CHAPTER 1

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From very early times the teaching of language has followed patterns that were thought to serve the purposes of the learners it was needed for. When we trace the history of English Language Teaching (ELT) we find that new teaching methodologies evolved as the purposes of language learning evolved, and English language learning shifted from an academic need to a social one. In recent times it has once again changed direction and is perceived as an economic necessity in our new, borderless economic universe.

Several changes have set in which have had a great influence on the position of English Language in today’s world. English is considered as the international language for business and has now been commonly accepted as a lingua franca. Crystal (1997) points to two factors that have played an important part in determining the world status of English. One was the expansion of English colonial power which peaked towards the end of the 19th century, and the second was the emergence of the US as the leading economic power of the 20th century.

English enjoys special status in over 70 countries like Ghana, India, Singapore etc. Over 100 other countries have prioritized the teaching of English, even though it has not been awarded any official status—Crystal (1997). Currently, the number of people who use English as a communication tool (approximately 1.25 billion to 1.85 billion) far exceeds the number of native English speakers (approximately 380 million)—Kameda (2005)

The advent of globalization was perhaps the single, most important reason for the status that English enjoys today. In an interview with Kam-Mei (2002) on language and linguistics, Halliday
assigns the status of English as an international language to the shift from a goods-and-service economy to an information economy—“Information is made of language; so whatever language has become the main medium for software, for information services, is going to be international in that very important sense.....at the moment it is English.”

Information technology (IT) provided a virtual connectivity that compelled businesses and media to relocate globally and, along with that, English language skill became central to survival in the knowledge economy. Much of the information processing activity has been outsourced to countries like India and China, and the economic growth of these countries has been phenomenal with the growth of the IT sector. The job market was flourishing. However proficiency in English language was the basic criterion for employment in this industry. In this context Warschauer (2000) has predicted the growth of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), a branch of English for Specific Purposes dedicated to the needs of particular vocational groups. He also suggests that these courses will increasingly be adopted by institutions offering vocational courses and by employers at worksites.

In terms of the number of English speakers, the Indian subcontinent ranks third in the world, after the US and the UK—(Mohan 2006). In India it is the language used by premium institutions like the IITs and the IIMs, supreme court proceedings, seminars and symposia. Thus the Indian metros successfully rode the IT wave with its abundant human resource who qualified for the jobs on offer. The Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) industry offered employment even to the comparatively less qualified candidates, as long as they were proficient in English.
The situation in Kerala

Kerala came to the limelight in the wake of the IT boom when the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) ranked Kerala second among the ITeS destinations in terms of infrastructure, connectivity and the availability of educated human resource. However, Kerala’s degree holders were found to be unemployable in the IT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector even in functional areas like finance, marketing, sales, human resources and administration due to poor communication skills. The present researcher was involved in a research project of the Kerala State I.T. Mission to create a database of graduates/diploma holders from in and around Kochi who were trainable to the standards required by the industry (Varghese 2004). Out of the list of 1174 post graduates/graduates/diploma holders who were shortlisted as being trainable, hardly 200 eventually cleared the final selection.

English communication skills have now become critical for success in the business environment of today. Articles in major business magazines as well as interviews with placement coordinators and leading executives, all support this assertion.

Underscoring the national problem of low employability because of declining English skills are the comments of a consultant from Orient Longman “As we travel all over the country, visiting schools and colleges, we notice the great decline in English standards. We meet the heads of the institutions, teachers and employers, and discuss the issue of unemployable graduates and their growing plight.” According to him, when jobs are waiting to be grabbed, “it’s a pity that students are missing the bus due to lack of communication skills and lack of proficiency in English”—(Businessline 2007)
In a recent public address in Kochi, the Director of Synthite Group minced no words when he said that “significant enhancement in English communication skills alone could render the youth employable”—(The Hindu 2009). Echoing the same sentiments, the Chief Operating Officer of Infosys Technologies Limited has said that Kerala is fast becoming attractive to the Information Technology (IT) industry. “Educated manpower is available here in abundance, infrastructure growth is taking place and the government is supportive…Also when we talk about enhancing the quality, the focus must not only be on the technical aspects, but also on other aspects like soft skills. When it came to communication skills of engineering students, 80 per cent of them did not meet the qualifying criteria.”(The Hindu 2007)

As far as University education in Kerala is concerned, during the past two years higher education institutions have diversified their course offerings to enhance the employability of its candidates. Courses that would result in immediate employment have been added on so that the job market can be exploited to the maximum. However, parallel efforts towards improving the communication and language skills are still very feeble. In his analysis of the major issues in teaching English at the undergraduate level in Kerala Mohan (2006) categorically points out the failure of the Universities in Kerala to respond to the need of the hour. “Everyone agrees that ELT at the tertiary level in the Universities of Kerala has not responded positively to either global or national needs of communication in English on account of preserving an English teaching programme which has become obsolete. Neither the identification of the linguistic needs of the learner nor the pedagogical strategies to achieve the target in accordance with the already existing curriculum has been of any serious concern in the Universities”

It is as an answer to these problems that this topic was taken up for research by the present investigator. It is evident that very little research has been done in the area of curriculum design
and teaching methodologies in ELT as far as students of higher education in Kerala are concerned.

The study focuses on enhancing the English language skills of students of management studies in Kerala in order to make them employable. With the opening up of the Indian economy the management sector has witnessed a deluge of job opportunities for the right candidates. Improving proficiency has become an economic necessity that will have far reaching effects on the progress and the growth rate of our nation. The title of the study is:

Towards a Teaching Model to develop English Proficiency for Students of Management Studies in Kerala.

Chapterization

The study is organized in the following manner:

Chapter One describes the significance of the study and the relevance of the research problem in today’s environment.

Chapter Two describes a pilot study to understand the exact nature of the problem that has to be tackled. Following that is the description of the research methodology used in the study.

Chapter Three traces the theoretical underpinnings of the teaching methodology to be used in the study. Various approaches along with the teaching models and hypotheses under each approach have been discussed.

Chapter Four discusses literature review on the English for Specific Purposes Model for curriculum development along with other curriculum design models and discusses their application in the context of the present study.
Chapter Five describes the teaching model in the present study and discusses the findings of the needs assessment done for the study on the basis of this model. The course design, the teaching learning process and the assessment procedures are discussed. The teaching methodology adopted in this study is explained on the basis of this model.

Chapter Six gives a literature review of the identified area of language weakness on the basis of which an intervention for a sample of the population has been formulated.

Chapter Seven explains the application of the partial intervention based on the new model where the control group is taught using the conventional task based teaching methodology and the experimental group is taught using the new methodology.

Chapter Eight explains the analysis and results of the partial intervention and reports the conclusions of the study.