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## British Council's English for Academic Purposes: A Critical Analysis of the Coursebook Taught at Pakistani Universities

*Abdul Qadar*

Lecturer in English, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sheringal, Pakistan

[abdulqadar143@gmail.com](mailto:abdulqadar143@gmail.com)

### Abstract

English for Academic Purposes course focusing on the academic language needs of students is a subfield of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is a type of specialized course to integrate specific subject matter, language content, and material based on learners' needs. The study aims to evaluate the British Council's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) coursebook in terms of content, sequencing, learners' autonomy, motivation, feedback and focus on language skills. Furthermore, the study tries to provide a general perception of the usefulness and effectiveness of the coursebook for undergraduate students. The EAP Students' Manual coursebook is used as a primary source for the data collection. The researcher has chosen Nation & Macalister (2010) model of language teaching principles to analyze and discuss the data. The study found the coursebook a useful, effective and an appropriate source of English language learning in terms of the investigated aspects of the book. The findings report that the coursebook provides practice and practical usage in all domains of the academically required English language skills. It helps the students to build language competency and to be more independent learners. In addition, it provides an opportunity to the learners to think in the target language, use the language more practically and learn it in a natural type of environment. The study concludes and suggests that the content needs to be supplemented with English language audios and videos presenting the students relevant documentaries and helping material in order to make the coursebook and the learning process more useful, effective, interesting and motivating. Furthermore, the study recommends that while choosing /designing a coursebook for a certain course, it needs to be evaluated following the various criteria and language-teaching-principles suggested by different language researchers.

**Keywords:** British Council, English for Academic Purposes, Critical Analysis, Text book

### Introduction



The emergence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in 1960s opened new domains in the field of foreign language teaching focusing on learner needs, specialized content, and material selection in developing ESP courses /textbooks. Mackay and Mountford (1978) state that “ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose”. It means that ESP is the teaching-learning process of English language where the goals of students are to use the language in a particular situation and for a particular purpose. About the development of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that “ESP is not a monolithic universal phenomenon”; there have been various phases through which ESP has evolved to its development. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider three main reasons for the growth of ESP; the demand of the brave new world, new developments in the fields of linguistics and the educational psychology.

The language courses and textbooks in the ESP field address the specific requirements of English language learners based on the needs analysis procedures. The course content, objectives and material are designed on the basis of the learners’ needs and requirements in a certain field, profession and situation. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), “the purpose of an ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in a target situation”. In his definition of ESP, Strevens (1988) considers the characteristics of ESP as “to meet specified needs of different learners, related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities, centered on language appropriateness and usefulness in the analysis of discourse”. Similarly, Basturkmen (2006) provided five broad objectives on which he based the specific teaching process of an ESP courses. These include “to reveal subject-specific language use, to develop target performance competencies, to teach underlying knowledge, to develop strategic competence and to foster critical awareness”.

ESP coursebooks play a critical role in the teaching-learning process of English language. An ample number of researchers have provided their opinions about the vitality of coursebooks in the process of English learning. According to Sheldon (1988) coursebooks "represent the visible heart of any ELT program". (Bano, 2005) states that “textbooks are considered as the sole and legitimate source of knowledge both for students and teachers”. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) say that coursebook play a positive and important part in the teaching and learning of English as it provides the required content in a lesson. Richards (2001) says that textbooks provide structure and syllabus to a learning program and the impact of the program is based on the textbooks. According to Cunningsworth (1995), textbooks are effective resources/sources for self-directed learning, presentational material, ideas and activities. He further adds that it is a reference source for students and syllabus where they reflected pre-determined learning objectives, and supported for less experienced teachers to gain confidence.



ESP courses are quite different in focus and narrower in themes as compared to the teaching of English for general purposes (EGP). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) differentiated ESP and EGP courses in quite simple terms as they say, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal". Similarly, Belcher (2009) considers ESP to be a learner-centered type of language instruction distinguished from other instructional approaches in terms of the goals of instructions based on students' specific purposes. Robinson (1980) believes that "the general with which we are contrasting the specific is that of General education for life, culture and literature oriented language course in which the language itself is the subject matter and the purpose of the course". In addition, Robinson (1991) thinks of ESP course as goal oriented and aiming at the specific task that the students have to do through the medium of English. An ESP course considers the different levels of learners' language-knowledge in order to address the specific conditions of their learning situation (Benyelles, 2001).

The domain of ESP courses has been divided by a number of researchers into various classifications. David Carter (1983) proposes three types of ESP based courses. These include English as a Restricted Language (ERL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) & Occupational Purposes (EOP), and English with Specific Topics (EST). Hutchinson and Waters (1987), in their famous 'Tree of ELT' have subdivided ESP into three main types: English for Science & Technology (EST), English for Business & Economics (EBE), and English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of the types has further been classified into EAP and EOP.

Designing ESP courses and textbooks involve a series of activity and considerations. These include discovering learners' needs, situational analysis, setting objectives, choosing content, material writing and evaluation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider course designing process as "an integrated series of learning experiences to lead learners to a particular state of knowledge". ESP researchers have proposed different approaches to ESP course designing—Language centered approach, Skills Based centered course design, Learner Centered Approach, Learning Centered Approach and Integrated Skills Approach.

In choosing a coursebook, it is important to evaluate the coursebook to ensure its effectiveness and suitability for a certain course and situation. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2004) defines evaluation as "the act of considering something to decide how useful or valuable it is". Tok (2010) says that analysis and evaluation of a certain coursebook help teachers to improve themselves and to attain the useful insights into the basis of material. Shatery (2012) considers coursebook evaluation is the most pivotal particularly in the field of English Language Teaching. A number of researchers have put forwarded the evaluation criteria and checklists for the evaluation of coursebooks/textbooks. Some of them include Skierso (1991), Cunningsworth (1995), Garinger (2001), Miekley (2005), Jahangard (2007) and Nation & Macalister (2010).



The current study tries to evaluate the British Council’s EAP coursebook which is taught to undergraduate students at Pakistani Universities. The British Council’s EAP Students Manual is a pilot project of the British Council and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The coursebook has twelve units with a content focusing on helping students to excel in their academics and English language skills development. Furthermore, it presents interesting content, authentic material and students’ centered communicative activities. Every activity/task integrates the use of all the four skills of English language.

The researcher has selected Nation & Macalister’s (2010) criteria for evaluation of the British Council’s EAP coursebook. In their criteria, Nation & Macalister (2010) have presented twenty principles of teaching English which provide the basis for course design and evaluation. These principles are divided into three main groups—Content & Sequencing, Format & Presentation, and Monitoring & Assessment. The Content & Sequencing tells about what goes into a language course and the order in which the language items appear in a course. The Format & Presentation is about what actually happens in the classroom and during learning. In addition, the third group of principles, Monitoring & Assessment, deals with monitoring and assessment. The overall focus of these three groups is on frequency, learners’ autonomy, speed retrieval, language system, useful language skills, teach-ability, learning burden, interference, motivation, four strands, comprehensible input, fluency, output, deliberate learning, time on task, depth processing, integrative motivation, learning style, environment analysis and feedback.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following research objectives:

- i. To evaluate the British Council’s EAP coursebook in terms of content, sequencing, learners’ autonomy, motivation, feedback and focus on language skills.
- ii. To provide a general perception of the usefulness and effectiveness of the coursebook based on the findings of the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant for finding insights into the effectiveness of the EAP coursebook in respect of content, sequencing, learners’ autonomy, motivation, feedback and focus on language skills. It highlights the important aspects of English language teaching-learning process and those ignored in the book. Thus, it tries to bring further improvements in the book. The study is also beneficial for English course designers to consider the better part of the results for designing



English courses. Moreover, it adds to the existing body of literature on the topic and motivates further studies in coursebook evaluation.

### **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in design and descriptive in nature. The study tries to evaluate the British Council's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Students' Manual. In addition, it aims to provide a general perception of the researcher about the usefulness and effectiveness of the coursebook based on the findings of the study. The EAP Students' Manual is used as a primary source for the data collection. The researcher has chosen Nation & Macalister (2010) model of language teaching principles to analyze and discuss the data. Among the given principles, the researcher has selected a checklist of 08 principles as per the need and requirement of the study.

The researcher has thoroughly read and taught the course for several years at different departments of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sheringal, Pakistan. The experience of the teaching-learning-process in teaching the course provided him with a bulk of knowledge about the book content and students' response—which is used as a secondary source of data for the evaluation of the coursebook. In the light of Nation & Macalister (2010) model of language teaching principles, the researcher presented a descriptive analysis to the coursebook in order to discuss the content, sequencing, learners' autonomy, motivation, feedback and focus on language skills in the said coursebook.

The study is delimited to the evaluation of the British Council's EAP coursebook in respect of content, sequencing, learners' autonomy, motivation, feedback and focus on language skills. Moreover, it is limited to seek the general perceptions of the researcher about the usefulness and effectiveness of the coursebook for undergraduate students.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The aim of the research is to evaluate the British Council's EAP coursebook which is taught at Pakistani Universities. Nation & Macalister's (2010) criterion of language teaching principles is applied to evaluate the book. The following section presents a detailed analysis and discussion of the topic.

Nation & Macalister (2010) believes that “a language course should provide the best possible coverage of language in use through the inclusion of items that occur frequently in the language, so that learners get the best return for their learning effort”. The principle explains the importance of inclusion of language content, skills and the required frequency of these skills in a certain language course. The British Council's EAP coursebook is a unique example of coursebook covering almost all the language content and skills required by the learners for their academic needs. It focuses on the most frequently occurring vocabulary, grammatical structures,



and language needs of the learners. Furthermore, the content presents the most frequently language skills required by the undergraduate students to improve their condition in academic skills. The coursebook includes practice in presentations, vocabulary building, learning the grammatical structure, essay writing, report writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, comprehension and the use of all the four skills of language practically. The content has been sequenced in a proper order; it introduces the students from easier to the harder piece of information and activity.

According to Nation & Macalister (2010), “a language course should progressively cover useful language items, skills and strategies”. The principle emphasizes on the integration of the useful language items, skills, and strategies in a language course. To address the principle, the British Council’s EAP coursebook possesses all the useful language items, skills and the strategies needed by the undergraduate students in their academic life. The course integrates the required vocabulary, important grammatical structures, language skills’ practice, dialogue production, writing summaries, comprehension activities, paraphrasing texts, report writing, essay writing skills, CV writing, and presentation skills. Furthermore, in another principle they are of the opinion that “a language course should train learners in how to learn a language and how to monitor and be aware of their learning, so that they can become effective and independent language learners”. The principle explains that a language course must help its students to be independent and strategic learners—a course composed of such activities that encourage the students to become strategic and independent target language learners. The British Council’s EAP coursebook provides a plenty of strategies, activities, tasks, exercises and puzzle-work to help the students become strategic and independent learners. The students receive input on how to learn words using different strategies—the contextual meaning, predicting the meaning, and using words in particular contexts. It teaches how to cope with complex sentences by practicing an ample number of complex sentences which are produced by the learners in writing and speaking. In addition, the students are taught pre-, during, and post reading strategies to become effective and independent readers. Similarly, the focus on writing process happens in every activity of the coursebook. The students are given word-clouds, puzzles, peer-work discussions, predicting the text, picture description, picture discussions and instruction sequencing like activities to help them independent learners. Furthermore, the students work mostly in groups allow them to freely share their ideas and minimizing the influence of the teachers.

In a language coursebook, “as much as possible, the learners should be interested in and excited about learning the language and they should come to value this learning” (Nation & Macalister, 2010). The principle explains learners’ attitude toward what they learn and study in a course. In order to make learners’ attitude positive in a certain course, the motivational level of the learners need to be enhanced. The material is required to be relevant, interesting and according to the



level of the students. The meaningful content, material, activities, and the language skills presented in the British Council's EAP coursebook are much interesting, suitable, and properly sequenced; these are according to the level and academic needs of the students. Moreover, the researcher in his own experience of teaching the coursebook found the learners to be more motivated, excited, interested and positive in attitude. The content and the process of the teaching are new to them; it is not a traditional type of teaching and learning. They feel excited to talk in front of the class and feel happy when receiving appreciation from the fellow classmates. The teaching-learning process provides them with an artificial environment to learn and use the language practically. The students have the opportunity to think in the target language without considering the traditional ways of learning the language.

“There should be substantial quantities of interesting comprehensible receptive activity in both listening and reading” (Nation & Macalister, 2010) in the teaching-learning process of a language course. The principle stresses on activities that should provide a comprehensible input in language teaching. The British Council's EAP coursebook integrates the use of all the four skills of English language in general and the receptive skills in particular. In every task /activity the students receive a comprehensible input both in listening and reading. In the coursebook, most of the activities involve reading texts; the students are motivated to read the given texts in groups and discuss the subject matter with one another. Thus, they receive plenty of input from reading extensive texts and listening to the discussions of the group members on different topics. Similarly, Nation & Macalister (2010) believe that “the learners should be pushed to produce the language in both speaking and writing over a range of discourse types”. The current course encourages the students to produce the target language both in writing and speaking by assigning them different tasks. The students present the learned-content in front of the class in groups and individually. The class asks different questions pertinent to the topic. Moreover, the students are put in writing practice by producing summaries of the given texts, paraphrasing, and comparing texts to their life experiences. All this help the students to be fluent both in receptive and productive skills; this aspect addresses another principle of the Nation & Macalister (2010) criteria of language teaching course which says “A language course should provide activities aimed at increasing the fluency with which learners can use the language they already know, both receptively and productively”.

“Learners should receive helpful feedback which will allow them to improve the quality of their language use” (Nation & Macalister, 2010). The principle elaborates the importance of helpful feedback in the production of quality language use. During the teaching-learning process of the British Council's EAP coursebook, the students receive a plenty of helpful feedback from the instructor, group members and classmates. The learners are appreciated for their responses and positive comments are being added on their written work. The students' errors are tolerated and



corrected using appropriate error correction strategies. Moreover, students' feeling are never hurt; this encourages the students to practice the language more and provide them the confidence which in turn help them improve the quality of their language use.

## Conclusion

The study evaluated the British Council's EAP coursebook and to know the usefulness and effectiveness of the coursebook. The study found the coursebook a useful, effective and an appropriate source of English language learning in terms of the investigated aspects of the book. The coursebook provides practice and practical usage in all domains of the academically required English language skills. It helps the students to build language competency and to be more independent learners. In addition, it provides an opportunity to the learners to think in the target language, use the language more practically and learn it in a natural type of environment. The study concludes and suggests that the content needs to be supplemented with English language audios and videos presenting the students relevant documentaries and helping material in order to make the coursebook and the learning process more useful, effective, interesting and motivating. Furthermore, the study recommends that while choosing /designing a coursebook for a certain course it needs to be evaluated following the various criteria and language-teaching-principles suggested by different language researchers.

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