics.  Almost all the activities related to this expansion and revolution were in need to a language that would cope with this fast moving spheres of science and technology. Needless to say that English was the immediate and obvious fulfillment of such a need due to the fact that most economic and technological activities took place in an English speaking country i.e. the United States of America. In acknowledgement of this; Hutchison and Waters (1987:6) say that the said huge changes brought with it an "… age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale.  For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role fell to English." Hutchinson and Waters (ibid.) continue to state that this resulted in placing pressure on the language teaching profession to come up with the required and proper response to accommodate the newly arising need for ESP. Gatehouse (2001:2) says that "the second key reason cited as having a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics." Hutchinson and Waters as cited in Gatehouse (200:2) emphasize this required change when they say "one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary." They (ibid) go on to state that this discovery led to more significant change, as far as ESP is concerned, when they say "This idea was taken one step further. If language in different situations varies, then tailoring language

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instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible." The third and final reason for the emergence of ESP as stated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as cited in Gatehouse (2001:2) is related to linguistics and psychology. To clarify this, they say

> Learners were seen to employ different learning strategies, use different skills, enter with different learning schemata, and be motivated by different needs and interests. Therefore; focus on learners' needs became equally paramount as the methods employed to disseminate linguistic knowledge. Designing specific courses to better meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this thinking. To this day, the catchword in ESL circles is learner-centered or learning-oriented.

All the above stated reasons for the emergence of ESP are summarized in a number of lecture notes by Lowe (2009:1). Lowe's account of the said reasons can be summarized more as follows:

## A. The Demands of a Brave New World, post WW2 'This is Lowe's title'.

**1.** The huge sudden expansions in the fields of science, technology and economics.

**2.** The dominance of English as a medium of instruction in fields of science and business.

**3.** Awareness of new generations of English language learners who knew why they need English.

**4.** 'Time and money constraints created a need for cost effective courses with clearly defined goals'. Here Lowe (ibid.) relates what he says to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:7).

**5.** The teaching of English expanded outside the educational institutions and consequently teachers became accountable in front of whoever pays for the concerned courses, i.e. positive results were expected.

## B. Advances in the field of linguistics and language teaching.

**1.** Emphasis on language in the real world i.e. the communicative approach.

**2.** The effect of the belief that language varies according uses and situations. This, of course, led to the need for concentrating on the features of the language of each specific field.

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## C. Emphasis of psychology

This meant taking into consideration learners' attitude in learning as well as their needs.

### • Types of ESP

From the theoretical point of view, ESP has different types and orientations that deserve being looked at to have a full view of what ESP is and is about. ESP courses themselves come in different types to serve different needs. Therefore; one needs to make a clear-cut distinction between the various types of ESP. Robinson (1991:2) touches this side when she says " a major distinction is often drawn between EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), involving work-related needs and trainings, and EAP (English for Academic Purposes), involving academic study needs." It is this branching of ESP that is to be reviewed more thoroughly later in this paper to show how much need there exists for using it in English at the secondary level so that our students are well-prepared to cope with a situation where English is used as medium of instruction in some of the applied science faculties in most Libyan universities specially in engineering and medicine.

It is obvious that for avoiding overlapping of views regarding what ESP is and is not, we need to pinpoint what are the criteria to ESP. Emphasizing this, Robinson (ibid.:2) says "… it is not uncommon to find courses which the organizers wish to think of as ESP courses but which do not appear to fit these criteria." She (ibid.:2-3) goes on to establish a number of criteria the presence of which would guarantee that the course is a real ESP one. Robinson (ibid.) criteria can be summarized as follows:

1. An ESP course must be goal-oriented.

2. An ESP course is based on needs analysis.

Robinson (ibid.) goes on to state features that are not seen as criteria but can be seen as characteristics that distinguish ESP courses from other types of English language courses. These are: (a) normally an ESP course is for a limited period of time, (b) the students are usually adults rather than young, and (c) the target students are not usually beginners, i.e. an ESP course student must have a reasonable general English background.

Seeing it from another angle, Gatehouse (2001:3) as cited by Carter (1983) identifies three types of ESP that can be summarized as follows:

### 1. English as restricted language

This type is a repertoire required by a specific kind of learners to be used in a specific type of situations and therefore; cannot be viewed as a proper preparation for

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communicating in situations other than those identified and rehearsed in the pre-determined situations.

## 2. English for academic and occupational purposes

This is the type that provides courses that are designed to serve those who need English for preceding their education in situations where English is the medium of instruction or for use in specific situations where English is being used in particular way or type of communication.

## 3. English with specific topics

This is the type in which, as Carter (1983) as cited by Gatehouse (2001:4) sate, the communicative situations are anticipated as future needs for the targeted learner. Basing on Carter, Gatehouse (ibid.) says "This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions."

- ### The Need for EAP

It is a well-established reality that most of the teaching/learning process in institutions of medicine, science, engineering, technology, etc orientations take place through English as a medium of instruction. Those who are usually in charge of designing or even choosing syllabi for the Libyan secondary education do not seem to pay enough attention to the above-stated reality. At this point, it has to be highlighted that the currently used textbooks do contain some instances of orientation toward applied science especially in the reading comprehension passages. However, the researcher sees this as by no means enough for preparing target students to cope with a situation where English is the medium of instruction upon joining university. Therefore; a new dimension needs to be created in the teaching/learning process regarding English as school subject within the Libyan secondary school system. This is said because we need to cater for the obvious need for the ability of using English as a medium of instruction. Emphasizing this, Wilmot (1985) as cited in El-Hemri (2000:67) says: "In recent years, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign and second language has expanded in specific directions, relatively a much longer growth area than the more traditional and general, or literary English." This is what the researcher meant by saying that a new dimension needs to be created in the English language teaching/learning process within the Libya secondary school system.

To put things in a more specific prospect, let us raise this question 'What is EAP?'

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## What's EAP?

As ESP can be viewed as a sub-branching of the English language teaching/learning process, EAP, in turn, can be viewed as sub-branching of ESP. As cited in El-Hemri (2000:69), in his taxonomy of ESP, Strevens (1977) made a distinction between two types of ESP. They are 'Occupational' and 'Educational'. Hirvela (1977) as cited in El-Hemri (ibid.) mentions that Strevens (1977) subdivided ESP into different types one of which was 'discipline-based' where target learners are provided with a course contents that concentrate on a specific discipline, medicine, engineering, etc. This is the spirit of EAP. Kennedy and Bolitho (1984:4) clarify this further when they view EAP as a sub-branch of ESP which is "taught generally within educational institutions to students needing English in their studies. The language taught may be based in particular discipline at higher levels of education when the student is specializing (in-study) or intends to specialize (pre-study) in a particular subject."

The above citation highlights the idea of serving a specific need when an EAP course of study is conducted. Emphasizing serving the academic need of the target learner is highlighted by Coffey (1984:4) when he says that an EAP course is a language course the aim of which is to "… to satisfy a student's need for a quick and economic use of English language to pursue a course of academic study."

To relate the issue of serving the target learner's needs, one would say that it is this kind of language courses or syllabi that are needed to equip our students at pre-university level with the very much needed ability to handle the situation of using English as a medium of instruction upon joining faculties of applied science.

## Do we really need EAP?

A Ph.D. study conducted by El-Hemri (2000) used questionnaires to investigate whether EAP really needs to be inserted in the Libyan Educational System. He used three questionnaires, for secondary school students, university students and teachers in addition to interviewing of faculties of Engineering and Medicine lecturers. The questions in each questionnaire came in the forms of statements with which the targeted students express their agreement, disagreement, or being undecided. Statement no. 22 in the secondary school students questionnaire reads as follows "As English is the medium of instruction in many applied science faculties in most Libyan universities, I think that my present level in English is good enough for me to be able to cope with studying in such faculties." The students' response to this statement came as follows: 79.9% disagreed, 10.9% agreed while 9.2% were undecided. This type of believe is repeated in the same students response to statement No.24 which reads "The teaching materials I get in the school represent a sufficient teaching of EAP."  The response to this statement came as follows:

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68.7% of the students disagreed with the statement, 20.6% agreed with it, while the remaining 10.7% were undecided. The same attitude echoes again in the same students' response to statement No.26 which reads as follows: "The teaching materials I get in the school meet my need for English at the university."  The students response was as follows: 71.0% disagreed, 12.2% agreed and the remaining 16.8% were undecided.

One section of the secondary school students' questionnaire was regarding reasons for studying English in addition to the obvious reason of English being a school subject. Statement No. 53 of the said section reads as follows: " I study English because it is very important for studying in applied science faculties where English is the medium of instruction." 79.5% of the students expressed their agreement with this statement, 11.5 disagreed with it while 9.0% were undecided.

The above stated were the views of about 1091 students who were covered by the questionnaire in the three cities of Benghazi, Tripoli, and Sebha.  The reader may argue that these were views of students who were yet to join the universities and therefore their views may be seen as impressionistic and do not necessarily represent the situation as it is at the university.  These views were double-checked by another students' questionnaire conducted at faculties of engineering and medicine where English is used as medium of instruction.  The said questionnaire yielded the following results: statement No.15 reads as follows: "As English is the medium of instruction in my faculty, when I joined the university my level in English was good enough for me to cope with such a situation." The students response to this statement was: 65.3% said that they disagree, 23.1% said they agree, and 11.8% were undecided.  This view was indirectly consolidated by the students' response to statement No. 24 which reads "The teaching materials that I had in secondary school represented a sufficient input for using EAP at the university." The students' response to this statement was: 69.3% disagreed, 22.2% agreed, and 8.5% were undecided. Yet another confirmation of lack of proper secondary school training on using English as a medium of instruction came from the same students response to statement No.35 which reads "English was the main problem that had to face when I joined the university" The students' response was as follows: 59.7% agreed with the statement, 26.3% disagreed with it and 14.0% were undecided.  This response was immediately confirmed by the students' response to statement No.36 which reads "My limited ability in EAP represented a serious threat to my university technical education." The response to this statement was as follows: 45.0% agreed with statement, 36.7% disagreed with it and 18.3% were undecided.

A further confirmation of the students views came from lecturers of engineering and medicine who were interviewed as a means of a supplementary evidence of EAP being needed at the secondary level. The following excerpts were taken from the said lecturers:

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One of the lecturers, referring to his students, said "They have never been prepared for such a situation" by 'situation he was referring to using English as a medium of instruction. This was confirmed by another lecturer who, referring to the same students in the same situation, said "highly intelligent, very motivated, and very hard working but their level of English is appalling." Yet another lecturer confirmed the fact that many students saw their very poor ability for using English as a medium of instruction as a threat to their university technical education when he said "many students drop out to go to faculties where English is only a taught subject." A fourth English speaking lecturer pointed out a more general handicap in English when he said "…I always feel that enjoying dealing with the friendly and very nice personalities of my students is usually hindered by their poor command of English and my lack of command of Arabic." The same lecturer continues to highlight the scope of the problem of the students being hindered by their poor command of English when he says "We listen for a certain purpose or purposes. Students mostly listen to understand. For them understanding is hindered by the use of medical and other scientific terminology. We try to simplify the language we use as much as possible, but there are always key words and idioms that cannot be avoided."

The above views of the students at both secondary and university levels and the university lecturers of engineering and medicine prove beyond any reasonable doubt that a strong need is felt for EAP at the secondary level to alleviate the burden of using English as a medium of instruction upon joining the university.

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