CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF ESP SYLLABUS DESIGN

2.1 EVOLUTION OF ESP, NEEDS ANALYSIS AND SYLLABUS DESIGN

The late twentieth century and the first decade of the present century have witnessed the resurgence of interest in the validity of offering ESP courses especially at the tertiary level. The distinction between general and specific use of language has specifically contributed to the development of ESP. The need to frame an ESP course in perspective to the academic and professional needs has made it the predominant way to promote communicative competence. Widdowson (1982) claimed the specific use of English in the fields of academic and professional domains and explained how it favoured the ‘necessary condition for communicative efficiency’. The demand for specific language use is identified through the specific communicative needs of the learners. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) stated that the growth and expansion of ESP is attributed to “… the expansion of demand for English to suit particular needs and developments in the field of linguistics and educational psychology”.

Nunan (1988a), Brindley (1989), Berwick (1989), Widdowson (1990), St. John (1996), Daoud (1998) and Basturkmen (2012) considered needs analysis as the instrumental tool for analyzing general and specific purposes of language learning. Long (2005) distinguished the role of English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and
stressed, “Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, it is more defensible to view every course as involving specific purposes, ...”. Hyland (2002) stressed on the role of specificity in ESP course as “… ESP must involve teaching the literacy skills which are appropriate to the purposes and understandings of particular academic and professional communities”. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) considered narrow-angle courses for assessing the specific needs of the learner,

…the wide-angle or so-called common core approach needs to be supplemented by some attempt to define students’ more specific needs and the actual language difficulties that they face on a day-today basis in classes in their disciplines or in their professional lives.

The impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on ESP is widely prevalent as both are concerned with understanding the communicative needs of the learners and their motivation for learning English. ESP, in particular is directed towards conducting a thorough needs analysis to understand the nature of the learner, nature of the language and the process of learning. With a thorough investigation of needs analysis, the distinction between the EGP and ESP is arrived at to whether the learner intends to take a course with general or specific objectives of language learning. ESP is necessarily a learner and learning centred approach as it incorporates needs analysis as a research tool to understand the needs of the learner and the purpose of learning. The impact of CLT on ESP and vice versa is a marked influence as they determine, “What does the learner want to do with the target language?” rather than, “What are the linguistic elements which the learner needs to master?” (Nunan 1988a). ESP emphasizes on needs analysis and essentially it is “… an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (Hutchinson & Waters 1987).
ESP courses are gaining momentum in India as the learners before a course is offered to them are given the chance to identify and analyze their needs and interests in language learning. As the learners are aware, able to realize and specify their specific purpose of language learning, ESP courses are becoming widely popular in higher education as they address the specific language use and communicative issues of the learners. Long (2005) favoured needs based ESP courses as they can focus on the immediate language and communicative requirements of the students. Needs analysis is the major criterion that has affected the ESP movement and ELT generally since the 1970’s to the present day (Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Lockwood 2012). The groundwork of syllabus design can be undertaken through conducting needs analysis. Needs analysis can be done through analyzing learners’ and learning needs in the present and the target situation. “Learner needs” signifies the effect of ‘goals’ and ‘ends’ of the course to understand the basis of the product based approach to language learning. “Learning needs” reflect the process orientations in other words to the process of learning, evaluation and revision of a course. Target demands can be mentioned as professional needs as it is relevant to the requirements of the job. Personal needs can be stated as the needs, expectations, lacks and wants of the learners to communicate in any real situation. The factors affecting why, what, how, who, when, where and whom are necessarily informed by needs analysis. It provides sufficient insight on the specific use of language and the necessary genres, skills, and tasks to perform in target situations.

Nunan (1988a) defined needs analysis as techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in the design of a syllabus. It is indispensable, as it underpins the methods and procedures of conducting research to gather information and to identify the communicative requirements of the learners. The information obtained from the needs analysis can be used in specifying the linguistic and experiential content,
genres, skills and tasks and planning the objectives and goal of the course. Needs analysis is essential as it is supportive and accommodating when designing a syllabus. It also functions as an active measure to indicate the role of specificity in language learning. Needs analysis has regained its importance with the emergence of the CLT and ESP syllabuses. The planning of syllabus has to be done in terms of purpose, product and process objectives. The concept of needs analysis as an investigative tool to find the core objectives and elements of ESP syllabus design is viable as it sets forth to develop both process and product approaches to language learning. It clears the distinction between syllabus and methodology as it combines both the product and process parameters of language learning. ESP courses can be found successful if the approaches to syllabus design are pragmatically treated with the specification of learner and target needs. With eclectic measures of both process and product orientations and emphasizing the significance of learner and learning centred approaches, ESP courses aim to satisfy the requirements of the target situation.

The evolution of ESP communicative syllabus design is seen through the changing scenario of ELT and with the new advocacy of various interrelated pragmatic teaching approaches and methodologies. It can be witnessed that with the advent of ESP and CLT in the 1970’s, the ‘paradigm shift’ of curriculum and syllabus evinced new horizons in language teaching (Breen 1987). The instant changes that occurred in the framework of curriculum and syllabus are due to the effect of CLT and vice versa. ‘Communicative approach’ is a term so frequently used in ELT and in ESL contexts that both the mainstreams of ESP and EGP revolve around it. The survival syllabuses of EGP or needs based communicative syllabuses of ESP are more concerned in promoting CLT along with the other integrated approaches to language teaching. Needs analysis was first introduced by Michael West (1926, cited in White 1988) in Calcutta, India, which was duly
recognized by the ESP experts Munby (1978), Hutchinson & Waters (1987), Berwick (1989), Brindley (1989), West (1994), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). The early proponents of needs analysis, Richterich (1972, cited in Howatt 1984) and Munby (1978) attempted groundwork in making needs analysis a crucial requirement when attempting syllabus design. Richterich and Chancerel’s (1980, cited in Berwick 1989) needs analysis is a basic model, besides providing learner’s needs, it envisions the focus of situation and the activities involved in language learning. Johnson (1982) acknowledged Munby’s Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) as “The ultimate in need analysis models” and stated that Munby’s model is sensitive and over complex and still “… the book cannot be ignored by all interested in needs analysis and ESP”.

Munby (1978) developed an inventory, Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) for analyzing the communicative needs of the learners in a systematic and detailed manner. Munby presented eight parameters to analyze the variables that affect the target needs of the learner. It proposes a scientific approach to process linguistic analysis of the target situation. Though the CNP helps in collecting information pertaining to the profile of the learners in sequential progression, it is not very helpful in understanding the situational demands other than the linguistic analysis of micro functions and skills in every communicative event. It has not helped to understand the required content and process of learning. The specification of what and how of learning is not thoroughly acknowledged to understand the use of relevant skills and knowledge to be developed in both present and target situation. The concrete understanding of learners’ attitudes, behaviours, cognitive variations, personal reflections and the process of learning situation are not completely revealed. With all these limitations, Munby’s contribution to needs analysis stands unique and exemplary for his meticulous attempt to understand the linguistic analysis of participants’ target level communicative competence.
Brumfit (1979) observed that “A needs profile can only be a
guideline, a way of meaning the syllabus against the necessary demands of
the real world”. Hyland (2003) explained that “… needs analysis is a form of
educational technology represented in a range of research methodologies
which can be applied before, during, or after a language course”, affecting the
major framework of the curriculum from designing the syllabus to the
evaluation of the course. Brindley (1989) termed it as ‘the gap between what
is and what should be’, Berwick (1989) identified it as “… a gap or
measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future
state”. West’s (1994) classification of needs analysis and the procedures to
conduct needs analysis are simple, applicable and widely practiced.
Flowerdew (2005) acknowledged needs analysis as an effective tool to
identify the needs of present and target situations and to accommodate ESP
syllabus design by drawing the elements from genre, text, content and corpus
based language studies.

2.2 IMPACT OF PROFICIENCY AND COMPETENCY ON
SYLLABUS DESIGN

The term proficiency is often conceptualized as competence and
defined through linguistic and behavioural categories. It is often interpreted
through linguistic content and communicative functions. The underlying view
of competence and performance to ‘langue’ and ‘parole’ was first developed
as part of a ‘general linguistics course’ by Saussure (cited in Stern 1983).
Saussure discriminated ‘langue’ as a system or structure and ‘parole’ as the
that ‘communicative competence means the mastery of ideal speech situation’
stating the fact that speech acts needs to be interactive and satisfactorily
performed. Chomsky (1965, cited in Stern 1983) implied the notion of
competence to the exclusive treatment of linguistic structures and relates
linguistic knowledge and proficiency to native speakers’ competence in a language. Hymes (1979) redefined competence through social interactional contexts, as he reflected, “There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless”. The notion of communicative competence gained instant momentum as competence is attributed not merely in terms of linguistic knowledge but communicative functions. Jakobovit (1970, cited in Munby, 1978) omitted grammatical competence and conceptualizes paralinguistic, kinesics, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors as the four parameters that contribute to the development of communicative competence. Jakobovit stood ahead of his times in emphasizing the significance of nonverbal communication, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors in developing competency skills. Had Jakobovit included grammatical competence with psychosocial and nonverbal cues, he would have been a pioneer and perfect model for developing verbal and nonverbal communication and personality, which are crucial demand in developing one’s employability skills.

The sociolinguistic impact of Malinowski (1923), Firth (1957), Jakobson (1960), Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Labov (1971), Hymes (1972), Robinson (1972) and Halliday (1973), (cited in Stern 1983; Howatt 2004) provided the basis for groundbreaking research on the functional use of language and communicative competence. The Council of Europe’s Threshold Level (Van Ek 1979) specified proficiency in the concrete details of designing syllabus for a specific group of learners in the target language. It represents a multiple categories of roles, settings, topics, language items, functions and notions. Canale and Swain (1980) considered linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence as the four distinctive areas for developing communicative competence. This model is widely quoted and accepted as ‘a central doctrine for ELT’ and has provided much scope in developing communicative

oriented through developing linguistic competence given through academic settings and BICS is oriented through developing communicative competence. Wilkins (1976), Canale & Swain (1980), Littlewood (1981), Stern (1983), Yalden (1983) and Ellis (1993) considered communicative competence as depending on both linguistic and communicative elements. Recent research studies view competency in context to cognitive, affective, linguistic, sociolinguistic, ethnolinguistic, pragmatic and strategic elements (Stern 1983; Toth 2011).

2.3 THE ROLE AND DISTINCTION OF CURRICULUM, SYLLABUS, INSTRUCTION, EVALUATION AND REVISION IN AN ESP COURSE

Curriculum develops with the designing and implementing of syllabus and examining the process of teaching, learning, evaluation and revision. It is a detailed note of descriptions including the framework of syllabus planning, implementation, administration, management, instruction and evaluation. Syllabus is the basic tenet of the curriculum, sometimes it features as the disguised trait of curriculum itself. The terms ‘curriculum’ and ‘syllabus’ refer to a course or programme of any subject for instruction. While discussing the distinction between curriculum and syllabus, Yalden (1983) stated, “In North America at least, it is often used interchangeably with ‘curriculum’, …”. The present research follows the North American perspectives referring syllabus synonymous to curriculum, course or a program (Yalden 1983; White 1988). With a traditional approach and a somewhat narrow view of curriculum theory, syllabus is generally confined as the specification of the content, while curriculum covers the process of planning, implementation and evaluation. White (1988) made the distinction between curriculum and syllabus as,
Curriculum theory encompasses philosophy and value systems; the main components of the curriculum: purposes, content, methodology and evaluation; and the process whereby curricula are developed, implemented and evaluated. … It is the breadth and depth of curriculum development which distinguishes from syllabus design, whose concerns and ramifications are restricted to questions of content.

Brumfit (1984a, cited in White 1988) defined a syllabus as,

> It is a document of administrative convenience and will only be partly justified on theoretical grounds and so is negotiable and adjustable.

Nunan, (1988a) asserted the role of syllabus as,

> A given syllabus will specify all or some of the following: grammatical structures, function, notions, topics, themes, situations, activities and tasks. Each of these elements is either product or process oriented, and the inclusion of each will be justified according to beliefs about the nature of language, the needs of the learner, or the nature of learning.

White’s (1988) third perfection of curriculum framework with all the four elements of objectives, content, method and evaluation is interrelated with the principles of syllabus design. Nunan (1988a) distinguished syllabus types into product-syllabuses and process-syllabuses,

> …product syllabuses are those in which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction, while process syllabuses are those which focus on the learning experiences themselves.

Syllabus complements the curriculum as it not only specifies the content of the course of ‘what’ to study, but also ‘what’ activities need to be conducted and ‘how’ they should be performed, evaluated and revised. With the development of communicative approaches and competence based
language teaching, the traditional distinction between syllabus and methodology is vague and the integrated aspects of product and process is followed (Nunan 1989). This has led to a paradigm shift in understanding the radical curriculum and syllabus changes in pursuit of the interrelated and interdependent concepts of content, methodology and evaluation. Yalden (1983) discusses the role of syllabus in replacing methods and asserts that with the guidance of a syllabus designer, it can act as a tool for the teacher to organize communicative tasks and activities in a classroom. Breen (1987) believed,

We are presently experiencing a salient evolutionary phase in syllabus design in which the questioning of established and well-tried types of syllabus coincides with a wealth of innovative proposals from theory, research and classroom experience.

The role of the syllabus is consistently varied and revised according to the pedagogical innovations and educational ideologies prevalent in the field. Yalden (1983 cites Alexander 1979) acknowledged that the syllabus needs to signify the ‘protosyllabus’ and ‘pedagogical syllabus’ and goes further to state that “it should also include an approach to testing”. Protosyllabus implies content specification through analyzing the target needs of the learners while pedagogical syllabus represents the plan for processing the content in a present situation. Breen (1987) considered the significance of syllabus to sketch on the process of teaching, learning and evaluation.

The plan must provide an accessible framework of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning which affords continuity and direction for its users. The plan should also function as a retrospective record, a basis for the evaluation of learning, and should itself be amenable to evaluation and adaptation.
Breen (1987) stated that a syllabus is a plan to elucidate the psychological, social and pedagogical processes of the curriculum. The early curriculum developers Taba (1962) and Tyler (1949) (cited in White 1988) were primarily concerned with addressing, “What ought to be taught in an educational institution?” and the classical humanists usually projected their ideas of specifying the ‘what’ of language teaching. The distinction between aims, objectives, and goals is clearly stated in the ‘rational planning model’ of the curriculum propounded by Taba (1962) and Tyler (1949) (cited in White 1988). The reconstructionists with their sheer knowledge and reasoning developed ‘general’ and ‘specific’ objectives of language learning and made a distinct attempt in evolving EGP and ESP as the major offshoots of ELT. Skilbeck’s (1984, cited in White 1988) Situational Model is closely associated with the ideologies of progressivism. The progressivists were more concerned with the ‘means’ or ‘process’ of language learning. They considered the ‘how’ of language learning with the specification of the instructional and process objectives of the course. Critical and needs based language learning have influenced ESP to develop required competency skills in contexts to the needs of education and profession.

2.4 REVIEW OF LEARNERS’ AND LEARNING NEEDS ON DEVELOPING COMPETENCY

On planning a workplace course for a Japanese company, Cowling (2007) suggested that the notional-functional syllabus, topic based syllabus and content based syllabus can be prescribed to examine the needs of communicative functions, skills and tasks along with content instruction and the topic areas related to meet the needs of the job. While discussing the role and significance for conducting needs analysis in syllabus design, Flowerdew (2005) reported the views of the stakeholders – students, teachers and employers for giving specific training to the students on logical thinking,
problem solving and thus making them proficient in producing analytical reports. Hossain (2013) analyzed the needs of engineering students in Presidency University and envisaged to construct a course framework with needs based syllabus design and developing materials for effective communication. Danilova & Pudlowski (2006) observed speaking, writing and reading as the specific needs of the engineering students. Freihat & Al-Machzoomi (2012) focussed on the language needs of the business graduate employees for developing professional communication.

The findings of Crossling & Ward (2002) at Monash University, Australia revealed that a development approach needs to be followed to meet the oral communication needs of the students in both formal and informal workplace contexts. Okoh (2007) reflected the communicative needs of the Nigerian students as they perceive speaking as their most difficult skill and their negative attitude towards learning grammar and their socio-economic and poor background in the secondary school education has been responsible for them acquiring limited proficiency in grammar. They revealed that writing was also difficult for them, because they are unable to organize their ideas and frame good sentences. In a research study conducted at City University of Hong Kong, Detaramani & Chan (1999) found that the students identified speaking as the most difficult and important skill and the same time the most effective for developing English communication. Further, they recognized the importance of intrinsic motivation, self-interest and positive attitude to analyze and self-predict students’ language needs and to make them take responsibility for their learning. Al Tamimi & Shuib (2010) discussed about the petroleum engineering students’ perspectives on acquiring English proficiency for their academic success in engineering education. They reported that the skills and tasks widely required are writing assignments, tests, reading notes and books, listening to the lectures and instructions and writing lab reports. Students felt that they need to be given sufficient practice
and training in speaking and listening than reading and writing. A majority of the students stated that they need to be given training in English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) for developing employability skills. They considered speaking, listening and communication skills need to be given much priority in the course. Rizwi (2005) stated students’ needs analysis, peer response and feedback are essential tools to design a syllabus and its implementation can be reviewed and evaluated for the success and effectiveness of an EAP program.

In planning and designing a new English course at Riyadh College of Technology in Saudi Arabia, Jassem & Jassem (2002) discussed students’ needs and reflected that linguistic variables like LSRW skills and language components like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation need to be incorporated in the syllabus. With the research findings of a survey conducted at Dhaka University, Bangladesh, Choudhury (2009) reflected about the implication of students’ needs, lacks, wants, problems, and perceptions of teaching and learning styles and the teachers’ personal observation and class experience and perceptions on constructing the framework of an EAP course on developing communication skills for academic and professional literacy. After thoroughly analyzing the situations and the needs of the ESL students, Kayi (2008) recommended that social and survival topics and themes have to be included in the content based curriculum. Warschauer (2002) stressed on the significance of technology in language learning and fosters to introduce a developmental approach to integrate technology in both process and product based language education. Access to work on computer and media are considered important as the students need to transfer the skills of technical literacy in their job functions.

Rajprasit et al (2014) reported the perception of both teachers and students on the problems in speaking and writing is due to their difficulties in
grammar and vocabulary. Jackson (2010) stressed that the tertiary level students need to engage in discourse with appropriate forms from their linguistic repertoire. They should be able to carry specific language functions in a wide range of communicative contexts. St. John (1996) discusses the needs analysis conducted for secretarial science and commercial students in Malaysia, “while all four skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking) were necessary, the need for spoken communication was dominant”. Belcher (2006) recognized the views of Bakthin (1986) on the use of speech genres inside and outside academia and considered that the base it is ‘by which the greatest amounts of knowledge are communicated and assessed’. Taillefer (2007) found that oral communication is specifically the most required skill to meet professional needs. Daoud (1998, cites Daoud 1994a, Barmada 1993, Daoud 1995) reported that the majority of the students perceive speaking as the most needed skill and they are not motivated to write. Daoud (1998) found that the students expect the course to cater to their needs and want to learn it in the order of – speaking, writing and reading.

Productive skills, literally both oral and written are the major skills to be used extensively in any industry (Edwards 2000; Riemer 2002; Darling & Dannels 2003; Kassim & Ali 2010; Vinod & Dipti 2012). The ability to exhibit effective communication skills in rhetoric and contextual discourse is the need of the hour. Interactive social and formal discourse, strategic and pragmatic competences are essential for developing language and communication skills. Rubin (1973, citing the suggestions of Neustupny 1968; Das Gupta 1971; Jernudd 1971), claimed that language problems needs to be addressed through linguistic, communicative, verbal and non-verbal communication and language as part of social and political process of change.

Davies & Birbili (2000, 429) considered metacognitive and conceptual knowledge of writing is useful to “… transfer and adaptation of
foundation literacy skills to the workplace”. Employment opportunities have provided different insights on developing job skills as Dovey (2006) expounds that new vocationalism considers the attribute “to learn how to learn” rather than “… training workers in stable and routinized competencies measured by standardized tests”. Citing the views of Usher (2000) and Symes & McIntyre (2000) on developing students employability skills, Dovey (2006) emphasized,

This ‘new vocationalism’ arises out of a shift in the world of work, and has led, in turn, to a shift in the orientation of higher education in certain contexts. In these contexts, courses are being developed to prepare students for contemporary workplaces in very specific ways.

The core ideology of the ESP course is to identify the specificity of the learning objectives and to transfer the required skills and ability from the learning to the target situation. Dovey (2006) explored,

The chain effect of the ‘new knowledge economy’ on the purposes of newly vocationalized courses on assessment tasks, and on the forms of learning and literacy required.

The implication is on to put forth new thinking and skills on understanding the specific purposes in specific contexts and to understand and solve the “issues of transferability from academic to professional contexts” (Dovey 2006). While discussing the specificity of contexts and the transferability of language skills, Hyland (2002) envisages the notion of professional and academic contexts and how the specific purpose of language learning should go along with workplace demands and academic needs.
2.5 REVIEW OF WORKPLACE CONTEXTS ON DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

English has become the most extensively used language in the corporate world and its application in education, technology, media and commerce has posed its immediate requirement to be a part of the global network. It has become a wide source of international lingua franca and hence business transactions are made using it. In investigating the use of English in corporate communication, Barbara et al (1996) found that 72% of the business organizations in Sao Paulo, Brazil use English for internal and external business communication; and the proposal, reports and projects were in English; and the presentations and meetings were conducted in English. The findings reflect the extensive use of English as an international language in business communication. It also reflects the various oral and written genres and skills used in international English communication. Competency in English communication has been a prime job requirement of any industry. An article, “Fit for Work?” in the journal English Today in January 2006 discusses the claims of the employers and managers on the inadequacies of the British students for being unemployable in their companies. Ben Pinnington, the media manager of Forum of Private Business (FPB) reveals the verdict of employers that ‘the school leavers are a dismal failure in the workplace’. Len Collinson, National Chairman of the FPB comments on the inefficiency of the British Education System as ‘turning out as if school leavers who are socially inept and unprepared for the world of work’ (English Today 2006). In a survey on the use of English language in industry, Sadanand (1993) reported that the high percentage of the respondents provided positive opinion on gaining fluency in English for better job prospects and seeking promotions in the workplace. In articulating the views of employees, Yates (1982) reflected that companies perceive the importance of English communication in business and claims that language inability is
one of the prime reasons of job ineffectiveness. The inclination towards English for being a language of international commerce and trade has made everyone accept and use English. It shows the preference to communicate in English for personal advancement in both education and profession (Kennedy 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova 2014).

While discussing about the need for the instructor and employer collaboration to find out the specificity of language and communication problems in workplace contexts, Stapp (1988) points out that “Most employers have difficulty specifying what they want in language skills; they only know that the employees in question have language problems”. It is the task of the instructor to interact with the employer and keenly observe the language problems, ‘the different proficiency levels of the students’, ‘to get a good description of the prospective students’ particular jobs’ and finally ‘to organize the required language components and skills and manipulate strategies for instruction’. Gray et al (2005) expounded that the academic writing programs need to understand and consider the employers’ concern for students’ lack of writing skills. The Managing Director of a Macelesfield based design company reveals, “Employers should be invited into schools to explain to teachers and pupils what is required of them in the real world of work” (English Today 2006). In the NASSCOM Annual Report 2013-14, it is stated that NASSCOM IT-ITES Sector Skills Council has launched a program on Global Business Foundation Skills (GBFS) to enhance employability of the Indian workforce.

Employers’ views are critical when analyzing job-specific needs and workplace needs. Fennick et al (1993) reflected the views of managers of manufacturing firms that the most widely prevalent problem in any industry is ‘poor communication skills’. They expect that the employees need to communicate, understand and solve the issues through effective writing skills.
They need not wait for instruction for what they need to do; they need to find and scrutinize the problems; and should be able to manage the situation. They need to realize their problem areas and develop capabilities to work collaboratively and solve any issues related to the project. They need to be efficient not only in accomplishing projects, but also understand their role in communicating and maintaining social relationships in the work environment. Davies & Birbili (2000) considered spelling, punctuation and grammar as important for all kinds of formal and situational writing.

Most of the recent research surveys confirm the significant use of speaking and writing in workplace. In exploring the workplace needs, Gray et al (2005) reflected, “Over the last 15 years, surveys in New Zealand and Australia have consistently shown that employers rank oral and written communication skills as highly as or more highly than any professional or technical skills”. In their survey on the oral communication needs in the workplace, Crossling & Ward (2002) found that “The most often used forms of oral communication are informal work-related discussions, listening and following instructions and informal conversations”. While discussing the formal and social use of communication, they argue that the use of formal presentation alone is insufficient to cater to the demands of the workplace as most of the oral interactions occur in informal discussions.

The language and communicative practices of the workplace needs to be continuously examined as they are contextually bound and culturally influenced. Louihana-Salminen et al (1996) investigated language use, communication practices and cultural perspectives of the Swedish and Finnish companies. The findings reflect the discoursal patterns, similarities and dissimilarities and the comparatives and contrast features of their text in email messages and meetings. They discuss the issues related to the corporate English used in the workplace. Rogerson-Revell (2007) identified the specific
difficulties of the non-native speakers in international business meetings and reflected on the perceived difficulties in understanding the different accent of the non-native speakers. Comprehension and production difficulties are commonly witnessed due to lack of vocabulary and the inability in managing high-speed interactions. Due to the lack of language proficiency and speaking rather slowly, the non-native speakers relatively feel that they are unable to interrupt or stress their viewpoints on any business developments.

On par with the use of speaking skills, writing skills are also found to be equally important in corporate communications. Cox et al (2009) discussed a collaborative case study project to help students to understand and learn more about the significance of writing skills in the workplace. Belcher (2006) considered written genres as ‘the chief currency of academia’ as it significantly develops academic literacy skills. Chew (2005) observed that written communication is vital for developing professional communication skills in a multilingual environment. Afzali & Fakharzadeh (2009) found letter writing genres as a major implication for designing syllabus on writing skills for teaching business and social writing skills for tourism students. Bacha & Bahous (2008) examined the importance of language skills and written tasks in business courses. Robbins (2001) stated on the use of technical writing skills as memos and proposal will weave workplace writing into the work of the classroom. Gray et al (2005) reported, ‘Concision, succinctness, and the ability to write to deadlines’ as the required attributes of written communication in workplace contexts. Further, it is also identified that the employees need ‘to write efficiently under time constraints’.

Most of the recent research studies highlight that students are not provided with adequate skills and training to prepare for their job related contexts. Discussing on the need for gaining knowledge and relevant skills to put in practice, Davies & Birbili (2000) argue that “… future workers need
certain kinds of knowledge about writing as much as they need the skills of writing”. Though the employees recognize writing as the most wanted skill for their job-specific communication, they are unable to transfer their writing ability to the formal contexts. Fennick et al (1993) points out the reasons for the poor writing skills of the employees in the workplace, “school writing has been far different from what is required in real communication situations, particularly in terms of audience”. This study highlights time again the need for involving students because if they are not, most courses do not have contextual relevance. Emphasizing the form and style of writing in academic and business contexts, Dovey (2006, cites Dias et al 1999) reports that writing in college and the workplace is significantly different. As academic writing seems to be irrelevant to the writings of workplace contexts, Cox et al (2009) suggests that the academic courses need to include the specific tasks relevant to job specifications.

Shin (2008) regarded academic literary skills like gaining adequate disciplinary knowledge, leading discussion on the topics and social interaction as very important besides acquiring language and linguistic skills for effective communication. Bernhardt (1992) considered reading, writing, computation, higher order skills like problem solving, critical thinking and reasoning with data as workplace skills. Rhoder & French (1994) discussed the relevant skills and knowledge to generate literacy development. It is also found that the participants’ self-prepared text generated from “… job-related materials and experiences, including job descriptions, job procedures, training materials, newsletters, booklets, and memos” helped them to acquire clarity regards to language skills required in the working environment. In a needs based survey conducted with the collaboration between instructor and employer, Stapp (1998) found, “… reasonable grammar, good pronunciation, and the ability to comprehend, explain and query specialized information” are required for technical workplace setting. Davies & Birbili (2000) entrust formal education
to provide metacognitive and conceptual knowledge of writing to solve the contextual problems in the workplace.

With the ongoing research studies conducted in analyzing the target situation needs, it is understood that English proficiency is required to improve technical skills to access the computer and internet. Nguyen (2008) acknowledged the use of internet and World Wide Web (www) in accessing authentic language resources and materials for language teaching and its influences on syllabus design and curriculum innovation and educational technology. Fennick et al (1993) visualized the use of computer drafted materials and the use of updated technology for developing literacy and work-related skills. Davies & Birbili (2000) considered the use of sending emails and using the internet for meeting the crucial demands of the workplace. Gray et al (2005) reported that the employers are concerned more about the “employees’ use and misuse of electronic communication tools”, particularly email sending during working hours. Ono & Zavodny (2008) stated that “English ability is positively associated with IT access and use”. It can also be understood that the gap in technical skills and IT usage can be attributed to the differences in English ability. Fennick et al (1993) elucidated that the school writing is rather significantly slow in adopting technology to update the required information and to use computers for technical writing. Gimenez (2006) observed the “textual and communicative complexity of business mails” and discusses the significance of contextualized genre analysis in business emails.

The significance of soft skills and strategic competence for effective communication in professional contexts is often emphasized (Nickerson 2005). Ahiauzu (1984) discusses on how strategic factors like culture and behavior influences workplace and industrial relations. Bernhardt (1992) regards how soft skills like good attitude, working with a team and
dependable to the working environment are essential to build social relationships in a working environment. Dovey (2006) identifies reflective writing, participating in teamwork as the general literacies to be practiced for new vocationalism. Further, elucidating the significance of new literacy skills, Dovey (2006) discusses that learning interpersonal skills to manage social processes of teamwork includes “… an emphasis on role awareness, team building, negotiation strategies, and conflict resolution, amongst other things”. It can be assumed that building workplace relations and rapport can be increasingly possible through teamwork and informal social conversations (Crossling & Ward 2002). Gray et al (2005, cites Nelson et al 2001; Alsop, 2002) acknowledged the demand for soft skills in communication and revealed that American corporate recruiters consider communication and interpersonal skills as crucial for a candidate seeking employment.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the research studies on syllabus design and the factors that purported to enhance the employability skills of students in technical institutions. The literature review shows that a majority of the studies have emphasized the need for syllabuses to be placed carefully involving teachers, management, industry and learners in the design of a syllabus that develop language competencies and helps engineering students to make smooth transition to their workplace. The studies are wide ranging and emphasizing the need for inclusion of suitable tasks from enhancing language fluency to computer literacy. The next chapter will describe the research context with specific reference to the lab based communication skills course for the third year students in the colleges affiliated to Anna University.